



Prayers & Devotions

St. Olaf College

2022-2023

Introduction

The book that you are holding is divided into three sections. The first section outlines seven aspects of **worship**. These short writings are designed for personal reflection or group interaction. They invite you to consider why we worship, but they also help you to worship - on your own or together. The second section includes twenty **devotions**. Each devotion is two pages in length and may be used alone or in groups. They are designed to focus your heart and mind on an issue of faith and college life. The third section offers **prayers**. The prayers are short and address life's many joys and complexities. They may be prayed quietly or aloud. They may be personal prayers or prayers that are shared with friends. However you choose to use them, they are written to speak to your college life.

May God bless you and keep you;
May God's grace and love always be with you;
And may you walk in God's peace. Amen.

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Worship

Seeking the Holy, the Sacred

We desire to experience the holy, the sacred.

When we call something “holy” or “sacred,” we typically mean that it is “set apart.” Rather than being ordinary; the holy, the sacred, is special. More specifically, the holy or the sacred is set apart due to its special relationship with God. Spaces can be sacred. There are holy grounds where we experience the fullness of God. Time can be sacred. There are moments during our day when we are especially aware of God’s presence. Practices can be sacred. There are behaviors – prayer, meditation, study, fasting, dance, musical expression – that lead us into a deeper relationship with God. We look for; we long to experience the holy.

God is present in all things ordinary.

Describing the holy, the sacred, seems to imply that God is present in some space, some time, some behavior and not in others. But, this is not the case. God is as present in the classroom as in the chapel. God is as present in worship as in play. While this is true, we have a deep, spiritual longing for those special connections with God, for those feelings of intense divine presence.

We desire to experience the holy, the sacred.

Seek out places and times and behaviors that draw you closer to God. Try new things. You might be surprised where and when and how you encounter God. You might experience the holy in things you once thought of as ordinary—chemistry or orchestra. You might experience the sacred in specifically designated religious activity—Bible study or daily chapel. Open yourself to God’s presence. *Seek the holy, the sacred.*

Where Two or Three are Gathered

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus explains that “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” This simple statement serves as a powerful reminder that the size of a group does not matter; Jesus is present in the smallest and largest of gatherings. But isn’t Jesus present when we are alone? Of course. We are never outside of the loving embrace of God. So, what is so special about this verse?

We desire intimacy, and intimacy takes many forms. We look for social intimacy, the bond that occurs within a group. We look for intellectual intimacy, the bond that develops when we learn and grow together. We look for emotional intimacy, the bond that forms when we share what moves us; moves us to love, moves us to fear. We look for physical intimacy, the bond that is formed through embrace, through touch. And, we look for spiritual intimacy, the bond that forms when we experience together the love and grace of God.

Can you be a Christian and be alone? Yes. But a spiritual intimacy is shared when we pray together and worship together, when we serve together and live together. Sharing our faith can seem risky. But finding a faith community is always deeply rewarding.

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”



Confession and Forgiveness

Scripture

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your lovingkindness;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with your free Spirit. (Psalm 51:1, 11-13)*

Prayer of Confession

I come to you, God, to confess my sins. I am guilty of hurting others with my words and with my deeds. I am ashamed of the way I have acted. My heart is heavy. I feel the burden of my brokenness. A cloud hangs over me. Forgive me. Let your love and grace act as a resurrection; grant me new life. Fill me with your Holy Spirit; empower me to act with kindness and grace toward others. I praise you, O God, for your justice and mercy. Amen.

Words of Forgiveness

*By water and the Holy Spirit, God gives us a new birth.
Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,
God forgives us all our sins.
We are sent forth to be children of God,
to love and serve our neighbors.*

Prayers for Others

We want to pray, but don't always feel that we know how. Sometimes it helps to follow a structure when we pray. Many churches around the world follow the same basic structure. During worship services, following the sermon and a hymn, those gathered offer "prayers of intercession." These prayers are sometimes called the "Prayers of the People" or the "Prayers of the Church." During worship, this is part of the liturgy – the work of the people. You are invited to follow the same structure in your personal, daily prayer.

You may wish to begin your prayer with some *opening words*.

"With the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, I pray for the church, those in need, and all of God's creation."

Or

"Strengthened by the Spirit who gives me words to speak and a heart to care, I bring my hopes and needs to you, O God."

The *first petition* may be for world concerns. You may wish to pray for peace among warring nations, for health where there is illness or for food and water where there is poverty and need.

You may end each petition with *shared language*; common language used by Christians around the world.

"Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer."

Or

"Hear me, O God, for your mercy is great."

The *second petition* may be for national concerns. Here, pray for areas of your nation impacted by severe weather or natural disasters, or for areas that are dealing with violence or for other topics (e.g. immigration or social services).

The *third petition* may be for those living with illness or grief. Pray broadly, for all who are dealing with sickness and issues of health. Pray specifically, for those who you know that are in need of healing and wholeness. You may wish to identify specific issues for your prayer, such as addiction or mental illness.

The *fourth petition* may be for your local community. This petition might include your family and friends at home, your college community, and the unique joys and struggles you are facing.

You may wish to end your prayer with *closing words*.

“Into your hands I commend my prayer, O God, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Or

“I lift my prayers to you, O God, confident in your grace and love. Amen.”



Remembering Our Baptism

Words spoken ...

"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Water poured ...

From a font or lake or river, water cold or water warm

Puts our sinful self to death ...

Forgiveness promised; eternal life with God awaits

Gives us new birth ...

Daily made new to live as children of God

Members of the body of Christ ...

Adopted into a new family, a global family, the family of God

How can we respond?

A free gift requires no payment

But we are filled with joy ...

So we worship and pray, study scripture and serve

Children of God ...

Forever being made new

Members together in the Body of Christ

Sent to love and serve the neighbor, the stranger, the world.



Hearing the Word

God's holy word is a gift.

We experience God's word in the Bible, the Holy Scripture. In it, we hear the good news of God acting in our lives and throughout the world. In it, we hear of God's grace and love in stories old and new.

In Advent and Christmas, we celebrate the Word made flesh.

In Epiphany, the mystery of this gift is revealed.

In Lent and Easter, the death and resurrection of Jesus is proclaimed.

During the season of Pentecost, the words and deeds of Jesus inspire us to grow in faith.

God's holy word is a gift.

We experience God's word in sermons and songs. In them, God's word is interpreted for our context. We talk and listen, we sing and play. We are part of the interpretation process. God's word is alive.

Sermons that challenge and sermons that comfort;

God's word is alive.

Hymns familiar and hymns new;

God's word is alive.

Listening and interacting; molding and shaping,

God's word is alive.

God's holy word is a gift.

We experience God's word in creeds and prayers. We recite creeds together, with one voice. We offer prayers together, countless petitions said together as one.

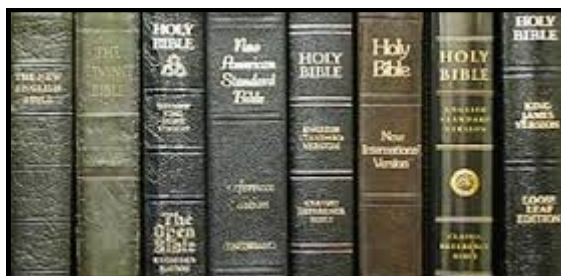
In our creeds, we recount God's great deeds of love.

In our creeds, we proclaim together our faith.

In our prayers, we cry out for help, for ourselves and for our world.

In our prayers, we offer praise and thanksgiving.

God's holy word is a gift.



Sharing the Peace

What happens when we share or pass the peace? We are not reciting “magic words” that eliminate fear or conflict. But, we are doing more than offering a greeting. So, what does it mean to pass the peace?

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.

It is true that the word “peace” can mean the absence of conflict. A peaceful day can mean a day spent doing stress-free, conflict-free activities. But, this is not the only meaning of the word “peace.” To be at peace can mean to be confident and content, secure and powerful even in the face of great danger. There are people who live with illness; their bodies ravaged by disease. And yet, they are at peace. They are confident and content. Their lives are difficult, yet they are secure. They look powerless, yet live as though they are powerful. Why? How?

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.

There is peace in knowing that we are not alone. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. There is peace in knowing that our sins are forgiven. The forgiveness of sins acts as a resurrection moment in our lives, offering new life in the midst of life's death. Consider Psalm 23.

Even though I walk through the valley of death

I fear no evil;

for you are with me;

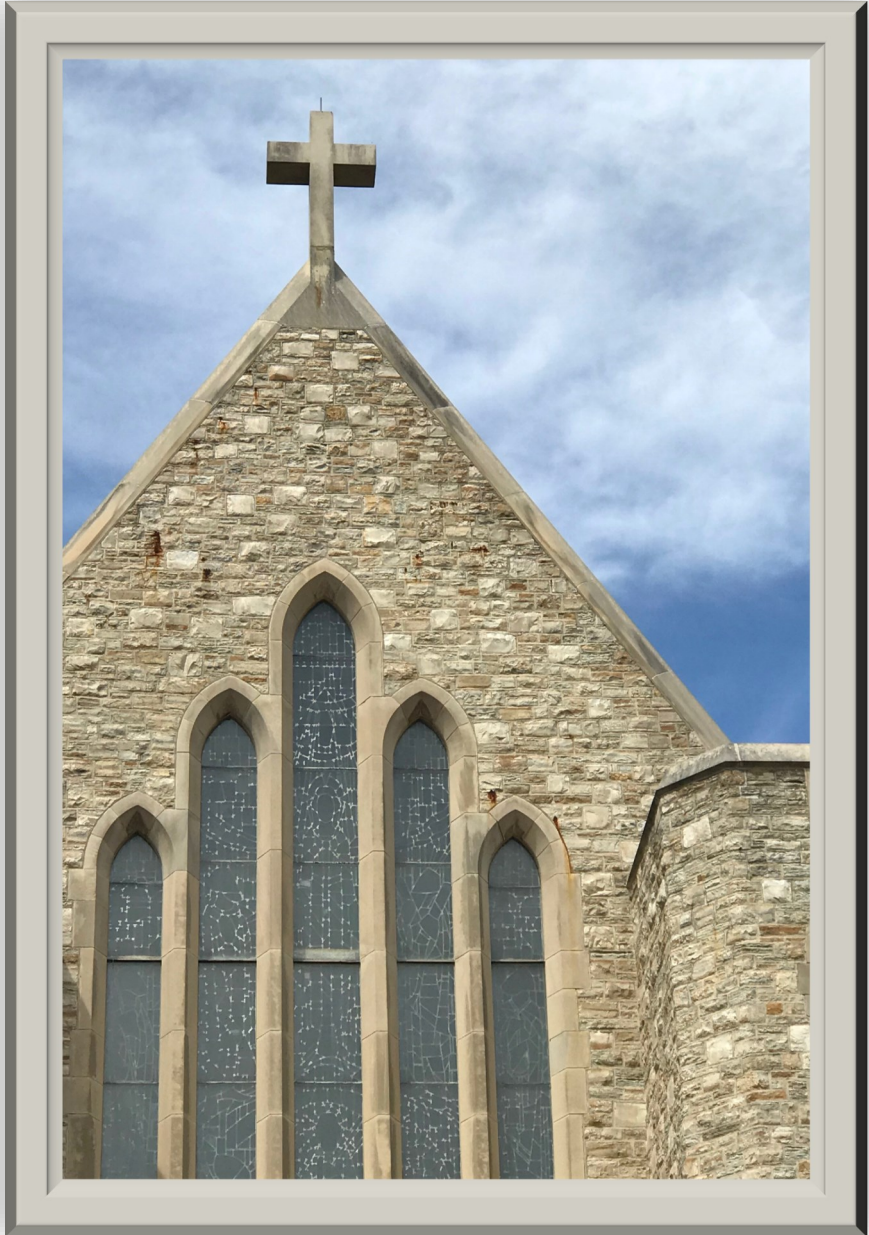
your rod and your staff – they comfort me.

