

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

Living Water
Third Sunday in Lent
John 4:1-42

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Seek the Lord while God may be found. Call upon God who is near.
We will return to the Lord our God.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's ways are not our ways.
We come, seeking new paths to follow.

As the heavens are higher than the earth so are God's ways higher than ours.
We come as pilgrims on the journey, praising God along the way.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God, our Creator and Sustainer,
 in you we live and move and have our being.
 In your depths we find meaning; in your heights we find light and joy.
 You are the source of peace and hope for all who turn to you.
 You alone have been our help and our guide;
 you give us strength and courage when we face challenges.
 In you we find rest and welcome along the way.
 We praise you, O God, for your steadfast love.
 Draw near to us once more in this time of worship.
 Reveal your purposes for us
 and prepare us for the days ahead
 so that our lives may witness to your mercy and grace
 as we follow Our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.

Opening Hymn #208: "In the Cross of Christ I Glory" (V 1,2,4)

In the cross of Christ I glory,
 towering o'er the wrecks of time;
 all the light of sacred story
 gathers round its head sublime.

When the woes of life o'ertake me,
 hopes deceive and fears annoy,
 never shall the cross forsake me:
 lo! it glows with peace and joy.

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
 by the cross are sanctified;
 peace is there that knows no measure,
 joys that through all time abide.

Call to Confession

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

Prayer of Confession

**God of grace and mercy,
 We confess that our thoughts are so often not your thoughts;
 our way are rarely your ways.
 Our tempers are short and we fail to act with kindness.
 Our confidence is weak and we treat others without respect.
 Our faith falters and we lose track of you.
 Forgive the many ways we fail you,
 and inspire us to follow you more faithfully. Amen**

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn us? Only Christ –
 And Christ died for us; Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us.
 In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. By Christ's mercy, we can make a fresh start following him.

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: "I Love the Lord" Choir

Responsive Reading

Question 135. What is meant by the second petition, “Your kingdom come”?

The kingdom of God is where God rules. To pray for God’s kingdom to come is to seek the rule of God among us through faith, love and justice. It is also to commit ourselves to work for the coming of the kingdom of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17) which God will bring into being one day.

Ps 103:19, Lk 17:20-21, Rom 14:17

Question 136. What is meant by the third petition, “Your will be done on earth as in heaven”?

We pray that in all of life God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May this be accomplished in our lives, in the church and in the power structures of our world!

Ps 119:33-34, Lk 22:42, Rom 12:2

Children’s Hymn #514: “Jesus We Are Gathered’

Jesus, we are gathered;
 Jesus, we are gathered;
 Jesus, we are gathered;
 We are gathered together with you.

Jesus, we are praying;
 Jesus, we are praying;
 Jesus, we are praying;
 We are praying together with you.

Jesus, we are thankful;
 Jesus, we are thankful;
 Jesus, we are thankful;
 We are thankful together with you.

Children’s Lesson**Prayer for illumination****(Congregant Prepared)****Scripture****John 4:1-42**

4 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ²(although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."
⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because

of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Sermon

Imagine if we had a woman who was like the woman at the well come to our church today. A woman who everyone in the community knows her whole life story. A woman who had been married multiple times, perhaps had a few children, all with different fathers. Maybe she has lived with a few men with whom she was never married, including the man that she is currently living with and she is pregnant again. Maybe she has even had an abortion or two in her life when the costs of raising another child seemed like just too much for her to bear. Now let's assume that she has just come to Christ, less than a month ago, she still lives with her boyfriend, and is not sure if he will join her at church, or even if he will marry her.

How would we treat such a woman?

I am confident that we would welcome her to join us in worship and fellowship, we would invite her to the Bible studies and fellowship events. However, would we hold a baby shower for her upcoming baby? Would we let her sing in the choir, or serve in the nurse's office, or teach in the Sunday School? Would we want her leading a group in Alpha, or at a fellowship event?

Ask yourself, how 'doctrine sound' and 'sin free' do we require someone to be before they can serve in the church, and as a witness of Jesus Christ? These are some of the questions we will seek to answer today as we examine the interaction between Jesus and the woman at the well.

