

**An Order for Worship Online
The Lord's Day, March 22, 2020
Being the Fourth Sunday of Lent**

Announcements

Call to Worship, Psalm 46:10

Be still, and know that I am God!

Be still, and know that I AM...

Be Still, and know...

Be Still...

Be...

Silence.

Collect[†] for the Fourth Sunday in Lent:

Gracious Creator, you sent Living Word, Jesus Christ, to come down from heaven and be the true bread which gives life to the world: feed us with his love, now and always; that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, he may live in us and we in him, to the glory of your Holy Name. **Amen.**

The Confessional:

Beloved brother and sisters, we come together in the presence of Almighty God, the Creator, to offer praise, to receive the Living Word, and to ask, for ourselves and on behalf of others, those things which are necessary for life and for salvation. And so that we may prepare ourselves in heart and mind to worship the LORD, let us bow in silence and with penitent and obedient hearts confess our sins to the One who alone holds the power of life and death:

All join in silent confession.

Most merciful God... we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Almighty God have mercy upon us, forgive all our sins through our Lord, Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness by the power of the Holy Spirit, and keep us in eternal life. **Amen.**

A Hymn of Sanctifying Grace, UMH 417

1 O for a heart to praise my God,
a heart from sin set free;
a heart that's sprinkled with the blood
so freely shed for me:

2 A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
my great Redeemer's throne;
where only Christ is heard to speak,
where Jesus reigns alone:

3 A humble, lowly, contrite heart,
believing, true, and clean,
which neither life nor death can part
from him that dwells within:

4 A heart in every thought renewed,
and full of love divine;
perfect and right and pure and good —
a copy, Lord, of thine.

5 Your nature, gracious Lord, impart,
come quickly from above;
write your new name upon my heart,
your new best name of Love.

the Rev. Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Searching the Scriptures:

A moment of silence follows each reading.

The First Book of the Kings of Israel, 19:1-8

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets [of Baal] with the sword.

Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."

Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree.

He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep.

Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat."

He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again.

The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you."

He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Here ends the reading.

Psalm 46

To the leader. Of the Korahites. According to Alamothe. A Song.

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Come, behold the works of the Lord;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
“Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

**Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.**

The Epistle to the Romans, 8:11-25

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Here ends the reading.

The Holy Gospel, according to John, 6:27-40

“Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

Then they said to him, “What must we do to perform the works of God?”

Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

So they said to him, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

Reflecting on the Scriptures, “Believe”

Let us pray:

Most gracious God, out of all the words that will now be spoken and heard, may it be your Living Word that stays in our hearts. Give us the grace to receive it, and give us the charity to let all the other words slip away. We pray this in the Name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The other day I was talking to my friend Janel about this coronavirus mess that we’re all in. We exchanged a couple of messages on a mobile phone application called Marco Polo, which allows you to record short videos and send them like text messages. The strange with Marco Polo is that I could see her face, and she could see mine, but we were in different spaces and in different times. It definitely felt like something was missing. As Janel replied to my initial greeting, she reflected on the isolation that we’re all experiencing and said, “Wow.. we’re all really physical people, aren’t we? And, as much as we talk about how screens have taken over, I think this [situation] illustrates that... well... we still do a lot face to face.”

I bring this up because I think Janel has put into words what I’ve been feeling... and what I think a lot of us feel: That no matter how “smart” our technology gets, no machine will ever become a living person. No machine will ever fulfill the human hunger for community... the human hunger to love and be loved. No phone, or laptop, or tablet... in fact, no medium of communication except the language of the Body itself will ever fully substitute for being in the presence of others who love.

We’re all here right now, for instance, somehow joined in mind and heart by the power of the Holy Spirit; but we’re not together at the deepest level are we? And this video will never substitute for being truly and physically present with one another in worship, will it? In fact, as I’ve tried to keep the church in touch over this first week of shutdowns and cancellations, all the things we’ve tried have felt like half measures that

come close, but never quite hit the mark. The phone calls are meaningful, and the emails, and the cards, and *this worship* is meaningful. But it's not what God intends. The God revealed in Jesus Christ – the God of the Creation, Incarnation, and Resurrection – intends to be *really present* with us, and for us to be *really present* with each other.

