

Christ in Our Home

January, February, March
2022

LARGE PRINT EDITION



Prayers

Morning

A new day dawns, O God. In the midst of this day may I bear witness to your refreshing grace. Help me recognize new life in moments of joy, laughter, and even sadness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Evening

The day has ended, O God. Where I have faltered, forgive me. Where I have held resentment, release me. Receive all that I must surrender so that tomorrow I may once again rise to newness of life. Give me rest. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Mealtime

This meal renews my strength for your service, O God. You have provided refreshment and nourishment, and now I shall taste your good gifts. Grant food and fellowship to all who hunger today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Festivals and commemorations

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

Jan. 1 Name of Jesus

Jan. 2 Johann Konrad Wilhelm Loehe, renewer of the church, 1872

Jan. 15 Martin Luther King Jr., renewer of society, martyr, 1968

Jan. 17 Antony of Egypt, renewer of the church, c. 356; Pachomius, renewer of the church, 346

Jan. 18 Confession of Peter; Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins

Jan. 19 Henry, Bishop of Uppsala, martyr, 1156

Jan. 21 Agnes, martyr, c. 304

Jan. 25 Conversion of Paul; Week of Prayer for Christian Unity ends

Jan. 26 Timothy, Titus, and Silas, missionaries

Jan. 27 Lydia, Dorcas, and Phoebe, witnesses to the faith

Jan. 28 Thomas Aquinas, teacher, 1274

Feb. 2 Presentation of Our Lord

Feb. 3 Ansgar, Bishop of Hamburg, missionary to Denmark and Sweden, 865

Feb. 5 The Martyrs of Japan, 1597

Feb. 14 Cyril, monk, 869; Methodius, bishop, 885; missionaries to the Slavs

Feb. 18 Martin Luther, renewer of the church, 1546

Feb. 23 Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, martyr, 156

Feb. 25 Elizabeth Fedde, deaconess, 1921

Mar. 1 George Herbert, hymnwriter, 1633

Mar. 2 John Wesley, 1791; Charles Wesley, 1788; renewers of the church

Mar. 7 Perpetua and Felicity and companions, martyrs at Carthage, 202

Mar. 10 Harriet Tubman, 1913; Sojourner Truth, 1883; renewers of society

Mar. 12 Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, 604

Mar. 17 Patrick, bishop, missionary to Ireland, 461

Mar. 19 Joseph, Guardian of Jesus

Mar. 21 Thomas Cranmer, Bishop of Canterbury, martyr, 1556

Mar. 22 Jonathan Edwards, teacher, missionary to American Indians, 1758

Mar. 24 Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Bishop of El Salvador, martyr, 1980

Mar. 25 Annunciation of Our Lord

Mar. 29 Hans Nielsen Hauge, renewer of the church, 1824

Mar. 31 John Donne, poet, 1631

Writers

Prayer page (inside front cover) Christine Hallenbeck Ask serves as director of mission integration and senior pastor for the Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society, based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. She shares her home and life with her husband, their toddler, and their border collie.

January 1–15 Kari van Wakeren is a wife, mom, and associate pastor at First Lutheran Church in Alexandria, Minnesota. She is the author of *Unbalanced but Centered: Tending to Your Heart in the Frenzy of Life* (self-pub., 2020) and the children's book *Bubble Wrap Girl* (Beaver's Pond, 2017). Learn more about Kari at www.karivanwakeren.com.

January 16–31 Paul Hoffman of Mukilteo, Washington, is a retired ELCA pastor who writes, teaches, and mentors the newly ordained across the church.

February 1–14 Rob Blezard serves as pastor of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Aberdeen, Maryland. A lifelong writer and editor, he is study guide editor and a frequent contributor to *Living Lutheran* magazine. He blogs at www.grow-withjesus.org.

February 15–28 Charlene Rachuy Cox is an ELCA pastor who serves as director of contextual education at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. She lives in Westbrook, Minnesota. Her passions include story-listening, storytelling, container gardening, and poetry. She has two grown children, Torie and Anna.

March 1–10 Rochelle Melander, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a professional certified coach, the editor of *The Word in Season* (a sister devotional to this one, published by Augsburg Fortress), and the author of twelve books, including *Mightier Than the Sword: Rebels, Reformers, and Revolutionaries Who Changed*

the World through Writing (Beaming Books, 2021). She was an ELCA pastor for eighteen years, serving congregations in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

March 11–21 Julie B. Sevig grew up listening to her dad read what seemed like “very long” *Christ in Our Home* devotions at the end of each meal—but now she realizes how short they are! She is a member of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chicago, and is social media and content manager at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. She and her wife are the parents of three teenagers.

March 22–31 Janna Firestone is a freelance writer and editor who loves to spend time outdoors, where she feels God speaking to her through the beautiful creation. She lives in Loveland, Colorado, with her husband and two teenage sons, where she currently serves as the director of women’s ministries at LifeSpring Covenant Church.

Name of Jesus

**And he was called Jesus, the name given
by the angel before he was conceived
in the womb. (v. 21)**

When choosing a name for each of our children, my husband and I considered several factors. Since our last name can be a bit of a mouthful, we wanted first names that were limited in syllables. We also wanted each first name to go well with the middle name we had chosen because of a family connection.

In the Bible, names are significant too. Many times a name was given because of what it said about a person's future character or situation. This was true for Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Samuel, Lydia, and others. It was also the case for Jesus.

The birth of Jesus ushered in the fulfillment of the promise of a Savior. It also made possible another name with incredible significance: child of God. This is the name given to us in baptism, and one in which we can center ourselves daily. This name means we are beloved, chosen, desired. It means our worth doesn't come from how much money we make or how hard we work, but from the one named Jesus, who gave himself for us.

Lord, thank you for naming and claiming us as your children. Remind us of that identity today. Amen.

Prayer concern: Obstetricians, doulas, and midwives

Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 8; Philippians 2:5-11



Second Sunday of Christmas

**From his fullness we have all received,
grace upon grace. (v. 16)**

I once received a card that read, “God loves you; pass it on.” Though there are various interpretations and perspectives as to what it means to love God and share God’s love with others, our reading today reminds us of one thing that is consistent and clear: through Jesus we have received “grace upon grace.”

The word *grace* appears four times in the Gospel of John—all in this reading from the first chapter. From the beginning the writer of John is deliberate in showing us what grace looks like. It is abundant—grace upon grace—flowing from God to the world in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Similarly, it is God’s presence living in and through us that allows us to see and experience God’s extravagant grace. As recipients of this grace, we are invited to live in a way that makes grace upon grace known to others as well. As the card I received put it, “God loves you; pass it on.”

**Jesus, help our lives reflect the grace and love
you have shown us. In your name we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Postal workers and delivery drivers

**Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20;
Ephesians 1:3-14**

Gladness for sorrow

**I will turn their mourning into joy . . .
and give them gladness for sorrow. (v. 13)**

Nora McInerny has made a life of speaking to others about grief. In 2014, within the space of a few months, she lost her second pregnancy, her father, and her husband. Grief like this is inexplicable and unfathomable, yet though our particularities will differ, Nora says we will all experience loss and be pushed to our limits in one way or another at some point. She also shares that grief is part of our journey but is not the end of it.

While it's true that some of Israel's suffering was a result of not being faithful to God, our reading today reminds us there is nothing that cannot be redeemed by God. In fact, every day God is on the move to restore and redeem us.

It is not easy for someone experiencing grief to see that a day will come when they will laugh or find joy again. Yet as we hear through the prophet Jeremiah, God will indeed "turn [our] mourning into joy and give [us] gladness for sorrow."

God, when we are overwhelmed by grief and sadness, remind us of your redeeming love. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those mourning the death of
a spouse or partner

Job 42:10-17; Psalm 72; Luke 8:16-21

All sorts of reasons

**Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!
Praise your God, O Zion! (v. 12)**

Numerous studies have proved the positive effect gratitude has in our lives. Personally, I have experienced this to be true as well. When I make a point of giving thanks—particularly in those times when I feel stressed or overwhelmed—doing so often has a ripple effect. The more reasons I can find to give thanks, the more I become aware of God’s presence around me. And the more I’m reminded of God’s presence and provision, the more I am able to experience God’s peace and find calm in the frenzy of life.

Long before gratitude journals became popular—indeed, millennia before modern science and therapy practices pointed to the benefits of gratitude for the sake of wellness and life satisfaction—the psalmist penned these words for the assembly, listing all sorts of reasons to give God praise. The psalmist’s words invite us to ponder: What am I thankful for today? How many reasons can I find to give God praise?

**God, you are worthy of our praise. Keep our
eyes open to all the ways you care for us. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Poets and songwriters

Isaiah 6:1-5; Psalm 72; Acts 7:44-53

All God's children

He destined us for adoption as his children . . . according to the good pleasure of his will. (v. 5)

Our neighbor once told me about a boy her daughter had met while in Jamaica. The boy lived in an orphanage and had a large growth on his jaw. My neighbor wondered what would happen to him once he was too old to stay in the orphanage, thinking that his future would be bleak.

However, not long ago she learned that the boy had been adopted by a family in the midwestern United States. As you can imagine, this changed the boy's life dramatically. He was given "a future with hope," in the words of Jeremiah 29:11. For this boy, adoption was a very powerful and life-changing event.

In our reading today, we are reminded that God has destined us for adoption as God's children. As it was for the boy when he was adopted by a loving family, God has welcomed us into God's family with open arms, eager to bestow on us the fullness of divine love, grace, and forgiveness. For all of God's children, this is a powerful and life-changing event!

**Loving God, through Jesus you claim each of us
as your child. Hallelujah! Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those awaiting adoption

Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 72; John 1:[1-9] 10-18

Epiphany of Our Lord

They saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. (v. 11)

When we think of Epiphany, we usually think of the wise men visiting the baby Jesus and offering him gifts fit for a king. Each gift, in its own way, acknowledges that Jesus is indeed king, although as the gospel story unfolds we quickly see that he is a different kind of king than any other the world has ever met.

This visit by the wise men marks the beginning of an entire season devoted to the ways the kingdom of God is revealed in the world. During this time we also focus on the light of Christ, and on how that Light, shining in the darkness, leads to wholeness and life for all. With this in mind, the season of Epiphany invites us to ponder: Where have I seen God in my life this week? How have the love and light of Christ been revealed to me? And through me?

Like the wise men, on this Epiphany we are invited to come to the stable, to kneel before our king, and to open our hearts to what this One desires to reveal.

**Jesus, you are the light of the world. Shine in
and through your people today. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People who reveal Christ to us

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12

Let your light shine

Arise, shine; for your light has come. (v. 1)

I can still picture Mrs. McCready leading our Sunday school class in singing “This Little Light of Mine” when I was a kid. “Don’t let Satan blow it out!” our young voices sang, bouncing off the walls. “Hide it under a bushel?” And then, “NO!” we shouted.

The light God promised to the people was made known to us in Jesus. We’ve been given that light to share. When I find myself playing down my gifts in order to try to make others more comfortable, I remember that old Sunday school song and the ancient declaration of Isaiah: “Arise, shine!”

Because we live in a culture where our worth often feels negotiable, we need to keep coming back to the truth about who God says we are. Our worth comes from our identity as beloved children of God. When we remember this, we are able to recognize the light of Christ in our lives, and then to let that light shine through us, with confidence.

Jesus, you are the everlasting light.

