

All Saints Day

[Jesus said,] “Rejoice . . . and leap for joy,
for surely your reward is great in heaven.” (v. 23)

Today we honor saints from all times and all places. This includes both the living and the dead. In the congregation where I worship, on All Saints Day we remember especially those who have died in the last year.

What makes someone a saint? While Jesus’ mother and the apostles are well-known saints, it is not necessary to be famous, a hero, or perfect to be a saint. Saints are the baptized children of God who are graced by God to use their gifts to bless their neighbors. This includes your grandmother, who took you to church as a child and taught you her favorite hymns. Among the saints are the man who smiles as he ladles out soup for the hungry. And the cancer survivor who welcomes and encourages each new patient in the chemo clinic.

How is God calling you to live out your sainthood? How are you blessing others with God’s love—even now?

**Saint of all saints, help me bless others’ lives
as you have blessed mine. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Saints who died in the last year

Psalm 149; Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Ephesians 1:11-23

A glimmer of hope

**. . . as if someone fled from a lion,
and was met by a bear. (v. 19)**

In fiction-writing class, we students were constantly told that our stories needed more conflict. Our mantra was “Things get worse.” Your heroine escaping from a lion only to come upon a bear would be an example of things getting worse. The conflict is even greater if she kills the bear but then trips on its carcass and falls into a deep pit. For a glimmer of hope she might find a knife at the bottom that could help her—with a lot of work—defeat the pit’s smooth walls.

In Amos’s prophecy, things couldn’t get much worse for the people of Israel. They were in deep trouble with God. Yet they were also given instructions to “seek good” (v. 14), “hate evil,” and “establish justice” (v. 15). These directions were a glimmer of hope that all was not lost. God wouldn’t have asked them to put in the hard work unless they could still be redeemed. By God’s grace, they could still turn things around.

**Hope-bringer, thank you for not abandoning me,
regardless of my wrongdoings. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Librarians and libraries

Psalm 50; Luke 19:11-27

Overwhelmed

I call upon you, for you will answer me,
O God. (v. 6)

Some days I feel overwhelmed. More bills arrive in my mail than I expected. People who are dear to me are besieged with ongoing medical or emotional problems. I watch the news and feel overcome by an apparent lack of justice and civility.

Today's psalm is attributed to David, who was called a man after God's own heart—a man of prayer who came before God in various times of need (see 1 Samuel 13:14). The psalmist calls on God to hear this prayer, to show steadfast love, and to provide protection. In the midst of distress, the psalmist turns to God, confident that God will hear and answer this prayer.

Jesus didn't hide the truth from us. He declared that in this world we will have trouble. But he also proclaimed: "I have conquered the world!" (John 16:33). I rest in the truth of the words of the psalmist and Jesus and believe that God has not abandoned me. God is with me.

Awesome God, remind me that your goodness and love follow me all the days of my life. Amen.

Prayer concern: People who feel overwhelmed

Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Acts 22:22—23:11

Hope

[Paul said,] “I have a hope in God.” (v. 15)

Hope is a small word. Yet it is so powerful. I understood this when I was moving through a difficult period in my life. I opened my Bible, and the pages fell open to reveal a passage from Jeremiah: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare, and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). Paul knew that promise as he stood before Felix and proclaimed: “I have a hope in God.” Paul lived in hope.

One of the greatest gifts God gives is hope. God’s promises are designed to give hope. Hope is the belief that something beneficial will come. What you are experiencing now is not the end of the story. Hope is fuel for the weary and downcast. It is the faith that God does have plans for you.

What challenge are you currently facing? What is causing you to worry? Hope is the key to persisting through any challenge. God works on your behalf. Never lose the lifeline of hope.

**Ever-caring God, help me put my complete hope
and trust in you. Amen.**

Prayer concern: People searching for hope

Psalm 17:1-9; Genesis 38:1-26

Called

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” (v. 11)

“You don’t want me. I’ve never done that before.” “I didn’t clean my room because I was tired.” Childish excuses to avoid something unpleasant.

