

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, May 5th, 2024
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Abide in Me (Part II)
Sixth Sunday of Easter
John 15:9-17

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

Let the earth rejoice and be glad,
let the heavens declare your righteousness!

May all people see your glory, O God;
may your ways be known throughout the earth.

Let us worship the God who loves us;
**We come to worship with open hearts,
to raise our voices with thanks and praise.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God of promise and purpose,
we greet you this day with thankful hearts.
As flowers unfurl and buds open,
the beauty of your world lifts our spirits in praise.
As children grow and students prepare to graduate,
their energy and enthusiasm encourage us toward your future.
Your world is full of such variety and detail,
we stand in awe of your creation.
Draw close to us in this hour of worship
and show us the promise and purpose in our own lives.
May we unfurl with your gift of new life,
and move into the future, renewed by the energy of your Holy Spirit.
We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ,
who lives and rules with you and the Holy Spirit

as the One True God, now and Forever. **Amen.**

Children's Hymn

Call to Confession

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

Prayer of Confession

Eternal and merciful God,
you have loved us with a love beyond our understanding,
and you have set us on paths of righteousness for your name's sake.
Yet we have strayed from your way;
we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
through what we have done and what we have left undone.
As we remember the lavish gift of your grace
symbolized in baptism, O God,
we praise you and give you thanks that you forgive us yet again.
Grant us now, we pray, the grace to die daily to sin,
and to rise daily to new life in Christ,
who lives and reigns with you,
and in whose strong name we pray. **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Jesus said, "My peace I give to you.
Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."
May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.
Let his forgiveness set you at peace with God and yourself,
and make peace with one another. **Amen.**

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.**

Hymn #367: "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee" (V 1,2,5)

Jesus, the very thought of thee
with sweetness fills my breast,
but sweeter far thy face to see,

and in thy presence rest.

Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,
nor can the memory find
a sweeter sound than thy blest name,
O Saviour dear and kind.

Jesus, our only joy be thou,
as thou our prize wilt be;
Jesus, be thou our glory now
and through eternity.

Responsive Reading

Psalm 98

¹ Oh sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things!
His right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.

² **The LORD has made known his salvation;
he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.**

³ **He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.**

**All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.**

⁴ Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!

⁵ **Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody!**

⁶ **With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!**

⁷ Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who dwell in it!

⁸ **Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the hills sing for joy together**

⁹ **before the LORD, for he comes
to judge the earth.**

**He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.**

Anthem (Music Ministry): “We Remember”

Choir

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

John 15:9-17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Sermon

Love is perhaps the most misused and misunderstood word in the Human vocabulary.

Love has been given many different meanings and definitions over time.

In poetry, Love has been called 'a rose'. Love has been called 'many splendid things.'

The Beatles told the world that 'All you need is love.'

There are so many things in this world that we proclaim our love too. People say that they love a particular food, or drink. People say they love this restaurant or that shop or brand. Plenty of people will say that they love their favorite musician, artist, actor, or sports team. People even proclaim their love for themselves.

However, what does the Bible say about love? It is true that the Bible does say that God is love.

1 John 4: 7-12

⁷Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

⁹In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, if God so

loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Duke Ellington summed this Scripture up when he said, 'God is a three-letter word for love and Love is a four-letter word for God.'

The world took it one step further and now says that Love is Love.

So how are we meant to understand the statement that God is love as Christians? To begin with we need to know that while we only have one word for love, biblical Greek has a few different words for love, and they have different meanings.

PHILEO (Brotherly Love) – This is the love that is shared between friends who are as close as or at times maybe even closer than brothers.

STORGE (Parental Love) – This is the love that parents have for their children, and it often goes so deep that they carry that love regardless of the actions of their children.

AGAPE (God's Unconditional Love) – This is the love that God has for all of mankind, and it is distinct from all of the other loves, it is in no way connected to the behavior of the person being loved. It is a pure love from a loving God.

It is important for us to understand this. The Bible talks about love in ways that we would struggle to understand in a world that says all love is the same, because it is not.

Today's Scripture does a lot to help us to understand the difference between the love of God and worldly definitions of love, it is a continuation of the Scripture we studied last week, where Jesus told the disciples repeatedly to 'Abide in me' and to 'bear fruit.' That fruit is the testimony of the skill of the vinedresser and the life-giving nutrients of the vine, and when we are fully abiding in Christ, we will bear fruit in abundance in our lives.

The fruit itself can only come from someone who is abiding in Christ and in that connection with the Lord and the life we live because of that connection that will attract others to Christ.

John 15:9-111

⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

In the Scripture today Jesus defines love by stating, '**⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.**' We can only vaguely understand the love that exists within the trinity, although Augustine, an early church father, defines them as love itself.