Shine through me today, for your sake. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those wondering about their
career path

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11; Psalm 29; 1 Corinthians 2:1-10

Included in the promise

**The Gentiles have become fellow heirs . . .
and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus
through the gospel. (v. 6)**

At the end of the Service of Baptism in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, those assembled say to the one being baptized, “We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God’s creative and redeeming word to all the world” (p. 231).

These words tell the person being baptized and those in attendance that through baptism—having received the promise of the gospel—they are invited to use their gifts to serve others and to share the good news of God’s love. This is a gift of both grace and responsibility.

The writer of Ephesians reminds the church—both new and longtime believers—that there is no partiality in Christ’s kingdom. It is God’s will for *all* people to be included in the promise of the gospel.

Having been included among those whom God has chosen, we are made “fellow heirs . . . and sharers of the promise” and are all invited to use our gifts to serve others and share God’s love with the world.

**God of all, help my life speak of your abundant love
for everyone, through Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Baptismal sponsors

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15; Psalm 29; 1 Corinthians 2:11-16



Baptism of Our Lord

**You are my Son, the Beloved;
with you I am well pleased. (v. 22)**

Throughout his life Jesus knew who he was. Even as a boy Jesus knew he must be about his Father's business, remaining in the temple as a teacher among the teachers (Luke 2:41-49). But God declares Jesus' identity to him again when Jesus is baptized: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

In our baptism we have also received the declaration of God's constant blessing. Yet sometimes we don't believe it or live into it. So again and again, in preaching, in the remembrance of baptism, and in the consolation of others, God comes to us to remind us of the identity proclaimed for us in baptism: that we are "sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever" (*ELW*, p. 231).

A retired pastor once put it like this: "Remember who your real boss is." God is in charge, yes. And what's more, I am God's beloved child. When I remember who I am in Christ, I am better able to face whatever comes my way with a sense of calm and compassion.

**God of love, help me listen to your voice above
all others today, to the glory of your name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Mental health professionals

Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17

You are mine

**Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine. (v. 1)**

Any number of things in life can threaten our sense of worth and leave us feeling unmoored: job loss, a scary diagnosis, infertility, miscarriage, depression, a loved one's death. Amid situations like these we might feel as though we are passing through tumultuous waters or burning flames, like the images in our reading today.

What strikes me about these verses is that God doesn't say, "*If* you pass through the waters or walk through the fire . . ." Rather, God says, "*When* . . ." God is honest that in this life we will experience deep struggles. But God's word through Isaiah reassures us that no matter what we are going through, God is with us, cares for us, and will see us through—because of God's love for us.

When we feel vulnerable and shaken, or when the path before us seems filled with difficulty and struggle, we can depend on God to sustain us. We can trust that when God says, "Do not fear . . . you are mine," God means it.

**Holy God, help us to trust you in all of life's
struggles and to find our strength in you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Hospice caregivers

Judges 4:1-16; Psalm 106:1-12; Ephesians 6:10-17

The voice of the Lord

May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace! (v. 11)

Our golden retriever, Blaze, is greatly distressed by loud noises: fireworks, gunshots, thunderstorms. Upon hearing one of these sounds, he rushes to our side, seeking reassurance. It's as though he needs to hear us say, "Everything's going to be okay."

At times when all I can see in front of me is brokenness, struggle, and impossibility, this is the assurance I most yearn for as well. I need a reminder that I am not alone and that it's not up to me to figure things out on my own.

In our psalm today, God's voice is compared to the boom of thunder and described as being powerful enough to break the cedars (v. 5). God's voice is able both to disrupt our usual way of doing things and to create order out of chaos. These verses remind us that God's voice is powerful enough to interrupt whatever we are experiencing—if not to remove the struggle, at least to remind us that because God is with us, everything will be okay.

Lord, you are powerful and good. Speak into our lives today for your glory. Amen.

Prayer concern: Speech pathologists

Judges 5:12-21; Psalm 106:1-12; 1 John 5:13-21

The gift of the Holy Spirit

**The two went down and prayed for them
that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (v. 15)**

Prior to COVID-19, our confirmation worship service included the laying on of hands. Our youth director and each student's family, mentor, and small-group guide all placed their hands on the student's head as a pastor prayed: "Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, stir up in [Maria] the gift of your Holy Spirit; confirm her faith, guide her life, empower her in her serving, give her patience in suffering, and bring her to everlasting life" (*ELW*, p. 236). This part of the worship service always proved deeply meaningful for the student and those who were passing on these words of blessing.

Peter and John are sent to the people of Samaria and, once there, lay their hands on them in order "that they might receive the Holy Spirit." This is not a gift we can earn or buy. It is a gift given freely by God. It is a gift that brings healing, wholeness, and strength for each of us to serve in Christ's kingdom.

**Father in heaven, for Jesus' sake, stir up in us
the gift of your Spirit today. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Youth directors and mentors

Numbers 27:1-11; Psalm 106:1-12; Luke 11:33-36

A new name

**You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be
termed Desolate. (v. 4)**

A technology expert once told me that if I cleaned out my email junk folders regularly, the amount of junk I received over time would decrease. Instead, good, useful email messages would replace them.

The people of God addressed by Isaiah are not only receiving junk messages about themselves from their captors and oppressors; they know themselves to be forsaken by God. But God won't let that stand. God promises to return to the people. And the prophet holds God to that promise, declaring it again and again until God acts and the people see their vindication. No more will junk messages and junk names define the people God loves. Rather, God comes to us with good news and with promises to save. God empties the words and power of oppression and gives us a new name: Beloved.

**God, help us hear your truth today: that you call us
Beloved, Redeemed, Precious. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who need a new beginning

Jeremiah 3:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; Acts 8:18-24

Expansive and steadfast

Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. (v. 5)

My husband's family of origin lives in New Zealand, so when our kids were seven and five, we took them there to visit. We went during the rainy season, so it was not uncommon to see a rainbow at least once—if not several times—a day. I never tire of seeing rainbows. Whether bold or dim, a rainbow draws my attention upward and reminds me of the expansiveness of God's creation and God's love for us.

Our psalm today echoes a sense of wonder at the awesomeness of God. We are reminded that God's love "extends to the heavens," and God's "faithfulness to the clouds." Perhaps the invitation today is to spend a few moments looking at the sky and pondering the fullness of God's love. As you do, whether you see blue skies, clouds, or even a rainbow, may you be reminded that God is with you and that God's mercies never fail.

God of all creation, you are faithful and good. Help us put our trust wholeheartedly in you today. Amen.

Prayer concern: Meteorologists and climatologists

Jeremiah 3:19-25; 1 Corinthians 7:1-7

All for the common good

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

I first learned of the “Big Toe Skit” as a counselor at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp in Montana. In the skit, different people portray parts of the body: an arm, the heart, the eyes. Each starts by declaring—with much drama and bravado—why that part is the most important. When the big toe introduces itself, however, it isn’t sure what value it has. The rest of the group teases the big toe and convinces it to leave.

Yet once the big toe is gone, the rest of the body doesn’t get very far. As soon as they start moving they fall over. Eventually they start to wonder if they are struggling because the big toe is missing. They call the big toe back, and once they start moving again they succeed. The skit illustrates in a comical and youth-friendly manner what we read today about spiritual gifts: all members in Christ’s body have value.

God has given each of us gifts to use for the common good. By the Spirit we can affirm one another’s gifts and work together to proclaim God’s love to the world.

**God, by your Spirit use our gifts to serve
our neighbors in their need and to proclaim
your kingdom. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Lutheran Outdoor Ministries

Jeremiah 4:1-4; Psalm 36:5-10; Luke 11:14-23



Second Sunday after Epiphany

**Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.”
And they filled them up to the brim. (v. 7)**

Everyone who attended the wedding received freely a gift of unparalleled quality in great abundance. In this, the first act of his public ministry in John’s gospel, Jesus sets the tone for life in Christ. Freely given, offered to all, what we receive at his hand is only the best.

As God’s baptized ones, we are anointed “little Christs” for the sake of the world. Following Jesus’ model, it is our delight to freely offer the needy world our very best, and in great supply. “Don’t hold back,” Jesus teaches by this living example.

In a world bent on gathering as much as possible for oneself, our Savior shows us a different way. Each day in the world is like a wedding where we show up and freely offer our very best in great abundance, in response to the needs of others. Such a way of life is as astonishing today as it was in Cana as Jesus’ Spirit blew over the waters and began the New Creation.

**As you, Lord, have freely and abundantly given,
may we also give with joy and gladness. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those living in poverty

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Treasured forever

**The stone that was rejected . . .
has become the cornerstone. (v. 11)**

It's often said, "One person's trash is another's treasure." Our reading includes Jesus in that sweeping assessment. The world rejected him, yet God made him the cornerstone. Because God acted decisively in the resurrection, the world now rests on a new and indestructible foundation that even death cannot destroy.

Through recycling and "upcycling," much of what the world calls trash is given new life. Some things are even made more beautiful in their new iterations.

What about you, and those around you, beloved of Christ? God gives us new hearts to regard all people as loved by God. Since Jesus was raised from the dead, the human family is given new life. You and I are treasured. And everyone else, no matter how eager we might be to trash them, is treasured by God as well. By grace we are called to treasure them too.

A new saying is better: "No one is trash; all are treasures."

**Thank you, God, for treasuring me. May I in turn
treasure others, for Jesus' sake. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those in prison, on the streets, or alone

Isaiah 54:1-8; Psalm 145; Romans 12:9-21

Confession of Peter

**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of
heaven. (v. 19)**

I wonder what the keys Jesus promises Peter look like.

Keys have changed significantly. I remember the key to my grandparents' farmhouse. It barely fit in one's pocket and was beautiful to behold. My parents' house key was more streamlined. And I don't even have a door key any longer—just a fob. We live in the days of keyless entry and push-button vehicle ignitions.

So I wonder what the keys to the kingdom of heaven look like. Could Peter, whose confession we celebrate today, fit them in his pocket? Over the ages, have they morphed into a code?

One thing I know for sure is that on that keychain there's a cross. It is Christ alone, "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (v. 16), who has unlocked heaven's door through his death and resurrection. Thankfully, not only does that let us in; it also lets heaven out. Our world is flooded with Jesus' love. Just one question remains: Will we unlock that love through the doors of our own lives and share in letting it loose on earth?

**Risen One, thank you for unlocking your love
for all. In your name we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Pope Francis and
our Roman Catholic siblings

**Acts 4:8-13; Psalm 18:1-6, 16-19;
1 Corinthians 10:1-5**

Liberating waters

And all passed through the sea. (v. 1)

As I go about my joyful work of baptismal teaching in the church, one of my favorite gifts to share is the wonder that every congregation has its own Red Sea. It's true! In every church, big or small, ancient or modern, the waters of the Red Sea ebb and flow.

Through those waters we pass from bondage to freedom, from sin to forgiveness, from death to life. Just as surely as Moses led his people through the waters, Christ leads us. Christ leads us through baptismal waters and then to the table where, with the bread and cup, we are fed spiritual food and nourished for our baptismal work in the world's wilderness.

Each time you think of the baptismal font in the place where you worship, or of the waters in which you were baptized, think of it as the Red Sea. And give thanks for the liberating waters that teem throughout the church, bringing all God's people from death into life.

**Blessed Jesus, your death and resurrection
bring us new life in baptism. We thank you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those preparing for baptism

Song of Solomon 4:9–5:1; Psalm 145; Luke 5:33-39

Law all day long

**[Ezra] read from [the law] . . .
from early morning until midday. (v. 3)**

Picture it. The people of Israel return to the temple from exile. At long last they stand outside, eagerly longing to reenter this beloved, holy place. But before they do, their wise leader Nehemiah has them pause (for hours!) as he refreshes their memories with the words of the Law of Moses.