God does not promise that we will never experience “valleys of death.” God does promise to accompany us through life's most dangerous moments. This allows us to walk with confidence. This allows us to live in peace.

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

And also with you.







Devotions

Am I Really Forgiven?

Matthew 18:21-22

Both theologians and psychologists might agree that forgiving others tends to be easier (and is perhaps more common) than accepting that we ourselves are forgiven. So in this devotion I'll ask, "Why can it be so hard to believe that God's grace and mercy extends even to us?"

There are many reasons that it can be hard to acknowledge our own forgiveness. When we recognize that we have done something wrong, that we have hurt ourselves or others, we may feel a sense of guilt or sadness. If we hear that by God's grace we are forgiven – without releasing the accompanying emotions, the forgiveness may not seem real. We wonder, "If I'm really forgiven, why do I still feel so bad?" Accepting that we are forgiven also requires doing the work of processing our own emotional reactions. We need to process our guilt or sadness or shame.

Another reason that it may be difficult to acknowledge that we are ourselves forgiven may be a matter of trust and love. It is often easier to forgive others, especially those whom we love. If a good friend – someone that we trust and love – does something that hurts us, we are more likely to forgive them and to look for ways to continue with the relationship. We look back to the goodness that we have experienced in them and the love that we have for them, and we work on the project of forgiveness. However, if we don't have a loving, trusting relationship with ourselves, we may believe that we aren't worthy of being forgiven. Where we might see other as deserving of grace, a lack of love for ourselves may leave us feeling empty.

It can also be hard to confess our sins and receive the promise of forgiveness if we are burdened with some form of self-deception. *Exceptionalism* is when we hold ourselves accountable or blameworthy in ways that we would never hold others. It's when we maintain a standard for ourselves that is far higher than one we would use for those around us. This is a cousin to perfectionism, and the belief that if things go wrong it is likely a result of our actions or inactions.

Expansionism is when we expand the realm of our responsibility to just about everything. If we see ourselves as responsible for everything, we will always encounter what we believe to be our failures or mistakes. *Confirmation bias* is when we operate with the assumption that only someone like us (insert your own negative judgment here; lazy, unlovable) could be responsible for the problem. Every perceived misstep, then, seems to confirm our sense of inadequacy. If we hold ourselves to impossibly high standards, believe that we are responsible for everything, or believe that everything about us is bad, this will reinforce the view that we don't deserve forgiveness.

As Christians, we are called to the discipline of self-examination and repentance. If faithfully receiving God's promise of forgiveness is a stumbling block for you, I invite you to think critically about the ways that you understand yourself and God, and to live into the free gift of God's grace.



Come to the Waters

Isaiah 55:1-9

Let's use our theological imagination. Let's enter into the words and world of Isaiah with our laments, our hopes, our longings, are fears, our confessions, and our confidence that our ways are not God's ways.

Isaiah 55:1, "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!"

There are many things for which we hunger, many things for which we thirst. Think about that for which you hunger. Are you thirsting for hope or health? Connection or direction? Think also about the needs of those around you. Push yourself to think beyond your immediate circle of friends and family. In your classrooms, in the cafeteria, in the world, for what are people thirsting?

Isaiah 55:2, "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich food."

For many people, our relationship with food is complicated. But it is clear from this passage that God wants us to be able to eat what is good and be nourished. What is it that nourishes you? Are you working for things that satisfy? Eat what is good. Fill yourself on that which is actually filling. Delight. Have fun. Laugh. Enjoy that which nourishes you. Set before others something that lasts. Offer yourself to others in ways that build up, nourish, satisfy. Name the things that you consume now. Name the things that consume *you* now. Name that for which you long. Ask God for it. Ask others for it. If it is already at the table, reach for it. Keep pushing the metaphor. What is it that satisfies? Take a nap. Set boundaries. Evaluate expectations. Ask yourself, "How much do I give? How much do I take?" It sounds so easy, "eat what is good and delight yourselves in rich



food.” But work toward this. Make this a part of your vision for friendship and family.

Isaiah 55:7, “Let the wicked forsake their way, and unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, that he will abundantly pardon.”

This verse proclaims a truth about God’s grace. There are no qualifiers. It doesn’t say, “As long as your ways and thoughts aren’t *too* bad.” It doesn’t say, confess and God will think about it. The economy of language is important. Confess and God will have mercy. Turn toward God and God will abundantly pardon. Sure, there is some work involved. When we confess and when we turn, we want to leave behind the things that we do and the things that we say that hurt ourselves and others. We want to because we want to live into the fullness of who we are called to be. But make no mistake, it doesn’t say, “Become perfect and God will show mercy.” We confess and we experience pardon. We confess and we turn. We work to become the best versions of ourselves. Not because our relationship with God depends upon it, but because we want to embody what it means to love our neighbor.

Isaiah 55:8, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

There is so much good news in this verse that it bursts from the seams. God doesn’t love like we love. God’s grace doesn’t look like our grace. We are limited in our ability and limited in our vision. When our lives are difficult, we almost can’t imagine future joy. But, God’s thoughts are different. God’s ways are not the same. God sees hope where we see despair. God sees life where we see death. We are invited to envision the cosmic. God’s view of everything is beyond our imagining. Yet, we are also invited to envision the personal. God sees us in ways that we can’t even see ourselves. When God looks at you, God sees beauty and strength, joy and hope. You are loved. You are forgiven. You are a child of God and God’s ways are higher than your ways, God’s thoughts are higher than your thoughts. Thanks be to God.

Coping With Frustration

I Ks. 19-1-4, 8-15

If you have ever felt low, if you've ever felt frustrated, if you've ever despaired because things haven't turned out like you thought they would, meet Elijah.

Elijah has just triumphed over the prophets of Ba'al. He had shown all of Israel that the Lord is God and Ba'al is just a pretender, the people bowed and said, The Lord is God. Elijah killed all the prophets of Ba'al, which, let's have a discussion about violence in the Bible another time, but still. Total win for Elijah. But, Jezebel, the Queen of Israel, is not happy that the prophets are all dead, so she says, "so may the gods do to me if I do not make your life like one of them by this time tomorrow." So Elijah gets scared and runs. He leaves, he wanders into the wilderness, and prays. He has had enough. He prays to die. It's enough now, Lord, he says. I'm done.

Elijah is totally honest with God. Imagine if you got a text one afternoon that Jesus was coming over to your dorm room. What would you do? Go get the vacuum? Make the bed? Clean up, put on some nice clothes? Would you put on a front like everything's fine in order to be welcoming? Sometimes we can be like that when we pray, too, thinking prayers need to sound proper or like we're welcoming a guest, regardless of what we're feeling. But that's not what God asks of us.

One of the holiest things we can do is come to God truly as we are. We can connect with God when we are at our most vulnerable, when we are open and honest. When we pray, we are talking with God, and when we confess what we are truly feeling, that is a sacred moment. Tell God all about your joys and sorrows. I love that Elijah does not sugarcoat things. He has done everything he knows how to do, and now he's done.

And this is where God comes and tends to him. Angels come and give him enough to eat and drink to keep up his strength. After Elijah spends some time quietly in a cave, recovering, God then gives Elijah a pep talk and a charge. But God doesn't start with saying, "Well, don't just hide in a cave, there's work to do!" God starts with saying, "Hey, what's going on with you? I'm listening. And I'm here for you."

We, too, can enter into the presence of God and just be ourselves. When we confess how we are feeling and what we are thinking, God doesn't reject us but tends to us, as God tended to Elijah when he was feeling down. We are never alone, even when we go through hard times and uncertainty; even when we want to withdraw and hide from the world, God and other faithful people are with us. And, even when we feel like we have given everything, and we think we have nothing left to offer, when it feels like the whole world is against us, there is rest and retreat to be had, and there is work to be done. God gives us a hope and a future. And we will walk into that new future, together.



Do Not Worry

Matthew 6:24-34

“Do not worry about your life,” Jesus says, “What you will eat, or your body, what you will wear.” These are surprising words, given that most of the people Jesus was talking to did not know where their next meal was coming from. They truly did live day-to-day, as many people do now. So telling them not to worry about things that were not a given is perplexing. So it’s important to look at the next words that Jesus says: “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

Yes it is. Life is more. People are more. People are more than hunger. Our bodies are more valuable than anything we can cover them with. Think for a moment how you might finish the “is not life more than...” question. Is not life more than studying? Is not life more than debt? Is not life more than dating? Is not life more than being a college pastor? Is not life more than what you’re majoring in? You could keep going and going, because life is not all one thing. It is always more. You may have something in your life that is consuming your worry. And it’s always good to take the step back and say, “Is not life more than ...”

The point Jesus seems to be making is that we shouldn’t worry, for several reasons. One, because worrying, on the whole, does not tend to make things better. Two, we may be worrying about things that don’t need that time or energy from us when we know there are more important things in life and our lives are worth more than that. And three, we shouldn’t worry because, even when there are things to be concerned about, real things, important things, God is with us through them. This does not mean that everything will turn out alright, but it does mean that we are not alone, that God is there with us, in everything, even the things we are worried about. Jesus is not scolding us for worrying, so much as helping us see the big picture and provide reassurance.

Take a moment today, with a piece of paper and a pen, or if you prefer, you can just meditate for a little while, and make a list of all the things you are worried about, big and small. Just take a minute to list them, to be honest with yourself and God, and name some things.

Now, go through the list and identify some things you want to let go. Things you are looking at on that list and thinking, why am I worrying about this? Life is more than this. And even though worry is not a switch to turn on and off, take some time to ask God to help you let go of this worry and focus on other things.

Next, look at your list again, and notice things that you are worried about that you think make complete sense and deserve that time and attention. What is on your list that worries you that you feel like you have to go through? That you need to address? Look at those things on your list, if you have them, and do two things -- one, think about the people and resources around you to help you through that worry. And two, ask God to be with you through whatever it is you are worried about.

Whether you are worried or carefree, God is with you.



Don't Hold Anyone Back

Mark 9.38-41

In this story in Mark's gospel, John, one of the disciples, comes to Jesus and says, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and they weren't one of us, so we tried to stop them!"