The story of the woman at the well is a well-known piece of Scripture. It is both incredibly simple and incredibly in depth. It seems simple, a man meets a woman seemingly by chance at a well, it is a brief encounter, yet it is one that will change the woman's life forever. In this simple encounter there are lessons for us about racial prejudice, religious hatreds and dealing with the moral outcasts of society. Also sewn into the story is an example for all followers of Christ as to what it means to live a Christ like life.

To begin we need to understand a little bit about the geography of the region in which this story takes place. In the region in which this takes place there are three nations, Galilee in the north, Samaria in the middle and Judea in the south. The easiest and quickest way from Judea to Galilee was through the nation of Samaria. However, this was a route that almost every Jew refused to take. Instead of passing through the lands of the Samaritans, pious Jews would cross the Jordan into the region of Perea, travel north, and then recross the river Jordan into the land of Galilee. This route took much longer but it allowed the Jews to avoid the lands of the Samaritans.

Now you may be asking yourself, why do the Jews dislike the Samaritans so much? Well, it all started around the year 722 B.C. when the Assyrian nation conquered Israel and took the northern ten tribes into captivity. The Assyrians brought in gentiles from the surrounding nations to settle the land that the Israelites had possessed. Eventually the gentiles and their pagan ways intermarried with the Jews who had been left behind in the region. Overtime these people became known as the Samaritans, a people who had developed a language, a culture and a religion that was partly based on their pagan heritage and partly based on their Jewish heritage. Eventually they even went so far as to build their own temple to God in a place called Mount Gerizim, where they preached and taught from their own version of the Old Testament.

The Jews looked down on the Samaritans, they thought of them as religious half-breeds and heretics. The hatred they felt for one another was similar to the way that modern day Israelites and Palestinians feel for one another.

Notice in verse four that it said that Jesus 'had to' pass through Samaria. Well why did Jesus need to pass through Samaria when the rest of the Jewish Nation did not go there at all or tried to get through as quickly as possible. The answer is simple, he went to meet the woman at the well. He knew exactly when she would be coming to the well and he made his trip so that he would be there at the same time. There is not one detail, not one moment, not even a single word left to chance in this encounter we are looking at today, every aspect of this meeting is part of God's plan and goes according to God's will. The woman did not go to the well seeking out Jesus, she went for water. But Jesus had come to the well seeking her, he knows the only way to bring his message to the Samaritan is to go to Samaria, and this woman is the one through which God has planned to deliver his message.

There is a message here for all of us about evangelism. Reaching out to people and introducing them to God is not always simple, not always comfortable, and most times it will be difficult. You have to go to where those who need God are if you want to reach them, your comfort is not the goal of evangelism. Imagine if a firefighter simply stood outside a burning building and told those trapped inside, 'Please come out before the house burns down!'. If you want to bring the message of the Gospel to people you have to go to them, the same way that Jesus went to this woman in Samaria.

The next point of interest is that they met in the middle of the day. Most people went to the well in the early morning or late evening, when the heat of the sun had lessened. They would come as large groups and the well was a communal meeting place, a social time, where the younger woman would seek out the advice of the older woman on the raising of children, cooking and dealing with husbands. It was a time of bonding for the women of the community and helped to strengthen their relationships with one another. However, for the outcasts this was a very difficult time, they were pushed aside and ignored, even ridiculed and insulted, fingers pointed at them, and they were told to stay away or to go home, the morning and evening were very difficult times for the outcasts to go to the well.

This woman had come at noontime. She had also come alone. This is both an unusual time and a dangerous journey. Women travelled together for protection. Why had this woman come alone and at noontime? We can only assume that the people of the village were well aware of her life story and because of that she was one of the outcasts at the well if she came with the usual social gathering.

As Jesus speaks with her, we learn about her past and the reason that she was outcast. She had been divorced and then remarried several times. She had five husbands, and she was currently living with a sixth man who was not her husband. Even though the Samaritans did not obey all of the laws that the Jews had in regards to relationship, they still shared the Laws of Moses, of which this woman was most definitely in violation. She would be considered an adulterous, a whore, and as far as any of the other women for the town would be concerned, she was trash, garbage, something you did not want to get near. This is why the woman comes to the well at noon, in order to avoid the other woman and the words that they assault her with both vocally and in the whispers of gossip.

