

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, February 12th, 2023
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Righting our Relationships
Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
Matthew 5:21-48

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Let us join our voices to praise the spotless Lamb, Jesus Christ,
who has redeemed us from sin and death.

**We, whom he has redeemed,
will sing praises and shout for joy this hour;**

because in Christ the Lamb we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of our sins in accordance with the riches of his grace.

**Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law
by becoming a curse for us.**

Let us praise him by saying:

**Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!
To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
we give worship this hour and forever and ever. Amen.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Mighty God,
we do not yet see the glory you plan for all humankind,
but in faith we do see Jesus.
We thank you for the humility and holiness
in which he lived and died.
We praise you that he freed us from our sin,
that he comforts and strengthens us through our struggles,
and that he gives us courage to follow him.

God of grace,
you have given us minds to know you,
hearts to love you, and voices to sing your praise.
Fill us with your Spirit,

that we may celebrate your glory
and worship you in spirit and in truth
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Opening Hymn #293: “Come, Thou Almighty King”

Come, thou almighty King;
help us thy name to sing;
help us to praise.
Father, all glorious,
o'er all victorious,
come and reign over us,
Ancient of Days.

Come, holy Comforter;
thy sacred witness bear
in this glad hour!
Thou who almighty art,
now rule in every heart,
and ne'er from us depart,
Spirit of power.

To the great One in Three
eternal praises be
hence evermore!
His sovereign majesty
may we in glory see,
and to eternity
love and adore.

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

Triune God,
we praise you as the God of love and life.
Though Jesus prayed that we would be one,
we confess that we fail to live in unity with each other and with you.
We break our communion through hostile words and unkind actions.
We long for your Spirit to heal us and to correct us.
We long for you to help us experience communion
with you and with each other
as we gather around your Word [and table].
Even now, dependent on your grace, we commit ourselves

to live more fully in the unity you desire.
Through Christ, our Lord, Amen

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news!
There is no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.
For the law of the Spirit
of life in Christ Jesus
has set you free from the law of sin and death.
Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.
The old life has gone;
a new life has begun.
Know that in Jesus,
God embraces you, forgives you,
and strengthens you to live a renewed life.
Thanks be to God.

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.**

Music Ministry: "Come Follow Me" by Choir

Responsive Reading

127. What is prayer?

Prayer is conversation with God, the offering up of our desires in the name of Christ, by the help of the Holy Spirit. It is confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of God's mercies (Westminster Larger Catechism, Answer 178). Prayer is seeking God's blessing and making our requests known to God in the confidence that God hears and will answer. It is seeking, asking and accepting from God whatever we need. In words or the absence of words, prayer is openness to the presence of God.

Phil 4:6, Rom 8:26, Ps 32:5, Lk 11:9-10

Question 128. Is prayer a substitute for action?

While prayer can become a mere rote exercise and an excuse for doing nothing, true prayer involves offering our lives in love and service to God and to our neighbor. When we pray for the poor and needy, the lonely and the sorrowing, the homeless and

dispossessed, we commit ourselves to doing what lies in our power to alleviate their sufferings.

Mt 6:7-8, Rom 12:1, Jas 2:14-17

Children's Hymn #307: "God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale" (v 1,3,6)

God of the sparrow
 God of the whale
 God of the swirling stars
 How does the creature say Awe
 How does the creature say Praise

God of the rainbow
 God of the cross
 God of the empty grave
 How does the creature say Grace
 How does the creature say Thanks

God of the ages
 God near at hand
 God of the loving heart
 How do your children say Joy
 How do your children say Home

Children's Lesson

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

Matthew 5:21-48

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown

into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

³¹ “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’

³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³ “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ ³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷ Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.

³⁸ “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Sermon

Last week we spoke of being the salt and light of our community as we live our lives according to the beatitudes. Jesus did not hesitate to explain what the expectations of Christian life are and how we are called to live by the law of God, and not the laws of man. He defined the laws of God from the Old Testament in his own words in the book of Mark.

Mark 12:30-31

³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Truthfully as Christians, throughout the beatitudes and the idea of living as salt and light the undertone of Love is always present. If we love our God, we will not want to hurt him in any way.