You don’t have to be a child to understand that excuses can run rampant, even in adult life. So it was with Moses in today’s passage. Moses said, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” Moses was fascinated but reluctant to accept the call.

God empowered Moses, removing limitations that he perceived. The connection is between God and Moses, between great power and hesitancy—the vast chasm between God’s greatness and human shortcoming.

Maybe that is why we shrink from facing what we know is our call from God. When we are tempted to cover our faces, to hide from our involvement in the world, the light of God’s fire bathes us in love and, as it did to Moses, draws us into a world whose pain we, with God’s help, can ease.

**Holy One, strengthen me to fulfill the tasks
you set before me. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those hesitant to step out in faith

Psalm 17:1-9; Luke 20:1-8

Time after Pentecost

**Some Sadducees . . . came to him
and asked him a question. (vv. 27-28)**

They came to him with questions—questions meant to trick Jesus, to ensnare him in a trap or to belittle him, because they did not believe in the resurrection. But we, too, have questions. They begin at an early age. When my son was small, he incessantly asked “why” questions that only led to more “why” questions. Maybe you have questions like my son’s. Questions we ask because we want greater understanding: “What is heaven like?” “Why does evil seem so rampant?” Sometimes, it seems that our lives are filled with more questions than answers, because we are people seeking the light of Jesus.

This is November, with overcast days where I live, too late in the year for sun to warm the earth. Perhaps it is the November of your soul—a waiting time, a questioning time. That’s when it is time to stand firm, to trust, to take courage. Let the questions take you into God’s presence.

**God of the living, focus my gaze
on your abundant life. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Preschool children

Psalm 17:1-9; Job 19:23-27a; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17

Mercy

**Our eyes look to the LORD our God,
until he has mercy upon us. (v. 2)**

Psalm 123 is a psalm about seeking mercy. Psalm 123 is a song recited when you are at the end of your rope. It is a song about a merciful God who gives mercy freely. It is about a God who is good, loving, and kind. It is about a God you and I need every day in our lives.

You and I are not so different from the author of this lament and supplication. Our anxieties can envelop us like a fog that descends over life. Sometimes we hesitate about sharing our burdens with God. We wonder if we should be open about our hurt, our anger, disappointment, or fear. However, the reality is that God loves us so much that God wants to hear our heart's cry. God's desire for our relationship is that we are close enough to share our emotions.

This song encourages you to look up in your time of need. To cast your cares on an ever-loving God. The Compassionate One is our gracious friend who invites us to come just as we are.

**Ever-loving God, I lift my eyes to you, knowing
that no event in life is beyond your mercy. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those seeking a loving God

Job 20:1-11; 2 Peter 1:16-21

Love

Let us love one another. (v. 5)

What does the word *love* mean to you? How do you use the word in daily conversation? How do you act upon love in day-to-day living?

Since COVID-19 broke out, social interaction has changed drastically. I've stayed at home and kept distance for the sake of everyone's safety. I've communicated by phone or in virtual meetings. But I fear that this change may have affected my mindset.

The Greek language has several words for love. The most often used is *agape*. It embraces a universal, unconditional love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstances. It goes beyond emotion to seeking the best for the other.

Jesus gives us a clear and beautiful road map for extending God's love to the other: "Just as I have loved you" (John 13:34). During the pandemic many of us have learned just how much we need to be connected to one another and how unhealthy it can be to have too much isolation. We need each other. It's how God made us.

Lord, help me to love without condition or reservation, as you have loved me. Amen.

Prayer concern: Isolated people

Psalm 123; Job 21:1, 17-34

Words

**Anyone who hears my word and believes him
who sent me has eternal life. (v. 24)**

Words! Words! We are bombarded with words. Everyone seems to speak at once. The noise of words infiltrates our minds. We live in a world of words coming at us through social media, evening news, editorials. But what words are we to believe?