Yet this is the woman that God has chosen to be a key witness in his reaching out to the town of Sychar and the people of Samaria with His Gospel. Jesus picked a woman who was an outcast of society to be a witness in a culture where even virtuous and upstanding women were not respected as credible witnesses or reliable teachers of religious truths. Very much in the same way that it was a woman from whom he had cast out seven demons that as the first to witness his resurrection.

This tells us something about the type of people that Jesus is looking for as witnesses to His Gospel. It tells us the qualifications that Jesus has in those who follow him, serve him, and spread his Word in this world.

It is clear from this woman life that she was seeking something in a relationship, something that she could not find in any of her five marriages. Her spirit was thirsty, it was seeking, and there was nothing on earth, no relationship which could quench the thirst of her spirit. She knew that she could go to Jacob's well and have her physical thirst quenched, but she had no idea where she could find relief for her spiritual thirst. Every physical, worldly way in which she had sought to quench her spiritual thirst had only left her dry and dusty.

Yet on this day, at this time, in this place she would meet a different man, one who would offer her a different way of living. Jesus would offer to this woman the living water, a spiritual drink from a well that never goes dry. Jesus offered her salvation in Him, he went to her, he found her and he brought her to him, this is a story about the sovereign grace of God. This was no chance encounter a well in the wilderness, it was divinely orchestrated so that God could save this woman before the world even began.

And it all begins with a simple request, 'Give me a drink.' He was tired from the road, and thirsty and she has the water he needs. She did not even know that she was thirsty and that He

was the only one who could give her the living water that she needs. The woman had not come to the well seeking Christ, he had come to the well seeking her. It is in this interaction that we can see how great the Lord is, how he has no prejudices. It does not matter to him that the Jews would not enter into Samaria, it does not matter to him that this woman was an outcast. He welcomes her, and all others, God shuns no one.

In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that he needs to be born of the water and the spirit. Here he tells the woman, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' We need water for our physical life, we need the Holy Spirit for our spiritual life, our living water. This is the living water we all need, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in our lives, God using us to create, maintain and spread His Word.

Jesus uses the living water, the Holy Spirit, of His Words to change the woman at the well. The process of conversion, of true faith is difficult. We need to see our sin to understand our need of a Saviour. In the woman's case Jesus directly confronts her with her sinful life. Without Hesitation he tells her of her five husbands and her current relationship which is out of wedlock.

It may seem that Jesus is cruel in saying this to the woman, but there is not contempt or judgement in his words, only truth. It is not cruel when God forces us to recognize the sin in our lives, although it may be uncomfortable. As the Holy Spirit points out our sinful nature, it becomes clear to us that we cannot save ourselves, the Holy Spirit shows us that we need a Saviour. It is this reality check that opens us up to receiving the living water of the Gospel.

The woman says to Jesus, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.' ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he.' This is the first time that Jesus has told anyone that he is the Messiah. He tells a gentile woman, living in a land that is hated by the Jews. How beautiful those words must have been for that woman to hear. How great her life would become now that she had been given the living water of the Gospel in her life.

And it changed her, she immediately left and went back to town. She went to the townspeople, the ones who judged her, scorned her, and even hated her and told them of the man she had met at the well. She had instantly become an evangelist when she believed, the woman who had gone to the well at noon to avoid the crowds, now intentionally sought out those who she avoided so she could share the news of Christ with them all.

In doing so the woman was going against all the cultural norms. The only people qualified to teach on religious truth in public were righteous Jewish men. Mothers could teach children, but only men could teach in a synagogue or temple. And they had to be righteous according to the laws of Moses. This woman was neither. She was considered a half-breed by the Jews, a heretic at best, and she was even an outcast among her own people. She was also clearly not righteous, divorce was rare and to be divorced five times says something of her character, even

worse she is living in sin with a man she is not wed too. Even in the modern church this woman's moral character would be put to question.

Yet where the world sees a sinner and responds with moral judgment and superiority – Jesus sees a woman thirsting for love, acceptance, hope and responds with the love, grace, mercy, and compassion of God. He offers her the living water of Salvation and a new life and new spirit within her.