Human beings like things to work the way they are supposed to, according to how we understand the world. We like to draw lines regarding who can do things, and who can't -- it's sometimes called gatekeeping. And sometimes, we get in the way of other people doing good.

Gatekeeping can sometimes be important. You wouldn't want just anyone operating on you if you needed surgery. You would want someone with credentials. You wouldn't want a member of the college ministry staff teaching physics. You would want someone with a certain amount of expertise.

The disciples could simply be concerned about credentials -- are these unauthorized people doing ministry for real? Is it right?

Gatekeeping can also cause real harm. People are left out. Voices are unheard. Good work, godly work, is missed. For example, many churches in the U.S. have excluded and harmed LGBTQIA+ people for years, causing deep wounds and missing out on so many beautiful humans and the gifts they bring. God has always been working through them, and the church was missing out. And we know the gatekeeping systems in the U.S., such as government, corporations, and higher education, too often keep power concentrated in the hands of a few, and those few tend to be White, and rich. Gatekeeping gives some people power, and tells others they don't deserve it.

It is important for us to recognize who we say can do what in this world, and who we allow to do what in this world, and who has the power to make the rules, to manage the gate. Who is being told no? And how do we change that?

Jesus, in this story, tells the disciples to not stand in the way of anyone doing the work of God in the world. If someone is doing healing, doing the work of repair, providing food or anything folks need, listening to people who are hurting, working so more people have access to

power, can come through the gate, don't stop them. Don't set requirements on who you think is in and who you think is out. Because it's likely that even if you think you've got it, you're wrong. The power of the Holy Spirit doesn't belong to any few. Instead of being worried about credentials, how about you open your minds and hearts to what God might be doing through others?

We are children of an untamed God. And things are really tough in our world right now. You might be having a great day, or you might be struggling with a lot right now. God does not only work through the chosen few. God's work of bringing people together, of bringing love, and care, and casting out evil, cannot be contained, no matter how we might try. Be open to the ways the spirit might be popping up in your life, or the ways you might be that surprising person God is working through, for the sake of someone else.



God and Money

Mark 10:17-31

In Mark 10, Jesus goes off on a rant about rich people and how impossible it is for them to enter the kingdom of God, which shocks and perplexes the disciples. Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom.

Jesus is pointing out the ways that wealth and human power are antithetical to the gospel. The more money you have, the more it is a stumbling block to living as God intends. Jesus puts it in pretty clear terms -- you gather up treasure in heaven by giving earthly wealth away.

Money was a necessity and obstacle for people in the time of Jesus. Money is also necessary in our society for survival; it buys not just goods and services but also power and influence. Money can be a way we take care of each other in community, like Mutual Aid, or a GoFundMe when someone has medical or personal needs and reaches out to others. But, the pursuit of wealth can also perpetuate evil, such as slavery, the genocide of indigenous peoples, environmental destruction, and poverty. In our society, people with a lot of money are honored and people without a lot are shamed. This is what Jesus is pushing back against. This is what Jesus is calling us to push back against.

Students, as you are becoming adults, you are developing ethics around all kinds of things -- sex and romance, faith and spiritual practice, friendships and how you care about people while still taking care of yourself, what kind of work you want to do and how you want to do it, how you relate to your family, and, it's going to be worth thinking about, your ethics, your habits, your culture, your feelings, around money. Because like it, hate it, or fear it, you're going to be figuring out bills, and a budget, how to get by, and how much money you want to make someday and what you're going to do with it. And you're going to spend money in ways that you wish you didn't have to, and you will likely spend some time wishing you had more. Money is often a source of worry.

A few pieces of advice:

One, try not to fall into the trap of relating money to your worth as a human being. Jesus loved people with no money and people with a lot of money. God does not assign human worth based on wealth. If anything, God has particular care toward people who don't have money. God loves you and sees you as a human being of dignity and tremendous value. See that in yourselves and others, regardless of money.

Two, notice when money has its grip on you. Notice when money keeps you up at night. Notice when you feel like you have to do something you don't really want to, in order to have money. Notice when having money makes you feel safe, and notice how much money you have to have in order to feel safe. Noticing the effect that money has on you is the first step toward reducing the power it has in our lives, because it gives us more power to make choices that align with our values.

And three, don't try to figure this all out alone. Be in conversation with people you trust. Part of the way money loses some of its power is when we are able to be in community and share how we are thinking and feeling and how money's affecting us and what we want to do about it. Jesus in this passage calls for a communal understanding and sharing of money.



How God Reforms Us

Mark 12:30-31

Take a moment, whether you are a senior, or even if you have just started at St. Olaf recently, and think about how you have changed during your time here. How are you different? What has remained the same?

You can probably think of some things that have changed. Some of those changes have probably happened to you without noticing or trying, and some may have been intentional. Some might be obvious, a change of hair, and some might be more subtle, like you feel more confident meeting new people. Some reforms may be for the better, some may be changes that you are not happy with. What are you holding onto as important to you? What do you want to change? This is what it means to be reforming.

I think if the college pastors had a number one message that we communicate to all of you whenever we can, it is that you are loved by God. You, exactly for who you are, in this moment, are loved, no matter what you do, you are loved. No matter what you are going through, new life is always possible. Jesus, in his death and resurrection, promises us these things.

And, the second message we often talk about is the one Jesus talks about many times – that the most important laws that we are given, when it comes to ways to live, is to love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. These are the responses to God's gracious love for us, that we love ourselves, we love our neighbors, and we love God – and one of the big ways we show love for God is loving our neighbors!

If you want to be intentional about your own life and how you are being reformed and reshaped, your home base, your core, is to be grounded in the grace and love that God has for you, no matter what you did in the past or anything else going on in your life. That love is real and is always there for you. That love will form you, in ways you may not even realize.

And, as you grow and change and learn new things and form new friendships and relationships and break up and change majors and shift in your identity, as you are rooted in love, you can intentionally work to shape your life around loving yourself, loving others, and loving God. These are the greatest commandments, as Jesus and scribes agree. When you think to yourself, how do I want to change? How do I want to grow more into myself and the kind of person I want to be? Not to earn love, or to fall into perfectionism, but to be intentional in shaping what my life is going to look like. We can be reformed and reshaped around fear, or money, or cynicism, or we can be reformed and reshaped by and for love, and justice. You will probably be molded by it all. But pay attention to how you are changing. Take note of how you are being reformed, and how you would want to be reformed. And remember both God's love for you, and God's call to you, to love others in every time and place.



Is Seeing Necessary for Believing?

Luke 24:1-12

A group of faithful women are the first to see and experience the resurrection; but when they share their story with the disciples, they are met with unbelief. Their words seemed like an idle tale. I don't like that their voices are not honored. I don't like that they are so easily dismissed. I would love for the story to go something like this, "Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. And their proclamation was heard and believed and they were all amazed at what had happened."

The gospel invites us to consider the possibility that they were not believed because they were women. Perhaps their testimony was not given the same authority as that of the eleven men? The gospel also invites us to consider the possibility that belief only comes with experience. We are told that Peter got up and ran to the tomb, stooping and looking in, he saw the linen clothes by themselves, then he went home, amazed at what had happened. It doesn't say that Peter told the others and they all believed. It says that Peter saw and believed. Does the empty tomb have to be witnessed to be believed?

This puts us all in a sort of bind. We don't get to run to the empty tomb and experience it for ourselves. If looking in and seeing is necessary for belief; then where do we go from here? The gospel, in beautiful way, provides an answer. To begin, it is not our seeing and experiencing that makes the resurrection true. Jesus is risen. The tomb is empty. Even if nobody had looked in, even if nobody had encountered the two men in dazzling clothes, the resurrection still has taken place. Our experience of the empty tomb does not raise Jesus from the dead. With that said, if there is a relationship between experiencing the empty tomb and belief, how do we experience the truth of the empty tomb, so that we might believe?



We listen to the women. Theirs is no idle tale. The group of faithful women who had dedicated themselves to Jesus during his life and ministry, share their experience with us still. Moreover, the gospel sets the women up as the ones to imitate. We follow the lead of the women and share what we ourselves have seen and experienced. When in our grieving we experience grace and love, we share that with others. When we are certain that death will have the final say, only to experience the promise of new life, we share that with others. We hear the good news: Jesus is risen. And we share the good news: with the resurrection, Jesus has defeated sin and death.

It's Ok to Cry

Joseph's story in Genesis

There are many people who cry in the Bible – Jesus, after the death of Lazarus; the woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears; Hannah, in the book of Samuel, when she is childless; Jacob and Esau, estranged brothers who cry when they meet up again; but no one cries in the Bible as much as Joseph, Jacob's son.

Joseph, for all he goes through in his life, from being betrayed by his brothers to being sold into slavery to being falsely imprisoned, doesn't start crying until he meets up with his brothers again, seeing them for the first time since they debated killing him before selling him as a slave. He is ripped away from his family into forced labor, winds up in prison, but we don't see the tears until he sees his brothers again. He sees them, and he cries (Genesis 42:23-24). He sees Benjamin, his younger brother, and becomes so overcome with affection he weeps (Genesis 43:29-30). He eventually cries loud enough that all of Pharaoh's court can hear (Genesis 44:1-2). He weeps at the death of his father, and when his brothers come once again to beg for mercy (Genesis 49:33-50:1, 17). All of these events are worthy of tears.

Joseph is overcome by his emotions. He just can't hold them in anymore. He tries to be as private as possible. For any of you who have ever cried, then washed your face and tried to go do what you had to do, like everything is fine, Joseph is a person in our ancestry of faith that can relate (Genesis 43:31).

It can be hard to cry at college, because it might be difficult to find the space. People are around all the time. Apparently thousands of years ago, and now, people tend to want to be alone when they cry. Not everyone, but most people. Because, a lot of times when we cry, we feel vulnerable or embarrassed, we don't want people to ask us what's wrong or try to make us feel better. We just want to let it out. We don't want to analyze it, we just want to be.

We cry for a lot of reasons. Grief. Relief. Joy. Sadness. Exhaustion. Anger. Our body simply needs to release some stress. If you have been crying consistently for many days, that can really have a negative effect on your mental health. But most of the time, crying is healthy, and it is normal. Every time Joseph cries in Genesis, it makes perfect sense.

Joseph was a man who had been through a lot of trauma and despite that had risen to great prominence and importance. And he cried a lot. And it seems appropriate, and he never apologized for it. In fact, other people sometimes joined in. Crying carries a lot of different meanings across many cultures, there are a lot of gender stereotypes about crying, but even God weeps in Jeremiah. Jesus cries. And God's people have feelings, and sometimes those feelings flow out in tears.

Tears are part of a life, including our life of faith.



Like a Tree Planted by Water

Jeremiah 17:5-10

“Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.”