It's hard to imagine a congregation in our lifetime having the discipline and patience to stand outside "from early morning until midday" to hear the law proclaimed.

Perhaps instead, we can remind ourselves on a regular basis of the beautiful way Jesus summarized the law for us. When asked by a lawyer of the Pharisees which commandment was greatest, Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . [and] your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39).

To live with such clarity and grace is a gift that helps us reenter a beloved, holy place each and every day.

**Holy One, you are the complete summary of the law,
perfected in love. We pray in your name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: That judges, lawyers, and
court workers serve justly

Isaiah 61:1-7; Psalm 19; Romans 7:1-6

Altars everywhere

**The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul. (v. 7)**

The psalm writer makes no apologies for seeing all of creation as our sibling and companion. The heavens tell of God's glory (v. 1), the sun is a bridegroom (v. 5), and days and nights speak (v. 2) just like people.

Closely connected, the perfect law of the Lord is as evident to the writer as the wonders of nature. Each has its place in God's lovely economy. Both are meant to help us take in the wonder and the beauty of God. In other words, there are altars everywhere. The psalmist pleads for eyes to see and ears to hear.

The psalm comes to its fruition in its final verse. Having witnessed and given thanks for the wonders of both nature and the law, the writer makes a final request. Could there be yet other places for an altar? Specifically, could they be in the words of our mouths? In the meditations of our hearts? Oh, to be the place where it is clear God so richly dwells.

**God, we are not worthy for you to dwell in us;
yet you do so nonetheless. For that we
give thanks. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who have not yet heard
the word of God

Nehemiah 2:1-10; Romans 12:1-8

All thumbs

**As it is, there are many members,
yet one body. (v. 20)**

Yesterday the psalmist pictured God in nature and the law. Today, we see the people of Christ as a body of many parts. Both are organic metaphors of connection and unity.

Science has taught us what Paul seemed to know intuitively: in order to function effectively, we need diversity *and* unity. Picture the dysfunction of a body that is all eyes, or all thumbs.

We quickly pass over Paul's encouragement to see ourselves as something more than a bundle of thumbs. It's important to drill down in the metaphor and take seriously the significance of our diversity as a gift. In our day, we know enough about the organic unity of cells to know that a closed mind affects an open heart.

Before there was an X-ray or an MRI, our forebears in the faith knew that we're all in this together. Current science informs us about the body's interconnectedness. Do our interactions with those least like us show true wisdom about how much we need one another?

**God, help me see in each person your creativity
and the wonder of all they offer to the world. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Thanksgiving for diversity
of people and nations

Nehemiah 5:1-13; Psalm 19; Luke 2:39-52



Third Sunday after Epiphany

**Today this scripture has been fulfilled
in your hearing. (v. 21)**

It is the shortest and longest sermon ever. In nine words Jesus proclaims the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: those who are poor receive good news, captives are set free, the Lord's favor is here!

These nine words ring across the ages. But when will this proclamation be fully realized? God's people still wait for God to free captives, to bring hope and good news to the poor and oppressed. As we wait, we are called to enter into the work God is doing. We too are anointed to announce the year of the Lord's favor. There is yet good news to proclaim and hope to come.

Jesus began his ministry in his hometown. It's a seemingly small detail, but it suggests, perhaps, that going back to our roots—spiritually, at least—is the way to make short work of a long, arduous task. Grounded in the basic gifts of word, sacraments, prayer, and community, we are sent to a needy world to bring what Jesus has already proclaimed. We offer the world what his death and resurrection have won for all people.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Amen.

Prayer concern: All who work for the dignity
of people everywhere

**Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19;
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a**

From persecutor to proclaimer

**The one who formerly was persecuting us is
now proclaiming the faith he once tried
to destroy. (v. 23)**

Paul's story offers hope to all who feel beyond God's love. Notice Paul's use of the adverb "violently" (v. 13) to emphasize how brutal his denial of Christ had been.

Our personal biographies don't all include dramatic turnarounds. But perhaps we overlook each week's time of confession and absolution in worship, when we are transformed from people who didn't even recognize their sinfulness to forgiven sinner-saints. We lay before God the truth that "we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves," then receive the joyous proclamation: "In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven" (*ELW*, pp. 95–96).

Do we recognize this dramatic turnaround? We may fail to see our own sin as we see Paul's persecution. Or maybe we're so used to the weekly ritual that it doesn't always sink in. But here's the astonishing truth: God loves us—as God loved Paul—and through Christ, God transforms us too from persecutors to proclaimers.

**O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth
may proclaim your praise. Amen.**

Prayer concern: All whose daily work
proclaims forgiveness

**Jeremiah 36:1-10; Psalm 119:89-96;
1 Corinthians 14:1-12**

Conversion of Paul

**And after taking some food,
he regained his strength. (v. 19)**

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity that began with the Confession of Peter comes to an end today as the church celebrates the Conversion of Paul.

Ordinary people like us can feel dwarfed by such spiritual giants as these. Yet today's story from Acts reminds us that Paul was far from a spiritual giant before his conversion, and the shortcomings of the disciple Peter are widely known as well.

Our baptism into Christ welcomes us to a community that not only believes in leaving our past behind us but is actually founded on that paradigm. In the crucifixion, Jesus puts to death the past failures of our lives and raises us up to new life every day. Each time we gather at the table with our siblings in Christ, we do so with those who are in need of the same daily dying and rising that we need. With Christ as both host and guest at this meal, our baptismal promise is renewed, and we follow in the footsteps of Paul. After taking some food, we regain our strength.

**Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, feed us now
and evermore. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who feel spiritually hungry

Galatians 1:11-24; Psalm 67; Luke 21:10-19

The evening news

There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues. (v. 11)

Today's reading comes from the Gospel of Luke, but it sounds like it could also be a headline ripped from the evening news. Earth continues to groan under the weight of its ever-evolving existence, and humankind never ceases to find itself in situations where nation rises against nation, kingdom against kingdom.

But does Jesus' advice in the face of such dis-ease seem reasonable? "Make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance" (v. 14). It seems contradictory to what he says elsewhere, counseling, for example, a king to count the cost before going to war, or a builder to estimate the final construction project before laying a foundation (Luke 14:28-31).

In both cases, the key element is trust. God, who made the world in all its wonder, who knows the complexity of national intrigue and geological phenomena, also knows us inside and out. No matter what, the promise stands: "Not a hair of your head will perish" (v. 18).

Loving Creator, you call us to trust you in all circumstances. We believe; help our unbelief. Amen.

Prayer concern: All who suffer from natural disasters

Jeremiah 36:27-32; Psalm 119:89-96; Luke 4:38-44

Only a boy

**I do not know how to speak,
for I am only a boy. (v. 6)**

A new verb has evolved recently: *adulthood*—as in “Adulthood is hard.” It’s true that it can be difficult to be an adult, responsible for many tasks and perhaps for other people while our thoughts are clouded by the complexities of our experiences and hardships. Jeremiah suggests the opposite: that being a *child* is hard, and that being a youth *and* a prophet will be harder still. Yet God assures Jeremiah that because God will go with him, he’s got what it takes.

Those of us who are “only a child” or “only a youth” are loved and called by God, just as those of us preoccupied with “adulthood” are. Adults can learn from children and teens, like when young people see goodness where we older folks focus on complication and fear. Yet kids, too, often face great difficulties and challenges. In the midst of it all, they are welcomed into the loving arms of Jesus (Mark 10:13-16)—as are adults. Loved unconditionally by God, we can love others without condition. Such love is a great quality in prophets, and in disciples.

**Loving God, as you embrace all your children,
help us love and serve with abandon and joy. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who serve, teach,
and protect children

2 Chronicles 34:1-7; Psalm 71:1-6; Acts 10:44-48

God's righteous work

In your righteousness deliver me. (v. 2)

In his study of the Old Testament, Luther was intrigued by the phrase "the righteousness of God." He found it in the story of Sarah and Abraham, and in this psalm. It was as if a switch flipped in his head and heart one day when he had the sudden realization that it is fully God's righteousness, not any work or merit on our part, that heals and restores us.

The psalmist also speaks of the righteousness of God. Think of it like this: It is God's very nature to deliver us and rescue us. It is God's nature to be our rock, our refuge, and our fortress. That is God's righteousness. It is who God *is*.

In those moments when we are convinced that we can go it alone, the words of the psalmist and the insight of Luther are both helpful reminders. Calling us back to God is God's righteous work, not our own. It is also a powerful reminder, as the psalmist inspires us, for our praise to be continually of God (v. 6).

From our birth to our dying day, O God, may our praise "be continually of you." In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Youth and family ministers

2 Chronicles 35:20-27; Acts 19:1-10

Noisy gongs and clanging cymbals

**If I . . . do not have love, I am a
noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (v. 1)**

On Minnesota lakes one of the most beautiful sights is a family of loons. Mama and papa swim with babes in tow, sometimes even riding on the mother's back. When danger approaches, perhaps in the form of a human in a kayak or canoe, the male often disappears beneath the water, only to reappear soon elsewhere, calling out loudly. With this distracting display he protects the beloved from those who might cause harm.

We humans might do all kinds of impressive things. But without love, Paul says, we and our impressive works are only a loud noise—a gong or a clanging cymbal. God's love—which bears all things—has come to us as a gift, calling out to us as God's beloved to love and protect each other.

God's love calls us to speak up—to draw another's attention—for the sake of God's beloved. Such love is patient and kind with those in need, and noisy for the sake of justice and freedom. Like loons on a summer lake, it is a beautiful thing.

**Help me, O God, to know how best to love
in any given situation. In Jesus' name. Amen**

Prayer concern: ELCA World Hunger ministry

2 Chronicles 36:11-21; Psalm 71:1-6; John 1:43-51



Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

**But he passed through the midst of them
and went on his way. (v. 30)**

It's a cautionary tale, this story of Jesus' hometown's reaction to his inaugural message. The language used is strong and should get our attention: "All," Luke says, "were filled with rage" (v. 28).

The human community often reacts with rage when we learn that people unlike us will benefit from someone or something we thought we could contain. When Jesus reminds the hometown folk of God's prior outreach to the widow of Zarephath and the army commander of Syria, they drive him out. But he passes peacefully through the midst of his family and neighbors to minister to the world.

The work of diversity, equity, and inclusion calls us to recall that, as far as Jesus is concerned, the hometown folk are *all* within Jesus' embrace. But so is everyone else. From this very first moment of his ministry, Jesus is clear that all are welcome in the love of God.

**Help us, O Lord, to remember that with you there
are no outsiders. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: All who work for diversity, equity,
and inclusion

**Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6;
1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

In every corner of creation

**My soul longs . . . for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy to
the living God. (v. 2)**

During the pandemic of 2020–2021, many Christians learned to worship away from what they commonly thought of as “God’s house,” or “the courts of the LORD.” Worship spaces were shuttered for fear of becoming super-spreader locations. At the heart of those building closures was our intention to love one another as God commands. We gave up something precious in order to protect others.

But as the gospel promises, death leads to resurrection. When the opportunity for worship in the beloved “courts of the LORD” died, we learned to worship in new ways: online or outdoors. Many of those became more inclusive than our sanctuary-bound services ever were. The Lord God who is both “sun and shield” (v. 11) was with us wherever and however we worshiped. And as we gradually returned to our buildings, we rediscovered that “a day in [God’s] courts is better than a thousand elsewhere” (v. 10)—wherever those courts might be.

