

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, January 19th, 2025
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Be a Witness
Second Sunday After Epiphany
John 1:19-42

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

How precious is God's steadfast love!

We will find refuge in the shelter of God's wings.

Come and feast on God's abundance.

We will drink from the river of God's delights.

For with God is the fountain of life;

And in God's light we will see light.

Let us worship God with joy and thanksgiving!

We will bring God our prayers and our praise with hearts full of love.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God of light and life,

as the new year unfolds before us,

we begin to feel the sunlight coming back to brighten the winter.

Our spirits grow stronger in the light.

You shine your light into our lives in your Son Jesus.

Your Spirit strengthens us to face whatever this year will hold.

And so, we come to praise you

for your light which transforms our days and our lives,

and for your wisdom which enlightens truth for our times.

Shine through us, we pray,

so that we may bear the light of Jesus in this world you love. **Amen.**

Children's Hymn

Call to Confession

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

Prayer of Confession

God of all life and our lives,
we gather in worship week by week,
seeking your refreshing presence.
But we confess sometimes we are discouraged
by things happening around us.
We don't expect your presence to make a difference for us.
Forgive us when we give up on you and end up feeling unfulfilled.
By your grace, refresh us when we are weary or worried,
and renew our trust in you. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn?
Only Christ, and Christ died for us,
Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us.
No power in heaven or on earth can separate us from God's great love.
Take heart, and know that you are forgiven.

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: "Precious Lord Take My Hand"

Chorus

Precious Lord take my hand lead me on let me stand I am tired I am weak I am worn
Through the storm through the night lead me on to the light
Take my hand precious Lord take my hand

Verse

When my way grows drear precious Lord longer near When my life is almost gone
Hear my cry hear my call take my hand lest I fall
Take my hand precious Lord lead me home. (Chorus)

Verse

When the darkness appears and the night draws near and the day is past and gone

At the river I stand guide my feet hold my hand
Take my hand precious Lord lead me home. (Chorus)

Responsive Reading

Psalms 35:5-10

⁵ Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them away!

**⁶ Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them!**

⁷ For without cause they hid their net for me;
without cause they dug a pit for my life.

**⁸ Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it!
And let the net that he hid ensnare him;
let him fall into it—to his destruction!**

⁹ Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD,
exulting in his salvation.

**¹⁰ All my bones shall say,
“O LORD, who is like you,
delivering the poor
from him who is too strong for him,
the poor and needy from him who robs him?”**

Anthem (Music Ministry): “Light of The World”

**Prayer for illumination
(Congregants Prepared)**

Scripture

John 1: 19-42

¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹ And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²² So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³ He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” ²⁶ John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he

who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Behold, the Lamb of God

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³² And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹ He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

Sermon

Over the past few weeks, we have been looking at what is considered the prologue of the book of John. In verses 1 through 18, we have a summary of the entire Gospel. It acts as a guide for everything that we are going to learn about Jesus as we read through the book of John. It is going to show who Jesus is and how he came to bring light to the world, and that there were those who believed and those who rejected the light that Jesus brought.

Today we start into the historical section of John’s writing. Starting here in verse 19 and going all the way to the end of chapter 4 we have John presenting Jesus as the Son of God.

First, we will explore the witness of John the Baptist and then the witness of the first followers of Jesus Christ.

This is something that sets the book of John apart from the other Gospels, he begins to teach us about the first year of Jesus’s ministry, while the other Gospels tend to focus on what happened later in Jesus’s ministry.

The witness of John the Baptist was to the priests and the Levites. He was testifying to the men who were sent from the Sanhedrin to the fact that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

John 1:19-28

¹⁹ And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" ²⁰ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." ²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." ²² So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" ²³ He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

²⁴ (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵ They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" ²⁶ John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." ²⁸ These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

John gives the witness of John the Baptist as the beginning of his testimony. He does not start where Luke does with the details about who John the Baptists parents were and, Zacharias the Priest and Elizabeth, and about how in his old age Zacharias was praying for a son, and when God told him he was going to have a son, he did not believe God.

So, the Lord struck Zacharias dumb, he could not speak throughout his wife's pregnancy, which may have been a good thing. And then just before John was born, at the time of naming, when they had planned to name him Zacharias, he instead names him John as he had been instructed.

The birth of John the Baptist was special because it broke what was called the 400 silent years, the time between the prophet Malachi and the coming of John, between the Old Testament and the New Testament. A time when there were no prophets and no messages from God given directly to his people that are recorded.