Jeremiah acknowledges that life is hard. This is not a simple, “trust in the Lord and your life will be blessed.” For Jeremiah, life is both great and hard for everybody. In this reading, everybody feels the heat of the day. Everybody experiences drought. This honesty is refreshing. How would this sound in your life? Perhaps something like this, “Those who trust in God and those who don’t both get sick, seriously sick. Christians have anxiety and depression. People who put their trust in God hurt others and get hurt by others.” In short, whether your trust in God or not, you will experience joy and suffering.

If trusting in God doesn’t eliminate the heat or the drought, the difficulty or the struggle, what does it do? In using the metaphor of trees planted near a water source, Jeremiah tells us that trusting in the Lord gives us what we need to endure, survive and maybe even thrive during our most terrible times. To understand this claim, we need to consider what it means to trust.

Central to understanding trust is the truth that it doesn’t begin with us. We trust people who have proven that they are trustworthy and we don’t trust people who have let us down and have proven themselves to be unreliable. When Jeremiah uses the phrase “those who trust in the Lord,” he isn’t emphasizing the trust of the followers of God as much as he is emphasizing the trustworthiness, the steadfastness and faithfulness of God.

God as creator delights in us – in you and me – and calls us “good.” God promises to be faithful to us, to never leave or abandon us. Good day, bad day, God walks with us. God promises forgiveness and grace when we long to hit a re-set button, when we need a resurrection in our lives. God doesn’t only love us, God’s is love. God’s very nature is to be love in our world. This is what is promised and this is the life-giving water that is provided during our experiences with heat and drought.

Jeremiah declares that if we only put our trust in other people, it really isn't enough to get us through our most difficult times. It will eventually feel like we are planted in the parched place of the wilderness. But, if we trust in God's faithfulness and commitment to us, we will hear again and again that we are loved and cared for when we need that the most. Jeremiah urges us to begin by remembering the promises of the Lord and to trust, to trust that we are beloved children of God. This truth is like living water.



Not “What,” But “Who?”

Mark 13:1-8

The thirteenth chapter of Mark is often called a “little apocalypse.” Little, because it is only one chapter long. Apocalypse, because – like Revelation, it describes the end times. To understand apocalyptic literature it helps to know how the people of the first-century Mediterranean world thought about time.

People assumed that the lives and experiences of those in the past were not too different than their own. Both hardships and joys were imaginable because they were similar to those experienced by every generation. The same was true for the future. People would have reasoned that the lives of future generations would look very much the same. This assumption of “sameness” extended very far into the past and very far into the future. Anthropologists call this “experienced” time, because the assumptions used to picture this time are based upon their own experiences.

However, since nobody was alive to experience creation, it occurred in what is called “imaginary” time. It takes imagination, not experience, to picture creation. Because it is our imagination at work, we use different language to describe it. Experienced time sounds like a narrative, but imaginary time sounds like poetry. “The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” This isn’t the language that is used to describe last Thursday, this is the poetic language to describe the unexperienced. The same is true for the discussion of the end times. Since nobody has ever experienced the end times, the language used is also that of poetry

So, why does this matter? Experienced time and imaginary time invite us to ask different questions. Experienced time invites the question, “What?” We ask, “What happened? What did they say? What did they do?” But the poetry used to describe imaginary time invites the question, “Who?” We don’t know (we can’t know) what happened, so we ask “Who?” Who created? Who is at the center of the story? The answer to that question is our triune God. It is God who created and it is God (and the love and grace and mercy of God) that will be there at the end.

Moving from a “what mindset” to a “who mindset” can be difficult, but it is also deeply rewarding. You are filled with “what” questions. What should I major in? What classes should I take? I’m realistic, we live in a “what driven culture.” But, apocalyptic writing invites you to ask the “who question” at the same time. Who will be with my during my college experiences? Who will be with me as I take next steps after college? This is where Jesus’ proclamation that he is the beginning and the end (and every day along the way), the Alpha and the Omega (and every letter in between) makes sense. We are strengthened by the good news that we may not always know the answers to our “what questions,” but we do know the answer to our “who question.” Our God promises to be our constant companion and guide.



Standing Out From the Crowd

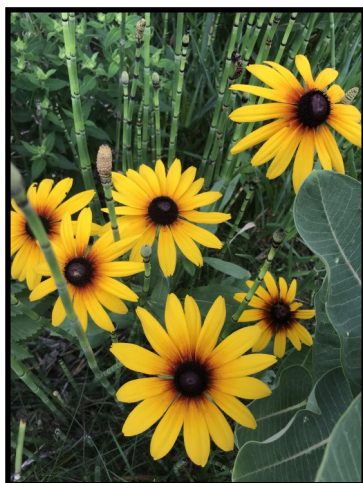
Mark 10:46-52

Bartimaeus is a blind beggar. When he hears that Jesus is passing his way, he begins to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The importance of the next line cannot be overestimated. “Many sternly ordered him to be quiet.” The people around him did not think that he was worthy of any attention or care, especially from Jesus. Because of his blindness, he is not valued. He is declared unworthy. Ironically, because *he* is blind he is not seen by *others*. He is a beggar because others feel that he can’t work and isn’t worthy of a chance. He is blind, but his poverty and suffering are caused by a social system that doesn’t make room for him.

We, too, work with assumptions that equate our bodies and minds with ability and inability, with value, and with inclusion and exclusion. We welcome some and push others away because of their bodies. We love ourselves and hate ourselves because of our own bodies. Based on the color of skin and the texture of hair, we decide who is in and who is out. Based on weight and height, we make declarations of beauty and, therefore, worth. From a very young age, we were taught to believe that these assignments of value are true and we all bought in.

In our story, Bartimaeus cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” While those around him have rejected him and pushed him to the margins, Jesus sees him and loves him. It is here that many of us really start reading. We label this text a “healing story” and declare that Jesus healed Bartimaeus when he restored his sight. But what if this isn’t primarily a story about physical healing? What if the social dynamic of blindness and the contrasting responses of the crowd and Jesus are meant to hold center stage?

By focusing on the social dynamic of blindness, we are invited to get involved. If we label this a “healing story” and declare that Jesus is the one who healed Bartimaeus when he restored his sight, we are only onlookers. However, if we observe the social dynamic of the text and declare that Jesus healed when he saw and listened to Bartimaeus, we can become participants in the story. We are invited to re-evaluate the ways that we define health and wholeness and the ways that they may or may not create barriers for inclusion. We can train ourselves to think differently about people and our about ourselves. Rather than to imagine that there are those who are worthy and those who are not worthy of God’s grace, we can re-draw the lines.



What Do We Do When We Doubt?

John 20:19-31

What do we do when we have doubts?

When people have doubts or questions about something, there are usually one of three responses: 1, we withdraw, we retreat; 2, we move forward, we lean in; or 3, we feel paralyzed, stuck, and aren't sure what to do.

I'm not assigning any of these actions as the right one. It tends to be what we do. We freeze, we withdraw, or we lean in. And the calculus of why we do what we do is based on our experiences, our sense of safety, the importance to us, how we like to communicate, etc. And different situations might call for different responses. When someone hurts you really deeply and you doubt the relationship, taking a step back from them may be exactly the right thing to do. Or, if you have doubts that you know what is going on in class that you are taking, withdrawing from the situation might not be your best option. Leaning in, engaging, getting curious, might be better.

When it comes to the resurrected Jesus, Thomas was a forward mover. He wasn't sure he believed the other disciples when they said they saw the resurrected Jesus, so he said he had to see Jesus himself to believe. But he stuck around. He leaned in. He said what he needed and he stayed to see if he got it. And the people around him allowed him that space. Jesus did not snub him. Jesus also leaned in to Thomas's doubts.



I think when it comes to our lives of faith, sometimes, when people have doubts, they withdraw. You might have done this, you might have felt like, I feel like I don't know what I believe and so maybe I shouldn't be in church. I don't want to tell anyone about the doubts I am having. I don't want it to be a thing. I don't want to be judged. Maybe I'll withdraw, and work it out for myself, and then I'll think about how I want to be in relationship to God, if I think God exists.

But, it is likely more helpful, most of the time, to engage, to move toward, to lean in, than to lean out. It's really hard to work out questions of faith by yourself. It's not a lot of fun to doubt on your own. When you doubt, learn more. Experience more. Say what you're thinking and feeling. Let others support you. They might not always say the right thing. Awkward silence may happen, but let's face it, it will be a part of your life anyway. Or it might help you move forward. There will be people to hang out with, and you don't have to think or feel or believe or practice the way they do. You can articulate what you might need, and give others and God a chance to show up for you. You might discover your doubts have actually led you down a delightful spiritual journey, on a path to a place you'd never thought you'd end up. When it comes to doubt and faith, many times the best response is to chase your curiosity and do it with friends.

What Does the Cross Mean?

Luke 23

Stories are powerful. Stories draw us in, make us laugh or cry. We can critique stories or simply be fans; we can remember stories our whole lives or easily forget them if they don't touch our minds and hearts. There are family stories you remember and events in your family you have long forgotten. Stories can win us over or fill us with doubt.

There's also what a story means. People give stories meaning. You can tell me the story of your breakup, but I will also need you to tell me what that story means for you, how you think of it as part of your life. Does it make you cautious about another relationship? Did it teach you something about yourself? It is people, individuals, communities, that give stories meaning. We connect stories to our inner worlds, our relationships, to God, to the ways we see the world and what we believe.

The story of Jesus, his crucifixion, his death, is a powerful story. It has meant many things to many people over the course of centuries. It has meant that God, in Jesus Christ, has suffered with humanity. God knows what it is to be lynched. God knows what it is to be betrayed, and falsely imprisoned, and be at the mercy of an empire. God knows what it is to do everything right, and still get killed. God understands that being faithful does not mean that trouble will not find you. In a world that likes to keep a carefully organized hierarchy based on money and political power, innocent people that try to offer a new way of living are a target. God knows this. God's kingdom is not of this world. God has embodied God's kingdom on earth in Jesus. And the world is pushing back.

For some, this story is about Jesus taking on the sins of the world. That by submitting himself to this, by his own free will, he takes all the hate and pain and violence the world has to throw at him and at us, he takes on death. And as it turns out, all that hate and pain and violence and death will not have the last word. Jesus will turn out to be too much for all that. Love will turn out to be too big to be snuffed out, even by empires. And through God's love for us, our hate and pain and violence and death and sin, can also be trans-

formed. For us, too, it doesn't have to have the last word.

There is also deep meaning in how similar it seems the world of Jesus is to our world. So often, people who heal, and preach love, and feed people, and work for peace, and try to disrupt empires, wind up hurt or dead. God understands this world, and invites us into a different one.

Look for meaning in the story of Jesus not just in the injustice and cruelty, but in the markers of God's kingdom along the way. The way Jesus resists giving in to tyrants or violence. The way people don't just abandon Jesus, but mourn, which is its own act of faithful witness. The way the community around Jesus endures even when it is dangerous. Look for the ways God is present and life-giving even when surrounded by death.

What does this story mean for you, today?



What is Important Beyond Measure?

