

Welcome, Announcements, and Land Acknowledgement

➤ *O let the power fall on me*

Call to Worship

We gather in awareness of God's love.

God's love is all around us.

We come together, opening hearts and minds to God's Spirit.

We are here because we are God's people and we are committed to God's way of abundant life.

God's love is all around us. Come, let us worship God as we join in prayer...

Gathering Prayer / The Lord's Prayer / Words of Hope

God of creation, all things belong to you. You have given enough for all and you call us to be stewards of the world's resources. May our choices show an awareness of your justice and your grace.

Generous God, you have enriched us with life worth living, but we confess we often squander your good gifts. We have wasted our time and energy, but held tightly to things we think we need. Forgive our foolish priorities, and those times we overlooked the needs of others. Inspire us to live more generously, trusting your goodness to sustain us always.

We beg for your forgiveness, O God. Restore your creation and by your grace reclaim us. We pray together as Jesus taught ...*Our Father, who art in heaven – hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come – thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen*

Trust the mercy of God, and be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another. Through God's love shown in Christ Jesus, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

➤ *We are God's people*

472

† Prayer for Understanding

Lord, send us your Holy Spirit to give us a fresh understanding of the Scriptures this day. Challenge us and change our lives as we encounter your wisdom and truth, through Christ, your Living Word. Amen

Scripture **Jeremiah 8: 18 – 9: 1** [OT 709]

My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: “Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her King not in her?” (“Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols?”) “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” For the hurt of my poor people, I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!

1 Timothy 2: 1-7 [NT 208]

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all – this was attested at the right time. For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Luke 16: 1-13 [NT 79]

Then Jesus said to the disciples, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, *‘What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer.’*

Then the manager said to himself, *‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.’*

So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, *‘How much do you owe my master?’* He answered, *‘A hundred jugs of olive oil.’* He said to him, *‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.’*

Then he asked another, *‘And how much do you owe?’* He replied, *‘A hundred containers of wheat.’* He said to him, *‘Take your bill and make it eighty.’*

And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.”

“Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message

Responding to a nation hellbent on self-destruction, Jeremiah plays the role of public griever and critic. He laments the state of the nation and wonders out loud if restoration is even possible. *Is there a balm in Gilead? Can anyone heal the nation? Has the nation gone beyond the point of no return?* These are hard words to hear and perhaps more difficult to speak. We don't know if things will turn out right, given the growth in violent expressions and the desire in some quarters to create a nation, built on injustice and coercion.

This week we started watching the new season of *The Handmaid's Tale* – a series based on Margaret Atwood's novel by the same name. It is a futuristic dystopian story set in a near-future New England, in a strongly patriarchal, totalitarian state, known as the Republic of Gilead, which has overthrown the United States government. In Gilead there is a hypothetical Christian form of government in which society is ruled by divine law. The *handmaids* are a group of women who are forcibly assigned to produce children for the *commanders* – the ruling class of men in Gilead. The subjugation of women and oppression of anyone who challenges authority are major themes. Lately I have been feeling like Atwood's novel is more and more like Jeremiah's lamentation – an honest reflection on the current state of affairs.

You might say that the words of Jeremiah are depressing – excessive in their despair – but some days I know how he feels. I understand his prayer – his expression of deep and personal distress over the fate of the people. Herbert O'Driscoll writes that Jeremiah is looking at a society on the brink of disaster – he is appalled and distressed. Sometimes I wonder if our society is similarly on the brink of disaster – if we are sick and beyond healing.

My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?

You don't need to look far to see images in the news and on our streets that would break your heart and cause your stomach to heave. People living in squalor and fear. People traumatized by war and other forms of violence. People affected by flood and fire – fleeing homes and wondering how to feed their families.

In our own community engaged in municipal elections we need to be concerned that far right politics is gaining a stronghold pushing agendas of racism, homophobia, gender shaming and anti-vax conspiracy. There is social unrest, poverty, child abuse, violence, gender inequality, drought, oppression, pestilence, armed conflict... and on it goes. How do we respond? What can we do beyond sitting with Jeremiah with our head in our hands crying to God for the tears to *weep day and night*?

First of all pray...

The words to Timothy join the life of nations and individuals and point to God's global reach. We are urged to pray – for everyone – not just for ourselves and people we know – but for the wider world, people we don't know, those who are different from us, even *for kings and all who are in high positions*. God desires our prayers for all humanity – not just Jews, but also Gentiles – not just Middle Easterners where the Christian faith began, but also westerners and Asians and Africans and Latinos – not just men, but women and children – not just rich but also poor. This good news – not a narrow message for one group of people – it is for all because God wants everyone to be saved... that is God's wish – God's desire.

