

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, January 16th, 2022
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Signs
Second Sunday after Epiphany
John 2:1-11

Welcome

Announcements

Confirmation and New Member Class

Starting end of Feb. Email me with dates and time which work best, and I will try to find a universal time that works for all.

Bible Studies!

Committees talk to elders.

Call to Worship

How precious is God's steadfast love!

We will find refuge in the shelter of God's wings.

Come and feast on God's abundance.

We will drink from the river of God's delights.

For with God is the fountain of life;

And in God's light we will see light.

Let us worship God with joy and thanksgiving!

We will bring God our prayers and our praise with hearts full of love.

Prayer of Adoration

God of light and life,

as the new year unfolds before us,

we begin to feel the sunlight coming back to brighten the winter.

Our spirits grow stronger in the light.

You shine your light into our lives in your Son Jesus.

Your Spirit strengthens us to face whatever this year will hold.
 And so we come to praise you
 for your light which transforms our days and our lives,
 and for your wisdom which enlightens truth for our times.
 Shine through us, we pray,
 so that we may bear the light of Jesus in this world you love.

Opening Hymn # 259: "Breathe on Me, Breath of God" (V 1,4)

Breathe on me, breath of God,
 Fill me with life anew,
 That I may love what Thou dost love,
 And do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
 So shall I never die,
 But live with thee the perfect life
 Of Thine eternity.

Call to Confession

We know that nothing is able to separate us
 from the love of God in Jesus Christ.
 Let us in freedom confess the wrong we have done.

Prayer of Confession

**God of all life and our lives,
 we gather in worship week by week,
 seeking your refreshing presence.
 But we confess sometimes we are discouraged
 by things happening around us.
 We don't expect your presence to make a difference for us.
 Forgive us when we give up on you and end up feeling unfulfilled.
 By your grace, refresh us when we are weary or worried,
 and renew our trust in you.**

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn?
 Only Christ, and Christ died for us,
 Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us.
 No power in heaven or on earth can separate us from God's great love.

Take heart, and know that you are forgiven.

The Lord's Prayer

**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 the Evil One.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.**

Responsive Reading

Psalm 35:5-10

- ⁵ *Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them away!*
- ⁶ **Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them!**
- ⁷ *For without cause they hid their net for me;
without cause they dug a pit for my life.*
- ⁸ **Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it!
And let the net that he hid ensnare him;
let him fall into it—to his destruction!**
- ⁹ *Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD,
exulting in his salvation.*
- ¹⁰ **All my bones shall say,
“O LORD, who is like you,
delivering the poor
from him who is too strong for him,
the poor and needy from him who robs him?”**

Music Ministry: “Jesus Cares for Me” by Glenda Barter and Mark Gould

Prayer for illumination

O God, your Spirit gives us the gifts we need to hear and understand your holy Word.
Open our ears to hear your truth,
and open our hearts to receive an understanding of how to live that truth
as we follow Jesus, your Living Word.
Amen.

Scripture

John 2:1-11

The Wedding at Cana

2 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

Children’s Hymn # 583: “The Wise May Bring Their Learning” (V 1, 2)

The wise may bring their learning,
 the rich may bring their wealth,
 and some may bring their greatness,
 and some bring strength and health;
 we, too, would bring our treasures
 to offer to the King;
 we have no wealth or learning:
 what shall we children bring?

We'll bring him hearts that love Him;
 we'll bring Him thankful praise,
 and young souls meekly striving
 to walk in holy ways:
 and these shall be the treasures
 we offer to the King,
 and these are gifts that even
 the poorest child may bring.

Children's Lesson

Everywhere we look around the world today we have signs telling us what to do. On the roads we have signs that tell us what is happening to the road, where the curves are and how fast we should go to be safe. In school we have signs that tells us where each classroom is, science rooms usually have signs that tell sus about science and math rooms about math. Restaurants have signs that give directions to the bathroom, and in many old classic dinners a sign that explains the specials of the day. Even many churches have signs that explain what denomination they are, and when services are held.

Sometimes its not even a sign that tells us what something is about. You do not need to see a sign telling you this is a church to know it is a church. You see the pews, the pulpit, the stained glass, and all of these things tell you it is a church. The same way that if instead of those things you saw, desks, a blackboard, and bookshelves you might think this was a classroom.

This works for people too; we know who people by what they are wearing. Someone wearing a police uniform is usually a police officer. If they are wearing scrubs, they are a doctor or a nurse or someone who works in the hospital.

