

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Fig Trees  
Second Sunday After Epiphany  
John 1:43-51**

**Welcome**

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

May the light of God's love push back the darkness.

**We come to the light from the four corners of the earth,  
from the north, from the south,  
from the east, and from the west.**

But we are all one in Jesus Christ.

**We come from many nations and many cultures.**

But we are all one in Jesus Christ.

**We come seeking the light that guides us to life.**

But we are all one in Jesus Christ.

**Let us lift up our many voices and praise the God of all people**

**Prayer of Adoration and Invocation**

Almighty Lord God,  
you gave your Son, Jesus Christ, to be the light of the world:  
We praise and magnify your holy name that in him  
you have revealed the wonder of your saving love to all people.  
With those of old who brought their tribute to his feet,  
confessing him as King of heaven and earth,  
we now present the worship of our grateful hearts,  
asking you to give us grace to give ourselves to you.  
Fill the world with your glory,  
and show yourself to all the nations,  
through him who is the true light  
and the bright morning star,  
Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Opening Hymn #291: "Thou Whose Almighty Word" (V 1,2,4)**

Thou whose almighty word  
chaos and darkness heard  
and took their flight,  
hear us, we humbly pray,  
and where the gospel day  
sheds not its glorious ray  
Let There Be Light!

Saviour who came to bring  
on thy redeeming wing  
healing and sight,  
health to the sick in mind,  
sight to the inly blind,  
now to all humankind  
Let There Be Light!

Blessed and holy Three,  
glorious Trinity,  
Wisdom, Love, Might,  
boundless as ocean's tide  
rolling in fullest pride,  
through the world, far and wide,  
Let There Be Light!

**Call to Confession**

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

**Prayer of Confession**

**God of grace,  
you have given us Jesus,  
the light of the world,  
but we choose darkness  
and cling to things that hide the brightness of your love.  
Immersed in ourselves, we have not risen to new life.  
Baptize us with your Spirit,  
that, forgiven and renewed,  
we may preach your Word to the nations  
and tell of your glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ,**

**our Lord and our light forever. Amen.**

### **Assurance of Pardon**

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you,  
that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.  
If we say that we have fellowship with him  
while we are walking in darkness,  
we lie and do not do what is true;  
but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light,  
we have fellowship with one another,  
and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin

### **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: "Bread of the World" Choir**

### **Responsive Reading**

#### **Psalm 139:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

<sup>2</sup> **You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from afar.**

<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> **Even before a word is on my tongue,  
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.**

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> **Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is high; I cannot attain it.**

**Children's Hymn #328: "This is My Father's World"**

This is my Father's world,  
 And to my listening ears  
 All nature sings, and round me rings  
 The music of the spheres.  
 This is my Father's world:  
 I rest me in the thought  
 Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas--  
 His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world:  
 The birds their carols raise,  
 The morning light, the lily white,  
 Declare their Maker's praise.  
 This is my Maker's world:  
 God shines in all that's fair;  
 In the rustling grass God's footsteps pass,  
 God speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Saviour's world:  
 O let me ne'er forget  
 That though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
 God is the Ruler yet.  
 This is my Saviour's world:  
 The battle is not done;  
 Jesus, who died, shall be satisfied,  
 And earth and heaven be one.

**Children's Lesson****Prayer for illumination****(Congregant Prepared)****Scripture****John 1:43-51**

<sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup> Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. <sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." <sup>46</sup> Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." <sup>47</sup> Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" <sup>48</sup> Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig

tree, I saw you.”<sup>49</sup> Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”<sup>50</sup> Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.”<sup>51</sup> And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

### Sermon

The book of John is considered the most theological of all of the Gospels, it tries from the very beginning of the book to help people see the truth and discover for themselves that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God. The opening of the Gospel of John makes that abundantly clear, **‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.’**

The Gospel of John does not include any of the details of the birth of Jesus, like the books of Matthew and Luke. Mark’s Gospel has a focus on the starting of the ministry of Jesus, which is missing from the book of John. While the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke share a lot of similar events, John is often set apart, it is a Gospel written for a different purpose, it is meant to give us a much deeper understanding of the story of the Gospel that we read in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

The Gospel of John starts off telling us that Jesus is the Son of God and immediately goes into the gathering of the disciples.