The call to pray for everyone is challenging, yet well worth being reminded of since it is all too easy for the church and those who seek to follow Jesus to turn inward and forget that Jesus tells us to *"Love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us."* No easy task since we tend to think about and pray about what is close to us – our concerns – our friends – our loved ones – our places. But as localized and specific as the love of God is – as directly as the love of Jesus meets our needs – that love is not confined to who we are and where we are. Neither should our prayers be nearsighted.

If this letter to Timothy was written in Paul's name late in the first century, a generation or two of early Christians have passed from the scene. Jesus has not returned as expected before the apostles themselves died, and persecutions and trials and resistance, including expulsion from the synagogues, have been part of the Christian experience for many years. Even when the emperors weren't actively persecuting and executing Christians as Nero and others did, they were nevertheless pagans, and the Roman Empire itself was pagan. It was clear just who was in charge of earthly affairs, with troops, money, and power of every kind.

This is a call to pray for everyone – including those pagan rulers who persecuted and opposed the early Christians. The prayers may not be to bless or support the empire, but they are called pray for their rulers so that the Christians can go about God's work in peace. In our day the message is just as relevant. Pray for everyone – including world leaders and those in positions of power that they follow the ways of wisdom. God desires the salvation of all, and this occurs in the concrete world in which we live. No one is worthless or beyond God's thoughts. It isn't my God against yours, but one God who loves everyone.

Soren Kierkegaard said that *“Prayer does not change God, but it changes the one who prays.”* In these days of polarization, with disharmony and disaster at every turn, prayer is our only hope for self-transcendence and common ground. Prayer is an act of interdependence – joining God with us, as well as humans with one another and all creation in common purpose. Prayer unites us as God’s children – looking beyond self-interest – humbly recognizing the limitations of our point of view – opening ourselves to greater guidance and wisdom.

The first thing I want you to do is pray.

If we pray in all things and in all times, perhaps it won’t be so hard to get along with one another – with our rulers and kings – with people we know and people we have yet to meet – as we make our way in this broken world. Not only will prayer change our interactions and create harmony in the world, it cannot help but lead to action. We do not sit passively and pray without being transformed by the experience. In our hymn books there is a quote from Thomas More that sums it up well: *The things, good Lord that we pray for give us the grace to labour for.*

The invitation is set before us to be the living and breathing faith that champions justice for all – the dignity of all. Be the living and breathing faith that God asks you to be as you truly see the world in which we live – celebrate the joy of God’s abundance and cry out in grief with Jeremiah at the cruelty, injustice, misfortune and heartbreak you witness. Pray for everyone – even those you distrust or fear.

We must not be silent about the blessings that fill our days nor complacent in the face of the world’s tragedies – we must continue to seek and serve the lost – providing Christ’s love and hope among the most vulnerable.

First of all pray... but let’s not stop there. **Amen**

➤ *There is a balm in Gilead* 747

† Offering Invitation

In every generation, God calls us to participate in the world’s healing and renewal. The gifts we offer will help touch lives with God’s renewing grace. Be generous as God is generous.

➤ *Praise God from whom all blessings flow* 306

† Offering Prayer

Generous God may these gifts be transformed into acts of kindness, expressions of solidarity, and deeds of compassion. As we share these offerings, we also commit ourselves to the courageous task of being your witnesses. All grace and mercy be yours, Almighty God. Amen

† Pastoral Prayers

We are here God – here we are. We love you and your amazing world. Thank you for creating us to be a part of your unfolding story. Help us remember that we belong to you – that you will always lead us in the way we should go. Each week our prayers join with many around the world to seek your healing grace for those in need and to pray for justice and mercy in your fragile creation. We thank you for the ways in which your Spirit can surprise us, bringing healing and hope in situations which cause us to despair. Encourage us when we feel overwhelmed and speak to us a word of hope.

➤ *Lord, listen to your children praying* 449

We remember before you people living face to face with war and violence – for the peoples of Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Myanmar, Ethiopia and Tigre, South Sudan and all those places where ancient hatreds burn... Speak to us a word of peace, O God – embrace us with your love.

We remember people living with illness and suffering – those struggling with disability or waiting for treatment, and those who know grief or fear or loneliness. Holy One, speak to us a word of healing.

We remember today people facing discrimination and social prejudice – those who are bullied at school, at work or at home, and those who are made to feel ashamed of who they are... Speak to us a word of dignity and embrace us with your love, O God.

We remember before you people caught up in economic uncertainty – worried for the future or struggling to make ends meet... Speak to us a word of reassurance we pray.

We remember your whole creation in its increasing vulnerability. Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love so that all your creatures may live together in health and wholeness. Holy One, speak to us a word of wisdom and embrace us with your love.

➤ *What does the Lord require* 710

Blessing

As we go forth intending to use our wisdom to serve God may we do our best to seek and provide healing in a hurting world, remembering that God desires salvation for all people. May the grace of Jesus, the wisdom of God and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit embrace us all.

➤ *May the God of hope go with us every day* 726