

Reflections on Faith and Life for May 10, 2020

God's grace and peace to you as we enter our 8th week of physical distancing. I know it's very hard for some of you, and I hope you're able to keep yourselves occupied with gardening, reading, listening to audio books, watching movies, sewing, crafting things—whatever you do, may it be a blessing to you!

Bishop Laurie from our synod office has sent out an email outlining what the future of our Northwest congregations may look like. She's encouraging us to err on the side of caution when we begin to gather in person, whenever that may be. "Out of an abundance of caution" they have canceled our synod assembly for this year (after postponing it until the end of August). They are also recommending that congregations NOT try "parking lot services," and they may also suggest that when we begin to worship together we wear masks and still remain "distanced" until the all-clear is sounded by our national health leaders.

In this time of social loneliness and separation, we remember that we're still in the middle of the season of Easter! Jesus, who overcame death and the grave, can help us through the maze of emotions, frustrations, questions, and antsy-ness we're experiencing. Spend some time with him every day. —I have multiple copies of my little book *Awake, My Soul! Making the Psalms Your Own*; if you'd like to have one, let me know. They're looking for a good home!

I received the following from a member who values humor; it's called "The Organist." *The Lutheran minister was preoccupied with thoughts of how she was going to, at the end of the worship service, ask the congregation to come up with more money for unexpected repairs to the church building. She was annoyed to find that the regular organist was out and a substitute had been brought in at the last minute. The substitute wanted to know what to play. "Here's a copy of the service," she said impatiently. "But you'll have to think of something to play after I make the announcement about the finances."*

When the time came, the pastor said, "Brothers and sisters, we are in great difficulty. The roof repairs cost twice as much as we expected, and we need \$4000 more. Any of you who can pledge \$100 or more, please stand up." At that moment, the substitute organist began playing "The Star-Spangled Banner." And that's how the substitute became the regular.

With that lead-in, it's my duty to inform you that, according to Bishop Laurie, the synod office has received some \$47,000 less than the expected amount so far this year. St. John has pledged \$300/month; I'm not sure about St. Stephen. Benevolence (donations) to the synod is one way congregations extend ministry beyond their own doors. There are 199 congregations in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, and all benefit from support by the synod office.

Unlike the pastor in the joke above, both St. J and St. S have new roofs that are paid for—but other congregational expenses are ongoing. I encourage you, as you are able, to send or drop off your offering envelopes during these distanced times.

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As I write these Reflections, I'm still pondering Jesus' words from last Sunday: *"I have other sheep that are not of this fold; and I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd"* (John 10:16).

Once again I refer to one of my daily devotionals, *When You Pray* by Reuben Job. These words speak to my heart: *"The House of God stretches from one corner of the universe to the other. Sea monsters and ostriches live in it, along with people who pray in languages I do not speak, whose names I will never know. I am not in charge of this House. . . . I have no say about who is in and who is out. I do not get to make the rules. . . . I am a guest here, charged with serving other guests—even those who present themselves as my enemies. I am allowed to resist them, but as long as I trust in one God who made us all, I cannot act as if they are no kin to me. There is only one House. Human beings will either learn to live in it together or we will not survive to hear its sigh of relief when our numbered days are done (An Altar in the World, Taylor; Job, p. 107).*

That last sentence is particularly appropriate in light of the public demonstrations last week in Mosinee and Madison. When this country began to recognize the deadly effects of the COVID virus, the first thing emphasized by the ELCA, both church-wide and from our Synod office, was that we need to love and serve our neighbors by following medical guidelines: social distancing and wearing masks. We're protecting not only ourselves, but also everyone we meet. I confess it's hard for me to *feel* love for those who selfishly and carelessly put whole communities at risk by their disregard for policies designed to protect us all. But *love* is an action, not a feeling. As a follower of Jesus I'm committed to pray for *all people*, including—especially!—those "other sheep" who are not of this "House of God," this sheep fold Jesus described. I pray we'll all remain safe from angry people who violate the guidelines meant to protect everyone.

Food for thought, from a "For Better or for Worse" cartoon in a *Wausau Daily Herold* several years ago. Frame 1: he says, "It's been a bad week." She answers, "It's been a rotten week." Frame 2: "I can't remember when we've had so much go wrong." "Me neither." Frame 3: she says, "We never have problems. We're usually so lucky." He answers, "Maybe that's why we had such a bad week." Frame 4: he continues, "It made us realize how lucky we are!"