Even the most functional and loving of families in this world would be a very poor reflection of the love that exists within the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet Jesus says that His love for His disciples is equal to the love that is shared between himself and the Father.

Jesus is perfect, he lived a perfectly sinless life, I can assure you that each and every one of us falls short of being perfect. So why would the Son love us to the same degree that the Father loves the Son?

Think about it for a moment, Jesus loves everyone of his people as much as the Father loves him, even though we fail him in almost every aspect of our lives. As he tells the disciples how much he loves them on the walk to the garden, he knows that Peter is about to deny him, and that the other 10 loyal disciples will abandon him and seek their own preservation after his crucifixion. This is the love of God, AGAPE love, a love that sees past all of the flaws and mistakes in our life, all of the sin and turning away that we do from God and loves us, as He helps us walk closer to him, to repent and turn towards God in our lives. It is God's AGAPE, unconditional love, of us in our sinful nature that results in us changing the way we live to better reflect his love, that we abide in him.

The world's understanding of Love has an issue with this definition. The world's definition of love is usually defined as unconditional love that makes any demands on the beloved abusive. The world believes that we have autonomy, and that no one should make a demand upon you or ask you to change, as long as your behavior is consistent with the current worldview.

Parents in the modern world encourage their children to go out and discover the world, to make their own choices, experience anything that they want, and they call this 'unconditional love'. This is not anything like the, abide in me, unconditional love that Jesus is defining here. Parents are told to let their children be 'freethinkers' but there is no freedom in the world, only slavery to sin.

The truth is that the unconditional love that the world speaks of and offers, is not the same as the unconditional love of God. In fact, the love that the world promotes so readily is not love at all, as it ultimately leads to destruction. STORGE love, parental love without God in it leads to destruction.

In the Old Testament there is the story of Eli who as a priest in the house of the Lord is an example of worldly unconditional love. Eli's sons would eat the sacrificed foods without permission, they were sexually immoral with the servants at the door of the tabernacle itself. Eli did not correct their behavior, he would mildly rebuke them, but never punish and correct them and thus their behavior continued. Finally, God spoke to Eli through another man of God, who told him that God was about to punish his family and gave him the reason for that punishment – Eli honored his family more than he honored God. Eli was filled with STORGE but lacked AGAPE in his love for his sons. Merely loving one's children and giving into them and

their every demand without training and discipling them, is in effect saying that they are more important than God in our lives and in theirs.

The love that Jesus is speaking about makes a claim on the beloved, it is a reciprocal love. Jesus loves his disciples, and he expects them to 'Abide in him' and to love him in return. The same way that a parent displays their love for their children by caring for them and the children demonstrate their love for their parents by willingly obeying them.

Jesus is a wonderful example of God's AGAPE love and STORGE that love between parents and children. He sets the example by willingly obeying the Father. When he asks us to, 'abide in him' he is not asking us to do anything that he himself is not willing to do, he is not asking us to do something that he does not practice himself in his relationship with the Father. He says that the Father is greater in authority than himself, to whom he submits to His love. He demonstrates to us in his walk on earth what living obediently and joyfully in the Love of God really means, as he loves his disciples and all who come to him regardless of their nature. So, he tells his disciples, 'abide in me', live like I have lived, keep the commandments of the Father, and obey the commands that I have given you. Obedience is proof of the disciples love of Christ.

Jesus tells his disciples that the end result of loving him, abiding in him, and obeying him is abundant joy. This is the exact opposite of what the world believes about Christianity, it believes that religion leads to boredom and rigidity, being a stick in the mud. Yet they do not see the freedom that we obtain by living lives that are not enslaved to sin and the pursuit of sin. Obedience to the world is grudging servanthood at best. We obey the world with the expectation of being rewarded with something worldly in the end, like a paycheck. The world just pushes us to pursue the next level of sin as soon as we can. The world cannot see the joy in Christian life because they are still slaves to the pursuit of worldly things, the Christian finds their joy in obedience and service to the Lord.

John 15:12-13

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

In verse 12 Jesus begins to further define what it means to 'love one another as I have loved you.' The disciples are to set aside all of their differences and unite in love. If you remember the story of the Last Supper in the book of Luke, you will recall that there was a debate at the table about who was the greatest among them, and this is what led to Jesus reminding them that they are called to be servants to others and not lord over people like others in the world. He even washed their feet as an example of that servanthood. If Jesus who was the greatest was willing to bend a knee and serve the least of them, then we are to follow in his example. And as easy as it sounds, learning to submit ourselves to someone else in true humility and service is a lot harder to do than to say. Submitting ourselves to others in humility and service is almost as difficult as keeping the Ten Commandments on a daily basis.