The problem lies in the human understanding of love. The human notion of love is not the one that God instilled in us when he created Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. That form of pure love was corrupted when Eve looked upon of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and saw the fruit of the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, so at the prompting of the serpent she took of the fruit and ate.

When she ate the fruit, the human concept of love changed to one of satisfying our own needs and not the pure love which God has for us. The serpent had persuaded Eve to see the tree as something that could satisfy all of her needs, physically as food, emotionally as delight and spiritually as wisdom. The serpent had perpetrated the lie that has been lived out by every human being since the fall, the lie that causes us to question God and believe that we can be self-sufficient in this world. Most of mankind believes that if they had the right resources, or enough time, or the correct motivation that they can have everything that they want out of life. Humans live thinking of themselves first and the rest of humanity and even God second, many believe that we can do whatever it takes to get the things we want from life as long as we do not hurt anyone else and we are still good people. Yet even that is a selfish thought, a lie perpetrated by the serpent. In the remainder of the sermon on the mount Jesus is going to lay out what real love is, what it means to live with the characteristics of God, and that it comes from the heart.

Our needs in this life are real, we have physical needs, emotional needs and spiritual needs, however, it is how we satisfy these needs that determines who we are, and when we remove God from the way that we seek to satisfy our needs we are no longer walking with him as the salt and light of this world, and instead have fallen into our own selfish ways. The real issue is that since the fall, walking in selfish ways is our default, we are preprogrammed to think of ourselves first in everything that we do, we try to be self-sufficient and in doing so we too often push God out. It is possible to be a perfectly good-looking living Christian on the outside and be absolutely barren and dead on the inside. When we are focused on the things of this world we are dying inside, it is only when we are focused on God first that we obtain eternal life.

In the last line of the scripture, we had read for us today Jesus Christ tells all of his followers that were gathered there with him, '**You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**', and that command carries though to each of his followers today. Our human nature tells us to do things out of self-interest, self-preservation, self-love and pride and God says do the opposite, live by the beatitudes, be salt and light, be perfectly loving. What makes this even harder is we are constantly persuaded by our own thoughts and minds that the self-serving things that we choose to do, are the right courses of action for God loving people to take.

Jesus came to teach us, and to demonstrate for us just how far away we are from being perfect followers of God. Then he went to the cross on Calvary to enable us a way to

make His perfection, his perfect love, our own as we walk with him in our lives. Deciding that we want to live by a good moral code, deciding that we want to be good people is not enough. We all know that even those things which start off with good intent, good purpose and following the teachings of God can be corrupted by man's own selfish desires and interests over time. This is because whether we recognize it or not, the human brain is a wonderful self-justifying organ, it will tell us that we are good people because of the things we have done, even when they are not according to the will of God.

It is not until we get to the point that we are willing to give up our self-interest, our sense of self preservation, our selfishness and pride that we begin to fully entrust our lives and destinies to Jesus Christ, and to do this we often have to begin to understand just how far away from the characteristics that God wants us to all poses we really are in this world. Our concept of Love is a selfish one, we love ourselves, we justify our self-love and twist it to make ourselves feel good about it, we do not understand what God's love is and that is what Jesus is trying to teach in the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount.

What Jesus is talking about is relationships; making them, keeping them and repairing them when they break. Jesus is teaching those disciples gathered around him how they can be more righteous than the law-abiding Pharisees, through Love the way the Father intended it to be, in relationship with God and in relationship with one another.

In our own selfish ways, we often choose to do things or not do things based on how it makes us feel. Many people come to church because it makes them feel better, the same way that some in the days of the Old Testament would make sacrifices to atone for their sins and make them feel better. In other cases, we restrain ourselves from doing something that we know is sinful and that makes us feel good, like we are good people, obeying and pleasing our God.

Jesus however is saying that not murdering is much more than simply not killing people. It is not just the action; it is the attitude that is important.

Think of the story of Cain and Abel. Cain was a farmer, Abel a shepherd. Cain offered God a portion of his harvest as a sacrifice, Abel offered his very best, the first-born lamb. God preferred Abel's offering and this made Cain upset, it angered him and in his anger, he murdered his brother.

Gods asked,

Genesis 4:6-7

⁶The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

Cain let his anger control his actions. He did not wake up that morning with the intent of killing his brother. Instead, he had a relationship issue, an unresolved conflict, an anger that he let swell up to the point that he murdered his brother.