God repeatedly emphasizes the importance of words. We are created for the glory of God (Isaiah 43:7). One good word we speak can glorify God; one coarse word can dishonor God. Those who hear the message that Christ brought and take him at his word have the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and become like him.

In a world that keeps talking, I must filter through the voices to recognize words that honor the Almighty One. Whether it's what we say or write, we can't forget the power that our words hold. My words can change someone's life. They can make someone fall in love, and that is life-changing. Don't ever think that your words don't matter. They do.

**Compassionate One, help me to speak words
that bring honor to your name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Awareness of the words I voice

Psalm 123; Job 25:1—26:14

Majesty

Make a joyful noise to the LORD; . . . break forth into joyous song and sing praises. (v. 4)

My daughter lives in Portland, Oregon. Each year, my wife and I visit Laurie and spend about a week with her. We take walks through her neighborhood. Sometimes when we walk the weather is gray, overcast, drizzly. We can't see much past the golf course nestled in a valley below the street where she lives.

But there are other days when the clouds lift. The air is fresh and clean, and we behold a spectacular view of Mount Hood, more than sixty miles away, towering above everything, Snowcapped. Awesome. Majestic. It looks like you could almost reach out and touch the mountainside. On those days, as I stand gazing in awe at its majesty, I must remind myself that Mount Hood is always there whether I can see it or not.

And I am reminded of our powerful and amazing God. I stand in awe and worship God's Spirit in my life. This God is always there for me, whether or not I feel God's presence. This God is astounding, and I lift my voice in praise.

Awesome God, I sing my praises to you. Amen.

**Prayer concern: Those who cannot feel
God's presence**

1 Samuel 28:3-19; Romans 1:18-25

Offering thankfulness

**We must always give thanks to God for you,
brothers and sisters. (v. 3)**

I receive so much unwanted mail every day. But the mail that is special connects me to distant friends and family. Best of all are letters—handwritten on note paper—that hold a personal word offering thanks.

In today's reading Paul launches into prayers of thanksgiving to God for the vital community in Thessalonica. His pastoral heart is on display. Like those Christians, our faith can flourish through the thanks that is extended to us from friends and family.

Allow those whose lives you have touched to come forward, remind you, and give thanks that what you have done really matters. These messages mean the world to me because they remind me that who I am matters and has impacted their lives. Likewise, I must offer my thanks to others who have transformed my life. We are God's people. When we speak God's love and offer thanks, we speak for God, and God's word leads to wholeness.

**God of grace, remind me to thank others
for their goodness in my life. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Mail carriers

Psalm 98; 2 Samuel 21:1-14

Gray days

[Jesus said,] “For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” (v. 21)

My wife and I went for a walk on a cold, blustery November afternoon. We were both saddened that the warmer autumn had come to an end, the trees were bare, and the skies were gray.

We returned to the house, chilled from the walk we had just taken and ready for a cup of hot chocolate. That is when we noticed that our Christmas cactus was in full pink bloom, adding so much brightness to our home.

As these wintry days get shorter over the next month, when life seems gray and filled with gloom, when I’m emotionally drained—maybe those are the days when I can find God’s beauty by spending a bit more time in prayer, reading a bit deeper into a Bible verse of the day, listening to uplifting music, or meditating in quiet moments on the goodness of Jesus inside my being.

God of light, in times of gloom, fill me with your radiance and beauty. Amen.

Prayer concern: Indoor plants

Psalm 98; Ezekiel 10:1-19

Time after Pentecost

By your endurance you will gain your souls. (v. 19)

I recall the park ranger at the Grand Canyon telling about the formation of that great chasm. As he talked, he kept edging backward, step by step, toward the precipice behind him, drawing closer and closer to the cliff that dropped off hundreds of feet. I was anxious, because I am afraid of heights, especially if I am standing near an edge of a tall building or an abyss.