When Jesus walks towards John the Baptist to be baptized and begin his ministry in the first few chapters, John calls out.

#### John 1:29

**<sup>29</sup> The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

Johns’ recognition of the truth of who Jesus is results in two of his disciples leaving him to follow Jesus. Andrew and Peter are intrigued by this rabbi that their master is so devoted to, and they ask him where he is staying. Jesus tells them, ‘Come and see’ and after seeing where he was staying and hearing his teaching, they become his first disciples. The next day he walks by Phillip and calls him with the simple words, ‘follow me’, and Phillip did.

If you have ever read the first chapter of John and thought about the calling of the first disciples, you must have come to the realization that there was something very special about Jesus. He drew people to him in a way that was special. People were willing to set aside their lives, leave their jobs and their loved ones in an instant and follow a rabbi that they knew almost nothing about.

What was so special about Jesus to these first followers? Did he have a lot of charisma? Did he have a persona that called people to him? Did he have a particular way of carrying himself, or maybe a lot of confidence? Was it just the way that he talked and taught? It had to be something special that these three men, Andrew, Peter, and Phillip did not question giving up all that they had in their lives and immediately following him.

In fact, what Phillip saw was so powerful that he could not contain it, instead he immediately had to share it with his friend Nathanel. Phillip runs to find Nathaniel and tells him about Jesus, **'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'**

If you have ever run to someone to share the truth of who Jesus is, you might be familiar with the response that Phillip received from Nathanel. Instead of leaping up and joining the three disciples, Nathanel responds with skepticism, he is doubtful. Nathanel does not hide the fact that there was a prejudice that existed in the region against the people from the region of Nazareth. **'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'**

In the opinion of many of the Jews of the time, Nazareth was a place of little to no importance. And in the first century it was important where you came from, people were often judged based on where they grew up, and interestingly, that has not really changed in 2000 years. If Jesus had been from Jerusalem or some other major city, it is very possible that Nathaniel would have reacted differently to the news his friend brought him. But Jesus was from that small backwater country town of Nazareth.

The Jews actually held Nazareth even lower than most of the small towns, it sat on the border of Gentile country. Nazareth was often jokingly called the "Galilee of the Gentiles" and the Jews had so much prejudice against gentiles that they believed that anyone or anything that even touched a gentile was tainted and unclean in the sight of God. And because Nazareth touched Gentile land it must be tainted and unclean as well.

Phillip could have shrugged his shoulders and walked away, he could have entered into a debate with his friend, but instead he does what all Christians are called to do, he invites his friend to 'Come and see.'

Two times in this very first chapter people are told to come and see. When Andrew and Peter ask Jesus where he is staying, he said to them "Come and see". Come and see is an invitation, an invitation to discover the truth about who Jesus is, an invitation to become his disciple. And that invitation is still going on today. Through the work of the Great Commission, Christians all around the world are inviting other to come and discover the truth of who Jesus Christ is, often people who have no real desire to know who Jesus is, people who may even have a prejudice against him, and are resting, seeking to take a break away from the world, very much in the same manner as Nathaniel.

Nathaniel was seated under a fig tree, probably leaning back with his eyes closed just escaping the world. How many of us wish that we could do this some days? Just go sit under a big tree, close our eyes, and let all of the worries of this world evaporate as we relax.

The truth is that life is exhausting, sometimes we get so caught up in our work that it becomes a burden to us, we get exhausted and disheartened. How many of us are disheartened and exhausted by the world around us; as we look at the constant sin, war, suffering and selfishness it can fill us with a sense of hopelessness.

Every day we are surrounded by sin that is openly taking place and even supported in our culture. We see people who seek power, money, fame seem to gain while people who give their lives to God seem to suffer.

We all need a fig tree, a place where we can sit down, escape the world, and contemplate life and try to figure out what we are called to do, just like Nathaniel. Phillip knew that he had the answer, that is why he invited his friend to 'Come and see.'

Jesus knew everything about Nathaniel before Nathaniel got up and walked his way. He knew what Nathaniel believed; he knew how Nathaniel had lived his life. He calls Nathaniel an 'Israelite indeed', he paid him a compliment. Even knowing that Nathaniel's initial response to Phillip was negative and prejudiced, Jesus does not respond in kind, but instead responds in kindness. He tells Nathaniel that he is everything that an Israelite should be simple because he believed in the truth and promises of God.

