

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, March 5th, 2023
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Born Again
Second Sunday in Lent – Communion
John 3:1-21

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

The Lord is our light and our salvation:
Of whom shall we be afraid?

The Lord is the stronghold of our life:
We will wait for the Lord in faithfulness.

Let us seek the Lord's face in this time of worship:
We will honour God's presence in our prayers and our praises!

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God ever creating, ever loving, ever leading:
when things around us feel chaotic, you are peace.
When so much we hear is not reliable, your word is truth.
When we are paralyzed by fear and anxiety, your presence is freedom.
When we feel bereft and helpless, your love gives us hope.
God, you are the Source of all that matters.
We bring you our prayers and our praise this day,
for you reveal yourself to us in the goodness of creation,
in the love and mercy of Christ, your beloved,
and through the energy and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.
We worship you, O God,
ever Three and ever One, world without end. Amen.

Opening Hymn #193: "Out of My Bondage, Sorrow and Night" (V 1,2,4)

Out of my bondage, sorrow and night,
Jesus, I come; Jesus, I come;
into thy freedom, gladness and light,
Jesus, I come to thee;
out of my sickness into thy health,
out of my want and into thy wealth,

out of my sin and into thyself,
Jesus, I come to thee.

Out of my shameful failure and loss,
Jesus, I come; Jesus, I come;
into the glorious gain of thy cross,
Jesus, I come to thee.

out of earth's sorrows into thy balm,
out of life's storms and into thy calm,
out of distress to jubilant psalm,
Jesus, I come to thee.

Out of the fear and dread of the tomb,
Jesus, I come; Jesus, I come;
into the joy and light of thy home,
Jesus, I come to thee;
out of the depths of ruin untold,
into the peace of thy sheltering fold,
ever thy glorious face to behold,
Jesus, I come to thee.

Call to Confession

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

Prayer of Confession

**God of compassion,
We are creatures who seek our own comfort.
We confess that we prefer our own plans to your purposes.
We shrink from costly discipleship and put our own interests first.
Forgive our fleeting commitment
and the times we have indulged our own complaints.
Have mercy on us.
Inspire us with the energy to do your will
and serve our neighbours in the example of Christ, your Son, and our Lord.
Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Friends in Christ, while it is true that we have all sinned,
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love poured out in Jesus Christ.
To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say, in Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven
Be at peace with God, with yourself, and with one another.

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 Taste the Goodness of the Lord" Choir**Responsive Reading****Question 133. What is intended by addressing God as "Our Father in heaven"?**

The word "our" indicates that our prayer is directed not to a private God but the God of the whole human family. We call God "Father" because Jesus addressed God as Father and made us brothers and sisters with himself. The phrase "in heaven" does not mean that God is "up there" but that God is above and beyond all visible reality.

Mal 2:10, Jn 5:17-18, Rom 8:15-17, Acts 17:24

Question 134. What is meant by the first petition, "Hallowed be your name"?

The first petition sets the goal and purpose of the whole prayer; that the name of God be hallowed (i.e., held as holy) by ourselves and others.

Ps 115:1, Ex 20:7, Ps 29:2

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 3:1-21

3 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Sermon

George Whitefield was an evangelistic preacher who lived in the 1700’s. He was known to speak to crowds from days upon end, even for preaching daily for months at a time and to crowds in the tens of thousands.

His passion for evangelism began when he was just 16 years old. When he was 16, he recognized the truth of his sinful nature, and in the same way that most youth do things, Whitefield tried to figure out how to deal with his sin himself. He tried every form of religious activity he could find in attempt to get rid of the guilt and shame he felt from his sin, even fasting for 36 hours a week and praying for days at a time. During Lent he fasted so much that he almost starved himself to death, but nothing worked, he only felt more miserable. It was only after he met Charles Wesley who showed him in the Scriptures that he needed to be 'born again' that he truly understood what Salvation was and how he could be 'born again' or eternally lost.

This was finally the point that the Holy Spirit began its work in his heart, he came to fully understand who Jesus was, he understood the words of Jesus that we are studying here in John 3, and through the grace and mercy of Christ he was saved. After he became a preacher, he regularly spoke about how people 'must be born again', Whitefield wanted every person to know and understand salvation and to experience the transforming power of God's grace.

Romans 3:23 teaches us:

Romans 3:23

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

We have all sinned, we are all sinners and to enter the kingdom of God we must be reborn, which is what Jesus is teaching Nicodemus and through him every Christian in the world about in this chapter of the book of John.