We all fear something. It was with horror that Jesus' disciples asked him when these wars, persecutions, insurrections, and destructions would happen and what signs would precede them. Jesus answered that there will always be events and people who try to make us afraid. Sometimes they try to keep us from trusting and loving God. Jesus said that when scary times come, we will be tempted to believe that God is wrong. We may think those scary people are strong and that God is weak. But Jesus said we are safe with God, even in desperate times. God will care for us.

**Strong Tower, help me to put my faith and trust
in your promise to always be with me. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those living in fear

Psalm 98; Malachi 4:1-2a; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Guarded words

**Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD;
keep watch over the door of my lips. (v. 3)**

Last night I shouted at the driver who wasn't paying attention to his driving and almost hit my car. My wife wasn't pleased at my outburst. Likely, God wasn't pleased either.

The Spirit seems to nudge me the strongest when the Spirit wants me to remain silent. Too often I resist that challenge to remain still. Rather than say what I want, I should, instead, remain silent. That is the Spirit's way when my heart is inclined to evil or wickedness (v. 4).

Words are important to God. Thus, the psalmist asks for God's help to guard his mouth, because the words we speak determine how we see ourselves. Words can inspire me to examine the intentions of my heart. Words can be used to hurt others. The words I speak are powerful, and it's up to me, with God's help, to use them wisely.

**Gracious God, help me to be thoughtful
in both silence and speech. Amen.**

Prayer concern: New drivers

Ezekiel 11:14-25; Ephesians 4:25—5:2

Shine, Jesus, shine

Do everything for the glory of God. (v. 31)

During November the daylight hours where I live continue to grow shorter and shorter, even as the evening hours increase. For many of us, that means that our times of interaction with other people will also decrease, resulting in fewer hours when we can show others how the light of Christ shines in our lives.

When I focus on the idea that even the mundane in life can bring glory to God, then I can choose to do everything with excellence and integrity. I will choose to do it not just for my good, but for the good of my community.

I heard a challenging definition of a Christian as someone whose life makes it easier for others to believe in God. Maybe these shortening days of November can serve as a reminder to let Christ's light shine. I need to think carefully about who I will see today and what actions I might need to take for this light to shine.

**Gracious God, help me today to seize each moment
to show your presence in life. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who are homebound

Psalm 141; Ezekiel 39:21—40:4

Restoration

Make known to them the plan of the temple. (v. 11)

Fourteen years have passed since the Israelites were taken to Babylon as captives. Now God will restore the bond that existed before captivity. Restoration by God with Israel and individuals is a recurring theme.

Today you may need renewal. Family, health, or job may be lost or broken and need repair. But God is not content with restoring a previous situation. God wants to improve on the original.

The prodigal never expected restoration into his family. He would beg his father to bring him back as a laborer. Instead, the father restored him into the family with a party, new clothing, and jewelry.

When I put my life in the Good Shepherd's care, God restores my soul with goodness and mercy.

**God who restores, give me a future
and a hope. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those seeking a new job

Psalm 141; Matthew 23:37—24:14

Mighty fortress**God is our refuge and strength. (v. 1)**

One evening my husband and I partook of a great Wisconsin tradition: the Friday fish fry. Neither of us bothered to check the evening's weather report. It turned out that we were due for a snow squall, an intense, short-lived burst of snow. It was the first time this new warning was issued in southeastern Wisconsin. When we entered the restaurant there was no snow, but when we finished eating our all-you-can-eat cod, it was a blizzard outside. We were totally unprepared for the near whiteout conditions. We were so relieved when we finally pulled into the driveway and were safe and sound in our warm, dry home.

Through the spiritual storms of life, God is our protection. In the words of Martin Luther, God is "a mighty fortress." However, as believers we don't need to find our way to a certain space or place, because wherever we go "the LORD of hosts is with us" (v. 11). We can call upon God wherever we are to bring us comfort and strength.