It is our attitude that impacts our behavior more than anything.

Mark 7:18-23

¹⁸ And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him.

²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

For Christians it should be the character of God that defines us, that is our salt and light, and ‘God is love’!

Being angry with someone without a righteous reason is the same as killing them in your mind. He used the term ‘Raca’ in Greek, which means moron or fool. When we show contempt or anger at another human being, we are attacking their character, we are assaulting them, hurting them. What is worse is that this type of language has become perfectly acceptable in our society, trash talk is common in sports and games, but it is not the way that a follower of Christ should behave and speak. What are often called ‘fighting words’ are definitely not ‘loving words.’

Jesus’s point is that we are responsible and accountable for what we think just as much as for what we do. Those angry thoughts we have when things do not go our way, when someone upsets us or when we get cut off while driving are all indicators of a heart that is still in the process of being changed by the Holy Spirit.

Righteous anger is anger at the injustices of the world, the hypocrisy, and selfishness of the world. Martin Luther defines righteous anger this way, ‘it is an anger of love, one that wishes no one any evil, one that is friendly to the person, but hostile to the sin.’ In the modern world we say it is to love the sinner and hate the sin, but even in this righteous anger we can often become self-important and by doing so, we lose our righteousness.

I hope you see the importance that Jesus is placing on Love and relationships, he goes even further when he tells us that before we come to church to worship God and offer our sacrifices to receive his blessings, we should ensure that all of our relationships are in order. If we know of a broken relationship that we can fix, we should fix it first, and after we can rejoice in the presence of the Lord and our relationship with Him.

Unresolved issues in relationship are like unexploded bombs. Throughout war torn areas of the world there are thousands of unexploded bombs, mines and shells, which are a constant danger to the humans who live in those areas, killing people every year when they suddenly explode. Over time they have begun to corrode and that makes them more and more unstable and likely to explode as time passes.

Unresolved issues in a relationship are the same. It becomes corrosive, like in the case of Cain and Abel, and over time it will make the relationship more and more dangerous, until suddenly, usually when we least expect it, it will explode, and our thoughts will become actions that will likely be un-loving in nature. So, Jesus is telling us to go and deal with those broken relationships before they become unstable.

He does not stop there; he says that we also need to fix our broken promises and broken business dealings. He is saying that we should seek to find a common ground and settle our differences with people before they become unstable ground, before they grow worse, or corrode into something which is a danger to all parties. This is God's nature, God's love! This is what God did with each of us, while we were enemies of God, living in our sin, and he sent Jesus, his only son to the cross to die for our sins.

Next Jesus speaks of our need for intimacy. God satisfies our need for intimacy through our relationship with Jesus Christ, and he shows us how they are meant to be met in marriage.

However human desire has a different idea, we want to know what the definition is so that we can come as close as possible to the defined sin and still be 'good'. Many people will argue that God says no sex outside of marriage, and then spend hours defining what exactly God means by sex. I once explained this to a young adult as anything you would not be comfortable talking with your parents about at a family dinner, because their idea was much more forgiving when it came to defining sex.

Jesus is saying that it is not just the act, it is the attitude. We should all know that the mind, the body, and the spirit are all tied together, they do not operate independently of one another. Jesus is saying what happens in the mind leads to what happens in the body, in fact our bodies never do something that our mind has not contemplated.

He is also not saying to literally cut off a hand or pluck out an eye, but to understand the nature of where our sinful desires begin. In the book of Job, Job says that he made a covenant with his eyes, a promise to not gaze upon other women, because he knew of the temptation that was in his heart, and his heart followed his eyes. We live in a culture that is filled with the acceptance of sexual desire, that promotes it in advertising and in our personal lives.

Jesus is using very strong language when he says to cut off a hand or pluck out an eye to avoid these lustful thoughts, and he is not just speaking of sexual lust, he also speaking of lusts for the others idols of this world. Lusts of power, beauty, influence, wealth, when we lust for something, we are willing to bend the scriptures and step away from our walk with God in order to obtain the things we lust for in this world.

Sinful action is easier to spot than sinful desire, but sinful desire is just as destructive to a person as sinful action. Remember we often are glad that other people cannot read our minds, but God can!