It is these things, these indicators of what something is or who someone is that John is talking about in his book. He wants us to know who Jesus is, so that we can all get into a personal relationship with him. Today John is telling us about a big wedding celebration which was taking place in Cana which Jesus went to with his mother. This was a really big deal as weddings were a very important part of the culture. At the wedding, the people holding the party run out of wine. Mary goes to Jesus and asks him to help.

And here Jesus does something that no one else can do, something that will make people recognize that he is very different than everyone else. Jesus has the servants fill up these huge jugs with water and he turns that water into wine. No one here can do that, no one at Jesus's time could do that. No one has ever been able to do that other the Jesus. Magicians can create illusions, they can trick us with distractions and make us think they did something incredible, but later you learn it was all a trick.

The servants at the wedding know this is not a trick, Jesus was not the one who picked up the pots and filled them with water. He was not the one who poured the water for the master of the feast. Jesus was completely sperate of what was physically done, yet somehow, he turned ordinary water in ordinary jugs into something extraordinary. No one can explain how He did this.

This is what we call a miracle, but John calls them signs. Signs of who Jesus is, Signs of what he can do. As we read the Bible and follow the life of Jesus we can see lots of these

signs, these indicators that tell us that he really is the Son of God and worthy of our worship and praise.

Jesus does many more signs in the bible, sometimes he feeds huge groups of people, or heals the blind, he even raises someone from the dead. These are all things that we are meant to think about when we read the bible, they are not just stories, they are real things that really happened, and they should help us understand Jesus is God.

Let us Pray,

God of Wonders and Miracles,

We love you for the amazing stories about miracles and for all the gifts that you have given us. We love you for our family and friends, for beautiful planet that we live on and the endless universe that we live in which all have signs that point to you as the creator. Thank you for all you love and care for us. Amen.

Sermon

We are surrounded by signs in the modern world. We have street signs, shop signs, billboards, sandwich boards, bumper stickers, and even window stickers. You cannot go outside for a walk or a drive without being inundated with visual information through signs.

In fact, we are so overwhelmed by signs that we often fail to notice them or even pay attention to them unless they grab our attention in a unique way. There is a suburb of Chicago called Oak Lawn that noticed the majority of people were not really obeying the street signs. In particular, stop signs, people would come to a rolling stop instead of a complete stop. The mayor of the town came up with a unique way to get the attention of people and have them come to a complete stop.

To each of the stop signs in town he added a second smaller octagonal sign. So, the signs read; STOP, and smell the roses; STOP, or I'm telling your mom; STOP, in the name of love.

It worked; people started to fully stop at the signs. What is ironic is that eventually they all had to be removed because they were deemed a violation of the Federal Uniform Traffic Act by the Illinois Department of Transportation.

However, it had worked. People had begun to pay attention to the important message of STOP when they took the time to read the sign and it was not just part of the background.

As I mentioned a few weeks ago the book of John stands apart from the other books of the Bible. John is not focused on the chronological telling of Jesus's story. He is focused

on making it clear to anyone who reads his book that Jesus is both Fully God and Fully man.

JOHN 2:11

¹¹This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

John wants us to see the signs. He does not want us to stroll through a reading of the life of Christ and not take a moment to stop and recognize the things that made his life unique, those things which set Jesus apart from every other human being that had ever lived.

Miracles had been preformed before, but the ones that Jesus did were different in John's eyes. He wanted all his readers to see them are the signs of who Jesus was and why we should follow him.

If you read all of the Gospels you will find it is filled with miracles or signs that Jesus preformed during his ministry.

JOHN 21:25

²⁵Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

John even tells us that if every sign were recorded all of the earth could not contain the books. These miracles that are recorded, these signs of who Jesus was are important and they are like the road signs we drive past every day. Some people will see them and obey them right away, some people will drive on ignoring them completely, still others might need a little prompting, like the people of Oak lawn did, a reminder that they need to obey the signs. The miracles we see performed by Jesus in his lifetime are our signs, our way of getting to and understanding God's message to his people.

And today we are looking at the first sign as recorded by John at a wedding in the town of Cana. Jesus is attending a wedding; we are not told whose wedding it is or who invited Jesus and his mother. It is likely that it was the wedding of a relative, a cousin or someone else to whom his mother was close, because she is aware of everything that is happening.

There is a lesson here for all of us, Jesus was part of the everyday lives of people. He was involved in the everyday events of the people of his time, things which we would do ourselves each and every day. Jesus should be part of what we do every day, he should always be part of our lives.