1 Corinthians 13:13

You are going to spend much of your college life being evaluated and graded, with the hope that one day you will be handed a diploma that confers upon you a bachelor's degree.

You will earn this degree by taking classes, getting good enough grades, fulfilling all the requirements, paying your bills even if that means you have loans, having a major or two or three. Your work will be quantified, measured, added up. You will do your best, and you can do it! Get that degree! Enjoy it! Learning and growing is why you are here!

But, as you well know, there is no degree for learning how to be a person. You can't do a concentration in friendship. You're probably fortunate that you will not be graded for dating, or hanging out, or breaking up. The changes that you have gone through from the moment you stepped onto campus to this moment right now can't really be quantified, whether that's a few days or a few years, and some of it probably can't be put into words. Some of the most meaningful parts of your college experience, the most important parts of life, aren't measurable, as much as I know some of the math majors out there want to try.

Yes, you might get credit for being in a choir, but that feeling of blending in harmony with other voices that makes you feel connected to something so much bigger than yourself? That's the good stuff.

Your experiences, living with roommates, living with Covid, the loneliness, the times when it feels like there are people around all the time everywhere, the joys, the deep hurts, your relationships with family, your connections with faculty, the times when you don't know if you'll finish, the laughter at student org meetings, the times when you are angry or frustrated, the times when you felt so close to teammates or friends, none of it can be measured but all of it has shaped who you are and how you got to this moment, reading this devotion. And God is with you through it all, and God has so much more in mind for your life than you being evaluated and measured for the sake of a degree.

When Paul writes his letter to the Corinthians, he urges them to focus on three things that really cannot be measured or evaluated for a degree or for being good enough – faith, hope, and love.

Where are these in your life? Who or what do you have faith in? What are you hoping for? Who loves you, and who do you love? These are the most meaningful parts of life that cannot be quantified, that make life what it is. Our relationship with God and our relationships with other people, and the faith, hope, and love we put into them. No matter how many classes you take, how many grades you get, the internships that set you up for your chosen career, no matter how much you want to achieve, remember that the best parts of life are not measured; they are lived, with God and with each other.



Why Do You Look For the Living Among the Dead?

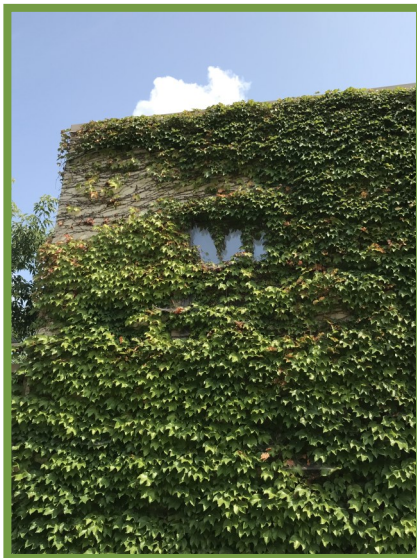
Luke 12:1-12

A group of faithful women visited the tomb. It was Sunday, the first day of the week, at early dawn. After his death, Jesus had been laid in a tomb. Now was the time that spices would be used to do the difficult and holy work of preparing his body for burial. The women, like the 12 disciples, had loved Jesus. They had been connected to his life and ministry and his death was a time of deep grief. We are told that when they arrived, they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. When they went in, they did not find the body. Suddenly, two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The angelic figures open with a question, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

On one hand, their question makes perfect sense. They are asking, “Why are you looking for Jesus here? He isn’t here. He is risen!” The question implies that the women shouldn’t be looking in a tomb for someone who is alive. That makes sense. But it is when we push this question that things get much more interesting. The good news of Easter is that we *should* look for the living among the dead. We *should* approach a tomb, or any other place where we experience death and grief, and look for and expect to find the living, resurrected Jesus.

Let’s consider the ways that we experience death. We experience real death; “capital D, death.” Perhaps you have experienced the death of someone close to you, a parent or grandparent, a friend or another loved one. Death is terrible and hard. It fills us with anger and confusion, an array of complex emotions. Death fills us with grief. However, we experience death in another ways, too. We might think of this as a “lower case d, death.” We experience the death of friendships and other relationships. We experience the death of hopes and dreams. While the grieving that accompanies this form of death may be different, it is also powerful. The plain and simple truth is that we all know the reality of death. That’s why the words of the men in dazzling clothes need to be challenged. They seem to imply that we shouldn’t look for life and resurrection among the dead. But this is precisely where should look – and expect – to find life.

The good news of Easter ought to train us to stare into tombs and every other place where we experience death, and expect to see Jesus. It is in our most desperate and difficult situations where we will see Jesus, the risen Jesus. When we say that Jesus has defeated sin and death, we proclaim that Jesus stands with us in our grief, proclaiming that death has not won. In death, new life is more than possible, it is promised. When we hear the question of the angels, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” we should to shout, “because Jesus promises to meet us in every experience of death!” Why do we look for the living among the dead? Because Jesus meets us in death.



Who Is My Neighbor?

James 2:1-10

A paraphrase of James might sound something like this, “I know that you have a category labeled ‘rich’ and a category labeled ‘poor.’ Moreover, I know that you value the rich and will do whatever it takes to treat them well. The poor? Not so much. They get neglected.” These words offer a sharp challenge for us to consider the ways that we label others and the ways that our actions correspond to that categorization. The text is a wake-up call. It invites us to consider, “Who do we value, who do we neglect, and why?”

For James, being honest about the ways that we label others and the ways that we treat others based upon this categorization process, is central to understanding the commandment to love our neighbor. The author of James would have asked a series of important questions. “What categories do I use when I meet people? More importantly, how does this inform the value that I assign to people?” For James, to love our neighbors means to place people – all people – into the single category of ‘neighbor’ and to assign everyone in that single category a positive value.

What might that look like for you? The categorization process is so embedded in the way that we engage with the world, that we often don’t even know we are doing it. We meet someone (we may even just see someone) and before we know it, we have put them into a category and we have assigned a value. The good news is that we can disrupt this process. We can retrain our brains to use different categories or to assign different values to pre-existing categories. In James, we are urged to work hard to create a positive category called ‘neighbor.’

Importantly, James also invites us to imagine the categories that are employed by God. God doesn’t use our categories. Rather, in baptism, we are all “Children of God.” Moreover, that category is given a positive value. As a child of God, you are loved and forgiven. You are wrapped in God’s grace.



Who Is the Greatest?

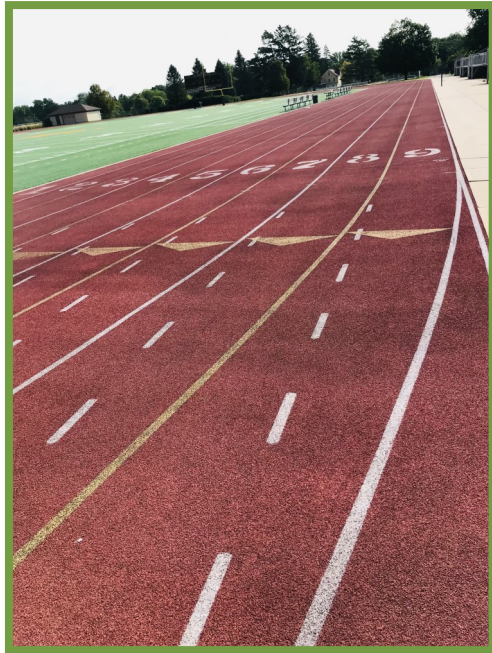
Mark 9:30-37

In our story from the Gospel of Mark, the disciples discuss which one of them is the greatest. While you likely don't discuss your relative greatness with your friends, have you ever silently assigned social worth to those in a class? Perhaps you base your evaluation of value upon your perception of the intelligence of others? "Oh they're smart (high social value). They don't take this seriously (low social value)." Have you done this at lunch? "They are sitting with people (high social value). They are sitting alone (low social value)." The truth is; we do this. We know (or at least we think we know) who is great.

Jesus interrupts the disciples' (and our) discussion of greatness by explaining, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." To emphasize the point, Jesus welcomes a child in his arms and says, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

While children were loved in the first-century Mediterranean world, infant mortality rates were as high as thirty percent. Another thirty percent of children died before the age of six. Sixty percent were dead by the age of sixteen. Children were hit the hardest by poverty and disease. On top of being the most vulnerable, they couldn't inherit property and were not given a voice.

It is into this context that Jesus says, "When you welcome one such child in my name you welcome me." Welcome and hospitality must come first, with assignments of value made later. Here is why. Do you have a friend that you think is amazing? You likely assign this value because you see them and listen to them. You invest in them. You prioritized them. When you laugh together and cry together, you see their real value, their real greatness. This is what Jesus is urging us to do. Welcome those around you into your life. Spend time together. Get to know one another. If we put in this effort first, rather than assigning a quick value judgment up front, we will see one another's value. No longer will we wonder where we fall on a greatness-scale, for we will be too busy celebrating the greatness of others.



Wilderness

Mark 1:9-15

As you begin this devotion, take a deep breath, close your eyes and let an image rise in your mind as you imagine the word, “wilderness.” Picture that wilderness. Go there. What do you see? ... What do you smell? ... What sounds do you hear? ... Is there anyone with you, or are you alone? And how does being out in this wilderness make you feel? Do you feel safe? Serene? Nervous? Cold? Allow yourself it take it all in for a few moments ... take a breath ... and open your eyes. Think for a moment about what that was like for you, how you felt doing that exercise.

Each of us has our own ideas about the wilderness. You might have pictured a desert, a rocky landscape, a lake, mountains, trees, a big open meadow, maybe even something industrial or urban depending on your experiences. Maybe you were alone or with friends or family.

But, that was staying for only a moment in the wilderness. Some folks live in the wilderness, some folks choose to go to the wilderness, and others never get there or avoid it. The natural world is beautiful, but it can also be frightening, unpredictable, and dangerous. You cannot control the wilderness, you can only prepare, learn, experience, and adapt.

Jesus, after he is baptized, is driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. Jesus goes out into the wilderness several times in Mark’s gospel, a few times even bringing crowds of people with him. In the New Testament the English word “wilderness” is the translation for the Greek word *eremos*, an adjective that means isolated, lonely, solitary, uninhabited. So, “wilderness” for Jesus is an isolated place. Perhaps we have all had to spend so much time isolated and away from each other that Covid pandemic time was also a wilderness time.

Jesus sometimes goes into the wilderness to retreat and pray. Sometimes he is tested being out there. Sometimes he goes with friends. It is always a place of spiritual encounter. Spiritual encounters are not always about peace or contemplation – sometimes they are about discomfort, being challenged, being spurred to action.

When do you feel like you are in the wilderness? Do you ever feel isolated or lonely? When is it a comfort? When does it feel scary? Have you felt God's presence?

Remember that even though Jesus goes out into the wilderness, an isolated place, he is not alone. And even if he is tested or encountering wild animals, angels are also there. When he is out in the wilderness with groups of people with no food, God provides. When he goes out to pray he comes back renewed. Whenever Jesus goes out into the wilderness, no matter what he counters, God is always there. During any wilderness places or moments in your life, Jesus is there, with you. You are never alone, whether you are soothed or scared. Jesus is there, walking with you.