**God, we worship and adore you. Show us how
you inhabit every corner of creation. Amen.**

Prayer concern: The health of our planet

1 Kings 17:8-16; Psalm 56; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Our brother, Jesus

**He had to become like his brothers
and sisters in every respect. (v. 17)**

In the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds we profess our faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Yet it's impossible for our human minds to comprehend even a fraction of the totality of God, maker of heaven and earth, author of time, creator of life itself, and designer of all living things, from single-celled organisms to giant sequoia trees.

Similarly, God the Holy Spirit stretches our intelligence and imagination as God's mysterious and holy presence works in ways unseen and unknowable.

But how much more readily can we understand God the Son, Jesus, who became like us "in every respect." As both fully divine and fully human, Jesus walked among us and experienced our life. Jesus knew hunger, sorrow, joy, abandonment, anger, and every other human emotion. We can relate to Jesus, God the Son. Jesus, our brother, gave all to us and for us. Jesus, our "merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God" (v. 17), hears our prayers and helps us live in fullness.

**Holy God, help us always to trust in your Son,
our brother Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who don't know Jesus

2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 56; 1 Corinthians 14:13-25

Presentation of Our Lord

**The child grew and became strong,
filled with wisdom; and the favor of God
was upon him. (v. 40)**

How were you formed in your faith? My parents brought me to church when I was a child. On Sunday mornings my mom and dad would roust me and my four siblings from bed, then get us fed, dressed, and in the car. Getting five children ready for church every Sunday took real effort, and it underscored my parents' value of passing on their faith.

Mary and Joseph undertook no small effort to travel to Jerusalem to present Jesus at the temple, a tradition of their faith. There he was recognized as the Messiah by Simeon and Anna, two holy souls who prayed over and prophesied about him. As Jesus grew, no doubt the patterns and rituals of religious life shaped him to be the man and Messiah he was meant to be. As faithful parents, Mary and Joseph followed their Jewish customs and traditions and raised Jesus in that faith.

Did someone bring you to church when you were young, or encourage your faith practice at a later age? Who might you encourage in the faith?

**Faithful God, teach us to follow your ways
and be transformed by your love. Through Christ,
our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who are raising kids in faith

Malachi 3:1-4; Psalm 84; Hebrews 2:14-18

Reluctant, but send me

**Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man
of unclean lips, and I live among a people
of unclean lips. (v. 5)**

A deeply faithful woman, Debbie always brought her two school-age children to church. She got along well with everyone and loved helping out. Yet when given the opportunity to lead a Sunday school class, she declined, explaining, "I'm not qualified. I didn't even go to college." Later Debbie admitted, "I'm scared."

Isaiah, too, felt unqualified and undeserving when God called him to serve in a special way. But then God prepared Isaiah and gave him what he needed to fulfill the mission God had in store for him.

It seems God typically calls ordinary people like you and me to accomplish holy work, ordinary people who may feel ill-prepared, out of place, or, as Debbie experienced, scared to take on a particular role. But Debbie learned, as Isaiah did, that when she finally said yes to the holy task, God would give her what she needed to succeed, and she became an ideal Sunday school teacher.

**Holy God, when you call us out of our
comfort zones, help us to say, "Here am I;
send me" (v. 8). Amen.**

Prayer concern: When we feel reluctant
to serve God in a certain way

Numbers 20:22-29; Psalm 138; Acts 9:19b-25

Cooking with God

**On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul. (v. 3)**

Our fancy new electric oven and range was a marvel of technology, offering a dizzying variety of stovetop options as well as conventional or convection settings for broiling, baking, or grilling. We were so happy because it greatly expanded the cooking potential of our home kitchen. But when a torrential thunderstorm blew into town and knocked out the electricity for two days, the stove was as worthless as junkyard metal.

It's the same in our lives of faith when we are disconnected from our divine energy supply, God. The Almighty has given each of us wonderful gifts and abilities that are unique to us, and God wants us to use them for holy purposes. But we're not going to accomplish much if we are separated from God's power. Psalm 138 expresses the sure promise that God is always there and ready to give us what we need—reassurance, strength, courage, wisdom—to walk as disciples.

**Loving God, energize us with your power
and strength, that we may do your will,
through Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Electricians and
appliance manufacturers

Numbers 27:12-23; Acts 9:26-31

Overcoming conflict

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you. (v. 1)

The Christian community was rife with problems. It seemed nobody could agree on anything: they argued over the role of women, marriage, and sexuality. Some were even listening to preachers with heretical ideas about the saving work of Jesus. This was the situation Paul was addressing in his first letter to the Christians at Corinth, a community he himself had founded. But what started out so promising had declined due to human nature's all-too-common propensity for disagreement.

At some point disagreement affects every Christian community, whether it's a family, a small congregation, or a megachurch. When has your community known conflict?

Paul's advice to the Corinthians two thousand years ago can serve Christians facing conflict today. He told them to stop quarreling and to refocus on what was most important. The saving message of Jesus can energize a community and help it move past disagreements to grow stronger.

Healing God, help us always to find peace and unity in the gospel, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer concern: Churches in crisis and conflict

Judges 3:7-11; Psalm 138; Luke 4:42-44



Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

**They caught so many fish that their nets
were beginning to break. (v. 6)**

When Simon responds to Jesus' suggestion that they move their fishing boat into deeper water, you can sense the weariness in his voice: "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing" (v. 5). Not only weariness, but also frustration and disappointment.

Most of us can relate to Simon's predicament of working diligently without any measure of success. We fall prey to depression and anxiety when our lives fall short of our hopes and dreams. Similarly, many of today's church members and leaders are discouraged because of decreasing attendance and financial resources.

Notice, however, that after Simon follows Jesus' advice to move the boat to deeper water, the nets can hardly contain all the fish they catch. For us and our churches, especially when we are experiencing discouragement, the first step in achieving success (or greater success) is to prayerfully seek Jesus' counsel, and then to follow it.

**God of hope, when we feel like failures, help us
hear your direction for how to get on track. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Spiritual directors and counselors

**Isaiah 6:1-8 [9-13]; Psalm 138;
1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

Following false gods

**Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of human hands. (v. 4)**

“The one who dies with the most toys wins.” So said the bumper sticker on the fancy sports car whose price could feed and house two families for a year. The slogan captures a prevailing idea in the culture in which I live: that life’s main objective is to accumulate as much stuff as we possibly can.

In ages past, people worshiped false gods in the form of gold and silver idols, dead gods that could not hear or speak or be in relationship with us. Today people still worship false idols of silver and gold—money and the things it can buy.

People of faith know that while “silver and gold” are necessary to live in this world, we don’t trust in money’s promise of power and security. Instead, we cling to the one true God who hears our prayers, whispers to our souls, and loves us unconditionally. We know that our life purpose is to accumulate treasure not on earth but in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). After all, the one who dies with the most toys leaves all those toys behind.

**God of abundance, teach us to trust always in you,
not in the false gods of silver and gold. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Financial advisors

Judges 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

All-knowing, all-seeing, all-listening God

**I have seen the suffering of my people,
because their outcry has come to me. (9:16)**

Where is God when we're in pain, when we're suffering? It's a question every faithful person has faced. We turn to God but don't get an immediate answer, so we pray harder. Sometimes our souls grow weary. We assume the Almighty isn't listening and doesn't care.

The story of God appointing Saul as Israel's first king lets us know that God does listen and respond to our prayers—not always the way we want, but in the way we need. Israel had prayed for a king. God told them they didn't need a human king, for down that road lay certain disaster. Instead, the Almighty would be their king. Still they pleaded. Listening to their cries and knowing their suffering, God finally appointed Saul as their earthly ruler—not to replace God, but to be God's instrument to deliver Israel from their enemies.

God always receives our prayers and knows our suffering. Sometimes God's responses don't fit our desired outcomes, but God listens and holds us in tender love.

**Loving God, thank you for always listening to
our prayers and giving us what we need. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Lutheran Social Services

Psalms 115; 1 Timothy 3:1-9

Calling all sinners!

**[Jesus] went out and saw a tax collector
named Levi . . . and he said to him,
“Follow me.” (v. 27)**

She worked as a stand-up comic and talks freely about her past of alcoholism and drug abuse. But God got hold of her, and now, as a pastor, best-selling author, and speaker, Nadia Bolz-Weber is a leader helping the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America form a vision for the future. With her unconventional background, Bolz-Weber has much in common with Levi, the tax collector whose profession made him a pariah among his own people. Yet in Levi Jesus saw potential. It's a pattern Bolz-Weber describes in her book *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People* (Convergent, 2015): “Never once did Jesus scan the room for the best example of holy living and send that person out to tell others about him. He always sent stumblers and sinners” (p. 30).

We are all “stumblers and sinners” when it comes to holy living, and God calls every one of us to work for God's priorities in the world.

**Holy God, you call us, imperfect as we are.
Help us to be your faithful disciples. Amen.**

Prayer concern: All of us sinner-saints

Isaiah 8:1-15; Psalm 115

Original sin

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals . . . , whose hearts turn away from the LORD. (v. 5)

What the Western church has long called the “original sin” of Adam and Eve went far beyond eating forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. In doing so they supplanted God as their ultimate authority on matters of right and wrong. They became, in effect, their own god, deciding for themselves about good and evil.

Much more harmful than discrete actions (stealing, lying) that tend to come to our minds when we think of “sin,” putting ourselves—not God—in charge of our lives is the real sin. As Jeremiah declares, “The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse” (v. 9). Augustine, a fourth-century theologian, observed that sin is our state of living “curved in on ourselves,” instead of focused outward toward God and neighbor.

To live curved in upon oneself is a cursed life, indeed. Separated from God, we not only trust in the wrong things—our own judgment and power—but we also disconnect ourselves from the source of real life, love, and joy.

Merciful God, when we trust only in ourselves, forgive us and reorient us toward you. Amen.

Prayer concern: Military chaplains and personnel

Jeremiah 13:12-19; Psalm 1; Acts 13:26-34

God's teaching

Their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night. (v. 2)

How does God want us to live? How does God want us to get along with our neighbors? How, exactly, are we to live so as to be the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world” that Jesus declares we are (Matthew 5:13-14)? These are matters about which the Bible is our truest and best source. When we steep ourselves in the Bible, we discover all the guidance we need.

Because we tend to focus on the legalistic meaning of *law* in our culture, and sometimes in our theology, the delight expressed in Psalm 1:2 might come as a wonderful surprise. What in English is “law” is the Hebrew word *torah*. Torah is the totality of God's teaching, particularly as revealed in the scriptures. God's teaching is for the sake of abundant life for us and for generations to come.

As God's people, we find true blessings and happiness, indeed, when we delight in the teachings of God and meditate on the Bible's guidance night and day.

Holy God, help us to turn first and foremost to your teaching to guide our lives. Amen.

Prayer concern: Christian education ministries

Jeremiah 13:20-27; 1 Peter 1:17–2:1

The hub of our faith

**If for this life only we have hoped in Christ,
we are of all people most to be pitied. (v. 19)**

When my bicycle's front bearing failed, the bike could no longer be ridden. The wheel was sluggish and made a gravelly sound instead of spinning freely on the hub. A marvel of efficiency, a bicycle is engineered to glide along with ease. But when a hub bearing goes bad, the bike is useless.