He was invited to be part of an everyday event, part of the lives of the people involved in this wedding. We are all called to invite him into our everyday life, into the events of our life outside of Sunday, outside of the normal spectrum of what we would consider Christianity. We are called to invite Jesus into every aspect of our lives, our work, our friendships, our hobbies. Jesus wants to be part of our lives.

Revelation 3:20

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Jesus is waiting at the door of our lives, waiting for us to answer, and let him into all parts of our lives. When we let Jesus into our lives, he is capable of helping us in ways we cannot help ourselves.

MATTHEW 7:7-8

⁷ “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened

This is what we see happening at this wedding. Weddings were huge events; they went on for days and the family that was hosting was responsible for their guests. Running out of wine would be disastrous. The bridegroom’s family would suffer a loss of honor in a society in which honor was critical because they had not thought and planned properly for the wedding celebration. Imagine The embarrassment they would feel having to go to their guests and tell them that they had run out of wine at their big celebration. And this is an interesting tidbit, they could even be fined in some cases for failing to provide for their guests. Running out of wine was a big deal.

I do want to take a moment and clarify something about the wine at the celebration though. This wine that everyone was drinking is not the same as we think of drinking in the modern world. No one was drunk, In Jesus’s day wine was drank by mixing it with water, lots of water.

The Jewish Talmud talks about the traditions of the Rabbis in Jesus’s time. Wine was usually drank at a ratio of 3 parts water to 1 part wine or higher. In a culture and society that had not yet discovered ways to purify water on a large scale the wine served to both flavor the water and purify it through the small amount of alcohol mixed into it. So, the free-flowing drinking of wine that many modern people envision is not what was really happening here.

Now back to the main event, the sign at the wedding in Cana. The had run out of wine, a major thing for a wedding celebration. Things were not going as planned, I am sure many of us are familiar with this feeling. We have a well laid out plan and then

something happens, and our plans are all for naught and we are left scrambling to readjust and come up with solutions to problems we had not even considered.

This is what is occurring here in this first sign in the book of John. Life is going in an unexpected direction for the bridegroom and his family. And Mary is going to be the example of what we are called to do when we have these unexpected challenges to the plans in our lives. She will be the one who shows us who to turn to when there seems to be no possible solution to a problem that arises in our life.

Mary sees the dilemma that the bridegroom's family is in, and she turns to the only one she knows can provide a solution to that problem. Mary turns to Jesus.

JOHN 2:3-4

³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

Mary is providing a method of problem solving that every Christian should be using. When you have a problem turn to God, it does not matter where that problem is or what that problem involves. We should be casting all of our problems to God in prayer, inviting him into every aspect of our lives so that through his divine interaction he is capable of providing us with solutions that go beyond what we are capable of through our own will and strength.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Mary knows that she is not capable of sourcing out enough wine for the wedding celebration. Mary also knows that the bridegroom's family cannot suddenly produce enough wine for the continuation of the celebration. Mary turns to Jesus and asks for his help. She has no idea if he will help her, or how he can help her, she just knows that he is the Son of God and that he is capable of helping in every situation.

And what is Jesus's response, **"Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."** To some this might seem a little abrupt, perhaps even cold, uncaring, and rude. However, this was actually a form of respect language at the time. Jesus is respectfully telling his mother that even though he was their son and needed to follow their direction, it was not yet time for him to be fully revealed as the Son of God. He has a much bigger plan that he needs to follow that has been laid out for him by the Father.

Mary, seemingly unaffected by his words turns to the servants.

JOHN 2:6

⁵ **His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”**

Do whatever he tells you. This could possibly be some of the best motherly advice given in all of scripture. Do as Jesus tells you! In the face of problems in life, Mary is a wonderful example of Christian faith. Turn to Jesus and do what he tells you to do.

What is it that Jesus tells us to do in the scripture when we have worries, troubles, or problems in life;

- Come to him

MATTHEW 11:28

²⁸ **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**

We are told to come to Jesus when things are troublesome or wearying and Jesus will give us rest.

- Cast our Cares on Him

1 PETER 5:6-7

⁶ **Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.**

We are told that we should be humble, there are plenty of things in this life that we cannot solve on our own. We will all face challenges that are beyond our means, physically, emotionally, and financially. We need to be willing to set aside our pride, our idea of self-sufficiency and instead turn to God and know that he loves for us and cares for us as his Child.

- Trust in Him

ROMANS 8:28

²⁸ **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**

We need to know that even though it may not always seem like things are working in our favor that God's hand is at work. We see this rapidly in the Bible, Perhaps the best example in the story of Joseph. There are many points in his story where he could have felt abandoned or even cursed by God, but in the end, we discover that all of the events in his life served a greater purpose, a greater good for the people of God. We need to

trust in this as well, even when things may not seem to be going the way we want, we need to trust that God's hand is at work and in the end his purpose will be fulfilled.