So, you could almost consider John the Baptist as the last of the Old Testament prophets. He fit the stereotype; he was fiery, rough, direct preacher. He spent the first 30 years of his life out in the wilderness, dressed in camel skin, eating wild honey and locusts.

People came from all over to see him, because he was not like any of the other religious leaders of the time.

When Jesus spoke of John the Baptists he said.

Matthew 11:11-15

¹¹ Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ¹² From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. ¹³ For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, ¹⁴ and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. ¹⁵ He who has ears to hear, let him hear

When he says among those born of women, he is including everyone, David, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Elijah, all of the prophets and heroes of the Old Testament. Among all of them, John the Baptist is the greatest. John had the task of closing off the times of the Old Testament and ushering the New, he was the promised herald of the Messiah.

The Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, tell us of how he spoke plainly and truthfully, rebuking the religious community and leaders. How crowds would gather to him as he preached the truth of the coming of God's kingdom.

However, when John says 'the Jews' came down to see him he is using a euphemism, he is speaking about the religious leaders of Israel, the group known as the Sanhedrin, a group of 70 rulers in the religious courts of Israel. They were essentially the supreme court of the church, and they had a duty to discover the truth about people who were preaching and what they were teaching.

They were trying to discern if what John was doing, preaching and baptizing, was being done according to the Scriptures or not.

However, we are going to see that they were in fact blind to what the truth was, the blind leading the blind. Very much like many of the denominations in the world today and the highest courts who sit over them.

The Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees and it seems like it was primarily Pharisees that were sent to investigate John. What is interesting is that the Pharisees were actually the minority in the Sanhedrin, they were the conservative Jews, the Sadducees were the liberal Jews. The Sadducees did not believe in life after death, angels, or spirits, they interpreted the Scriptures in their own ways to fit their ideas. The Pharisees were made up of the priests of Levite and when they show up the first thing that they ask John is, 'Who are you?'

And John's first response is: I am not the Christ, I am not the Messiah, I am not the anointed one. So right off John the Baptist wants to make it very clear that he is not the one that the people of Israel are waiting for.

So, then the Pharisees ask him, 'Are you Elijah?' They ask him this for a couple reasons, the first is that his style of preaching and his strict adherence to the truth of Scripture is very much like Elijah. However, it is the prophecy of Malachi that primarily drove this question.

Malachi 4:5-6

⁵ “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

So, they were looking for Elijah, waiting for him to appear before the Messiah. And just so you are aware this is still a belief of many Jews today. At the Passover celebration within their homes each year, there is a place setting with an empty chair, just in case Elijah should come.

Many people believe that this reference in Malachi is to the second coming of Christ, the time that is described in the book of Revelation when he comes as the Lion of Judah to judge the world.

So, while John the Baptist appeared and preached like Elijah, he was not Elijah. The Gospel of Luke helps to clear this up. The angel of the Lord said this to Zachariah about his son.

Luke 1:16-17

¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

John the Baptist spoke with the power and spirit of Elijah. And when John speaks, he makes it clear that he is not Elijah.

Next the Pharisees ask him, ‘are you that prophet?’ What prophet are they asking about?

To know who they are speaking of, you have to go back to a prophecy given by Moses.

Deuteronomy 18:15-18

¹⁵ “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— ¹⁶ just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ ¹⁷ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. ¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

In this prophecy Moses is speaking about the coming of Jesus. In the book of Acts when Peter is preaching, he is the one who ties this prophecy of Moses and Jesus together.

Acts 3:19-23

19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. 22 Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'

Stephen says something similar in Chapter 7 of the book of Acts.

So, the Pharisees finally ask, 'Who are you? We need to go back to the ones who sent us with an answer.' They knew he was not but still had no idea who he was.

His response to this question is perfect, **'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said.'** Could you picture the Pharisees going back to the court of the Sanhedrin saying that John is the voice.

John is referring to the prophecies of Isaiah.

Isaiah 40:3-5

³ A voice cries:

**"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**

**⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.**

**⁵ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."**

There is an important thing to know that does not come across well in our English translations. In Isaiah that word translated as Lord is YAHWEH, meaning God. So, John the Baptist is making it clear that he is there to announce the coming of God, not the coming of one of Gods minions. This again defeats the argument of modalism, and the Jehovah witnesses and the oneness movement, all who teach that Jesus was not really God.