We can begin by understanding who Nicodemus was, he was both a moral man and a religious man. He was a pharisee, a conservative in a culture that was not loyal to the teachings of God. We often are critical of the Pharisees in the modern world, and we need to remember that for the most part they were people who believed in and tried to obey the teachings of the Old Testament. They tried to obey every word right down to the smallest pip, and this was their fault, they tried so hard to obey scripture and the letter of the law that they lost its meaning. Their mistake was in believing that their obedience to the words of the law alone would be what would make them acceptable to God and allow them entrance into the kingdom of Heaven.

Nicodemus was also a leader, a ruler of the Jews. Nicodemus was a member of the ruling council of the Jewish peoples. He was not just the ruler of a small congregation, but a religious leader over the entire Jewish nation.

And it was because he was a religious leader of the Jewish nation that he was so concerned about public opinion of himself. So instead of approaching Jesus in the day and in a crowd, he chooses to approach him at night. Jesus was gaining popularity and Nicodemus did not want to risk losing his position by being identified with an unpopular

cause of controversial teacher. Yet even though he had these fears, he still wanted to approach Jesus and ask him a question

It is clear from his first words to Jesus, '**Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.**' that he is searching for answers to a question he cannot answer. Remember that he is a man who is thoroughly committed to his faith, who studies the scriptures and the laws and tries to live accordingly, yet, even with all of his devotion and dedication he still has some emptiness in his heart. He knows that Jesus has the answer, he has recognized that Jesus is from God, he still does not know that Jesus is God, but he knows that God has blessed the ministry of Jesus.

Nicodemus is in many ways like people of the world who may know of Jesus, may have read his word, but still have not found their relationship with God. He may even be like some people who we would consider church leaders, people who are moral and religious, people who know of God, but struggle to know God personally.

Jesus's response to Nicodemus teaches us some important truths.

The first is that it is necessary for us to be born again.

John 3:3

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Jesus reminds Nicodemus that there is another world beyond this world. Scripture teaches that God is sovereign over all things, but we also know that there will be a time when the things of this world are made anew, and the kingdom will be presided over by God himself. To Nicodemus, a man well versed in the scripture, he would know that Jesus is talking about God's eternal kingdom, and if he wanted to participate in that kingdom at the end of the ages, if he wanted to experience eternal, resurrected life and to be with God forever he would need to be reborn.

Jesus is making it clear that this rebirth is the only way into that kingdom, notice it says nothing about being a good person, or giving so much to charity, or know or memorizing so much scripture, there are no moral or religious criteria, only that you need to be reborn to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

This perplexes Nicodemus, he is puzzled so he asks the same question we all would have asked, '**How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?**'

To which Jesus replies,

John 3:5-8

⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus that the new birth is spiritual, something that Nicodemus should have known. This is why Jesus tells him not to marvel at what he has said. When he says to Nicodemus, ‘you must be born again’, the word that is translated again in Greek is ‘another’ which also can mean from above. Jesus is literally telling Nicodemus that he must be born from above. This teaching would match the teachings that we see elsewhere in the scripture around being reborn of water and the spirit, in both the Old and New Testaments. Simply put the Holy Spirit brings about a new birth in a supernatural, spiritual way.

He also explains that this birth is sovereign in nature. Jesus describes it as the wind which blows where it wishes. No human being can direct the wind, only God can control the wind, the same is with baptism by the spirit, no man controls the spirit, only God can bring about the new birth in someone.

And finally, the new birth is secret. In his reference to the wind Jesus reminds that we hear the sound of the wind, but we do not know where it comes from or where it goes. The Holy Spirit’s activity in the new birth in a believer is something that we cannot begin to understand, although we can see the effects of it, we do not know the when, why, where or how of the process of their new birth through the Holy Spirit. The new birth of a believer is part of the mystery of God’s work in his people. We may never understand the process, but we do understand that we have been born again.

Even with this explanation Nicodemus struggles to understand because of his adherence to the books of law that the Jews had created in an attempt to work their way into salvation. He asks Jesus **‘How can these things be?’**

Jesus points out that he should understand based on his knowledge of the Scriptures,

John 3:10-12

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

Jesus was thinking of all of the passages from the Old Testament that spoke of the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 36:25-27

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

And it is from this point that we get one of the most important monologues on faith and being reborn as a Christian.

John 3:11-16

¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Jesus starts with ‘Truly, truly’ or ‘Amen, amen’. Jesus wants Nicodemus to know that there is no doubt to his authority to speak and teach on the new birth. Jesus always spoke this way about scripture, Jesus always spoke directly and truthfully and he expects us to be able to do the same when we speak of his teachings.

Next, he instructs Nicodemus that he is the Son of Man, he makes a point that it is by the way he has lived that we should know that he is the Son of God. We will see this ultimately made true when he dies upon the cross, is resurrected from the dead and ascends back into heaven from where he came.