- Believe on him for our salvation

ACTS 16:31

³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Have faith in God and his power to save you. Have faith in the power of God to transform your life from whatever state it is in today to a completely new being, a more Christ like being through the work of the Holy Spirit in you.

Mary turned to God when she had a problem and trusted that he would solve it. She is a fitting example of what all of us are called to do. Turn to Jesus and do what he tells us to do.

Jesus is invited into the problem and the servants are told to follow everything he directs them to do. When Jesus is invited in and followed, he can make miraculous changes in the world around him. Jesus can take what is commonplace and make it into something extraordinary. He can do the impossible, because for him all things are possible.

And that is exactly what Jesus does in Cana. He turns water into wine. Notice he does not go about getting wine like the bridegrooms' family would have, by calling on connections to rush a supply of wine to the celebration. He does not call out to others to support him by rushing to their homes and getting wine to bring back to the celebration. Jesus does it like no one else would. Know and understand this, when you call upon Jesus to be at work in your life, it may not always be the way you want it to be.

ISAIAH 55:8-9

**⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.**

**⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

God's way of doing things is not in accordance with our understanding of how things should be done. God's plan and knowledge goes far beyond our own. When we pray for something, and life seems to go in the complete opposite direction we need to remember what Mary said. Trust in God and do as he tells us to do, even when we do not want to because we think our ideas are better.

God will always do things His way. We cannot understand or even begin to guess why he does things. One of the most vivid signs of Jesus's miraculous powers is his ability to heal the blind. We can all think of at least one case in which we see Jesus heal the blind.

Yet did you ever notice that it is always done a little differently. In Mark, Jesus heals the blind man in Bethsaida by placing spit on his hands and rubbing the man's eyes. In Mark we also have the blind man Bartimaeus, who is healed simply with words, being told his faith has made it so he can see. In John we have a blind man healed by having mud placed on his eyes. All the stories are true, they all took place, the blind were indeed healed by God, but each in his own way. God knows what is best for each of us and that is a truth we need to acknowledge and accept. We need to humbly come before our God and cast our cares upon him, trusting in him to lead us in the best way.

The servants bring ordinary water to Jesus, and he turns it into extraordinary wine.

John 2:9-10

⁹When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."

The servants knew the truth of the sign. At this wedding celebration in the village of Cana, Jesus turned ordinary water into extraordinary wine. A wine so great that it was comment upon as being better than even the finest wines which had already been presented, and no one knew of the miracle except for Mary, His disciples, and the servants.

God is at work in our lives, every day, in ways we cannot understand or comprehend. He is at work in us always, and there will be times in which we see his work, we experience his presence, we know what he has done, and no one around us will know, see, or acknowledge that God has been at work. There are people out there who will experience the blessing of God in their lives and be completely oblivious to its occurrence because they do not believe, they do not trust, the do not turn to him.

Christ's followers will recognize his work and his presence in our lives, we will know that he is doing what he knows is best for us, this is often what our testimonies of faith are composed of when we give them. They are the times when we saw his hand in our lives or experienced his presence. We know where the wine came from, we know it was just ordinary water that was transformed into something better, just like he is doing in each of us. We know and understand the sign, we see the miracle, to everyone else it is just wine.

JOHN 2:11

¹¹This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

Mary presented Jesus with a world problem and responded to her call. He provided the wine that was sought after. He provided what was needed. The truth is that Jesus will provide for our worldly needs, even if it is not always what we wanted or in the way we wanted.

He also did more than that, He provided spiritual sustenance for those who believe in him. While the people gathered at the celebration all experienced the wonderful wine, it was the faithful, the disciples who were there with him who saw the truth of the sign. They knew the miracle of the wine and experienced the event very differently than all the others who drank of the wine.

And it '**manifested his glory.**' The truth is that true faith in Jesus changes you. It changes the way you think and behave. Faith in Christ as your savior changes every aspect of your life. When you experience something in your life where you see the work of Christ it strengthens you and gives you hope in every situation. You believe in his ability to change you, to change your life and to change the lives of the people around you and around the world.

When you begin to Jesus at work in your life and in the lives of those around you it reminds us of the importance of our faith, the importance of spending time with our God in praise, worship, and study. It reminds us of the importance of Fellowship with our brothers and sisters and the sharing of our testimonies. You begin to see the glories of God in the world all around you and it brings you peace and joy in your heart, because you understand that God is with you always and he has a plan for your life.