**Mighty fortress, protect me from all the storms
that trouble me. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who face spiritual storms

2 Chronicles 18:12-22; Hebrews 9:23-28

Outcome of faith

**For you are receiving the outcome of your faith,
the salvation of your souls. (v. 9)**

One definition of an *inheritance* is that which is received when another person dies. The inheritance the apostle Peter writes about in his letter is a different kind. It comes from one who died, but then lived again: Jesus Christ.

Jesus offers a legacy of hope to all who believe in him, which leads to an “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (v. 4). This comes to those who believe in Jesus and love him even when they cannot see him, even when they go through struggles and difficulties. The outcome of faith is a way through human suffering to new life, not unlike the pain and even death Jesus endured to offer those who trust in him a new birth.

Our everlasting inheritance is eternal life when we believe in the one who died and rose again.

**Holy Jesus, lead me forth into the inheritance
of new life you have promised. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who have inherited faith

Psalm 46; Zechariah 11:1-17

Faith like a child

**[Jesus said,] “Whoever does not receive
the kingdom of God as a little child
will never enter it.” (v. 17)**

I was asked by a local funeral director to officiate at the funeral for a man I didn't know. During the service I offered an opportunity for those present to share memories of the deceased. A little girl was the first to raise her hand. Her mom tried to discourage her from speaking. I called on her to share. She sweetly said, “Grandpa always read to me.” This girl's response led to a flurry of memories from several other grandchildren. Those beautiful, honest words of kids made this one of the most touching funerals I have ever led.

Jesus' disciples wanted to shoo away the children who came to see him. But Jesus welcomed the children with open arms, because they are members of the kingdom of God. Hopefully, we can all learn from the openness, freshness, and honesty of a childlike faith.

**Loving Parent, open my heart to receive you
like a little child. Amen.**

Prayer concern: The children of the world

Psalm 46; Jeremiah 22:18-30

Christ the King

**“If you are the King of the Jews,
save yourself!” (v. 38)**

Often those who wield power do so to their own advantage, accumulating wealth, success, prestige. Jesus was not that kind of king. In today’s reading Jesus finds himself “throned” on an ancient instrument of torture known as a cross. On either side of Jesus are criminals, also dying in a cruel, painful execution. Jesus didn’t even use his power to save himself from death. One can’t help but wonder along with one of the criminals executed with Jesus: “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” (v. 39).

Jesus understood where his true power was—in the power of love. That is what makes Jesus different from all the rulers of this world. Jesus’ royalty and divinity are revealed in his willingness to sacrifice his life in the name of love. Jesus faced death so that all who believe in him may have life abundant in his name and one day see him in paradise.

**King of Love, rule over my heart and life
that I may follow your ways. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those serving in prison

Psalm 46; Jeremiah 23:1-6; Colossians 1:11-20

God's world

The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it. (v. 1)

God is the creator of the world, and thus the world belongs to God. Sadly, all too often humankind believes and acts as if the world is our possession. In the creation story in Genesis, the crown of God's creative work is humanity. God made humans to have dominion over all the other creatures of the sky, earth, and air. It is all too tempting for humans to assume that dominion means domination—power over and control. Rather, God has given to all of us a sacred trust to preserve the earth and all its creatures and growing things for the next generation. From the very beginning, God made us to be stewards and caretakers of the world God created and loved. What a special and daunting role!

Take a moment to consider how you can play your part in preserving and protecting this wonderful world that has been entrusted to our care.

**Creator God, may I seek to play my part
in tending your great creation. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who care for creation

Jeremiah 46:18-28; Revelation 21:5-27

Bookends

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (v. 13)

As a young mom I participated in the amazing miracle of birth when each of my children came into the world. When I held them in my arms for the first time, I felt God’s presence in life’s beginnings.