Next Jesus speaks on divorce. It was a common topic of debate in Jewish culture, much in the same way it is in the present world. Moses said that a man could divorce his wife if she did something 'indecent' which people then started to interpret in any way which could benefit themselves and their own desire. It reached a point where a Jewish man could divorce his wife for almost any reason according to the laws of men.

This, however, is not what Jesus is saying. He is saying that a marriage between a man and a woman is like the marriage that is picture in our relationship with God. It is meant to be treated with respect and not to be dissolved unless it has been dissolved by one of the parties through unfaithfulness. What matters is the heart and its intent if a person is unfaithful to God and repentant God will take them back. If a person is unfaithful in a relationship and repentant to God and their spouse, then working at saving the relationship, saving the marriage is the better choice.

However, that does not equate to tolerating abuse in a relationship. Jesus is saying that marriage is a relationship that is based upon mutual love. Our relationship with God is based on our love for him and his love for us, and if either party were to do things intentionally to harm the other there would be no love in that relationship. The same is true of marriage, if one part of the relationship is intentionally causing physical, spiritual, or emotional suffering without remorse or repentance then divorce is the only correct course of action.

In our relationship with God, he knows that we fail over and over, but he knows that our love for him will continue to work in us helping us to be better with the help of His Holy Spirit, so our relationship stays strong and continues to improve over time.

When Jesus says 'you have heard it was said' he is telling people that this is the tradition, or this is the ways that humans think about things. He uses this when he speaks of the ways that the religious leaders had created a complicated system for determining just how binding a promise that was made was. For many then, and for us today, when something becomes too difficult, or becomes too costly, or too inconvenient, or maybe we just forget, we begin to make excuses for not keeping our word.

Jesus is reminding us that ‘a promise is a promise’, we are meant to keep our word. In essence he is reminding us that we need to be honest in all of our dealings with others. If we say yes to something then we should follow through, and that means we should also be able to say no to people when we know that we are going to be unable to follow through.

The law that was given to man in Exodus and Deuteronomy was meant to bring about justice and limit man’s desire to seek out vengeance. We all know that when we are hurt by someone else, we often seek our revenge that is much worse than what they have done to us. Jesus is reminding us that this behavior is not in line with God’s character. He is telling us that even when we desire vengeance we are not to seek to get back at others, not just physically, but emotionally as well.

Jesus is telling us to go against our default human nature of self-preservation and self-interest. That we do not need to be caught up in the ideas of personal-rights and personal-wealth, instead we should be living out of the character of God. Filled with love and concern for others, including those who we might consider our enemies or ‘evil’. The example of someone walking a mile and you go two or of someone demanding a tunic and giving them your cloak as well is not telling us that we need to give away all of our possessions but reminding us that it is how we live and behave in this world that shows others God’s love and God’s mercy. If we do more than is required, and by doing so we can show others the love and mercy of Jesus Christ is that not worth doing? Through the beatitudes Christians are called to be loving and giving, meek and gracious, the salt and light of this world so that others can find Jesus Christ through them.

Which brings us to:

Leviticus 19:18

¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

The Pharisees had decided that this meant you were called to love those who loved you in return. This is honestly the default human position in love. It is easy to love people that already love us – Loving those who we hate takes the Holy Spirit’s power, it is not something that we can do on our own, but it is what God did, he loved us even when we were his enemy, out in the world full of sin and abandon, without a care for the hurt we were causing Him.

This is what Jesus means when he says be perfect. Be an example in this world of God’s perfect Love. I am sure that we all recognize that this is impossible for humans, even being ‘pretty good’ seems like a long shot. But that word that we see translated as perfect means something closer to mature. God’s standard is perfection, a perfection that we get closer to as we are guided by our love of God first in our lives, as we mature in Christ and through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit we are matured in our

faith, and we become God's people, who actually begin to live as the salt and light of the world.

This is all about relationships – making strong ones that can endure the trials and tribulations of this world, remaining faithful in our relationships and repairing them when troubles interfere with them. We are called to be relationship makers – even with those who we do not like and those who do not like us; relationship keepers – people who are honest, faithful and committed; and relationship fixers – the ones who are willing to seek out resolutions when we can to keep our relationships with others healthy.