Finally, he tells Nicodemus why it is that he has come. When he speaks of Moses lifting the serpent in the wilderness, he is inferring that he too will be lifted up upon the cross. Like those who looked upon the serpent were saved in Mose’s time, those who look to Jesus on the cross will receive Salvation, the debt of their sin shall be paid and eternal life shall be theirs.

It is then that the most widely quoted piece of scripture in the modern world appears, **‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life’**

But what is often skipped over are the verses that follow John 3:16.

John 3:17-21

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

Jesus continues after John 3:16 to teach of the difference between the condemnation and judgement that will be received by those who do not believe and the eternal life and salvation that all believers will receive. It is simple there are only two states of being at the time of judgement, those who belong to Christ and those who do not, the sheep and the goat, the saved and the unsaved.

The new birth is a gift from God alone, that is proven by the evidence in our lives. It is a gift which renews us, renews our hearts, and brings us back to spiritual life. It is God’s grace upon us who walked away from him in sin.

There is nothing we can do to create a new birth in ourselves or anyone else, it is an act of the holy Spirit. All we can do is cry out to God in prayer for his Grace and Mercy upon us and upon others in this world.

However, the scripture also calls for all who have received this gift of grace to walk in Christ. To place their trust in him, to be transformed by him, and to do the work which he has called us to do in this world. It calls for us to live as the Salt and Light of the world so that the Holy Spirit may do its work in the world around us through us. It is through the Holy Spirit in us that we are able to praise, worship and bring honor and glory to God in our lives.

So, ask yourself, have you been born again? We have all sinned and we must be born again to enter the kingdom of Heaven. We need to place our full faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and trust in his eternal grace and mercy to receive the gift of eternal life.

I pray we all have been reborn and been renewed by Christ in our lives today and every day of our life as we walk with him in this world, bring his light to those who still are seeking the peace and love of His embrace.

Let us pray,

Confirm our Faith and Hope in Your Grace and Mercy

Lord God, heavenly Father,
 may your Holy Spirit strengthen our hearts
 and confirm our faith and hope
 in your grace and mercy.
 Although we have reason to fear because of our conscience,
 our sin and our unworthiness,
 we may nevertheless, with the woman of Canaan,
 hold fast to your grace
 and in every trial and temptation
 find you a very present help and refuge;
 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 2

Hymn: "What Grace is Mine"

What grace is mine that He who dwells in endless light
 Called through the night to find my distant soul
 And from His scars poured mercy that would plead for me
 That I might live and in His name be known

So I will go wherever He is calling me
 I lose my life to find my life in Him
 I give my all to gain the hope that never dies
 I bow my heart take up my cross and follow Him

What grace is mine to know His breath alive in me
 Beneath His wings, my wakened soul may soar
 All fear can flee for death's dark night is overcome
 My Savior lives and reigns for evermore

So I will go wherever He is calling me
 I lose my life to find my life in Him
 I give my all to gain the hope that never dies
 I bow my heart take up my cross and follow Him
 I bow my heart take up my cross and follow Him

Communion

Invitation to the Table

Jesus invites us to this table and now we do as Jesus did.
 We take this bread and this wine, ordinary things of the world.

In these, Jesus has promised to be present.
 Through these Christ can make us whole.
 Come all of you this is the joyful feast of the people of God.

As Jesus offered thanks for the gifts of the earth,
 let us also bless God with great thanksgiving.

The Prayer of Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you;
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts;
We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God;
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

*Generous God, overflowing fountain of good,
 you who lived from all eternity in trinitarian abundance
 and yet made room for creatures, creating life
 through the mediating Son and the hovering Spirit,
 pouring out value on all that you made—*

*You honored us human beings with the breath of your life,
 making us in your image and likeness,
 to care for the earth in stewardship and love,
 to live together in hospitality and zest
 as a daily reminder of your trinitarian abundance.*

*You crowned us with virtue and honor
 and are now renewing us in your image through the work of your Son.
 Magnificent you are, strong God, giver of splendors.*

*You bless inside a world of curses.
 You heal inside a world of wounds.
 You save inside a world bent on being lost.
 We thank, praise, and honor you,
 generous God, overflowing fountain of good,
 through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
 heaven and earth are full of your glory.
 Hosanna in the highest.
 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.**

Hosanna in the highest.