As pastor and hospice chaplain, people have invited me to be a part of the equally sacred journey from life to death. There have been times when I have felt like a sort of midwife, guiding a person’s birth into whatever lies beyond. I have offered final blessings to people taking their last few breaths. Of one thing I am certain: God is there in that moment.

God is with you from your first breath to your last. However, the real gift is recognizing God’s presence with you in all those breaths in between, especially when there is so much to distract from that truth. As you read the passage for today, take your breath in slowly, hold it, and, finally, release it. Remember that each breath belongs to God.

My Beginning and End, comfort me that you are with me every breath of my journey. Amen.

Prayer concern: Midwives and hospice workers

Psalm 24; Isaiah 33:17-22

Knowing God

**“You shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior
and your Redeemer” (v. 16)**

God’s chosen people, the Israelites, turned away from God to worship the false gods of the nations around them. So the punishment fit the sin—God made use of other nations to conquer Israel and force them into exile. Yet God did not reject God’s beloved Israel forever. God gave them the opportunity to repent and return.

The story of Israel’s exile and return is a story of hope for all who trust in God’s compassion and grace. Every one of us makes mistakes. Every one of us is tempted at one time or another to turn away from the true God to the false idols all around us.

In Christ we are reminded that God continually seeks to be our redeemer and savior. In Christ, God grants every one of us to repent and return to God’s loving presence.

**God of hope, open your gracious arms that I
may return and receive your forgiveness. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those far from home

Psalm 24; Luke 1:1-4

Give thanks

**. . . as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks
to the name of the LORD. (v. 4)**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic came around, what we now call “in-person worship” was just worship. Most folks didn’t think of distinguishing going to worship in a church building from the various versions of at-home services on YouTube, Facebook Live, and Zoom. Early in the pandemic, when most church buildings were closed to medium to large gatherings, many believers yearned for the opportunity to come together with others for prayer and praise.

I can’t help but think of the adage “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” One thing we have, hopefully, gained from the challenging pandemic times we have endured is a new appreciation and thankfulness for Christian community. As we continue to move forward, uncertain of what may lie ahead, we can hope that we will discover new meaning in Psalm 122:1: “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’” Recognizing worship for the blessing it is, it is not to be taken for granted.

**You are worthy of my praise, O Lord! May I ever
be thankful to be able to worship your name. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those without freedom to worship

Daniel 9:15-19; James 4:1-10

What is faith?

**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen. (v. 1)**

When I left my congregation after twenty-three years of serving as pastor, I was looking for a change. As I started thinking about what I should do next, I found myself drawn to job listings for chaplaincy. I then took a “leap of faith” and applied. Right then I couldn’t see what was ahead for me. As it turned out, God has been able to use my gifts in new ways that have breathed new life into my ministry. I simply had to trust enough to follow God’s lead, even though I wasn’t sure where I was headed. That’s how the author of the Letter to the Hebrews defines faith. Even when we can’t see God we trust that God is with us.

In these unpredictable times we can’t always see what’s up ahead, but God makes God’s plans known to us in many and various ways, especially through the Son. God won’t let us face an unknown future alone.

**Trustworthy God, assure me that your promises
are true, that I might always live in hope. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those taking a leap of faith

Psalm 122; Genesis 6:1-10

God's covenant

I will establish my covenant with you. (v. 18)

The story of Noah's ark is often misrepresented as a cute story. Whenever I read the actual biblical account in Genesis, it strikes me as a weighty tale about the consequences of sin and violence. God saw the wickedness of humankind and was sorry to have made them. God resolved to wipe all humanity from the earth, with the exception of Noah and his family. It was with them that God made a covenant, a binding agreement. Noah carried out everything God asked, and God gave humanity a fresh start through Noah and his family.

Those who lost their lives in the flood were likely not very different from people alive today, touched by the same sin, corruption, and violence. God made a promise to never again destroy all humanity in a flood. Yet, in Jesus Christ God has made a covenant with us by the waters of another kind of flood called holy baptism. God promises all the baptized new life as daily we die to sin and rise again to new life.