Jesus did not come to this world to pat the righteous religious people on the back and bolster their prejudices. Jesus came to save the lost, and this woman was clearly one of the lost, yet still redeemable. So, Jesus begins by extending grace – the grace of willingly talking with her in a public space that no one else wanted to share with her. The through that grace he offered her salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the living water which would create in her a clean heart and a new life, she would be reborn.

Jesus offered her grace, mercy, and compassion, but first he offered her the truth. Before she could recognize her need for Christ, she needed to face the truth of her sinful life. Jesus exposed to her the truth of her failed relationships and her current immoral and sinful relationship, not so that he could condemn her, but instead so that he could heal her, so he could set her free of the sins in her life. She could not understand what she needed until she knew that she was searching for ways to quench her thirst in all the wrong ways and all the wrong places.

It is only a personal relationship with Jesus that will fill the void that exists inside the human heart. People will seek out ways of the world to fill it, they will seek out power, fame, pleasure, and they will find that they are never satisfied, they will always crave more. Only Jesus can bring peace and joy to the human heart.

In order to experience the saving grace of God, the woman only needed to know her own sinful nature. She did not need to know doctrine, she did not need to understand the scripture fully, she did not understand the difference between atonement, justification, and regeneration. She just knew that she was a sinner and she needed Christ.

Faith is not measured in intellectual assets; faith is the humble reliance upon Christ and His finished work upon the cross. Faith is knowing that Jesus Christ is Lord, repenting and trying to live a life according to His Word, then you are saved.

Romans 10:9-10 teaches us that

Romans 10:9-10

⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

How much did the Samaritan woman know about pre-existence, incarnation, the deity and humanity of Christ, how much did she know about his atoning death, his resurrection or his return. Absolutely nothing!

The same could be said for all those who came to Christ on the day of Pentecost. How many of them could explain the trinity? Probably not one. This woman did not understand Christianity fully, maybe even not a little. She was probably burdened by her knowledge of Samaritan traditions and laws around religion. This all did not disappear in her short conversation with Christ. She saw Jesus as a prophet, and then when he claimed to be the Messiah, she simply believed.

Her testimony was simple, she did not try to convince others, she simply told people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?'. She simply shared her experience and invited others to come experience him as well. She had not yet changed anything in her life, she was still living with a man to whom she was not married. We never learn what happened in her life after this short time. We simply know that Jesus changed her life, and she immediately began to spread the news.

She began to witness, to tell the truth of who Jesus was in her life to anyone who would listen. God used the living water to save her and then he used her to bring His message to the Samaritans. The fields were ripe for the harvest and God was going to use this woman to perform a miracle.

This Samaritan town invited a Jewish rabbi to teach them. He taught them for two days. Could you imagine the Palestinians today allowing a Jewish Rabbi to come into their temples to teach for two days? It would not be possible.

After just two days the people admitted that 'we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.' The Samaritans, who only had the books of Moses, they knew that this was the seed of the Woman that God had promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden. They knew that he was the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through whom the whole world would be blessed. They knew that he was the fulfillment of the sacrifices required in the Law of Moses. They knew that this was God's sacrifice who would give up his life for the sins of the world.

Everyone here today probably knows more truths about Jesus and the Bible than this woman did. Everyone here had probably had a more respectable life than this woman did. Everyone here had probably experienced more of the life-changing presence of the Lord than this woman did. Yet almost everyone here still feels like they are not qualified to talk to others about the Lord. Be a witness to the Lord. Share the truth of who he is in your life with others, share the gospel in the way you live, and in words if you have to. Invite people to 'Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?'

The woman does not claim to have any of the answers, in fact she is still asking the question herself. She knows people are going to look at her and see a sinner, she has no air of holiness

or superiority. Her objective is not to change the world, or to change people and make them more moral or righteous. Her one goal is to connect people with Christ in their lives, Christ is the one with the answers. He is the truth, the light, and the way.

Too often we doubt our ability to witness, we think we do not have enough knowledge, we are not sanctified enough, or we cannot answer all the questions. You do not need the answers, you cannot be the Saviour – you just need to introduce people to Him. Invite them to come and ask, ‘Could this be the Christ? The Saviour of the word?’