*Holy God, you are mighty in power yet abounding in mercy.
While our world was marred with sin,
so much so that we had no hope of redemption,
you made a covenant with your people.
You promised to renew your creation.
You promised to give hope amid the sorrow,
healing in place of sickness, wholeness in place of emptiness.*

*You stepped into our darkness in the person of Jesus Christ.
Our Lord and Savior lived among us.
He, God before the beginning of time,
willingly came to live at a specific place in a specific time.
He came quietly to a young unwed mother
through the power of your Holy Spirit.
He experienced our human joys and sorrows.
The Lord of the universe became a helpless boy.
He ate, he drank, he grew.
He was like us but without sin.*

*Then the King of kings showed us how to live.
He healed the sick, cared for the least of society,
and took time for children.
He forgave sins and performed miracles.
He loved, and he served.
He gave up his very life for his friends.
He died the excruciating, disgraceful death of a criminal for us.
Yet you raised him out of the tomb.
He triumphed over death so that we too may live.*

*On the night before our Lord died, he ate with his disciples.
As we so often do, Jesus began with prayer.
He took the bread and the cup,
and he shared them with his friends,
saying, "This is my body given for you. This cup is poured out for you.
My body and my blood are given for the forgiveness of your sins.
Do this in remembrance of me."*

*So, loving God, we do, in obedience to your command,
eat the bread and drink from the cup.
As we do, we remember with awe and gratitude
the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ,
King of all, Savior, Anointed One.*

We rejoice that your great love through our Redeemer's sacrifice has set us free and given us hope for a future with you.

Until our Lord Jesus returns to establish his kingdom without end, we will joyfully proclaim his death and resurrection.

**Christ has died;
Christ is risen;
Christ will come again.**

*Heavenly Father, show forth among us
the presence of your life-giving Word and Holy Spirit,
to sanctify us and your whole church through this sacrament.
Grant that all who share the body and blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ,
may be one in him and may remain faithful in love and hope.
And as this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf
and these grapes from many hills into one cup,
grant, O Lord, that your whole church may soon be gathered
from the ends of the earth into your kingdom.*

**Through him, with him, in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honor and glory are yours,
Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.**

The Apostles Creed

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,**

and the life everlasting. AMEN.

The Story of the Last Supper

The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread,
and when he had given thanks for it, he broke it, and said,
'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'
In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying,
'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in
remembrance of me.'
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

*Take, eat, remember, and believe
that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was given
for the complete forgiveness of all our sins*

*Take, drink, remember, and believe
that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed
for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.*

Prayer after Communion

*Loving, glorious, gracious God,
you have fed us at your table.
In your mercy you have nourished us,
and we are grateful.
This day, in this time and place,
we connect through the centuries
with the church everlasting,
those who before us broke bread and took the cup.
Help us now, as we leave this place,
to continue the work of the holy catholic church,
to practice the communion of the saints,
and, with hearts and souls refreshed, to seek your will.
Help us, now that we have been fed,
to feed those who are hungry,
invite in the stranger,
and visit the imprisoned.
You have met us where we are, O Lord,
and filled our needs yet again.
May we do the same for all of your children;
may we leave this place to love abundantly.
May we love you with all our hearts.
May we love our neighbors as ourselves.*

In Christ's name we pray. Amen

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 #197: "Forty Days and Forty Nights" (V 1,2,5)

Forty days and forty nights
thou wast fasting in the wild;
forty days and forty nights
tempted, and yet undefiled.

Should not we thy sorrow share
and from worldly joys abstain,
fasting with unceasing prayer,
strong with thee to suffer pain?

Keep, oh keep us, Saviour dear,
ever constant by thy side;
that with thee we may appear
at the eternal Eastertide.

Pastoral Prayer

God of grace,
You are our Judge and our Hope.
Transform us with your love and harness our energy for your purposes in the world into which Christ came and for which he died.
We pray for the Church facing the challenges of rebuilding ministry and mission amid the uncertainties of this world.
Where congregations are tempted to guard traditions and resist new possibilities, where members magnify differences instead of celebrating our unity in Christ,

where energy for leadership and community life has grown weaker,
send your healing and transforming grace.

We pray for relationships suffering under the stress.
Where families are tempted to nurse grudges and harbour complaints,
where friendships have been wounded by misunderstanding or neglect,
where workplace tensions have arisen over clashing opinions or exhausting demands,
send your reconciling and restoring mercy.

We pray for the world filled with increasing threats and conflicts.
Where countries are torn by unrest and persecution,
where communities are diminished by prejudice and discrimination,
where those with power and authority degrade or dismiss their critics,
empower those who work for just solutions and advocate for the powerless.

We pray for all who are troubled and find it hard to face these uncertain times,
we pray for those who face illness or loss of any kind,
for those challenged by economic hardship,
and for those faced with the reality of death, their own or of someone dear.
Embrace each one with your compassion and courage.

Even as we remember the many challenges around us,
we give you thanks for the blessings we know,
for moments of pleasure,
for laughter shared,
for conversations that brightened a day.
Thank you for your steadfast love
and the comfort we draw from your presence with us in all things.
In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen**

Benediction

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
guard your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of God's Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
remain with you always. Amen.