God has similarly designed our lives to glide us along, but there is trouble indeed when the hub goes bad. That's what Paul was talking about in today's reading when members of the Corinthian church began to doubt the gospel's hub message. "How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" (v. 12).

As people of faith, we know that our lives do not begin and end with our time on earth, but instead we live in the flowing stream of God's eternity. It gives our lives meaning, hope, purpose, and vitality. Because Christ has been raised from the dead, we too will be raised. It is the hub around which our lives spin as freely as a bicycle wheel.

**God of life, teach us how to revolve our lives around
the promise you give of new life in Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: For the safety of cyclists

Jeremiah 17:1-4; Psalm 1; Luke 11:24-28



Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

**Woe to you who are full now, for you
will be hungry. (v. 25)**

Climbing to the top of the social and economic ladder was hard work; the professional couple spent years gathering the wealth they expected would bring them fulfillment and joy. But having achieved the station in life to which they had long aspired, they were surprised to sense emptiness. "All this stuff," the woman said. "It really doesn't mean anything."

Jesus' Sermon on the Plain understands this countercultural phenomenon. And it goes further: those who are full now "will be hungry," Jesus says. His mother Mary had declared of God: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53).

God has indeed done these good things, so we pray for God to show up again with good news for the poor and liberation for those oppressed by unjust structures and authorities or by their own wealth. We pray for God to use us to proclaim and show love and liberation. In such work true happiness is found.

**God, help us desire the true riches that we
can obtain only through loving relationship with
you and others. Amen.**

Prayer concern: All who trust in wealth

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Our source of strength in grief

**For as all die in Adam, so all will be
made alive in Christ. (v. 22)**

The funeral and the fellowship meal that followed were over, and the congregation's luncheon crew was just finishing the kitchen cleanup. The day carried a heavy somberness because the dear departed had lived only into her forties before her life was cut short by cancer. Her parents, husband, and children were left hungering for unknowable answers to hard questions: Why? How could God let this happen? How are we to go on without her?

Nothing compares to the pain of losing a loved one, especially when they have not lived to old age. Yet Christians find strength in knowing that the end of our days on earth does not mean the end of our life. Rather, Christ has been raised from the dead, and through Christ we, too, are assured of resurrection. This knowledge does not remove our grief for loved ones who die, but it does comfort us. Even in their pain, the family of the woman who died knows that she will be made alive again with Christ. And so will they.

**God of life, help us always to trust in the sure
and certain hope of the resurrection, through
Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Funeral home ministries

2 Kings 24:18–25:21; Psalm 120

Going home

The LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia. (v. 1)

The familiarity of home can provide a sense of stability and security. It can be hard to be away from home under the best of circumstances. It is even more difficult to be away from home when it is not by choice. When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, the temple built by King Solomon was ruined, and many of the Hebrew people were taken into exile. They were forced to leave home.

But God did not leave them. God's promises followed them, even into the most challenging times. God promised them that one day they would return home. Today's passage is the beginning of the fulfillment of that promise, the beginning of their homegoing. It is a reminder that God keeps God's promises.

This reminder is as true for us today as it was for God's people of old. Even amid our most trying times, God is with us. God promises to never leave us. God promises to bring hope out of despair, new life out of death, and to ultimately bring us home.

**Gracious God, fill us with trust in your presence
and hope in your promises, through Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: All who are away from home

2 Corinthians 1:12-19; Psalm 120

Table talk

So [Jesus] went in and took his place at the table. (v. 37)

The dinner table is often the setting for some of life's most important conversations. It is around the table that households share hopes, dreams, and fears. It is at the table that the stories of daily life are told, griefs are processed, and the big questions of life are explored. It seems to be a universal truth that in a shared meal, the table talk is just as important as the food.

In the Gospel of Luke, we find Jesus eating more meals than in any of the other gospels. In fact, the meals in many ways move the story along. Meals provide the occasion for some of Jesus' most noteworthy teachings. Today's passage is no exception. Here we find the table talk centered on justice. Jesus points out that a life that contradicts justice contradicts God.

This reminder and invitation call us as children of God, claimed and named in baptism, to follow the example of Jesus and "strive for justice and peace in all the earth" (*ELW*, p. 236).

**Renewing God, draw us daily to the waters
of baptism and raise us to lives of justice.**

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer concern: Advocacy workers and
community organizers

Jeremiah 22:11-17; Psalm 120

A new perspective

God sent me before you to preserve life. (v. 5)

Air travel allows us to see things from a different perspective. What is on the ground looks different from several thousand feet up. Farm fields look like a patchwork quilt. Rivers look like snakes wriggling across the countryside. Cities look like ornate, intricate works of art. What one sees changes with one's perspective.

When Joseph and his brothers meet again after many years apart, their perspectives are quite different. Because Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery and told their father he was dead, they approach the meeting trembling with fear. Joseph, however, views their meeting from the perspective of one who has faith in God's purpose for his life and the life of the world.

This perspective of faith helps us see things differently too. We do not believe that God causes bad things to happen. Instead, we trust that God is at work, even when bad things happen. Even in the midst of death, God is ever present, working to bring about God's purposes for good—for life.

**Holy Spirit, give me the faith to trust
your purpose for my life and that you are at work
in the world. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Mediators, counselors,
and peacemakers

**Genesis 43:16-34; Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40;
Romans 8:1-11**

God, our refuge
[God] is their refuge
in the time of trouble. (v. 39)

It is hard when things don't make sense. We like to understand not only how things happen but why. Why do bad things happen? Why is good not always rewarded? Why do the wicked sometimes win? We look for cause and effect. We like to connect the dots. We seek answers.

God's people of old did the same thing. They wondered why sometimes it seemed like evil prospered while goodness suffered. They sought direction for how to survive in the face of injustice. Psalm 37 is a pastoral response to such concerns. It provides insight for living in a world that sometimes seems upside down. It is a reminder to trust in who God is and what God promises.

When we face our own confounding experiences or suffer injustice, this psalm reminds us to look to God. The psalmist proclaims God's power to overcome the evil that appears to be winning. God is the author of salvation. God will help. God is our refuge in every trouble.

God of promise, be my refuge today and always.
In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those without homes or a living wage

Genesis 44:1-17; 1 John 2:12-17

Resurrection promise

**What is sown is perishable,
what is raised is imperishable. (v. 42)**

Often when we gather together in worship, we confess our faith using the words of the Apostles' Creed. Through this confession, we articulate both who God is and what God has done and continues to do for us and for all creation. We proclaim our belief in God who creates, redeems, and calls to faith. At the end of this confession, we declare, "I believe . . . in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

Sometimes these words are accompanied by individuals making the sign of the cross over their bodies. This is a reminder that baptism into Christ promises resurrection. Baptism promises that just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so shall we be raised to life everlasting.

Marking yourself with the sign of the cross does not have to be reserved for corporate worship. In fact, it can be a daily reminder that you belong to Christ and that in this belonging, God has given you a resurrection promise.

**Holy God, remind me of my baptism and give me
the hope of eternal life through Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who are dying and all who grieve

**Genesis 44:18-34; Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40;
Luke 12:57-59**



Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

**Be merciful, just as your Father
is merciful. (v. 36)**

It is a familiar scene among children at play. All is well until something turns into some kind of disagreement. The disagreement turns into a scuffle. The scuffle turns into tears, and one or the other calls out to some person in authority. “She hit me,” cries one. “He started it,” responds the other. And back and forth the rationale of retaliation goes. This reasoning, not by any means limited to children, suggests that fairness means that what is done to one must be done to another.

In today’s passage, Jesus shows us a new kind of fairness, and thereby a new kind of love. It is love not rooted in the value of what you get; instead, it is love that expects nothing in return. It is God-love. It is love made flesh in Jesus.

This Jesus-enfleshed love makes God’s mercies new every morning for you. It does not repay your sin in kind but with the life of Jesus, poured out to love you into a new creation—once and forever.

**God of love, thank you for making me new today,
in Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Enemies and those with whom
we disagree

**Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40;
1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50**

Waiting

Make haste to help me. (v. 22)

Waiting is hard. Whether we are waiting for something joyful or anticipating something sorrowful, waiting can leave us with a sense of powerlessness and uncertainty. The outcome for which we wait may not be within our control, nor may it be to our liking. Whether we are waiting for test results from the doctor, for an acceptance letter from a college, or for justice to come, waiting is hard.

Psalm 38 is an ancient prayer for help amid a time of anguished waiting. It is the plea of one who is both sick and penitent, abandoned by friends and taunted by enemies. In naming the sorrows of affliction, the psalmist is vulnerable and honest. The psalm identifies what is wrong, and the one praying cries out to God for aid, confident that God will indeed help.

This psalm is an invitation for you to bring the troubles of your own life to God, trusting that even amid your waiting, God will not forsake you. God will be near you. God will be your help and salvation.

**Ever-present God, make haste to help me in my
time of need, through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer concern: All who await medical tests
and treatments

Genesis 33:1-17; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Unity in Christ

**I hear that there are
divisions among you. (v. 18)**

An elder I know had a saying about congregational life: "Where two or three are gathered, there will be divisions among them. That's why we need Jesus." It was a reminder that our human brokenness can drive us apart and that our unity lies not in anything human, but in Christ.

Division among the followers of Jesus is a prominent theme in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. These divisions even became apparent in the celebration of the Lord's supper. In the early church, the supper was a part of a larger meal in a private home. The Corinthians followed mealtime social customs that privileged people of position and status. The most privileged persons received the most and finest food. Paul identifies that such practice is inconsistent with the ministry of Jesus and contradictory to the intention of the Lord's supper.

United in Christ through the waters of baptism, when we celebrate the Lord's supper, God's "for you" is given equally for all.

**O God, help us to tear down walls that divide
and to embrace our unity in Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Communion assistants and
altar guild ministers

1 Samuel 24:1-22; Psalm 38

Surprise!

**What God has made clean,
you must not call profane. (v. 15)**

It can be startling to open the door to what we expect to be a quiet room, only to have a group of people jump out and yell, “Surprise!” Often such surprises are joyous affairs—birthday parties, homecomings, congratulatory events. But even when such experiences are reasons for celebration, the unexpected “surprise” can be unsettling.

Chapter 10 of the Acts of the Apostles is a story in which both Cornelius and Peter are baffled by a God-driven surprise. Both men have visions. Both men are unnerved. Through those visions, God brings the two men together, and both are changed. The barriers that once divided Jews and Gentiles are broken down—surprise! In Jesus, God continues to amaze us with the expansive fullness of God’s redeeming reach.

Sometimes it can be difficult to believe that God really does love you, that Jesus really has redeemed you. This story is God’s bold declaration: “Surprise! Jesus loves you too!”

**Loving God who makes all things new, thank you for
your surprising love for me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who feel they are
beyond God’s love

Leviticus 5:1-13; Psalm 38; Luke 17:1-4

Word and image

**The skin of his face shone because
he had been talking with God. (v. 29)**

Different ways of learning work best for each of us. Some of us learn best by reading and writing. Others learn through music. Still others learn by engaging their bodies and all their senses. The more ways we encounter something, the more apt we are to comprehend it.

Just before today's reading, Moses has been on the mountain with God, and God has renewed the covenant with Israel. When Moses returns to the people, it is not what he says that captures their attention; it is what he looks like. His face is shining! Through Moses, God gives the people more than one way to comprehend God's message. God gives them both word and image.

In our own life of faith, the Holy Spirit gives us various ways to experience God. The word of God announces the story of Jesus for us. God comes to us in baptism and communion too, that we might touch and taste the goodness of the life-giving love of Jesus.