Nathaniel wanted to live up to God's standards for the nation of Israel- and like many Jews he was desperately awaiting the Messiah to come and save the people of God. When Phillip comes to him so excited about finding the Messiah, he has his doubts, even Phillip seems to not fully understand who Jesus is, after all he refers to Jesus as the Son of Joseph of Nazareth and not the Son of God.

While there may have been doubt on the minds of Phillip and Nathaniel, there was no doubt in the mind of Jesus. He had known these men since before their mothers had known them. He knew everything about them. Jesus knew that Nathaniel was an honest man, he was not one who sought to deceive or mislead people. He knew Nathaniel was a direct man, one who said exactly what was on his mind, as we saw in his response to Phillip. He did not hide his thoughts and prejudices when he asked if anything good could come out of Nazareth.

So, when Jesus compliments him immediately it catches Nathaniel off guard and he asks, 'how do you know me?' He had never met Jesus, how could Jesus know the kind of person he was, how could Jesus know he was a good Israelite? He does not trust the words of Jesus.

He is about to discover the truth of who Jesus is, he is about to know that Jesus knows literally everything about him and about his life.

You see Nathaniel was sitting under the fig tree, both physically and spiritually. The fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel, and that is the teaching that Nathaniel was sitting under in his life. In the region the fig tree stood for peace, security, rest, and worship to the one true living God.

It was not uncommon for the faithful to seek out their own fig tree to sit under in solitude and spend time in praise and worship of God. In direct communion with the Lord.

**Micah 4:4**

**but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,  
and no one shall make them afraid,  
for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.**

This means when a faithful follower places their lives under the fig tree, under God, they are his, and he will provide for them. They no longer need to fear the things of this world. As the Revelation Bible study learned this week, a time is coming when we will have eternal peace, no more suffering or sadness, just joy as we live in the presence of God for eternity in His kingdom.

All of God children share in this Hope, they know that we are just tourists in this world and that our true home is in God's eternal kingdom. Nathaniel was sitting under that fig tree, contemplating life and in communion with God, whatever hopes and fears were on his mind, Jesus knew them. Jesus knew exactly what Nathaniel was going through in his life as he sat under that tree when Phillip approached him.

The same way the Jesus knows everything that we are going through today; He knows all of our hopes and dreams. Jesus knows us today; he also knows us tomorrow because he knows what will come to pass. We would do well to remember this, we only really know the here and now, we know what we have been through and what we are in, but God knows where we are headed, he knows all of our tomorrows and while we may not always feel that we want to be where we are today, God knows that where we are today is best for us.

When Jesus told Nathaniel that he saw him under the fig tree before Phillip called him, he is telling Nathaniel I know everything about you. I know your innermost thoughts. I know all of your fears, your challenges, your temptations. I know your desires and your faithfulness.

Jesus knew exactly why Nathaniel was sitting under that tree, that day at that time. No one else who heard Jesus's response would understand what Jesus was saying, but to Nathaniel it was crystal clear and that was enough for him to set aside his prejudice and his doubts, to give up his life and become a disciple of the Lord.

God is very real, and one day we will all stand before him. Those who are unfaithful will do so in fear of Judgement, but we have nothing to fear because we have Jesus Christ.



That conviction that the early disciples had is the same conviction that Christians should have today. Christians should be convicted that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who became man, without ceasing to be God, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, and that He lived a sinless life that he might reveal God to all of humanity; That he accomplished our redemption through His death on the cross as a substitution for the debt of our sin and that our redemption is made sure by his literal, bodily resurrection from the dead; That the Lord Jesus Christ is in Heaven now, seated at the right hand of God, having become the High Priest for his people, he fulfills the ministry of representative, intercessor, and advocate; That Jesus Christ is our Lord, Saviour, Sanctifier, Baptizer, Deliver, Great Physician and King. With Jesus Christ we have nothing to fear!

The truth is we all spend time sitting under the fig tree in this world, not always a physical tree, but often a spiritual one. Everyone contemplates the world; everyone contemplates life and those who spend enough time under that tree often discover the truth of who God is in their lives. Eventually, we discover the Truth of God's Word, the truth of the necessity of our faith in him for our Salvation.