Jesus says that true love, is laying down one's life for brothers and sisters. Once again Jesus is about to give us the ultimate example of this when he goes to the cross for the salvation of all who believe in him, all who abide in him.

John 3:16

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.

The son of God demonstrated His love of the Father and his love of his people by his selfless sacrifice for our sin on the cross so that we could have eternal life. This type of sacrificial self-giving love is expected of Jesus's disciples, of those who abide in him. This means us too. All of the disciples with the exception of John died violent deaths at the hands of people who persecuted them for their faith, and their sharing of that faith with others. This is the obedient love that Jesus asks of us, pick up your cross, lay down your life for God, the same way that Jesus did. Almost every one of the disciples could have avoided execution if they publicly denounce Jesus and embraced the Roman Emperor as their God, yet every one of them chose death.

This form of AGAPE and PHILEO love was evident in the early church. People in the early church suffered much persecution. Christians were often captured and tortured so that they would reveal the locations of other Christians that could be captured and tortured. However, instead of betraying their brothers and sisters they would endure the torture, they would endure endless agony and horrible deaths because of their love for one another.

Many people cringe at this thought because we fear it could happen to us as well. In many parts of the world today, there are Christians suffering because of their faith while people in North America believe that their faith bring them wealth and happiness. Many Churches and people teach that Christianity will give you everything you want, yet Jesus warns us of exactly the opposite being true.

John 15:18-23

¹⁸“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

²⁰Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²²If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.

²³Whoever hates me hates my Father also.

Why do so many people think we will be ‘raptured’ and escape all of the troubles of this world? Christians in Egypt, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, India, and many other places are suffering, in the

same ways that Christians suffered 2000 years ago! Are they not entitled to the same blessings that North American Christians are? Did they get raptured away from their persecution and suffering? Why do so many North American Christians think that we are immune to the persecution and suffering of our faith? We are freed from the wrath of God because of our faith, but because of our faith we are going to suffer the wrath of man. If we are keeping God's Word, truly abiding in him, then there should be some difficulties in our life caused by our faith.

If you want to know what PHILEO love looks like with AGAPE just look to Judas. Even though Judas was one of the twelve and walked, ate, and experienced God every day, he had his own personal and hidden agenda that none of the other disciples were aware of. His mind was on money, worldly sin, and worldly pleasure. In the end he decided to betray Jesus to the Jewish authorities for a mere three months wages. Yes, he had a good relationship with Jesus and the disciples while he walked with them, but he did not love them with the AGAPE love of God, or he could never have done what he chose to do.

John 15: 14-17

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

It is here that Jesus tells them that they are his friends. Servants do the things they do out of fear of the master, friends do things for one another out of love for one another. They are friends because Jesus has now revealed to them all that the Father had sent for him to reveal. The disciples now know the truth, and it is the truth that sets them free of the grasp of the world and their sinful nature. Part of willing and loving obedience is knowing the reasons behind the things we do, instead of just blindly obeying the commands of the master. Yet there are still demands, expectations, that are placed on being a friend of Jesus and Jesus expects them to keep them if they are to remain his friends, because to be a friend of God is a great privilege and blessing in our lives.

The disciples are reminded of the basis for this friendship. Jesus emphatically tells them that THEY did not choose him, instead it was He who chose them and appointed them to produce fruit. This is a reminder that we are to set aside all worldly pride in service of the Lord, we are to bow down before the grace of God. There is no place for Self-love in the Kingdom of God.

Once again this goes against the world. The world sees the highest personal good in self-actualization and self-esteem. The goal of the world is to be the ultimate narcissist. Just look around at the millions of unique genders, pronouns, and sexualities that are being invented daily. Narcissism is running rampant in our culture.

Ironically, prisons are filled with people who score very highly on the self-actualizational and self-esteem tests. Hollywood, the music industry, social media, sports and even churches are filled with narcissists. And our world celebrates and idolizes these people.

Jesus is telling us something different. We need to be focused on abiding in him, filling our lives with Christ-actualization and Christ-esteem. Paul put it this way in his epistle to the Colossians.

Colossians 1: 24-29

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Humbly serving Christ is the way to true joy and happiness. And if we are to find human dignity, we can find it in the Lord who called us friend, in spite of our own behavior and sins. Jesus calls the disciples friends, even though he knows that they are all about to horribly fail him in all that he has taught them, the same way he calls us friends, even though we fail him so often.

The Bible teaches us we need to set aside our human pride.