Words of Hope

Romans 15:13

In everyday speech, we tend to use the word hope when what we actually mean is something like “wish” or “desire.” We say, “I hope they have St. Olaf Cookies at the Cage.” In this case, hope is the expression of a desired future over which we have little or no control. We also use the word hope when the future is unknown, but we believe that success or failure depends upon us. We say, “I hope that I do alright on my test tomorrow.” In this case, the future is unknown, but making it happen depends upon our hard work. Both of these popular uses of the word can be problematic. Hope is either completely outside of ourselves (where we have not control or agency) or completely within ourselves (where success or failure depends upon us). The Biblical meaning of hope, however, is always framed within a relationship.

Imagine someone close to you. Perhaps it is a parent or a roommate or a friend; but imagine someone that you trust, that you like, even love. Now, it is true that you don't know the future. You don't know what tomorrow or the next day will bring. But, having someone in your life that supports you, makes you laugh, will listen to you, will challenge you, this can give you hope. In this case, hope is a disposition, a life orientation. You have hope because you know that if you fail, you will not be alone. You will have someone who will stand by you, care for you. Likewise, if you succeed, you will not be alone. You will have someone who helped you along the way and will be happy to celebrate your achievement. In both cases, you do know something about the future. You have a future of care and support. This can give you hope.

It is possible to test this understanding of hope by imagining different relationships. For example, when we consider all of the scientists who are dedicated to medical research and environmental protection, we can live with hope. The witness of their wisdom and creativity assures us that while we don't know the future, it is a future that will be filled with discovery. Witnessing the work of others, gives us hope

As Christians, we have hope. With his resurrection, Jesus has conquered sin and death. In baptism, we received the promise that we are members of the Body of Christ, our sins are forgiven and we will live eternally with God. Eternal life is not left up to chance (“I hope I go to heaven”) nor is it something for which we are responsible (“I hope that I will am worthy of eternal life”). We have hope because our relationship with God is one of grace. God comes to *us* daily in love. We may not know the specifics of our futures, but we do know that no matter what we encounter; we will not be alone. We will be in relationship with a God who is faithful to us. Likewise, our relationships with others are to be ones of love and grace. We are invited to walk with others throughout the complexities of life; giving hope to and receiving hope from our fellow members of the body of Christ.







Prayers

Morning Prayer

You have made this day,
Creator God,
and I give you thanks for it.
Each day is a new day with you,
full of uncertainty, hope and possibility.

May my words and actions today
reflect the love and mercy you have for me.

Fill me with strength to meet
today's challenges and joy for today's graces.

Bless us all as we go about our day,
trusting that you are with us.

Amen.



New Beginnings

Be with me, O God.

I am excited and nervous at the same time.

This is the start of something new and I hope it is wonderful,
but it could also be very different from what I have imagined.

If something doesn't go the way I would like,

help me process it and find new hopes.

Give me courage to move through this day,

to experience it fully,

and to try things even when they seem scary.

When everything around me seems overwhelming,

comfort me with something familiar.

Help me see you as I venture into this new situation.

Amen.



An Ordinary Day

God of the great,
God of the ordinary,
today is a perfectly average day.
My best college memories may not be made today!

Yet, you are here.
You are my constant companion.
We journey together through all of life,
even the ordinary.
Help me to recognize your activity in the world,
even in the calm,
the basic,
the unremarkable.

Help me to be grateful for all of life,
even today,
even now.

Amen.

Tired

I am tired.
I am exhausted.
My schedule is full
and assignments
weigh heavy on my mind.

Grant me rest, O God.
O God, grant me peace.
Restore me.
When this day is over
and a new day has broken,
bless me with energy
and a renewed sense of purpose.

But for now,
slow my body,
slow my mind,
and let me sleep.

Amen.

Giving Thanks for Friends

Loving God, I am so grateful for my friends.
They make being at college feel like home.
I am so happy to have found people who support me
and that I can trust.
Thank you for the laughter, the fun,
the good and bad advice,
the deep conversations.



Continue to build the friendships in my life.
When we have disagreements,
help us work them out with respect and kindness.
Inspire me to be an honest, caring,
and trustworthy friend,
and may all of us nurture each other
in becoming the people you call us to be.
Amen.

One-sided Friendship

I love my friends, God, but I am tired
of being the one who is always listening,
who is always leaned on,
who is always there for everyone else.

I feel poured out.

I feel like I do all the giving,
and no one is giving that same care back to me.

I want to continue
to be there for my friends.

I care about them.

But I also need support.

I pray someone will reach out to me.

I pray that I will find a way to share my feelings
with my friends,

because I need them, too.

Amen.



Friends Making Bad Decisions

I don't know
about the decisions some of my friends
are making, O God.

And I don't know
if I should talk to them about it.

I don't think
the ways they treat themselves
or others is right.

I worry about their safety.

I wonder how
or if I can help.

God,

I trust in you,

and I come to you for guidance.

Give me courage to speak up if I need to,
or wisdom to give them space if that's what is right.

Show me how to care for them
and still be the person I want to be.

Surround me with support
to know what to do.

Amen.

When Friends Drift Apart

I'm hurt, God, and I turn to you.
Something just isn't right with my friend.

We used to talk all the time, but now we barely see each other.
When we do talk, it seems awkward,
and not natural, like it used to be.
I feel like we're drifting apart.
I miss "us."
I'm not sure we're going to stay friends.

Help me see a way forward.
If we are going to reconnect, help us laugh together,
enjoy each other, share our lives again.
If we are going in different directions,
help us both heal and move on,
and find other friendships.
Keep us both in your loving care.
Amen.



Concern for a Friend Far Away

I am praying for a friend, God.

We have shared so much,

but today my heart is heavy.

I am concerned and I am not sure what to do.

I feel helpless and frustrated.

I wish that we could be together;

just being together has always made us feel better.

We can text,

but it isn't the same.

You know our hearts.

You know our pain.

Please bring your grace and love into this situation.

Finally, where I may have difficulty

in expressing my thoughts and my feelings,

grant me the wisdom to know how to serve as a long-distance friend. Amen.

Grateful for My Roommate

Thank you, God, for my relationship with my roommate.
We get along so well and have fun together.
We respect each other's time and space and
have found a way to live together that is so comfortable.

Even when we have disagreements, we can work them out.
I know that no matter what happens to me during the day,
I can come home to a safe space and
to someone who understands me.

My roommate has been a great gift in my life and
I am grateful.
Continue to build our relationship of trust,
caring, and grace.
Amen.

Roommate Problems

Holy God,
things are really hard with my roommate right now.
We are not communicating well.
We irritate each other.
I try to compromise but it just doesn't seem to be working.
We're too different.
We can't accommodate each other.

You, O God, are gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
Please grant me some of your graciousness,
patience, and forgiveness.

Guide us in how we might work through our problems,
and give us wisdom to know when we might need help.
Send friends to support us,
and fill us with your love.
Amen.

Family

You make us to live in community, God.

Today I pray for my family.

Where there is love and affection,

I give you thanks and praise.

Where there is distance and hurt,

I ask for the strength and commitment

to be kind to those whom I love.

We are often the hardest on those

with whom we are the closest.

Where I need to let go,

where I need to forgive;

grant me patience and grace.

Where I need to change my actions

and change my heart;

grant me the courage to grow.

We are also the most silly and

most carefree and

most loving with those to whom we are closest.

Thank you for those times of abundant joy.

Amen.

A Family Illness

God, someone that I love is
sick.

I want to help, but I feel
helpless.

When I am in class,
I think that I should be at home.

When I am with friends,
I feel like there is something else,
something better I should be doing with my time.

Let your presence bring some calm to this storm.
Be with the health care professionals
as they perform their gracious work.
Be with my family as we all attempt
to provide love and support.

Where healing is possible,
God, grant that it may be so.



I Wish I Was Dating

Loving God, I really want someone to date.
I want to like someone and have them like me,
and then spend time with them!
It sounds easy, but it's harder than I imagined.
I want that kind of intimacy and affection and excitement
in my life, but it's not happening.

Give me confidence in myself,
courage to keep trying,
and openness to see new possibilities.
When I am filled with longing,
remind me of your love,
and help me to be grateful for the healthy relationships
I do have in my life.
Amen.

Giving Thanks for Dating

I am so happy to be dating, God.
I love spending time with this person and being affectionate.

I love the feeling when we're together,
that it's comfortable and exciting at the same time.

I don't know where this is going,
but I am so grateful to be with this person.

Please guide me,
because even though we enjoy being together
I am not always sure what to do or what to say.

Help me
to express my own needs and desires,
and grant me the ability to listen well.
Inspire me to be considerate, kind, thoughtful,
faithful and honest.

Amen.

When a Relationship Ends

Out of the deep, I cry to you, O Lord.
Hear my voice.

I am in such pain.
It hurts so much when a relationship ends,
even when it's the right thing.

Sometimes I feel like I don't want to get out of bed.
I want to talk to my friends about it,
but I don't want to keep saying the same things over and over.
I am sad and I just want to feel better.

I know it will take time.
Show me healthy ways to start moving forward.

Draw near to me, O God,
and bring me your comfort and your peace.
Give me a heart big enough to be gracious to the one who hurt me.
Help me to heal and to rest in your unfailing love.
Amen.

Belonging

O God, I thought college would be a place
where I would feel comfortable and accepted.

But I feel like no one really understands
who I am.

Everyone seems to have their own group
except me.

It feels like if you don't
look a certain way
or act a certain way
that you're not a part of things.

Remind me that I am
your beloved child.

Give me the confidence to be
the person that I am
and trust that other people
will appreciate and care about me.

Grant me patience and hope
as I continue to seek out relationships and
find a sense of belonging.

Amen.



Body Image

O God, is anyone content with how they look?

I never hear anyone talk about how beautiful they are.
Yet I look at others and think they look good, but I don't.

I don't see much that I like when I look in the mirror.

I see things I wish I could change.

I don't want to feel this way.

I want to see myself positively.

I want to feel confident and appreciate my appearance.

Help me see myself, O God, the way you see me.

Help me be happy with this body you have formed and love.

Open my eyes to see my own beauty and worth.

Amen.

Doubt

I am filled with questions.

I am filled with doubt.

Why is there so much evil and pain and suffering in the world?

Why do my prayers seem to fall on deaf ears?

Is there any consistency between what I hear in church
and what I learn in my lab?

Are you even real?

I am praying,

God,

and that means that I am seeking,
looking for answers.

I don't need everything to make sense,
but I do long for a sign of your presence in the world.

Open my eyes and stir my heart
to recognize your grace and love
during my time of confusion
and searching.

Amen.

I Don't Know What to Pray

God of words,
God of silence,
I don't know what to pray.
I don't know what to pray,
but I want to connect with you.
So, I open myself to this time and
this place;
read my heart.