Jesus is there in every moment of your life, even when you think he is not there, even before you became a believer. Jesus is involved in the life of every being that exists on the planet throughout all time. He is the creator and the sustainer of all life. Jesus is there in our lives through big and small through thick and thin. He knows every detail of our lives, right down to the number of hairs on our heads we learn in the book of Matthew.

He is not a God who sits above his people on a mighty throne looking down at his followers like servants. He is a God who is intimately involved in the life of each and everyone of his followers, concerned about their well being down to the smallest of details. He is sitting at the door of our lives just waiting for us to invite him in to sit and fellowship with him. He is a God who loves us as a father loves his child, all we need to do is listen to the advice of Mary, call on him and do as he tells us to do. Whatever our need is today, tomorrow or 10 years from now. Our God is there, when everything seems beyond our control, beyond our ability to overcome, we simply need to humble ourselves and come before him seeking his help, casting our troubles upon Him, and

trusting in him to know and do what is best for his people. We need to do as Mary did, bring it to Jesus!

Let us Pray,

O Father in heaven,
 look upon all your people
 who struggle
 with anger, anxiety,
 doubt, frustration,
 guilt, hopelessness,
 loss, memories,
 lack of patience,
 pain, regret,
 sadness, selfishness,
 temptation and weakness.
 Your holy Word tells us
 "All things work together
 for the good of those who love God,
 who are called according to his purpose."
 And that means that you make all these things work
 for your good purpose in our lives,
 even when we do not understand.
 Remind us of your invitation,
 "Cast all your cares upon me,"
 and of your assurance that goes with it,
 "because I care for you."
 ...through your Son,
 Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Hymn: "I Saw the Light" by Glenda Barter and Mark Gould

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's

Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3) We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer.

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspertchoffering@gmail.com Please include your Offering Envelope # in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (eg Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer

God of grace and mercy, receive all our gifts, offered in thanksgiving.
We share the fruit of our labours with you,
asking that you will multiply their effects in and through the Church.
And we share the fruit of our time and talent,
seeking to know how you would have us serve in Jesus' name.

Closing Hymn #181: "All Praise to You, O Lord" (V 1,4)

All praise to you, O Lord,
who by your mighty pow'r
did manifest your glory forth
in Cana's marriage hour.

You speak, and it is done;
obedient to your word,
the water redd'ning into wine
proclaims the present Lord.

O, may this grace be ours:
in you always to live
and drink of those refreshing streams
which you alone can give.

So, led from strength to strength,
grant us, O Lord, to see
the marriage supper of the Lamb,
the great epiphany.

Pastoral Prayer

Wonderful God,
Jesus brought the joy
into lives that needed hope and a new beginning.
We pray for all those who need a new beginning this year:
Individuals trying to make a new start,
Families trying to sort through difficulties,
Groups hoping to accomplish good things for others,
Refugees building new homes in a new land,
Students and teachers beginning a new semester,
Businesses and congregations trying to rebuild in uncertain times.
Show each one how much they matter to you,
and renew their courage and resolve to make a fresh start.

Loving God,
Jesus changed water into wine
to show us that you can accomplish extraordinary things through ordinary lives.
We pray for all those volunteering their energy and concern
to make a difference for others in this community.
We pray for our elected leaders and for all government workers
trying to manage their responsibilities in such challenging times.
And we pray for one another
and for each good purpose we undertake with new resolve this year.
Give us a glimpse of how our hands become your hands, blessed by the Spirit.

Caring God,
Jesus faced the suffering around him with compassion,
reaching out to those in pain and grief with healing and hope.
We remember before you those whose lives are wrapped in sorrow or despair,
and those facing tragic death or critical illness...
We remember those rebuilding lives and communities after flooding and storm
and all those burdened by pain or problems that seem to have no end...
Embrace each one with your comfort and courage,
and show us what we can offer to make a difference.

O God in whom we live and move and have our being,
thank you for giving us the courage and commitment we need
to follow Christ in good times and in hard times.
Thank you for the strength we find together as part of your church
and the gifts you give us in each other,
gifts we can rely on as we plan for our ministry and mission
in these ever-changing times.
Help us trust in the promise of your love for us
and energize us with your Spirit

so that we can recognize the opportunities you give us
to live out the grace and mercy we know in Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen**

Benediction

May the omniscient God give you knowledge,
the omnipotent God give you power,
the omnipresent God give you a presence that blesses—
so that you may share God with the world. **Amen.**