Children's Time: Kids, can you collect 1 cent for each year of your age, for each Sunday we've missed worshipping together, and bring it for "Change for Change" when we come back? So far we've missed 3/22, 3/29, 4/5, 4/12, 4/19, 4/26, 5/3, and today, 5/10. That's 8 Sundays. If you're 10 years old, that would be 10 cents a week times 8, or 80 cents. (For me it would be 72x8, or—oh, my!--\$5.76! I'll keep track of mine and let the coins clink!)

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Call to Worship (Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16) *If there are 2 or more of you, why don't you read this responsively by half verses (the indented part is the second half)*

In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; (when I pray this, I always pray, "Let me never be put to shame before you")

Deliver me in your righteousness.

Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue;

Be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.

Since you are my rock and my fortress,

For the sake of your name lead me and guide me.

Free me from the trap that is set for me,

For you are my refuge.

Into your hands I commit my spirit; [Do you recognize these words from Jesus on the cross?]

Redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth.

My times are in your hands;

Deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.

Let your face shine on your servant;

Save me in your unfailing love.

Invocation (inviting God to be with us): In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Confession

Beloved in the Lord: let us draw near with a true heart, and confess our sins to God our Father, imploring him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

Our help is in the name of the Lord,

Who made heaven and earth.

I said, I will confess my sins to the Lord.

And you forgave the iniquity [wickedness] of my sin. Almighty God, merciful Father, I, a troubled and penitent sinner, confess to you all my sins and iniquities with which I have offended you, for which I justly deserve your punishment. But I am sorry for them, and repent of them, and pray for your boundless mercy. For the sake of the suffering and death of your Son, Jesus Christ, be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being; forgive my sins, give me your Holy Spirit for the amendment of my sinful life, and bring me to life everlasting. Amen.

Announcement of Forgiveness

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you, and for his sake God forgives you all your sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ he gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Hymn of Praise

Make Songs of Joy (vv. 1,2,3,6) (you may sing all 6 verses!)

150

Make Songs of Joy

1 Make songs of joy to Christ, our head; Al - le - lu - ia!
2 Our life was pur - chased by his loss; Al - le - lu - ia!
3 O death, where is your dead - ly sting? Al - le - lu - ia!
4 And where your vic - to - ry, O grave, Al - le - lu - ia!

He lives a - gain who once was dead! Al - le - lu - ia!
He died our death up - on the cross. Al - le - lu - ia!
As - sumed by our tri - um - phant King! Al - le - lu - ia!
When one like Christ has come to save? Al - le - lu - ia!

5 Behold, the tyrants, one and all,
Alleluia!
Before our mighty Savior fall!
Alleluia!

6 For this be praised the Son who rose,
Alleluia!
The Father, and the Holy Ghost!
Alleluia!

© Text: Jiří Trausník, 191-1637; tr. Jaroslav J. Vojta b. 1919
Tune: Chorale, Velka Paritura, 1936

ZPĚVEMEŽ VŠICKNI VESELE
84 84

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, Your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Give us grace to love one another, to follow his commands, and to share his risen life with all the world, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Notes on the readings for today: The first three readings all contain imagery of *stones* or *rocks*. The psalmist (in the Call to Worship) declares his confidence in the Lord, his “**rock** and his fortress.” In Acts we’ll read that Stephen is “**stoned** to death.” Peter will tell the believers that they have become “**living stones**” in the household of God because of their connection to the chief “**cornerstone**,” who is Christ.

A reading from Acts, the 7th chapter (7:55—60) – Note: Stephen was one of the 7 men chosen by the apostles to serve tables so that the apostles could be free to serve the word (Acts 6:1-6). Stephen does more than distribute food, however. For his preaching of God’s word, he becomes the first martyr of the faith (the first person killed for his faith).

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Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” But the Sanhedrin (council of priests, scribes, and Pharisees) covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. They dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (more words from Jesus on the cross). When he had said this, he died.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

A reading from First Peter, the 2nd chapter (2:1-10)

Therefore (remember, this word is always followed by an explanation of what came before; if you’d like to get out your Bible and look it up, you’ll find it almost at the end of the New Testament.) **Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.** (Paul writes, in I Corinthians 3:2, that he gave the church in Corinth *milk*, not solid food, because as “infants in Christ” they were not yet ready for more. As we grow in Christ, in faith, we can handle more “spiritual” food.)

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by human beings but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood (Luther calls the church “the priesthood of all believers” —did you realize you were priests??), **offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in scripture (Isaiah 28:16) it says, “See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and whoever trusts in him will never be put to shame.”** (Re-read the beginning of Psalm 31, the Call to Worship.) **Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22), and “A stone that causes people to stumble, a rock that makes them fall” (Isaiah 8:14). They stumble because they disobey the message....**

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (Like Abraham in Genesis 12:2, who was “blessed to be a blessing,” we are made God’s chosen people **so that we may proclaim the mighty acts of God, who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light!**) **Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.** (Re-read that last sentence and imagine how your life would be now if you weren’t part of God’s “priesthood of all believers,” and if you hadn’t received the unending mercy of God.)