**God of word and image, thank you for
revealing yourself in diverse ways so we can
all receive you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Pastors, deacons, and other
proclaimers of the word

Deuteronomy 9:1-5; Psalm 99; Acts 3:11-16

God is faithful

**They cried to the LORD,
and he answered them. (v. 6)**

One of my spiritual practices is to choose a phrase that I hold in my heart throughout a given day. The words take my mind off of things that may be causing me distress and center me in my faith. One of my favorite phrases for this centering is an internal call and response: “God is faithful; therefore, I will hope.”

Psalm 99 is a reminder of this faithfulness and hope. It proclaims that God is worthy of worship because God has promised to hear the cries of God’s people. The biblical story demonstrates many ways that God answers when God’s people call. Psalm 99 names a few examples: the stories of Moses, of Aaron, of Samuel. Each of these stories bears witness to God who has promised to be faithful; therefore, God’s people hope.

I invite you to use these words as a refrain to carry you through your day today. Whatever you face in your life this day, may they fill you with comfort, strength, and peace: God is faithful; therefore, I will hope.

**Faithful God, meet me in my need this day,
and fill me with hope. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People with depression and anxiety

Deuteronomy 9:6-14; Acts 10:1-8

Transformed

All of us . . . are being transformed. (v. 18)

I once saw a photographic exhibit titled *Imagination Transformation*. Each photograph was of a child in a costume looking into a mirror. The image in the mirror, however, was not of the child but of an adult dressed in attire that matched the child's play clothes. The child dressed as a firefighter saw a real firefighter, the child dressed as a doctor saw a real doctor, and so forth.

Today's passage reminds us of our transformation as baptized children of God. In Christ, God's glory is revealed. Baptized into Christ, we are made a new creation, a reflection of God's glory. When we look in the mirror of grace, it is not ourselves that we see, but ourselves being transformed into the image of Christ. Through daily dying and rising, we bear this image into the world, reflecting Christ for others.

Today, look in the mirror and trace the sign of the cross upon your forehead. Remember that God loves you, and behold the glory of God.

O God made known in Jesus, help me reflect Jesus to others, by the power of your grace. Amen.

Prayer concern: Photographers

Deuteronomy 9:15-24; Psalm 99; Luke 10:21-24



Transfiguration of Our Lord

**This is my Son, my Chosen;
listen to him! (v. 35)**

When I served as a campus pastor, I walked with young adults as they discerned what they were called to do with their lives. Amid conversations I would ask open-ended questions. One such question was this: “To whose voice do you listen?” It is a good question, not just for young adults trying to figure out what to do with their lives, but for all of us. To whose voice do you listen?

The story of the transfiguration of our Lord is mystical and moving. On the mountain with Jesus, time collapsed. The ancients came. They spoke of what would happen in Jerusalem. A voice from heaven identified Jesus as God’s own chosen, and the command and invitation to listen to Jesus was uttered.

That invitation comes across time to you: Listen to Jesus. After all, just as God through Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and to the promised land, Jesus leads you from brokenness to wholeness, from sorrow to joy, from death to life.

**O God, help me to listen to your voice today,
through Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: College and university campus pastors

Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12–4:2

Return

**[God] is gracious and merciful, slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love. (v. 13)**

I was not looking forward to the trip home. After spending a month in New Zealand I dreaded the twenty-four hours of travel back to Minnesota. It was going to be a long journey, lacking the same type of excitement as the one that took me away. The return trip was going to be hard, but it was made easier because my family's love was waiting to receive me when I got home.

Today we hear the summons to God's people to return, to come back again to God. Such turning again toward God can be hard. The journey of repentance can be rending. But Joel reminds us that it is God's nature that makes such a return possible—for the people of old, and for us.

Because God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, repentance is not a journey of fear but of hope. It is a journey that concludes with "Welcome home, people of God! Welcome home."

**Merciful God, turn me from my wanderings
toward my home in you, through Christ. Amen.**

Prayer concern: All who have lost their way

Exodus 35:1-29; Psalm 35:11-28; Acts 10:9-23a

Hide and seek

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me. (v. 10)**

When my young children did something wrong, they hid. I'd find them curled up under their covers or tucked behind the sofa. After a stint in time-out, we'd talk over the incident. They had trouble looking me in the eyes. "Sorry," they'd mumble into their chests. Time-out always ended with hugs and "I love yous."

As adults, we often fear facing up to our failings. After hurting a friend, we might avoid them. It seems easier to say nothing than to apologize. We worry they won't love us anymore. We might do the same thing with God. When we have done something wrong, we might avoid God. We stop attending church. We don't pray. We worry that God has stopped loving us.

Today's text shows us how to ask God for forgiveness. In fact, it gives us words to use when speaking to God: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love" (v. 1). We can be assured that like a loving parent, God will embrace and forgive us.

**Merciful God, when I hide, find me.
When I sin, forgive me. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Daycare teachers

Ezekiel 1:1–2:1; Psalm 35:11-28; Acts 10:23b-33

Ash Wednesday

**For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also. (v. 21)**

Have you ever wondered, “What will people think?” Some of us ask that question before every decision, worrying about disappointing people. Others of us invite responses to our choices, taking photos of our outings and posting them on social media.

Jesus told his followers to stop worrying what others might think, especially about their spiritual practices. Jesus was challenging the motivation behind his followers’ actions. He warned against praying and serving others to get immediate rewards. Instead, Jesus wanted people to give money, pray, and fast as a way of loving God and neighbor.

But how do we know if we’re doing the right thing for the right reasons? Jesus gave us a question to help evaluate our motives: “What do I treasure?” When we pray, serve others, or receive our ashes today, we can ask ourselves: “Do I treasure the praise of others? Or do I treasure God’s love and serve in order to thank God?”

**Jesus, help me to stop worrying about
what people think and to spread your love
by serving others. Amen.**

Prayer concern: The worldwide church
as we begin Lent

**Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Psalm 51:1-17;
2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10**

The whole shebang

Then you . . . shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you. (v. 11)

How do you say thank you? Do you send a card, dash off a text, or place a call? Do you say thank you for the gift or for everything the person is to you—"the whole shebang"?

In today's text, Moses gave the people of Israel a ritual of thanksgiving for the harvest. But that's not all; he wanted them to thank God for the whole shebang. Moses instructed them to thank God for taking them out of slavery and bringing them safely through the desert. He asked them to thank God for acting on behalf of many people, including the homeless and the oppressed. Finally, Moses told them to put their prayers into action by sharing their bounty with those in need (v. 12).

In our daily prayer and weekly worship, we remember what God has done for us—all of it, the whole shebang. We recall that God acts for everyone in the world. And then we share our bounty with others.

Giving God, remind me to thank you for all my blessings and to share them with others. Amen.

Prayer concern: Urban farmers

Exodus 5:10-23; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Acts 7:30-34

Our refuge

[You] will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.” (v. 2)

I'm a writer and a worrier. With my great big writer's imagination I conjure up worst-case scenarios. What if my back pain is permanent? What if my child doesn't succeed? What if I get fired?

I sometimes wonder if the psalmist worried too. This psalmist mentions several dangers, including physical and emotional persecution, evil, and illness. No doubt, the psalmist had experienced these dangers firsthand. And in every case, the psalmist had also experienced God's loving care. God showed up as shelter, shadow, refuge, fortress, protector, rescuer, salvation.

When I look back on my life, I realize that when I experienced worry, God was my refuge. When I faced danger, God offered protection. God was with me during that medical procedure, God surrounded my family in challenging times, and God was present in the difficult work meeting. The psalm reveals that in every worrisome situation, God shelters us. Next time you worry, take a moment to pray, and trust that God is there.

**Protector and Nurturer, remind me that
wherever I go, you are with me. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Medical technicians

Exodus 6:1-13; Acts 7:35-42

You belong

**The same Lord is Lord of all and is generous
to all who call on him. (v. 12)**

I recently tried to post a message to an online group. Within minutes, it bounced back with the words “You can’t post. You’re not a member.” It wasn’t personal; the system didn’t recognize my email address. But it triggered memories of times when I was excluded.

In today’s text Paul shares the promises of God: “The word is near you, . . . you will be saved. . . . There is no distinction. . . . Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (vv. 8, 9, 12, 13). These promises bless us with a great big welcome. No matter who you are, how you look, or what you have done (or not done), this promise is for you. Paul reminded his readers—and reminds us—that when it comes to the community of faith, God’s promise is for everyone.

If you’ve ever felt the sting of rejection and wondered if there was a place for you in the family of God, take a highlighter to this passage: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” You belong to God.

**Welcoming God, when I feel left out, remind me
that I belong to you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who feel they don’t belong

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16;
John 12:27-36**



First Sunday in Lent

Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” (v. 8)

Just after John baptized Jesus, the guests arrived to celebrate! The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus. God claimed Jesus in the best baptism speech ever: “You are my Son, the Beloved” (Luke 3:22). Then the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness, where the devil tempted him to show off his power, capture the glory and respect of the world, and test God’s love. But in every case, Jesus turned down the devil by turning to God.

Most of us won’t be tempted in the wilderness, but every day we are barraged by messages that tell us: *You’re not lovable. You haven’t accomplished enough. But we can help!* It’s tempting to believe these half-truths.

In those times, remember that Jesus handled temptation by turning to God. When the world causes you to doubt God’s promises or your worth, remember that God loves you and claims you as God’s own. No matter what happens in life, turn to God to remember that you are enough. You are loved. And you belong.

**God of all, remind me that I belong to you,
and help me to turn to you when I doubt. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Graphic designers and copywriters

**Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16;
Romans 10:8b-13**

What would Jesus do?

**Whoever says, “I abide in him,”
ought to walk just as he walked. (v. 6)**

In the 1990s, the phrase “What would Jesus do?” was placed on bracelets, bumper stickers, and T-shirts to help people consider how Jesus would handle the situations they faced.

The writer of 1 John might have found this question to be a helpful tool for his readers. He wanted their walk to match their talk. He wrote that those who claim Jesus ought to “obey his commandments” (v. 3) and “walk just as he walked.” Reading this, we might feel a little anxious. Instead of moving through our days with joy, we might worry that Jesus’ footsteps are just too big to fill.

It may help to remember that Jesus declared that the greatest commandments are to love God and love your neighbor (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus isn’t looking for us to save ourselves or the world. *He* did that. Jesus wants us to embrace him and others with love. Next time you’re faced with a challenging situation—or are just trying to get through the day—ask yourself, “How can I act with love?”

**Dearest Jesus, when I fail, love me, forgive me, and
send me back into the world to love others. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Retail store workers

1 Chronicles 21:1-17; Psalm 17

One came running

**I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;
incline your ear to me, hear my words. (v. 6)**

Martin brought his little sister Maria to my writing class at the library. Everything was peaceful until Maria lost sight of her mother. The two-year-old girl screamed, “Mama!” All the adults in the library turned their heads—but only one came running. Soon Maria was reunited with her mama, and all was well.

Maria trusted that her mother would respond to her call. She reminds me of this psalmist, who was experiencing troubles. When enemies surrounded and threatened, the psalmist boldly called on God: “Guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings” (v. 8). Then the psalm writer sensed God’s assurance that the psalmist—like all people—was precious to God, beloved, worthy of being cared for as a mother bird cares for her hatchlings.

We have troubles too. No matter how old we are, we hope that when we call out, someone will come running. Psalm 17 reminds us that we can call out to God, who loves us and will guard and protect us.