When we spend time sitting under our fig tree, we often begin to take a deeper look at ourselves, our lives, our circumstances, it makes it easier for us to see who we were, who we are now and to have hope in the person that we are becoming as we walk with God in our lives.

Nathaniel after meeting Jesus fully understood that he was Lord, the Son of God and in that instant, he gave his life fully to discipleship under the Great rabbi, the Son of God, the King of Israel, the King of Kings.

We all need to spend some time under the fig tree. This world is filled with busyness, with a constantly filling schedule, with demands of our attention and our time. So, we need to set aside some time to sit under the fig tree, to commune with God, to share our dreams, our desires, our thoughts, our concerns, and our fears. We need to sit under our fig tree and tell Jesus everything about us, so that when we come and see, we can be filled with the Holy Spirit and dedicate our lives to him the same way that Nathaniel did on that day 2000 years ago.

Let, us pray,

### **A Prayer of Thanksgiving and for Strength**

We give you thanks upon thanks,  
 O Lord our God,  
 Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,  
 by all means, at all times, in all places.  
 For you have sheltered, assisted,  
 supported, and led us on  
 through the past times of our lives,  
 and brought us to this hour.  
 O good and loving,

grant that we may pass this holy day,  
 and all the times of our lives, without sin,  
 with all joy, health, salvation,  
 sanctification, and fear of you.  
 O Lord God, drive away from us  
 and from your holy Christian and apostolic Church  
 all envy, all fear, all temptation,  
 all the working of Satan,  
 and all conspiracy of wicked men.  
 Supply us with things good and profitable.  
 In whatever ways we have sinned against you,  
 in word, deed, or thought,  
 pass over in your love and goodness.  
 Do not forsake us, O God,  
 for we hope in you.  
 Lead us not into temptation,  
 but deliver us from the evil one  
 and from his works;  
 by the grace, compassion, and goodness  
 of your only Son. **Amen.**

***Source: The Divine Liturgy of St. Mark, in Bright's Ancient Collects,***

**Hymn #313: "Oh Worship the King" (V 1,2,5)**

Oh, worship the King, all glorious above;  
 oh gratefully sing God's power and God's love,  
 our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,  
 pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise.

Oh, tell of God's might, oh sing of God's grace,  
 whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;  
 whose chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,  
 and dark is God's path on the wings of the storm.

O measureless Might, unchangeable Love,  
 while angels delight to hymn thee above,  
 thy ransomed creation, in glory ablaze,  
 in true adoration shall sing to thy praise.

## Communion

### Invitation to the Table

As we prepare to celebrate holy communion, let us remember that Scripture calls us to examine ourselves before God. We are taught that eating and drinking unworthily brings judgment upon ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28-29). Let us therefore ask God for the proper spirit in which to celebrate the sacrament.

Let us Pray,

Almighty God, before whom can be neither secret thought nor hidden deed, grant us your Spirit that we may know our hearts, our lives, and our inmost thoughts as you know them.

Grant us your grace that we may repent sincerely of all sin, find peace with you through our Lord Jesus Christ, and grow in assurance of salvation in him.

May the celebration of our Savior's infinite love in his redeeming death bring joy to us and glory to you. **Amen.**

### 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.**

We acclaim you, holy God, glorious in power;  
your mighty works reveal your wisdom and love.  
You formed us in your own image,  
giving the entire world into our care  
so that, in obedience to you, our creator,  
we might rule and serve all your creatures.  
When our disobedience took us far from you,  
you did not abandon us to the power of death.  
In your mercy you came to our help,  
so that in seeking you we might find you.  
Again and again, you called us into covenant with you,  
and through the prophets you taught us to hope for salvation.  
Almighty God, you loved the world so much  
that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior.

Incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,  
 he lived as one of us, yet was without sin.  
 To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation;  
 to prisoners, freedom; to the sorrowful, joy.  
 To fulfill your purpose, he gave himself up to death  
 and, rising from the grave, destroyed death  
 and made the whole creation new.  
 And that we might live no longer for ourselves  
 but for him who died and rose for us,  
 God sent the Holy Spirit,  
 God's first gift for all who believe,  
 to complete God's work in the world,  
 and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all.