2 Corinthians 10: 17-18

Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

When we let our own pride get in the way it acts as a wedge that divides us from the world and from other believers. We begin to compare ourselves to others, and it leads to tension. In the same regard we need to recognize that we are called friends of Jesus, and that makes us worthy to serve him. This is another Christian Conundrum, the battle between our pride and our unworthiness, perhaps this is why every character in the Bible expect for Jesus is shown as being flawed, it is our very nature. Only God is perfect, and the proper thing for us to do is to remember that we stand by Grace and neither boast in ourselves nor despise ourselves.

Finally, Jesus tells the disciples that because of their relationship with him, they can make requests of him and be assured of an answer. Another reminder of the importance of prayer in the life of a faithful Christian. But it is also a reminder that our prayer needs to come from a proper understanding of what it means to abide in Christ. It means trusting and obeying his

commands in a world that teaches us the opposite, it means focusing on Christ ahead of our own worldly passions and desires, it means loving one another in this world the same way that Christ loves us. It means bringing the truth of God's Word and the real meaning of unconditional love to the world. However, people need to see that the church is abiding in Christ before they can abide in him themselves.

Let us Pray,

Perfect Love

Grant me, even me, my dearest Lord,
to know you, and love you, and rejoice in you.
And, if I cannot do these perfectly in this life,
let me at least advance to higher degrees every day,
until I can come to do them in perfection.
Let the knowledge of you increase in me here,
that it may be full hereafter.
Let the love of you grow every day more and more here,
that it may be perfect hereafter;
that my joy may be full in you.
I know, O God, that you are a God of truth,
O make good your gracious promises to me,
that my joy may be full;
to your honor and glory,
with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Source: Augustine of Hippo, Fourth Century

Hymn: "Holy Ground"

This is holy ground, we're standing on holy ground
For the Lord is present and where He is is holy
This is holy ground, we're standing on holy ground
For the Lord is present and where He is is holy.

These are holy hands, He's given us holy hands
He works through these hands and so these hands are holy
These are holy hands, He's given us holy hands
He works through these hands and so these hands are holy

These are holy lips, he's given us holy lips
He speaks through these lips and so these lips are holy
These are holy lips, He's given us holy lips
He speaks through these lips and so these lips are holy.

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 whole 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

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."
 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."

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.

Taking of the bread

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

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

Offertory Prayer **(Congregant Prepared)**

Closing Hymn #411: "Stand Up and Bless the Lord" (V 1,4,5)

Stand up and bless the Lord;
 God's people now rejoice;
 stand up and bless the Lord your God
 with heart and soul and voice.

God is our strength and song;
 now is salvation ours.
 God's love in Christ we now proclaim
 with all our ransomed powers.

Stand up and bless the Lord;
 the Lord your God adore;
 stand up and bless God's glorious name
 henceforth forevermore.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, gracious Father,
 in the presence of your bounty keep us humble,
 in the presence of all people's needs make us compassionate and caring.
 Give us faith in our praying and love in our serving,
 knowing that by your power
 all may find a new balance in living and a new victory in adversity.
 We pray for all unhappy lives,
 those who are bitter and resentful, feeling life has given them a raw deal,
 those who are sensitive to criticism and quick to take offense,

those who desire their own way, whatever the inconvenience or cost to others.

May your judgment and mercy be for their healing.

We pray for those who are lonely,

who are shy and self-conscious,

who find it hard to make friends;

those who are nervous and timid,

who ever feel themselves strangers in a world they can scarcely understand.

May your presence inspire confidence and ensure companionship.

We pray for those who live with bitter regrets,

for loving relationships brought to ruin,

for opportunities freely given and woefully abused,

for the bitterness of defeat or betrayal at another's hand,

or for failure in personal integrity.

May your grace give new hope to find victory in the very scene of failure.

We pray for all in illness and pain,

weary of the day and fearful of the night.

Grant healing, if it be your will,

and at all times through faith the gift of your indwelling peace.

Bless the company of Christ's folk, the church in every land.

Make her eager in worship,

fearless in proclamation of the gospel, and passionate for caring.

Bless our country. Bless our leaders.

Bless our children and grant us peace within our borders.

Grant us as a nation to be found effective in establishing peace

throughout the world.

Bless us, each one, in the communion of the saints,

and keep us ever mindful of the great cloud of witnesses that,

following in their steps, as they did in the steps of the Master,

we may with them at the last receive the fulfillment

promised to your people.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ,

who lives and rules with you and the Holy Spirit

as the One True God, now and Forever. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the grace of Christ, which daily renews us,

and the love of God, which enables us to love all,

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, which unites us in one body,

make us eager to obey the will of God until we meet again,

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