The Pharisees accept John's answer that he is the voice, so they proceed on with the rest of their investigation, **'Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?'**

This again requires some background knowledge. The Jews did have baptisms, it was symbol of the forgiveness of sins and the purification of ones being. However, the Jewish baptism was only given to gentiles, often called proselytes, people who became Jews from other religions.

The Jews believed that they did not need baptisms, they Jews believed that they were automatically going to heaven because of their race, and their national religion. So, the Pharisees were put off by John baptizing Jews in the river.

Johns' response, **'I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷ even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.'**

John is saying my baptism is symbolic. John is not giving Christian baptisms, he is giving a symbolic baptism, preparing the Jewish people for the coming of the Messiah. He was reminding them to prepare their hearts for the coming of Jesus by repenting of their sins, refocusing their lives on the Lord.

John also says that he is unworthy to untie the sandals of the one who is to come. Remember that at the time it was the job of the lowest slave to wash the feet of the people who came into the homes of people. This man who Jesus said is the greatest among all men, humbles himself and says that he is not even worth to wash the dirt off the feet of Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist is driving home the point that we are called to always point people to Jesus Christ.

Next, we have John's witness of the baptism of Jesus Christ.

John 1:29-34

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." ³² And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

The beginning of the Gospel of John is all over roughly 4 days, the very start of Jesus's ministry. Verses 19-28 is day 1, 29-34 is day 2.

This witness of John the Baptist does not appear in the books of Matthew, Mark, or Luke. We do not know who John the Baptist is speaking to, but it would seem that he is telling this to those who are gathered along the river for baptism.

John points to Jesus and says, 'The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.' This title for Jesus Christ is used four times in the New Testament. Here in verse 29, again in verse 36, we do not see it again until acts 8:32. Which is the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch coming to Christ as Phillip explains Isaiah chapter 53 to him. Then we see it used in 1 Peter chapter 1:19 once again talking about the sacrificial lamb for sins.

So right here at the very start of Jesus Christ's ministry, John the Baptist is speaking of his death upon the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. The substitutionary atonement for our sinful ways, notice that John says for the world, not just the Jews but that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is enough for all, anyone who comes to him.

Jesus died for the sins of the world, the entire world, but only those who belong to him, repent and turn away from their sins, only those who humble themselves and serve him receive forgiveness and eternal life in his eternal kingdom.

John then tries to explain that Jesus existed always, **'This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me'** John and Jesus were related and John was six months older than Jesus, but John is saying that Jesus was in fact much older.

John and Jesus were related, but John says, **'I myself did not know him'** This is because from a young age John was out in the wilderness, he was not at family events where Jesus and John would have typically met. John was fulfilling God's prophecy and plans the same way that every other being was, all to the purpose of our salvation.

John says, **'I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'** ³⁴ **And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.'**

John does not go into the details of the baptism; he does not mention the voice of God speaking. 'This is my beloved son in whom my soul delights'

In this moment of Christ baptism, we have God the Father speaking from heaven, God the Son being baptized in the river Jordan, and God the Holy Spirit descending from heaven in the form of the dove. Can you see how this very scene defeats the ideas of modalism and oneness? How can God being a single being who changes modes, when we have the three distinct personalities of God all represented here in the baptism of Jesus Christ.

Jesus's baptism was not about purification and the forgiveness of sin, it was about fulfilling prophecy and showing him as the one and only Son of God. It was for him to identify with the sinners whom he came to redeem.

John says that Jesus came to baptize with the Holy Spirit, and we see this take place on the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts. John's Gospel more than any of the other Gospels teaches us about the Holy Spirit especially in the upper room discourse which we will get to eventually.

So, John's baptism is symbolic, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the true baptism that brings people together as the body of Christ, the church. The same as the baptisms I do today are symbolic, it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that makes you one of God's children, not water sprinkled on you or being dunked by a man.

Finally, John clarifies that Jesus is in fact the Son of God. He states with no uncertainty, **'And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.'**

Next, we have the witness of the first followers.

John 1:25-42

³⁵ The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). ⁴² He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

Day 3, verses 25-42. Two of John's disciples, Andrew and who most people believe is John the writer of this very book, overheard John refer to Jesus as the lamb of God and they choose to follow Jesus.

Jesus sees they are tailing behind him and he turns to them and asks, **'What are you seeking?'**

And they say, **'Rabbi' (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?'** which was a way of saying can we spend some time with you? They have begun their walk with Christ, even though they are not yet disciples. He told them 'Come and see'

It was the tenth hour when they joined him, that could be Jewish time or Roman time and that is an important distinction. In Jewish time the tenth hour would be 4pm in the afternoon, Roman time would be 10am in the morning. In the Gospel of John most references to time are Roman time, which meant that they spent quite a few hours in Jesus's company.