If you're anything like me, our forced isolation and marked uncertainty makes you feel hungry for real community. I'm hungry to see my extended family. I'm hungry to see my friends and neighbors. I'm hungry to see you all, my brothers and sisters in Christ. And the longer this crisis goes on without any kind of clarity or reprieve, the need to avoid becoming starved for community becomes more and more urgent.

Under these circumstances, today's reading from the first book of Kings becomes especially poignant, because we find in this scripture a profoundly human moment of need and an echoing resonance with our situation. Elijah feels completely alone, and this to the point where he has given up on life. He's left his companion and servant behind, the prophetic ministry to which he has dedicated his life has become too brutal and bloody to sustain, and – worst of all – after the most dramatic display of supernatural power in fire and thunder, God has gone silent. Alone, hopeless, and afraid, Elijah lies down to die under a scrubby little tree, completely starved for the community of those who love him.

But it's just at this moment that the Word of the LORD comes to Elijah with fresh assurance and command: "Eat, Drink; or the journey will be too much for you." The Bread of Heaven here is more than just food and drink; it feeds Elijah's heart and mind with a renewed call to ministry. Whereas Elijah understands his life to be over, God makes it clear that his life has just begun. And as he walks through the heat of 40 days and the chill of 40 nights, one may imagine that the ancient songs of his people are as poignant for him as his story is for us today:

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

And might we not add...

Though disease confine us to our homes...
though isolation incarcerate our hearts behind bars of longing...
Though our mind falter in the weariness of uncertainty...

In this moment of physical, emotional, and spiritual dis-ease, the promise of the scriptures comes to us as the eternal refuge of God's strength. We are called to get up, to eat, to drink, to face the heat and cold of each day in absolute confidence that this is, in fact, a new beginning in our journey and not the end. And if any of us are wondering what in the world we're supposed to actually do to be faithful at a time like this, remember Jesus' reply to the crowds who asked, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Believe. Let your hearts be moved by the promises of the LORD our God and *believe!*

Believe, and you will find Jesus transforming your desire for certainty, security, and freedom to a hunger for God alone... And this hunger the Bread of Heaven will immediately fulfill! Believe that, in the economic, emotional, and physical desert of COVID-19, you are not cut off from the God who made heaven and earth. Believe that this God sets before you the food of eternal life, who is Christ himself. Believe that "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you"... to make plain to you the difference between the broken world that is passing away and the New

Creation that is being born! Believe, and you will experience the bonds of love that bind all God's people together into the communion of saints across time and space.

Last Thursday, as I was still pondering what God's message for us might be this week, I went for a walk with our toddler, Elliott. Elliott is just old enough to push himself along on his little red tricycle. He does this Fred Flintstone style by pushing against the ground with his feet. He's pretty cute if you ask me, and to see him chugging along the sidewalk looking for pine cones made my heart sing "yabba-dabba-doo!" Elliott doesn't know yet about the suffering of the world; and for a moment, I forgot. For a moment, I was able to see the world again with the wonder of a child. For a moment I was able to perceive the world that is coming to be.

We came to a pile of leaves that had fallen from a Gingko tree in the neighbors' yard, and Elliott stopped to pick one up to add to his growing collection of botanical paraphernalia. What at first appeared to be nothing more than a pile of last Fall's yard waste, became suddenly and breathtakingly beautiful when I looked with 2-year-old wonder. The Gingko leaf Elliott chose to collect was the color of coffee with a little bit too much cream... a succulent, delicate beige that was as rich as any Summer green. I was reminded that our perception of how things are going remains connected, intensely connected, to our assumption about what's possible. It was possible for me to hurry past a pile of rubbish. It was also possible for me to stop, and look, and see the beauty of God.