Merciful God, may the covenant of my baptism give me hope as I begin anew each day in you. Amen.

Prayer concern: All the baptized

Psalm 122; Matthew 24:1-22

First Sunday of Advent

**Keep awake . . . for you do not know
on what day your Lord is coming. (v. 42)**

In today's reading, Jesus preached about the end of the age when the Son of Man will come again in glory. Even Jesus confessed, "About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (v. 36).

Even as no one knows exactly when the end of the world will come, most of us have no idea when our own individual ends will come. A doctor may diagnose a person with a terminal disease, but rarely does anyone have a precise timeline. Only God knows the exact hour of a person's death. All we know is that we all must die sometime.

Jesus' solution is that we should all be ready at all times. What does that mean for us? That we should live every day growing in our relationship with God, so when that inevitable day arrives, we need not fear, but fully embrace the gift we have prepared for all along by studying God's word, joining in prayer and praise, and serving God and our neighbor.

**Lord Jesus, prepare my heart, soul, and mind
for your coming. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those with a terminal illness

Psalm 122; Isaiah 2:1-5; Romans 13:11-14

Is God on our side?

**Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth. (v. 8)**

For more than thirty years, I've lived in Green Bay Packer country. When football season comes around, I've been asked to pray for the Packers to win. My standard answer is that God doesn't take sides.

Yet, in today's psalm the writer more than implies that God has chosen Israel and delivered them from their enemies. "If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive" (vv. 2-3).

How can we possibly know if God is on our side? The people of God who had been oppressed join with all those who God has lifted up in confessing: "If God had *not* been on our side." The oppressed, the poor, the lowly, and the hungry—with all who believe—put their trust in a loving God who defeats the powers of death, liberates the oppressed, and raises the dead.

**Blessed be the Lord, who is our help and strength
in troubled times. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who live in war-torn lands

Romans 6:1-11; Genesis 8:1-19

Bow in the clouds

**I have set my bow in the clouds,
and it shall be a sign of the covenant
between me and the earth. (v. 13)**

The Hebrew word used in Genesis to describe God's "bow in the clouds" is the same word used to describe the type of bow an archer uses to shoot an arrow.

Next time you see a rainbow, look at the direction the bow curves. Which way would the arrow be pointing? It would point at the heavens, traditionally viewed as God's "home," as if to say, don't you dare think of threatening the end of humanity by flood again! The rainbow is an everlasting sign that we can trust in God to remember and keep promises.

We continue to sin and fail God. We deserve the consequences of our actions. Yet the rainbow is a reminder that our God is the God of forgiveness, the God of resurrection and new life every day, in much the same way that Jesus took the pain of our sin upon himself on the cross.

**Rainbow God, you take the threat that
I deserve and turn it upon yourself
so I may be forgiven. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Meteorologists

Psalm 124; Hebrews 11:32-40

Andrew, Apostle**He brought Simon to Jesus. (v. 42)**

After Andrew met Jesus, he was so excited that he had found the awaited Messiah that he went and found his brother, Simon Peter, and (literally) brought him to Jesus. In today's world, how can we bring Jesus to others? We need to use our imaginations and creativity to continue to make Christ known.

One snowy day, I looked out the front window of a woman I was visiting and saw three teenagers shoveling her driveway—they were bringing Jesus to her. One of my hospice patients had given up on eating, but then told me, “I could sure go for some pizza.” When I brought him a slice on his birthday—I was bringing Jesus to him. When a church member injured her shoulder and unexpectedly needed to be off work, people from her congregation brought her a box full of groceries—they were bringing Jesus to her.

Pay attention to the people in your life. What do they need? How can you help? What creative ideas do you have for bringing Jesus to others?

**Jesus, Messiah, come with me as I discover ways
to share you with others. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who don't know Jesus

Psalm 19:1-6; Ezekiel 3:16-21; Romans 10:10-18