We just need to connect people with Christ, and let the Holy Spirit begin its work in them. Christ needs all His people to be the salt and light of the world. Some do it in the way they live, some do it through words and teachings, some do it through acts of mercy and grace.

And every church needs a few people like the Samaritan woman, people whose lives are a little bit messy, who may not know everything about the Bible, who can relate to the lost in the world and invite people to ‘Come and see the man who told me everything I did, could he be the Christ?’ People who ask others to come see for themselves, come and meet a man who knows my past, a man who knows all my wrongs, all the worst about me – and still loves me – and he has the living water that quenching the thirsting soul as nothing else can.

Let us pray,

Preserve Us in All Temptations

Lord God, heavenly Father,
 you sent your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
 to take on himself our flesh
 that he might overcome the devil’s tyranny
 and defend us poor sinners.
 We give you thanks for your merciful help.
 Be present with us in your grace in all temptations,
 preserve us from worldly security
 and by your Holy Spirit keep us
 in your Word and your fear,
 that we may be delivered from the enemy
 and obtain eternal salvation;
 through your beloved Son,
 Jesus Christ our Lord,
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one true God, now and forever.

Source: Veit Dietrich, d. 1549, Lent 3

Hymn: “Here is Love” (V 1,2,3)

Here is love, vast as the ocean,
 loving-kindness as the flood,
 when the Prince of Life, our Ransom,
 shed for us His precious blood.
 Who His love will not remember?
 Who can cease to sing His praise?
 He can never be forgotten
 throughout heav'n's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion
 fountains opened deep and wide;
 through the floodgates of God's mercy
 flowed a vast and gracious tide.
 Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
 poured incessant from above,
 and heav'n's peace and perfect justice
 kissed a guilty world in love.

In Thy truth Thou dost direct me
 by Thy Spirit through Thy Word;
 and Thy grace my need is meeting
 as I trust in Thee, my Lord.
 Of Thy fullness Thou art pouring
 Thy great love and pow'r on me
 without measure, full and boundless,
 drawing out my heart to Thee.

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 #211: "Take Up Your Cross" (V 1,2,4)

Take up your cross, the Savior said,
 If my disciple be you would be;
 Deny yourself, the world forsake,
 And humbly follow after me.

Take up your cross; let not its weight
 fill frightened spirit with alarm;
 his strength shall bear your spirit up
 and brace your heart, and nerve your arm.

Take up your cross, and follow Christ,
 Nor think till death to lay it down;
 For only those who bear the cross
 May hope to wear the glorious crown.

Pastoral Prayer

God of Hope,
 When the world is confusing and frustrating,
 you bring light and hope.
 We give you thanks for lessons learned, for changes of heart,
 for fresh discoveries made, and new paths followed,
 even during these months of pandemic.
 We pray this day for those who are confused or afraid.
 for those who feel anger or despair.

God of Peace,
 there is so much conflict, hostility, and antagonism
 around us and within us.
 Personal relationships are often tense; the world community at odds.
 We pray for understanding to prevail
 in relationships at home and at work,
 in our community and our country.
 And we pray for diplomacy to end conflict and threat among nations

God of Joy,
 we give you thanks for moments of joy and celebration in our lives,
 for small pleasures given and received through times of isolation.
 We remember those who feel left out or bitter,
 those who are anxious or in distress.
 We pray for those who face loss and hardship in these uncertain times,
 and all who know sorrow and suffering,

naming before you those on our hearts this day.

God of community and compassion,
we thank you for your steadfast presence
in the face of all that brings uncertainty and worry these days.
Bless our congregation and every church that is struggling;
inspire us to consider renewed ministry and mission
after months of restricted gatherings.
Reawaken our love for one another
and our desire to worship and serve together in Jesus' name.
Sustain leaders who feel exhausted by the challenges they've faced
and renew our stewardship with gratitude for your love.

God of grace,
Receive these prayers and the unspoken prayers of our hearts.
Deepen our trust in you for the days ahead,
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Benediction

May the grace of Christ attend you,
the love of God surrounds you,
the Holy Spirit keep you
now and forevermore.