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**

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Introduction to the Gospel (say it in your outside voice!) **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

The holy gospel according to John, the 14th chapter (1-14). **Glory to you, O Lord!**

Jesus speaks to his disciples in the Upper Room during his Last Supper: **“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions (many dwelling places, many rooms). If that were not so, would I have told you that I’m going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I’ll come back and take you to be with me, so that you also may be where I am. And you know the way to the place where I’m going.”** Thomas said to him, **“Lord, we don’t know where you’re going, so how can we know the way?”** Jesus answered, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”**

Philip said to him, **“Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.”** Jesus answered, **“Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I’ve been among you for so long? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words I say to you I don’t speak on my own authority. Rather, it’s the Father living in me, who’s doing his work through me. Believe me when I say that I’m in the Father and the Father is in me—or at least believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, all who have faith in me will do the works I’ve been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I’m going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask *in my name*, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything *in my name*, and I will do it.**

This is the gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ!**

Sermon

Can you imagine being there with Jesus at his Last Supper? He’s just washed your feet, which really upset Peter: **“No, Lord, you will never wash my feet!”** He told all of you he’d be leaving you soon, and you wouldn’t be able to follow him. He gave you a new commandment: **“Love one another as I have loved you.”** Then he told Peter that Peter would deny him three times that very night. And the very next words out of Jesus’ mouth are, **“Don’t let your hearts be troubled—I’m going ahead to get everything ready for you.”**

If you’re a disciple, your head must be swimming by now. You’re eating the Passover meal, as commanded by God 1500 years earlier, and your life has just been turned upside down. Your Lord, the Master you’ve followed for three years, serves you like a common slave and then tells you he’s leaving you. He predicts that Peter, the Rock, will deny him. And then he basically says, **“Don’t worry, be happy!”** -- What’s going on here?

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The first paragraph of John 14 is often used as the basis for funeral sermons because of the promise it holds: Jesus himself is going ahead to prepare a place for his disciples in his Father's house. When he tells his friends that they know what he's talking about, Thomas points out his mistake: **"Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way?"** Then Jesus, in one of the best-known verses of the Bible, says, **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."**

Words of promise for us who know the *end* of Jesus' story, which his disciples hadn't yet experienced. Words of comfort and hope to the bereaved. Jesus, our Savior and Lord, is **the way, and the truth, and the life**. For us who believe, these words are what we hang on to when we face our own mortality, or the death of those we love. God raised Jesus from the dead, and we trust that *our* resurrection, too, is secure. Praise the Lord for living faith that trusts in these words Jesus spoke 2000 years ago!

The only problem is, that wasn't all he said. There was more. **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."** As beloved as the first part of that statement is, the second part is one of the most contested in the entire Bible. **No one comes to the Father except through Jesus.** Wars have been fought and churches divided over these words. ***Does this mean that people who don't worship Jesus will never go to heaven???***

I invite you to think back to last week's gospel, where Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was speaking to the Pharisees: **"I have other sheep that are not of this fold, and I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd."**

Think back a bit further to the third Sunday in Lent—our last "live" worship service together. Jesus was speaking with the woman at the well. He was comparing the Samaritans' faith (which included only the Hebrew scriptures up to end of Pentateuch—the "Book of Moses") with the faith of the Jews, who had grown beyond the Mosaic Law (the law of Moses).

Jesus said to her, **"A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.** (Note that the **Father** seeks those who will worship **in the Spirit and in truth.**) **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth"** (John 4:23-24).

Jesus doesn't say, "No one comes to **God** except through me," but "no one comes to the **Father** except through me. Jesus has been speaking here to a faith community—the disciples—that has known God *through the incarnation—the living flesh—of God's Son, Jesus*. "God" isn't some generic deity, but rather the One they recognize in the life, and the upcoming departure/death, of Jesus. When Jesus says "no one" he means "none of you." Not Peter, or James, or John, or Nathaniel, or Philip, or Judas (not Iscariot), or Matthew, or Andrew, or Bartholomew, or Matthew, or Judas Iscariot, or Simon.