And Andrew then goes to find his brother, testifies that he has found the Messiah and brings him to Jesus.

Jesus takes one look at him and says, **‘You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter).** Petros, which means rock. Which is prophetic because later on Peter’s confession will be the foundation on which the church will be built.

So, in this section, over these three days we have the witness to the truth of Jesus being God given to the Pharisees by John the Baptist and then by John the Baptist to the Crowds and finally by Andrew and the other unnamed disciple, most likely John, to Simon Peter.

And there is a lesson for us in this, it is our call to bring people to Jesus Christ. Andrew became known as the friendly apostle because he was constantly inviting people to ‘come and see’ who Jesus was, he was the one who brings the gentiles to Jesus, he was the one who found the boy with the bread and the fishes to feed the 5000. Andrew was always bringing people to Christ, his family, his friends and even strangers.

We need to be like Andrew, finding others and pointing them to Christ. A characteristic of Christians is wanting to share who Christ is with others. To just sow the seeds, to water them with prayer. It is called personal evangelism, and it does not always work the way we want, but we are to sow the seeds and pray, for our parents, our spouses, our kids, our siblings, and others so that God will open their eyes.

We need to be the Salt and Light of God’s Word.

Let us Pray,

O Father in heaven,
look upon all your people
who struggle
with anger, anxiety,
doubt, frustration,
guilt, hopelessness,
loss, memories,
lack of patience,
pain, regret,
sadness, selfishness,
temptation and weakness.
Your holy Word tells us
“All things work together
for the good of those who love God,
who are called according to his purpose.”
And that means that you make all these things work

for your good purpose in our lives,
 even when we do not understand.
 Remind us of your invitation,
 "Cast all your cares upon me,"
 and of your assurance that goes with it,
 "because I care for you."
 ...through your Son,
 Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Hymn: "Blessed Be Your Name"

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Offertory Prayer
(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn: "He Touched Me"

Shackled by a heavy burden,
 Neath a load of guilt and shame;
 Then the hand of Jesus touched me,
 And now I am no longer the same.

Chorus:

He touched me
 Oh He touched me, and
 Oh the joy that floods my soul;
 Something happened, and now I
 know,
 He touched me and made me
 whole.

Since I met this blessed Saviour,
 Since He cleansed and made me
 whole;
 I will never cease to praise Him,
 I'll shout it while eternity rolls.

Pastoral Prayer

Wonderful God,
Jesus brought the joy
into lives that needed hope and a new beginning.
We pray for all those who need a new beginning this year:
Individuals trying to make a new start,
Families trying to sort through difficulties,
Groups hoping to accomplish good things for others,
Refugees building new homes in a new land,
Students and teachers beginning a new semester,
Businesses and congregations trying to rebuild in uncertain times.
Show each one how much they matter to you,
and renew their courage and resolve to make a fresh start.

Loving God,
Jesus changed water into wine
to show us that you can accomplish extraordinary things through ordinary lives.
We pray for all those volunteering their energy and concern
to make a difference for others in this community.
We pray for our elected leaders and for all government workers
trying to manage their responsibilities in such challenging times.
And we pray for one another
and for each good purpose we undertake with new resolve this year.
Give us a glimpse of how our hands become your hands, blessed by the Spirit.

Caring God,
Jesus faced the suffering around him with compassion,
reaching out to those in pain and grief with healing and hope.
We remember before you those whose lives are wrapped in sorrow or despair,
and those facing tragic death or critical illness...
We remember those rebuilding lives and communities after flooding and storm
and all those burdened by pain or problems that seem to have no end...
Embrace each one with your comfort and courage,
and show us what we can offer to make a difference.

O God in whom we live and move and have our being,
thank you for giving us the courage and commitment we need
to follow Christ in good times and in hard times.
Thank you for the strength we find together as part of your church
and the gifts you give us in each other,
gifts we can rely on as we plan for our ministry and mission
in these ever-changing times.
Help us trust in the promise of your love for us
and energize us with your Spirit

so that we can recognize the opportunities you give us
to live out the grace and mercy we know in Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the omniscient God give you knowledge,
the omnipotent God give you power,
the omnipresent God give you a presence that blesses—
so that you may share God with the world. **Amen.**