You know the struggles
and
you know the joys of the world.
Even if I do not have the words to pray today,
you know your creation.
Grant your peace.

You know my life.
Even if I do not know how
to articulate my thoughts today,
you are my God.
In you I find my strength.

Amen.



Knowing Right From Wrong

God of action, I am struggling with my own sense of ethics.

How do I distinguish between right and wrong?

I am not looking for easy answers,

because I know that the complexity of life requires
a complex road map.

And, yet, I want to know where I should draw the line.

How should I act?

Grant me the ability to listen for voices that I trust.

And, grant me the courage to disregard
those that do not have my wellbeing in mind.

Help me to discern what you would have me do.

Help me to ask the hard questions.

Does this build me up or tear me down?

Does this contribute to the health and wholeness of others?

Does this bring joy or sorrow?

Will this lead to regret or hope?

Finally, when I do let myself and others down,
give me the strength to confess and
the openness to receive your forgiveness.

Amen.

Last Night

What can I say?
I am embarrassed, God.
I wish that I could take last night back.
I wish that I could hit reset.
I wish that I could erase the past.
You are the source of grace and forgiveness.
Forgive my thoughts and words and deeds.
Where I have hurt or offended others;
sow the seeds of reconciliation.

Finally, help *me* to extend grace to *me*;
that I might forgive myself and live today
as a new day,
a day of grace.

Amen.



Money

God of all of creation,
I find myself preoccupied with the thought of money.

I think about the money that I do not have.

College is expensive. Life is expensive.

I am worried about the financial burden
that I am placing on myself and my family.

I think about money and my future.

I want to live comfortably,
but I worry that money is becoming my focus, my idol.

Help me, O God, to establish a healthy
relationship with money.

Help me to see that it must play a role in my life,
but must not become the focus or goal of my life.

You are my compass.

Help me to keep my life oriented toward you.

Amen.



My Future

O God,
I think about the future all the time.
I wonder what's ahead for me.
I think about what I might want to do,
where I want to live,
the relationships I want in my life.
Sometimes the answers are clear,
sometimes I'm excited,
but often I am confused
and anxious about what lies ahead.

Help me when my anxiety about my future
prevents me from making decisions.
When I am discouraged, send me support.
When I need advice, send me wise counsel.
When I need to relax, grant me rest.
Surround me with your love,
wherever my future might lead.

Amen.



Opportunities

It's hard to know
which opportunities to take, O God.
I want to try many things,
to find a path for myself.

Grant me wisdom to discern what to do,
and *give me courage* to ask those I trust for advice.

Empower me to make choices,
and if they are right, rejoice,
and if they are not, to simply learn from them
and choose something new.

Fill me with a sense of openness
to what you may be calling me to do.

Amen.

Service

I want my life to be one of service, God.

Grant me a commitment to my community.

Help me to see the joys and the struggles
of those around me and
open my eyes to see how I might be of service.

Grant me a commitment to love the stranger.

Help me to see beyond the boundaries of my life and
my world and open my heart to those in need.

Finally, where I am hurting and
where there are needs in my life,
open me to the generous service of others.

Amen.



Sickness/Health/Healing

Merciful God, I long to feel healthy and whole.

It seems like my body is at war with itself.

It is strange how quickly we forget how awful it feels to be sick.

Today is awful.

Where I am weary,
grant me strength.

Where I am anxious,
grant me confidence in you.

Where I am tired,
grant me rest.

Where I am lonely and afraid,
grant me peace in your presence.

Amen.

Who Am I?

God of grace, I am not sure who I am,
and I'm not sure who I want to be.
My life has changed so much, so fast.
I feel like a new person all the time.

No matter how I am feeling,
remind me that I belong to you,
that the core of my identity
is that you claim me as your child.

Give me a vision for how to live my life rooted in your love,
your generosity, and your forgiveness.

As I am on this journey of discovering who I am,
calm my anxiety, and fill me with joy
and a sense of adventure.

Amen.



Homesick

I am homesick, God. I miss my family and my friends.
I miss the comfort that I feel when I am home.
Sometimes it is about the space.
My dorm room seems so small.
But more often, it is about the feeling of connection.
At home, people know me.
I can be myself.
I am supported and loved.

I thank you for the gift of a family and a home.
But I also pray that I may feel at home here on campus.
Help my relationships to grow, to deepen.
Help me to make meaningful connections
with those around me.

I know that you are always with me
and for that I give my thanks.
Amen.

Happy to Go Home!

Loving God, I am so excited to go home!
I miss my family,
my room,
my favorite foods,
my pets,
my old friends,
the neighborhood and streets I know so well.
It will feel good to rest,
to do laundry,
to remind myself of where I come from and
how much I value home now that I am away.

Help me be gracious to my family and friends as we all adjust
to how things are different now,
even though some things seem the same.
Surround us with joy and laughter.
Let me soak in all that I love about being home,
while still appreciating that I will leave again.

Amen.

I Dread Going Home

I am not looking forward to going home, God.

I love my family, but, I feel like there is so much

I cannot share with them.

Instead of feeling warm and comfortable there, I feel alone.

Give me eyes to see all that my family means to me,
even when things are awkward.

Help me be gracious and try to understand their perspective.

When we don't get along, grant us space.

As you love and forgive me,
help me to love and forgive them. Amen.

Feeling Lonely

God of all, I feel alone.

It seems like no one really knows me.

I can be surrounded by people at lunch
but feel like I am not really connecting.

My family is far away.

Sometimes it feels good to be alone,

but these days, it feels like there's something wrong.

Lift me out of this hole, God,

and help me look around and see the people who care about me.

Remind me of your abiding presence,

and renew my spirit to initiate relationships,

knowing that you created us to be in community.

Amen.



Grief

My world has forever changed, God.

In my loss, I feel lost.

I can't imagine tomorrow.

All I can think about is today,

and today I feel scared and alone and hopeless.

Everybody else is going on

as if everything is normal.

Sometimes I resent them.

Can't they see that I am hurting?

Sometimes I am jealous.

I wish that I could forget my pain for a while.

Fill me with the promise of Easter.

Remind me over and over again

that you have power over death;

that your forgiveness and grace

are stronger than my confession and sin,

that your love is stronger than my despair.

In you, I find my strength.

Amen.

Jealousy

I wish that I did not feel jealous, O God, but I do.
I look at others and I compare myself.

Sometimes I want to yell, “It isn’t fair!”
Some people seem to get special treatment,
while I feel ignored.

Some people seem to have it all.
But when I look at myself and my life,
I only see what is missing.

Grant me clarity of vision,
that I might more clearly see others and myself.

Help me to release my feelings of resentment
and replace them with peace.

Help me to realize that it is in you
that I will find my deepest sense of worth and meaning.

Amen.

Joy

I am happy, O God.
But it is more than that.

I am content.
I feel full of hope and promise and love.
I feel like laughing and talking and sharing
my joy with the world.

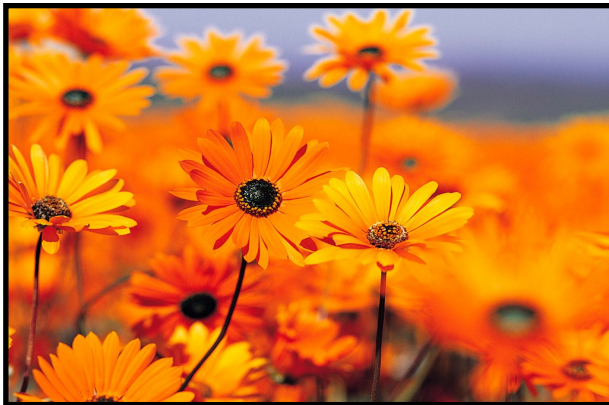
I have been around long enough
to know that this feeling isn't permanent.

That is okay.

Thank you for this moment,
for this overwhelming feeling.

You are my God
and I give you thanks and praise!

Amen.



Perpetrating Prejudice

I may not want to say it out loud, God,
but in the privacy of this prayer
I confess my prejudice.
I use categories, labels, values for
everything and everyone.

When I am in class,
when I am walking through Buntrock,
and when I see the people in my hall,
I judge them.

Give me the wisdom and strength
to see every person as your child.
Help me to overcome my feelings of superiority.
Open my eyes to see beauty in all of your creation.

I acknowledge that this will not be easy,
but I open my heart and my mind to this challenge.
Amen.

Experiencing Prejudice

Sometimes, God, I get so tired of people judging me.

I get tired of assumptions.

I get angry at wrong things people say,
sometimes when they don't even know it.

I feel like there are spaces where people both watch
me too much and don't see me.

I just want it to stop. I deserve to be treated well.

I deserve to be honored for who I am.

You know, O God, all that is in my heart.

I bring it all to you.

Surround me with people who love and value me.

Remind me that I am your beloved, that with you
I always belong, that I am always enough.

Bring an end to the prejudices that harm us,

And lift me up as your child.

Amen.

Procrastination

I can't do it, God.

I know I have work to do,
there are deadlines looming,
I am feeling the pressure, and yet ...
I just can't seem to get it done.
I tell myself there is plenty of time,
I try to get organized, and then,
I put things off.
I want to do better.
But, here I am.

Forgive me my shortcomings.
Help me create new habits so
I feel less stressed.
Give me the strength to move forward
and the insight to set priorities.
Surround me with others who will set good examples
and who will help me use my time well.

Amen.



Regret

My regret weighs heavy on my heart, God.
I want to live in the present.
I want to think constructively about my future.
But my past casts a shadow over everything in my life.

Grant me the wisdom to understand
that I cannot change the past.

No matter how much I would like to go back and
do things differently, this is impossible.

Grant me hope.

Help me to see that my past has not left me
without options.

Help me to see that my past will not
inform all of my future relationships.

Help me to see that your resurrection promise
extends even to my life today.