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This is the root of *our* faith! We are the people of the God who has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ! We come to our Father only through Jesus. But he has other sheep who know God not as the Father of Jesus, but by other names. He has brought together *others* who worship the same God we worship, but in different ways and by different names, yet still **“in spirit and in truth.”**

Does this make sense to you? The whole idea of *exclusivity* is truly a monstrous cause of contention. There are many religions (even other Lutheran branches!) that say “ours is the only way to salvation.” Unfortunately for the reputation of “Christianity,” this *exclusivity* is expressed in places throughout the Bible, but not anywhere that I can find in the words or actions of Jesus himself. The only ones Jesus “excludes” are those who are rich or powerful and use their power to oppress the last, the least, the little, the lonely, and the lost.

Jesus embodies a God who stoops to wash the dirty feet of his friends; a God who offers his own self in the service of love. In Jesus, we recognize God’s compassion for the poor, the hungry, the sick, and the outcast. Jesus reveals a God who treats our brokenness with mercy and our humanity with compassion. He includes the excluded, reaching out to women and men, young and old, rich and poor, believer and unbeliever. We all come to God, the Father, through Jesus.

A secondary aspect of this gospel text is the meaning of “my Father’s house” (“In my Father’s house are many rooms”). For centuries the Church interpreted this phrase to mean “heaven,” or “the place of eternal life.” Biblical scholars of the last half century suggest that it’s more faithful to the Gospel of John to understand it as the relationship between God and Jesus—and therefore also for us, our relationship with God. In John 3:36 we read that “whoever believes in the Son *has* (present tense!) eternal life.” In 5:24, Jesus says to the self-righteous men in the synagogue, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent he *has* (present tense!) eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

It’s sad that many people who attended worship services do so only because they want to “get to heaven.” Some fear “going to hell” when they die. If that’s a fear you have, or if you know someone who’s “going to church” because s/he was “scared out of hell,” please talk to me! Some 50% of mainline pastors and ministers now reject the concept of an eternal hell, where “lost souls” are tormented in fire and anguish. Once you recognize that we can’t “earn” our way to heaven for eternal life with God—on the contrary, that God himself seeks you out to draw you to himself—what a wonderful blessing it is to know that your “eternal life” with our loving God and his Son Jesus begins NOW, in *this* life!

In the midst of our present social distancing and suffering economy, Jesus says to *us*, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. I came that you might have life, and have it abundantly. Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Come, follow me.”** --Thanks be to God!

Sermon Hymn

You Are the Way

You Are the Way

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1 You are the way; through you a - lone Can we the Fa - ther find;
2 You are the truth; your Word a - lone True wis - dom can im - part;
3 You are the life; the rend - ing tomb Pro - claims your con - qu'ring arm;
4 You are the way, the truth, the life; Grant us that way to know,

In you, O Christ, has God re - vealed His heart, his will, his mind!
You on - ly can in - form the mind And pu - ri - fy the heart.
And those who put their trust in you Not death nor hell shall harm.
That truth to keep, that life to win, Whose joys e - ter - nal flow.

The musical score consists of two systems. Each system has a treble clef staff with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is written in the bass clef. The lyrics are placed between the two staves of each system.

Text: George W. Doane, 1799-1859, alt.
Tune: Psalter, Edinburgh, 1615

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CM

The Apostle's Creed God has made us his people through our baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

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Prayers of Intercession

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, great is your glory and greatly to be praised. You are worthy of blessing and honor and glory and praise and thanksgiving, and we would come before you with worship and honor this day, bowing at the foot of your cross in humble obedience and faithful serving.

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and merciful, have mercy on your Church: the body of Christ, the communion of saints, the priesthood of all believers. Strengthen all who worship you in spirit and in truth. Open the hearts of your people to the fellowship we share with others who call you by different names. Great Shepherd of one flock, draw this broken world into wholeness in your loving heart. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and merciful, have mercy on this broken world, where human greed and carelessness have destroyed the good creation you gave us to steward. Teach us to heed warnings from those who study and understand how we might still deliver this planet from the ravages we have committed. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and merciful, we pray for all throughout the world who suffer from, or because of, the coronavirus. Ease the panic, the pain, the frustration in all places; teach us wisdom, that we may endure the restrictions until it's truly safe for us to leave our safer homes; and give us patience as we wait for things that have changed to become our new normal. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and merciful, to all who live in hopelessness and despair, give a moment of hope and surcease of suffering, and send your holy angels and your Church to minister. We pray for all whose circumstances are beyond our comprehension: inmates in prison; those with severe physical or mental limitations; those addicted to substances or behaviors; those who are abused, and their abusers, that they yearn for and find healing; the neglected, the abandoned, all who have been "thrown away" by society; all who suffer from natural disasters of any kind; and all animals and people who suffer from human depravity. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