Maybe, just maybe, if you're anything like me, this time of isolation and seeming emptiness harbors within it the time and space for transformation. Maybe we should receive this parentheses in our collective life as the gift of Sabbath. And maybe if we could embrace the quiet and the solitude, we might here a new word from the Lord Jesus in which he calls us to reconcile, first and foremost, with ourselves. In the quiet of a world experiencing the grandest pause in human commerce in nigh on a

century, we find ourselves hungry for community. But we can experience this hunger as an invitation... and invitation to change our perspective... an invitation to recognize that the only thing which can truly fill our yearning is the Bread of Heaven, sent by the Father/Mother to strengthen us for our journey through the uncertain deserts of a dying world.

Instead of resisting what we think is isolation and uncertainty and fear, what if we accepted the hidden invitation to enter into profound and life-altering communion with the Living Word. In so doing, we might experience **and enter** the reality that we are all one. In so doing, we might find the ability to relax into the promise that, in the *Fullness of Time*, all who have loved their neighbors as themselves will be joined in one communion of saints for ever and ever. In so doing, we might come before the throne of grace to join our voices with that great music of the Spheres, which hails the New Creation in the glory of the Victorious Christ:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

In the Name of the One Who Is,
the Living Word, and the Spirit of Hope -
The Holy Trinity of Life and Love:
May each of us be blessed with patience.
Amen.

The Great Litany:

Now with patience, let us pray to the LORD:

**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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
for thine is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.**

From all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy;
from envy, hatred, and malice; and from all want of charity:
Good Lord, deliver us.

From lightning and tempest; from earthquake, fire, and flood; from
plague, pestilence, and famine:
Good Lord, deliver us.

From all oppression and conspiracy; from violence, war, and murder;
and from dying suddenly and unprepared:
Good Lord, deliver us.

In in the hour of our death and in the day of judgment:
Good Lord, deliver us.

That it might please you, loving God, to illumine all your ministers with true knowledge and understanding of your Word and Holy Spirit; that both by their preaching and living shepherd your church and all people into the Way of Peace:

We beseech you, loving God.

That it might please you to give to all people your grace which alone leads to flourishing life in the common good:

We beseech you, loving God.

That it might please you to inspire all of your servants, in our unique callings, to do the work which you give us to do with singleness of heart in obedience to your will:

We beseech you, loving God.

That it might please you to make wars to cease in all the world; to give to all nations unity, peace, and concord; and to bestow freedom upon all peoples:

We beseech you, loving God.

That it might please you to show your pity upon all prisoners and captives, the homeless and the hungry, and all who are desolate and oppressed:

We beseech you, loving God.

That it might please you to preserve all who are in danger by reason of their work or their travel:

We beseech you, loving God.

That it might please you to visit the lonely; to strengthen all who suffer in mind, body, and spirit; and to comfort with your presence those who are failing and infirm:

We beseech you, loving God.

That it might please you to give us true repentance; to forgive us all our sins, negligence, and ignorance; and to fill us with the grace of your Holy Spirit to change our lives according to the example of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ:

We beseech you, loving God.

That it might please you to forgive and bless those who would be our enemies, and to turn their hearts:

We beseech you, loving God.

That it might please you to bless those whose faith is known to you alone, that they may have a place in your eternal kingdom:

We beseech you, loving God.

O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,
Grant us your peace.

Amen.

Words of Comfort and Blessing:

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Romans 15:13

AND

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

II Corinthians 13:14

Let us bless the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

† COLLECT noun (in church use)

A short, communal prayer, especially one assigned to a particular day or season. Origin: Middle English: from Old French *collecte*, from Latin *collecta* 'gathering', feminine past participle of *colligere* 'gather together'.

(New Oxford English Dictionary).

The liturgical use of the word indicates a kind of prayer which unites – or gathers together – the hearts and minds of those who are present for worship in a common sentiment and feeling. (JBC)