**Gracious God, just like a loving parent, protect me
when I am lonely and scared. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Librarians

Zechariah 3:1-10; 2 Peter 2:4-21

Trust amid tragedy

**[Job said,] “The LORD gave, and the LORD
has taken away; blessed be the name
of the LORD.” (v. 21)**

Some religious leaders have made popular the saying “Name it and claim it.” They believe that if you work hard and have faith, God will bless you with wealth, health, and happiness.

The story of Job challenges these ideas. As the story opens, Satan—understood in ancient times as a sort of prosecutor in the heavenly court—asks God, “Does Job bless you because you’ve blessed him? If you cursed him, would Job curse you?” Job was tested: His children, servants, and livestock were killed. He was stricken with painful sores. Then Job’s friends, much like today’s prosperity preachers, blamed him for his problems.

What happens next can help us face our own difficulties. Job speaks honestly to God about his great grief. He confesses his faith: “For I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25). And God appears, showing him the wonder of all creation. In this story of tragedy and loss, we find hope: we can trust that the God who did not abandon Job will not abandon us.

**Merciful God, when life is difficult, wait with me
and give me hope. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Victims of violence

Psalm 17; Luke 21:34–22:6

God shows up

**[The LORD said,] “Do not be afraid, Abram,
I am your shield; your reward shall be
very great.” (v. 1)**

God called Abram and Sarai, promising many blessings, including “offspring” (Genesis 12:7). Years passed. Blessings happened. But no child. In today’s text, we read that Abram complained to God, “You have given me no offspring” (v. 3). He told God about his plan B.

God didn’t chastise Abram for doubting but reiterated the promise that Abram’s descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Then God backed it up with a covenant ceremony. Happy ending? Not yet. Abram has more waiting ahead.

But this isn’t a story about how well Abram waits. In fact, he wavers between trust and impatience. No, this is a story about *God’s* faithfulness. When Abram doubts and loses heart, God keeps showing up, making more audacious promises.

Waiting is hard. But we can trust that God is loving, steadfast, and faithful. When we doubt or lose heart, God shows up, waits with us, and blesses us.

**Gracious God, while I wait, help me to trust
that you walk with me and bless me. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Patience for people in a time of waiting

Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:2-12

My superpower is worry

**Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart
take courage; wait for the LORD! (v. 14)**

I often joke that my superpower is worry—my uncanny ability to create a worst-case scenario. So the movement in Psalm 27 from trust to prayers for deliverance is real. I can go from complete confidence to “But what if . . . ?” in seconds. And as my imagination runs wild, I can feel as though God isn’t paying attention or doesn’t exist at all. Faith is often a roller-coaster ride.

If you’re like me, this psalm is for us. It is good to be reminded how normal the wild ride of faith is. Our confidence skyrockets, but before we know it, we’re perched on the cliff of disbelief. Then along come the closing words of Psalm 27.

I’ve sung these words from the Taizé prayer service with small groups and large assemblies. Perhaps you have as well. Wonderful memories of singing over and over again in quiet, candlelit spaces: “Wait for the Lord, whose day is near. Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!” (ELW 262). It might be just what you need today too.

**Faithful God, may those overwhelmed
by anxiety and worry experience
calm and peace this day. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who tend to worry

Genesis 14:17-24; Philippians 3:17-20

Bigger and better

Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior. (v. 20)

Perhaps you've been part of a congregation where the pastor walked a newly baptized baby among worshipers who leaned to see the infant, smiled, and maybe clapped. Baptized kids—and adults—are presented and welcomed into the community of faith. Some pastors name examples of how the congregation will support their life of faith: through a Sunday school teacher, the usher who shovels or sweeps the front walk, a teenager who helps in the nursery. These people make up the community in which this individual now becomes a "citizen."

In this joyous ritual, something profoundly weighty happens. Through water and God's word, we're all called to join something bigger than ourselves, our civic communities, even our country. Our most fundamental citizenship is in God's family—what some call the "kin-dom" of God. Through baptism, every day we have a fresh start of forgiveness and new life. Every day we are invited to focus our attention beyond ourselves and to join one another in service for the greater good.

Faithful God, we give you thanks for all who join our kin-dom through the waters of baptism. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who are newly baptized

Psalm 118:26-29; Psalm 27; Matthew 23:37-39



Second Sunday in Lent

**Blessed is the one who comes
in the name of the Lord. (v. 35b)**

On this second Sunday in Lent, the scripture is already propelling us toward Palm Sunday and Holy Week. We'll soon witness Jesus' ride into Jerusalem to shouts of "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Luke 19:38).

We go with Jesus toward the cross. As we join him in his ministry of casting out demons and healing, we ask: How can we focus our ministry on justice that stands against today's demons? On providing healing and health care for all people? On having compassion for our enemies?

This is our job description as faithful disciples. In the Great Thanksgiving of the communion liturgy, many cross themselves at the phrase "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." It reminds us that as we both gather in our holy space and march toward our "Jerusalems," God strengthens us for often uncomfortable and challenging ministry so we can offer hope to the world in Jesus' name.

**Jesus, like a mother hen, hear our cries of lament
and gather us under your wings. Amen.**

Prayer concern: ELCA missionaries in the Middle East

**Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27;
Philippians 3:17-4:1**

Get out!

**Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works. (v. 2)**

There have been times when life has brought me so low, when my doubts have been so great, that my only path to recovering some strength or hope was to tell myself, “Get out!” In other words, get outside. During the COVID-19 pandemic, overcome by anxiety, my go-to place was the local forest preserve. There I could see physical examples of God’s “wonderful works.”

That’s sometimes all it takes. It’s no wonder exercise and spending time outdoors are among the first suggestions from mental health professionals: Go for a walk. It’s also no wonder so many beloved hymns have been based on Psalm 105, including “For the beauty of the earth,” “All creatures of our God and King,” and “Thankful hearts and voices raise” (whose text continues, “Tell everyone what God has done” [ELW 204]).

A good hike and an uplifting hymn can’t solve all our problems, but they are a start. And if we can get out and about with a tune in our hearts and heads, that might well be double the medicine.

**Creator God, give me strength to get out today
and enjoy the beauty of your earth. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Naturalists and caretakers of parks

Exodus 33:1-6; Romans 4:1-12

House rules

**The LORD is slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love. (v. 18)**

In our home we have a large wooden plaque with the heading “In our house,” followed by these statements: “We do second chances. We do grace. We do I love you. We do I’m sorry. We do laughter. We do family.”

It’s not on the plaque, but especially when our kids were younger, it wasn’t unusual to respond with this additional house rule: “You get what you get and you don’t throw a fit.” During the wilderness journey in Numbers, and especially in the lively exchanges between Moses and God, it was as if God was saying, “You get what you get and you don’t throw a fit.”

But there was also a more resounding message: assurance that God is slow to get angry, and full of steadfast love. What more could we ask of a loving parent? When we blow it—and we *will* blow it time and time again—God forgives us and welcomes us back. No matter our age, this message accompanies us through life and bids us to offer the same to others: we do grace.

**Thank you, faithful God, for your abundant love;
help us in our own relationships. Amen.**

Prayer concern: ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission

1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Psalm 105:1-15 [16-41] 42

Jesus leads us to higher ground

**Indeed, some are last who will be first,
and some are first who will be last. (v. 30)**

Some conversations with Jesus in the Bible remind me of political debates or press conferences. Reporters stand up and toss out their questions—some of them excellent, some really a reach. Frequently they appear to miss the mark—as do many of the responses. Perhaps you have yelled at the TV too: “Just answer the question, will you?!”

This encounter with Jesus is another place we might get caught up in the question—one that Jesus doesn’t really even bother answering. He pivots. Not like a politician, but like someone who sees the forest through the trees. He tells us not to play the numbers game and calls us out on our obsession with who’s in and who’s out.

Jesus leads us to higher ground, telling us to care for others and keep our own entitlement in check. The last may be first and the first, last. Sit down, questioners, and listen to Jesus. His answers will be fair and possibly unexpected. And they will always come from a place of love.

**Loving God, help us to welcome all people
just as we want to be welcomed. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Journalists and reporters

2 Chronicles 20:1-22; Psalm 105:1-15 [16-41] 42

God dwells in us

**He shall build a house for my name,
and I will establish the throne of his
kingdom forever. (v. 13)**

Through the wonders of social media I've connected with a relative in Norway whom I've never met in person but who has taught me so much about our family line. My grandmother and his grandfather were siblings. His genealogy research, going back to our great-grandfather, amazes me.

Recently, he has made his way to the fourth generation and is gathering information on my own children, still teenagers. He has become an unexpected link between my past and my future, and the information he's gathered will be available for generations to come.

In this story from 2 Samuel, we get a glimpse of the house—or dynasty—of David. Through that line God dwells in people. God's grace extends beyond what is shown to David, through his family line and the one who is to come: Jesus.

Through baptism, we are heirs of this same promise. God dwells in us and through us, and God's love is lived out in all the seasons of our lives and legacies.

**For all who have come before us, especially our
parents and grandparents, we give you thanks,
O God. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Genealogists

Daniel 3:19-30; Psalm 63:1-8; Revelation 2:8-11

This promise is for us

**That the promise may rest on grace and
be guaranteed to all . . . who share the faith
of Abraham. (v. 16)**

It must be all the years with Sunday school, Bible camp, and youth group kids—I can't read about Abraham without breaking into song. An online search for "Father Abraham lyrics" yields the religious version and one used at scout camp. Both get singers up and moving! Kids (and adults) either love the song or can't stand it.

At least it's successful in getting the wiggles out! So we sing, "Father Abraham had many sons; many sons had Father Abraham." Biblical scholars can debate the possible numbers of sons and daughters. Beyond the song's silliness is this true statement: "I am one of them, and so are you."

Clearly, the apostle Paul spent a lot of time pondering the bizarre story of Abraham—a story of faith that led to belief even amid doubt and hardship. Because God was faithful, Abraham and Sarah's faith held fast in the face of testing. By the power of the Holy Spirit, so can ours. It's enough to make you do as the Abraham song urges: "So let's just praise the Lord!"

**God, help us believe what we cannot see—that your
promise is also for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: The 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering

Daniel 12:1-4; Psalm 63:1-8; Revelation 3:1-6

Joseph, Guardian of Jesus

**When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did
as the angel of the Lord commanded him;
he took her as his wife. (v. 24a)**

My friends spent three years trying to adopt a child but were rejected by organizations or birth mothers ten times. *Ten times!* The heartbreak was unbearable for them, and unfathomable for us who love them. Two other friends recently brought their baby home amid great joy, though nothing went according to the birth plan. They were fortunate to have a happy ending at all. You probably know people with similar stories of heartbreak and joy, often a mixture of the two.

As we hear from gospel writer Matthew, Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus had their own drama. While the story of a young woman pregnant by the Holy Spirit is surely drama enough, this family also faced decisions involving religious traditions, marriage, community, and possible rejection and divorce.

These are the very places God enters our lives. In the birth of this baby, God comes to dwell with us. In all the heartbreak and joy we experience as humans, Jesus offers us love and mercy.

We give thanks, loving God, that you enter both the joyful and challenging moments of our lives. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those yearning to be parents

2 Samuel 7:4, 8-16; Psalm 89:1-29; Romans 4:13-18



Third Sunday in Lent

**If it bears fruit next year, well and good;
but if not, you can cut it down. (v. 9)**

I'm the parent of a teenage athlete who likes to make excuses. When things don't go his way in a game, he blames others: the coach, the ref or umpire, teammates. "I could have gotten a shot off if they'd ever throw me the ball." "That umpire was horrible!"