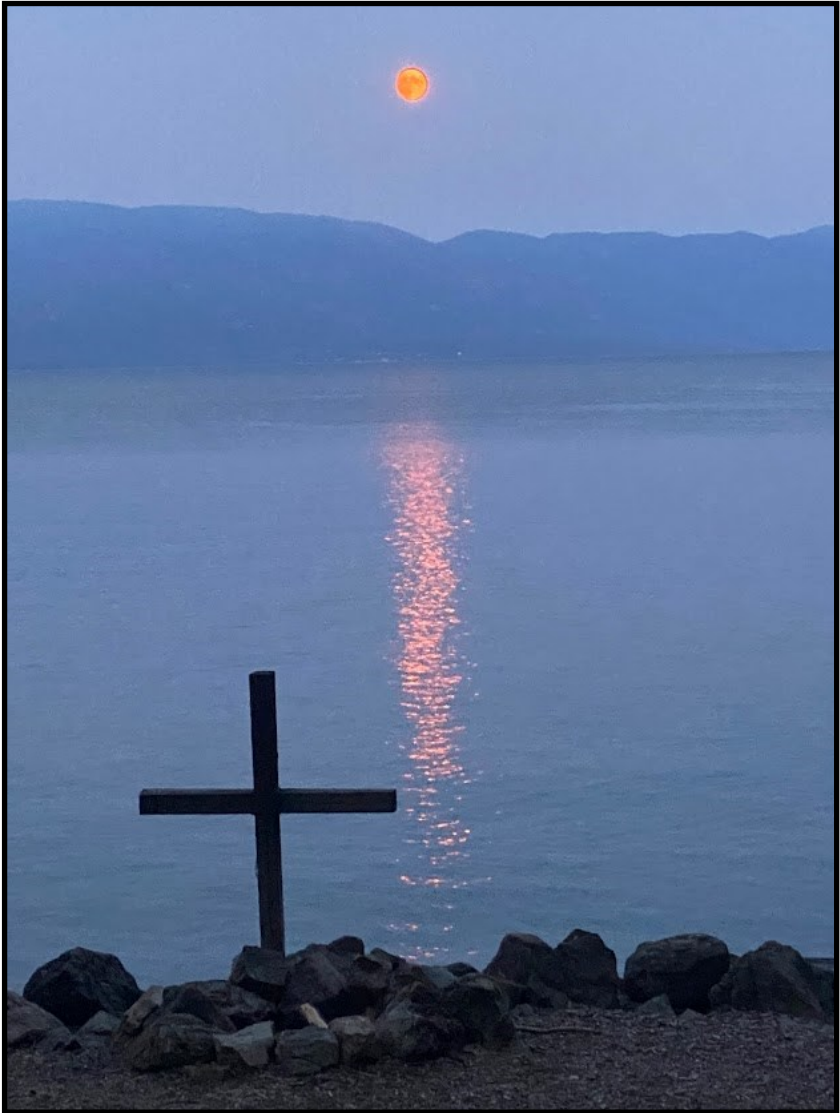
Ground me in your promise of new life.

Amen.

Stress

Merciful God,
I have so much to do and
I don't know how it's all going to get done.
I feel like I should be able to handle things
– everyone else seems to –
but I am not keeping up.
I don't sleep or eat well and
I am starting to feel a sense of despair.

I need a deep breath.
Help me get through this.
Instill in me,
even for a few minutes,
a sense of calm.
Give me self-confidence and
determination to keep going.
Send me support and encouragement.
I know you are with me,
and I have hope.
Amen.



Burden to Succeed

I
feel
buried
by the burden to succeed.
Some days it feels like a weight on my shoulders
that I can no longer bear.

When I look at other people, I see their successes.
My friends and my family seem preoccupied with making
plans
and setting goals and achievement,
or at least that is how it feels to me.

Grant me rest, God.

I always seem to see things more clearly when I am not so
tired.

Grant me the wisdom to see
that there is no such thing as perfection.

My days will be filled with both large and small
failures and successes.

Help me to find this liberating rather than frightening.

Finally, grant me a healthy understanding of success,
so that I may move forward with confidence and love.

Amen.

Success Achieved

I did it!

I worked hard and I succeeded.

But to be honest, God, I am torn.

Part of me is exhausted and surprised
that I am done and that everything went so well.

I had doubts in myself and I still do.

Part of me is confident and happy with my achievement.

Thank you for walking with me during this long journey.
Thank you for gifting me with both perseverance and talent.

But, I did not do this alone.

Open my eyes; that I might recognize
and thank all of those people who have helped
to make my success possible.

I have a tendency to look too quickly at the next challenge.

Help me to live in this moment,
to savor this time.

Tomorrow and all of its tasks will come soon enough.

With a happy and a thankful heart,

I sing your praise.

Amen.

Getting Homework Done

God of wisdom, sometimes I can't wait to work on a paper,
to do the reading, or get into the lab.
Other times, I dread opening a book.
I get frustrated with group projects because
others aren't putting in the time.
It's hard to get everything done,
especially when some of it seems like a waste of time.

You have called me here, O God, to be a student.

Continue to nurture me as I learn.

Build up my perseverance for studying when I am uninspired,
and spark my imagination for further study in the work I love.
Help me see how all of it is shaping the person I am becoming.

Amen.

Before a Test

I am nervous about this test, God. I always am!
My classes are so important to me. I want to do well.
I feel prepared and yet always want more time to feel ready.

*Do not let me be consumed by worry.
Help me bring all that I can to this moment, O God,
and then put this test in perspective.
While it is important, a test is not who I am.
I am a child of God, and my life is defined by
being loved unconditionally and being called to love others.*

But, if my nerves start to get the best of me,
center me, O God, in you.
Amen.



When Homework is Difficult

I really like what I am learning, God,
but this homework is so hard.
I thought that if I studied something I loved it would be easy,
but it takes much more effort than I realized.
Sometimes I think it means this isn't what I am meant to do.
Other times I am determined to work hard and
keep pursuing my goals.

When I get frustrated, O God, be with me.
Encourage me to take a break and refocus.
Give me the determination to finish my work,
strengthen me in my vocation as a student and
help me discern which work I truly love to do.
Amen.

Help

I know I need help, God, and yet I don't want to ask for it.

Why is that? Why is it so hard?

I want to do everything on my own,

but deep down I know I can't.

I need you and other people.

Let me see you in those around me.

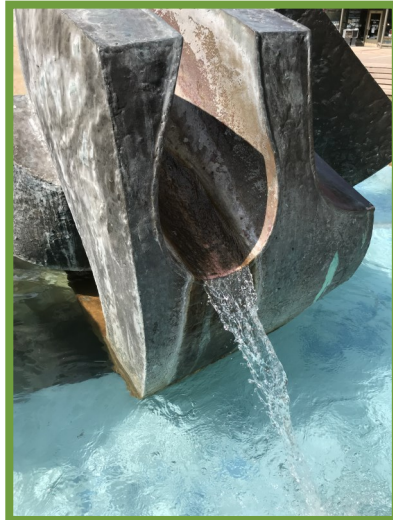
Open my heart to let others in.

Remove my stubbornness or my shame.

You have called us to love and serve our neighbors,
and right now I am the neighbor that needs love and service.

When I do reach out,
may I be met with kindness and understanding.

Amen.



Failing

I am failing, God.

I am in denial

and I don't know what to tell others.

But, I know that *I am failing*.

This situation feels so permanent.

I am not sure how to get out of this hole

and it is hard to imagine future success.

Give me the courage to look for help.

Give me the courage to be honest.

Remind me that there are always options,

even when I feel desperate or alone.

Most importantly,

thank you for being my rock.

I am relying on your strength and your hope.

Amen.

In Time of Natural Disaster

Your world,
your creation,
is wondrously made.

But today, God,
we experienced its power and devastation.

The wind, the water,
and the land can be sources of life.

But today,
we experience
that they can also bring despair and death.

Help us to see your presence in the midst of so much chaos.

Help us to find your peace
in the midst of so much
confusion and pain.

Where we can help, where we can serve,
grant us a willing spirit with eager hands and feet.

Where we can be generous with our resources,
open us to share.

And always,
give us the strength to pray.
Even when we have no words,
listen to our sighs and silence.

Amen.

In Time of Conflict or War

Once again, our world is plagued by warring nations.
O God, it seems that we are designed to fight.
Greed and ill will come so naturally.
Fear and the lust for revenge seem more natural
than the desire to stand as one.

We fight over land.
We fight over religion.
We fight over natural resources.
We simply fight.

We pray for peace among nations.
Work in all hearts a desire
for community and cooperation
that is stronger than any inclination
toward hatred and violence.

Today, I pray especially for all
who are living in fear
and with the threat of harm.
May your good and gracious presence
bring a sense of calm and peace.
Amen.

In Time of Crisis or Disaster

Our world is hurting and I feel so helpless, O God.
The terrible events of this day make me feel
weak and vulnerable.

Hear the cries of those who are in pain,
of those who are experiencing loss,
of those who are struggling to find hope.

Where there is anxiety,
grant the peace and reassurance
of your presence.

Grant strength and courage
to all who are called to provide assistance;
that they may serve with resilience and grace.

I too, want to do something, God.

Let this prayer rise like incense,
adding to the prayers of
countless others.

Let this prayer give voice to our
fear and pain.

Let this prayer give voice to our
hope and faith in you.

Amen.





Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,

now and forever. ***Amen.***

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, and the power, and the glory,

forever and ever. ***Amen.***

A Guide for Public Prayer

1. There is a difference between the prayers that we offer in private and those that we offer in public. In our public prayers, we attempt to represent the community gathered in worship. This means that while we lift up shared experiences, we limit our descriptions of accompanying emotions. For example, while we might pray for the beginning of a new academic year, we do not assign specific emotions to that beginning. Some people are certainly eager, while others are filled with uncertainty. In contrast, our private prayers are often built upon our emotional responses to our individual experiences.

Accompany us, O God, as we begin this academic year.

2. Prayers often take one of two forms. On one hand, we are free to identify specific prayer petitions and accompany those petitions with specific prayer requests. For example, we might pray for those who are grieving. In addition, we might call upon God to grant a sureness of the resurrection. In contrast, we may identify a specific prayer petition without a specific accompanying request. This is often the case when we do not know what or how to pray, but we do wish to lift up our concern to the care of God. For example, we might pray for those living with mental illness. The weight of the prayer

concern is great. Therefore, we simply state the concern; we put the petition in the hands of God.

For those who grieve; grant them a sense of peace and hope that is grounded in the promise of the resurrection.

Or,

We pray for those living with mental illness.

3. Prayers ought to reflect the individual who is praying. Are you poetic? Let the beauty of your words rise up like incense. Are you succinct? The length of a prayer says nothing about its weight. Use your words, your vocabulary, your social location. With this said, it is the role of a prayer leader to be inclusive. Ask yourself, am I using my voice to speak for the community gathered?

4. Finally, there are no rules to what must be included in our prayers. We often pray for the world, for the nation, for health and wholeness, and for our local community. With this said, there are times that a single issue dominates our prayer. Regardless of the topic, we always proclaim that God is active in our world. Prayer is our opportunity to communicate with God. It is our opportunity to offer our thanks and praise; to lift up our wants and needs, our hopes and fears. It can be a time of confession. We ought to feel liberated in our prayer. It is our time to bring our whole selves to our God who loves us.

Table Prayers

Sharing a meal is an intimate act. It is often appropriate to use a short, familiar prayer. Many families begin their meals with the prayer, “Come Lord Jesus be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.” There is no reason that these words must be confined to small family gatherings. The prayers below are similar prayers for small and large gatherings.

Bless our food, dear God we pray. And bless us, too,
throughout the day. Keep us safe and close to you.
Keep us just in all we do. Amen.

God, bless this food we are about to receive. Give
bread to those who hunger, and hunger for charity
and justice to us who have bread. Amen.

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts which we are
about to receive from thy bounty. Amen

For life and food, for love and friends, for everything
thy goodness sends, almighty God, we thank you.
Amen.

We thank you Lord for generous hearts, for sun and
rainy weather, we thank you Lord for drink and
food and that we are together. Amen.



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