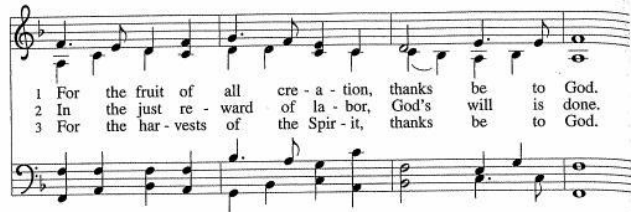
All these things, and whatever else you see that we and our world need, we pray in the name of Jesus, your Son, our Savior, who taught us to pray: **Our Father,**

Offering Song

For the Fruit of All Creation

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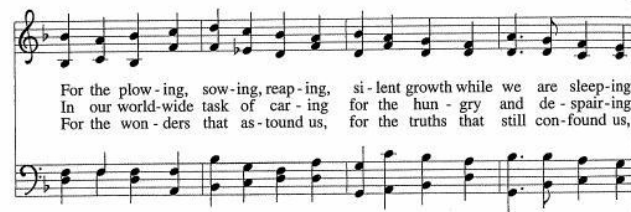
For the Fruit of All Creation



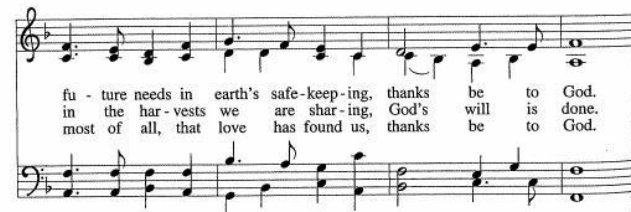
1 For the fruit of all cre - a - tion, thanks be to God.
2 In the just re - ward of la - bor, God's will is done.
3 For the har - vests of the Spir - it, thanks be to God.



For these gifts to ev - 'ry na - tion, thanks be to God.
In the help we give our neigh - bor, God's will is done.
For the good we all in - her - it, thanks be to God.



For the plow - ing, sow - ing, reap - ing, si - lent growth while we are sleep - ing,
In our world - wide task of car - ing for the hun - gry and de - spair - ing,
For the won - ders that as - tound us, for the truths that still con - found us,



fu - ture needs in earth's safe - keep - ing, thanks be to God.
in the har - vests we are shar - ing, God's will is done.
most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.

Text: Fred Pratt Green, 1903-2000
Music: Welsh traditional; arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958
Text © 1970 Hope Publishing Company

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Benediction: May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you, may the Lord look upon you with favor, and give you peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Closing Hymn

Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing

CLOSE OF SERVICE

Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing 259

1 Lord, dis - miss us with your bless - ing, Fill our hearts with
2 Thanks we give and ad - o - ra - tion For your Gos - pel's
3 Sav - ior, when your love shall call us From our strug - gling

joy and peace; Let us each, your love pos - sess - ing,
joy - ful sound, May the fruits of your sal - va - tion
pil - grim way, Let no fear of death ap - pall us,

Tri - umph in re - deem - ing grace. Oh, re - fresh us;
In our hearts and lives a - bound. Ev - er faith - ful,
Glad your sum - mons to o - bey. May we ev - er,

oh, re - fresh us, Trav - 'ling through this wil - der - ness.
ev - er faith - ful To your truth may we be found.
may we ev - er Reign with you in end - less day.

Text: alt. John Finckel, 1740-1817 vs. 1-3; Godwin Thorne, 1893-1903 vs. 2-4.

Dismissal: Now stay in place to love and serve the Lord! **Thanks be to God!**

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Unfolding Light (Pastor Steve Garnaas-Holmes, May 6, 2020)

Dearly Beloved,

Grace and Peace to you.

*I am the way, and the truth, and the life
No one comes to our Abba except through me."*

John 14:6

This is not a treasure map for conversion,
not a filter to screen out unbelievers,
no "One Way" directions to some secret entrance
to the favor of God. Jesus speaks
not to unbelievers but to us who already believe.

We want to know "the way."
There is no "way," Jesus says,
no set of instructions, no formula,
no Thing You Do to get to God.
He says, "I *am* the way. Me.
Not beliefs about me, but me, myself."

We don't come to God on Jesus' coattails,
behind him, or beside him,
but *through* him. Inside him.

Be Jesus. Be God's self-giving love
embodied in the world.
That's how you come to God.
Be God's love for you (yes, yourself!)—
which becomes God's love for the world.
Get right inside that love. Move through it.

We don't get close to God by our beliefs,
even our righteous obedience.
We get close through love.

Love is the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to God except through love.