**We praise you, we bless you,  
 we give thanks to you,  
 and we pray to you, Lord, our God.**

Let us together confess the faith of the church at all times and in  
 all places:

### **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.**

### **Communion**

Holy God, we now celebrate this memorial of our redemption.

Recalling Christ's death and his descent among the dead,  
 proclaiming his resurrection and ascension to your right hand,  
 awaiting his coming in glory,  
 and offering to you, from the gifts you have given us,  
 this bread and this cup,  
 we praise you and we bless you.

When the hour had come for him to be glorified  
 by you, his heavenly Father,  
 having loved his own who were in the world,  
 he loved them to the end:  
 at supper with them he took bread,  
 and after giving thanks to you,  
 he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying,  
 "Take, eat. This is my body, which is given for you.  
 Do this for the remembrance of me."

#### **Taking of the bread**

Take and eat.  
 This is the body of Christ, which is [given] for you.  
 Do this, remembering him.

After supper he took the cup, saying,  
 "This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood,  
 shed for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins.  
 Whenever you drink it,  
 do it for the remembrance of me."

#### **Drinking of the cup**

This cup is the new covenant  
 sealed by Christ's blood,  
 which was shed that the sins of many  
 might be forgiven.  
 Drink from it, all of you

#### **Prayer after Communion**

Most gracious God,  
 we are in awe of your great gifts to us,  
 experienced here at this table.  
 You have given your Son that we might live,  
 you have fed our spirits with bread and wine,  
 you have made us one body with all your children.  
 We are renewed today  
 in our commitment to loving service.

We leave here to build your kingdom in this world,  
 and we ask that your love will shape our love,  
 that we may reach to others  
 as Jesus Christ has reached to us.  
 Hear us, accept our thanks,  
 and continue to walk with us.  
 In the name of him who gave himself for us, **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](mailto: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 #500: "Open My Eyes, that I May See"**

Open my eyes that I may see  
 glimpses of truth thou hast for me.  
 Place in my hands the wonderful key  
 that shall unclasp and set me free.  
 Silently now I wait for thee,  
 ready, my God, thy will to see.  
 Open my eyes, illumine me,  
 Spirit divine!

Open my ears that I may hear  
 voices of truth thou sendest clear,  
 and while the wave notes fall on my ear,  
 ev'rything false will disappear.  
 Silently now I wait for thee,  
 ready, my God, thy will to see.

Open my ears, illumine me,  
Spirit divine!

Open my mouth and let me bear  
gladly the warm truth ev'rywhere.  
Open my heart and let me prepare  
love with thy children thus to share.  
Silently now I wait for thee,  
ready, my God, thy will to see.  
Open my mouth, illumine me,  
Spirit divine!

### **Pastoral Prayer**

We praise and thank you, O Lord,  
that you have fed us with your Word and at your table.  
Grateful for your gifts and mindful of the communion of your saints,  
we offer to you our prayers for all people.  
God of compassion,  
we remember before you  
the poor and the afflicted,  
the sick and the dying,  
prisoners and all who are lonely,  
the victims of war, injustice, and inhumanity,  
and all others who suffer from whatever their sufferings may be called.

O Lord of providence  
holding the destiny of the nations in your hand,  
we pray for our country.  
Inspire the hearts and minds of our leaders  
that they, together with all our nation,  
may first seek your kingdom and righteousness  
so that order, liberty, and peace may dwell with your people.

O God the Creator,  
we pray for all nations and peoples.  
Take away the mistrust and lack of understanding  
that divide your creatures;  
increase in us the recognition that we are all your children.

O Savior God,  
look upon your church in its struggle upon the earth.  
Have mercy on its weakness,  
bring to an end its unhappy divisions,

and scatter its fears.  
Look also upon the ministry of your church.  
Increase its courage, strengthen its faith,  
and inspire its witness to all people,  
even to the ends of the earth.

Author of grace and God of love,  
send your Holy Spirit's blessing to your children here present.  
Keep our hearts and thoughts in Jesus Christ, your Son, our only Savior. **Amen**

**Benediction**

May Christ, the Son of God,  
be manifest in you,  
that your lives may be a light to the world;  
and the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**