God is love and that love is relational, we see it in the trinity, the love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Relationships are important to God.

Jesus is reminding us that as humans our relationship with God was damaged in the fall, we were hateful, we were unfaithful, we abandoned him, we did not keep our promises and for all of that we deserve God's judgement. But God is a relationship maker, keeper, and fixer. In every way in which we failed in our relationship he succeeded, God sought us out, came to us, and in Jesus Christ created a way to not only repair our relationship with Him, but a way for us to become like him in our relationships with others. That is Love!

Without Jesus we are incomplete, we are immature, we are not perfect. But once our relationship with God is repaired the Holy Spirit gets to work changing our nature of self-interest to giving of self, transforming us, maturing us in God's character, in the beatitudes so that we become an active part of God's plan in this world as we walk among our fellow man as the Salt and light of His church.

Let us pray,

Make Us Grounded in Your Truth

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
grant, we pray, that we might be grounded
and settled in your truth
by the coming of your Holy Spirit in our hearts.
What we do not know, reveal to us;
what is lacking within us, make complete;
what we do know, confirm in us;
and keep us blameless in your service,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Source: Clement of Rome (c. 90)

Hymn: "Rising Sun"

Praise Him all you sinners
 Sing oh sing you weary
 Oh praise Him all you children of God

We lift high His glory
 Shown throughout our stories
 We praise Him as the children of God

Chorus

Our great Redeemer glorious Savior
 Your Name is higher than the rising sun
 Light of the morning You shine forever
 Your Name is higher than the rising sun
 Your Name is higher than the rising sun

Praise His Name forever
 Speak it loud and clear now
 Oh praise Him all you children of God (Chorus)

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. standrewspert offering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it 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 (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer**(Congregant Prepared)****Closing Hymn #321: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" (v 1,3,4)**

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, who rules all creation!
 my soul, praise God, who alone is your health and salvation!
 Come, all who hear; sisters and brothers draw near,
 joining in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work, who defends you;
surely God's merciful goodness here daily attends you,
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
when in great love God befriends you.

Praise to the Lord, and with all that is in me adoring,
All who have life and breath, come with glad praises outpouring!
Let the Amen sound from God's people again;
now and forever adoring!

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, gracious Father,
in the presence of your bounty keep us humble,
in the presence of all people's needs make us compassionate and caring.
Give us faith in our praying and love in our serving,
knowing that by your power
all may find a new balance in living and a new victory in adversity.
We pray for all unhappy lives,
those who are bitter and resentful, feeling life has given them a raw deal,
those who are sensitive to criticism and quick to take offense,
those who desire their own way, whatever the inconvenience
or cost to others.
May your judgment and mercy be for their healing.
We pray for those who are lonely,
who are shy and self-conscious,
who find it hard to make friends;
those who are nervous and timid,
who ever feel themselves strangers in a world they can scarcely understand.
May your presence inspire confidence and ensure companionship.
We pray for those who live with bitter regrets,
for loving relationships brought to ruin,
for opportunities freely given and woefully abused,
for the bitterness of defeat or betrayal at another's hand,
or for failure in personal integrity.
May your grace give new hope to find victory in the very scene of failure.
We pray for all in illness and pain,
weary of the day and fearful of the night.
Grant healing, if it be your will,
and at all times through faith the gift of your indwelling peace.
Bless the company of Christ's folk, the church in every land.
Make her eager in worship,
fearless in proclamation of the gospel, and passionate for caring.
Bless our country. Bless our leaders.
Bless our children and grant us peace within our borders.

Grant us as a nation to be found effective in establishing peace throughout the world.

Bless us, each one, in the communion of the saints, and keep us ever mindful of the great cloud of witnesses that, following in their steps, as they did in the steps of the Master, we may with them at the last receive the fulfillment promised to your people.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen**

Benediction

United as one body in Christ, our Lord,
turn your minds and hearts toward each other in love
so that you may rest in God's eternal love,
at peace with those who have gone before us,
at peace with those around us,
and trusting in God's peace for those yet to come.
Receive now this blessing from our God,
the God of the past, the present, and the future:

Grace and peace to you,
from him who is, who was, and who is to come,
and from the seven spirits before his throne,
and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Amen.