Postgame conversations with him are tricky. Occasionally there is truth to what he's saying, and I want to protect his feelings, confidence, and ego. But this sort of mindset is not going to serve him well in employment and all his relationships yet to come.

Repentance is an ancient Lenten practice, and it appears throughout scripture and throughout our lives. It bids us to turn in a new direction and look at things in a new way. Sometimes that means self-awareness that calls us to examine and own our shortcomings *and* rest in God's grace. In this parable the tree is not left on its own, and neither are we. God's pruning, patience, and mercy also belong to us.

**Creator God, when we're tempted either
to overfocus on or to deny our flaws,
help us lean into your mercy and grace. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Teenagers and their parents

Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

When we go low, God goes high

**So are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts. (v. 9)**

In the Great Litany many congregations use as they enter Lent, we who live in the United States pray for our president, governor, and mayor by name (and for Congress and the Supreme Court).

Throughout the year my congregation also includes the president in the prayers of intercession. This is no small thing and sometimes forces us to pray for someone who wouldn't normally be on our prayer list.

Both the season of Lent and the prophet Isaiah stand as stark reminders that the surprising work of God is open to all. This includes our president, a coworker we don't get along with, the neighbor or family member we unfriended on Facebook. We and those we consider "wicked" or "unrighteous" are all invited to return to a gracious God who "will abundantly pardon" (v. 7). When we go low, God goes high.

This gracious God offers a table of rich food, including wine and bread, and joins us together—in the work of love.

**During this season, give us a hunger and thirst
for righteousness, abundant God. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Family members who are estranged

Jeremiah 11:1-17; Psalm 39; Romans 2:1-11

Beyond the sanctuary

**So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory. (v. 2)**

Hiding from enemies in the desert of Judah, David cried out to God, drawing upon what he already knew. David had “looked upon [God] in the sanctuary.” We can’t be sure what this means, but somehow he had perceived God’s power and glory, not in just a quick look but a long, lingering gaze.

Some people use a prayer practice of discerning a focus word for the year. I’ve hesitated to do this. Friends have shared their experience focusing on the word *health*, only to face many hospital stays. But in 2021, I sensed God giving me the word *gaze*. A beautiful word describing not just glancing at something but slowing down to take in the sight.

David had apparently gazed at God in the place of worship. And what he perceived stuck with him. God’s presence, provision, and protection stayed with David even in the desert. In fact, wherever we are or whatever we face, it is *God’s* loving gaze on us first that draws *our* focus to God. There we find reassurance, protection, and love.

**God, thank you for displaying
your power and glory. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those in need of protection

Ezekiel 17:1-10; Psalm 39; Romans 2:12-16

From complaining to giving thanks

**And do not complain as some of them did,
and were destroyed by the destroyer. (v. 10)**

Paul writes to the Corinthian believers of lessons they can learn from the experience of their ancestors, the Israelites, who often struggled in their life of faith with spiritual immaturity and complaining.

It's natural to complain about new diagnoses, ongoing struggles, broken relationships. But I also complain about trivial things: running late to a meeting, an item of convenience needing repair, unexpected interruptions.

We're in the season of Lent, a time of reflection and preparation leading up to Easter. I wonder if we're aware of how often we complain. Consider putting ten rubber bands loosely onto one of your wrists as you start the day. Each time you complain, move one rubber band to the other wrist and pray a simple prayer of thanksgiving. At the end of the day, consider how long it took you to go through all ten rubber bands.

Paul reminds us that it's common to be tempted to complain but that we, with God's help, can resist the temptation and grow in gratitude.

**God, I trust you with the blessings and challenges
in my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Lutheran World Federation leaders

Numbers 13:17-27; Psalm 39; Luke 13:18-21

Asking God for a sign

Ask a sign of the LORD your God. (v. 11)

King Ahaz was shaking in his boots—or at least in his heart (v. 2)—as enemies threatened the kingdom of Judah. So God told him to ask for a sign of what was to come. Though Ahaz's initial response went against God, he fooled himself into thinking he was just being humble and gave the excuse of not wanting to test God. Perhaps Ahaz feared what sign God might give.

It can be challenging to know what decision to make, what the next step should be in life. So God invites us to ask for wisdom—even for some sort of sign. But “God is a God not of disorder but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33). God loves you and wants to guide you. When I'm faced with a decision, I follow these steps of discernment:

- Search scripture: What does God's word say?
- Seek faithful counsel: Ask trusted friends to seek God's guidance with you in prayer, and to share their insights on the situation.
- Ask for confirmation: Ask God to confirm what you think you're discerning: possibly with a tangible sign, or by giving you a sense of peace in your soul.

Loving God, thank you for the good you have planned for me. Help me trust in you. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those facing difficult decisions

Joshua 4:1-13; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:5

Annunciation of Our Lord

And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” (v. 28)

Gabriel was an important messenger from God. Can you hear the excitement in his voice? He knows he has the most important and life-changing message for Mary—and the world.

In his greeting, Gabriel calls Mary “favored” and affirms that God is with her. Indeed, that’s how God begins with each of us. God is excited to greet us, to remind us that we’re chosen, and to stay with us.

By many standards, Mary was an unlikely choice for such a vital calling. She was poor, young, and female—characteristics seen by many as disqualifying. As Mary did at first, I easily focus on my own limitations and the reasons I don’t think I fit God’s plan.

But God sees things differently. God loved Mary, was with her, and chose her to carry the Son of God into the world. And God sees us differently too. As our creator, God loves us, is with us, and chooses us to carry Jesus into the world around us.

**God, thank you for choosing me, like you
chose Mary. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who are pregnant

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 40:5-10; Hebrews 10:4-10

A heart's desire

**I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart. (v. 8)**

What does your heart desire? If you're like me, you might have just now pushed aside a knee-jerk answer as you pondered what you *ought* to say is your heart's desire. But my question had nothing to do with your *mind's* desire. We're talking about your *heart* here.

A heart's desire is constant—it doesn't require much thought or analysis to identify. It's a longing, a deep hunger for something of importance.

When God's law becomes more than a list of to-dos (and don'ts), it enters into our heart—the very core of our being. A beautiful transformation takes place. We realize that God's law is birthed out of God's love for us and is truly what is best for us and the world.

Then, by the power of God at work in us, we respond not out of obligation but out of love for God and neighbor. We find we delight to follow God's will. God's law of love becomes our heart's desire as we respond to life's circumstances, daily choices, and the needs of others.

**Generous God, thank you for making your
law of love my heart's desire. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Cardiologists

Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 32; Luke 15:1-10



Fourth Sunday in Lent

**Rejoice, because this brother of yours
was dead and has come to life. (v. 32)**

Some who hear or read this parable identify with the rebellious son, while others identify with the brother who clings to self-righteousness. Each struggles to embrace his role in the family, but the father won't let either one go.

When the father opens his arms and home to the wayward son, the young man is astounded to be reaffirmed as a full-fledged family member. When the older brother pouts about this exuberant welcome, the father comes to him too with open arms: "Son, you are always with me. All that is mine is yours" (v. 31). The older brother's position as a full-fledged family member is reassured. The clincher is that as the parent lovingly claims both children, their relationship as brothers is also recemented. Just so, because our heavenly Parent calls *all* of us children of God, we can't *not* claim one another as siblings.

Lent is a fitting time to remember this.

**God, thank you for loving us, even when we rebel
against you or hold on to self-righteousness. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Families experiencing reconciliation

Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Rolled away

The LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” (v. 9)

For more than four hundred years, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. The back-breaking work, cruel abuse, and devaluing existence lasted for generations and had become almost the normal way of life. We’re familiar with the stories of Israel’s deliverance, crossing the Red Sea, and wandering in the desert. Now we come to the big moment Joshua and the Israelites had been anticipating—entering the promised land.

But first the Israelites stopped to reaffirm their love for and commitment to the one true God. And God “rolled away” the past, their shame and reproach, from the Israelites. They crossed over from their old life and old ways into new life and new ways as they physically crossed over the Jordan River.

During Lent, we anticipate the coming Easter celebration. The same God who rolled away Israel’s disgrace rolled away the stone of Jesus’ tomb. We can trust that God will roll away our own past too, leading us into our promised land—new life in Christ.

God, thank you for rolling away the past and freeing us to love and share you with the world. Amen.

Prayer concern: ELCA prison chaplains

Leviticus 23:26-41; Psalm 53; Revelation 19:1-8

Gain joy through forgiveness

**While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long. (v. 3)**

I remember watching commercials for a toy store chain as I was growing up. Kids of all ages were shown enjoying the latest and greatest toys, and the commercial ended with a bouncing cartoon kangaroo promising to “turn your frown upside down.”

Can the same be true of forgiveness? While it’s not as simple as a trip to a toy store, the transformation is nonetheless profound.

David, in his gut-wrenching transparency, shares in this psalm how his sin and silence caused emotional and physical pain. Not until he sought God, asking for forgiveness, did he gain complete joy. When we ask for forgiveness, we can count on God to respond and offer it fully. It’s nothing short of a profound transformation.

When we recognize our sin and feel ashamed of it, we want to hide. But when covered up, sin can grow and become heavier. Only God can forgive and transform. The weight of sin is lifted. Our shame is no more. Our life is turned upside down—or, rather, right-side up!

**Forgiving God, please help me to not hide from you.
Thank you for forgiving and transforming me. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those seeking forgiveness

Leviticus 25:1-19; Psalm 53; Revelation 19:9-10

A mission of reconciliation

We are ambassadors for Christ. (v. 20)

When my husband and I did marital counseling, the pastor drew a triangle, labeling the points for God, my husband, and me. The idea was that even if the two of us compromised and found common ground, without relying first on God's love, guidance, and reconciliation of each of us, we would still be unstable.

While reconciliation, or restoration of relationship, is not always possible in marriage, it is *a/ways* possible with God—in fact, it is promised. God has reconciled us to Godself and has given us in turn a ministry of reconciliation for the world. When we remember that God first loved us and that God's love is meant to be shared with all, we no longer regard anyone from even a well-meaning human point of view. Instead, we can't help but view our neighbors—from family members to the whole world—through Christ's love and grace. God continues to show up with this love for everyone—through us! We are ambassadors for Christ. While it is hard work, we find our stability in God.

**God, thank you for drawing me to you
through Christ. Help me share your
reconciling love. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Couples in conflict

2 Kings 4:1-7; Psalm 53; Luke 9:10-17

A new thing

**I am about to do a new thing; now it
springs forth, do you not perceive it? (v. 19)**

We who live in Colorado celebrated when the two largest wildfires in our state, burning a combined 400,000 acres of land, were fully contained. The destruction was devastating. Structures and lives were lost. The combined efforts of firefighters from multiple states were nothing short of heroic.

While it will take a great deal of time and effort to rebuild lives and homes, the earth is already rebounding. Fire plays a key role in the overall ecosystem. New growth can be found in grasslands.

Similarly, God is always at work redeeming the destruction in our lives and rebuilding our relationships. As God, through the prophet Isaiah, promises the Israelites “a new thing,” so God will do for you and me.

Take a moment to ponder these questions: In what way do I need God to do a new thing in my life? Where do I see signs of new growth sprouting up in my life?

**God, I praise you for doing new things
in and through me today. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those recovering from addiction

Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 126; Philippians 2:19-24

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