

Truly God has listened;
he has given heed
to the words
of my prayer.

Psalm 66:19



Sunday Devotion

May 17, 2020

*Find a quiet place by yourself or
with another and come to God.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

We come to worship the God who inhabits our world and indwells our lives.

We need not look up to find God, we need only to look around:

within ourselves, beyond ourselves, into the eyes of another.

We need not listen for a distant thunder to find God, we need only listen to the music of life,

the words of children, the questions of the curious, the rhythm of a heartbeat.

We worship the God who inhabits our world and who indwells our lives.

OPENING PRAYER

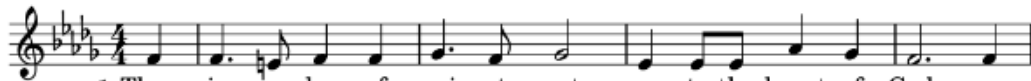
Source of all creation, maker of the world and everything in it, you are never far from each one of us.

We come this day seeking you, O giver of life and breath. Reveal yourself to us; dwell with us; abide

in us. We live because of you. We hope because of you. In the name of Jesus Christ in whom we

live, and the Spirit of Truth who abides in us. Amen.

HYMN Near to the Heart of God



1 There is a place of qui - et rest, near to the heart of God, a
2 There is a place of com - fort sweet, near to the heart of God, a
3 There is a place of full re - lease, near to the heart of God, a



Refrain

place where sin can - not mo - lest, near to the heart of God.
place where we our Sav - ior meet, near to the heart of God. O
place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.



Je - sus, blest Re - deem - er, sent from the heart of God, hold



us, who wait be - fore thee, near to the heart of God.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS

Lord of mercy, there are so many times in our lives when we feel alone. We wonder where you are.

We cry out to you in our confusion, pain, and hurt. And when you do not immediately grant the

prayers of our cries, we begin to doubt that you even care or exist. Stop us from going down this path
of self-destruction. Help us look around and find the many ways in which you have blessed our lives.

Forgive us when we are so quick to doubt and so arrogant in our demands of your responses. Give us a

spirit of patience and willingness to be ready to hear your voice. Strengthen us for the ministries of love and hope that you have placed before us; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

WORDS OF BLESSING

You are not alone. When the ways of this world press down on you, Christ takes upon himself your yoke. When the fears in this world entrap you, faith opens the door. When despair sucks the air out of the room, the Spirit blows in. You are not forgotten. You are loved, and your strength is renewed by the faith and love of others. You can do this. You will make it. You are not alone, for we are all with you, and Christ is with you. Rejoice and remember that Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON Psalm 66:8-20

⁸Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard,

⁹who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip.

¹⁰For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried.

¹¹You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs;

¹²you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

¹³I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows,

¹⁴those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.

¹⁵I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah

¹⁶Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me.

¹⁷I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue.

¹⁸If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

¹⁹But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer.

²⁰Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.

SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON John 14:15-21

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

MEDITATION

A man who underwent open-heart surgery told a friend about his experience. He said, "The day before surgery a nurse came into my room to visit. She took hold of my hand and told me to feel it and hold it."

"Now," she said, "during the surgery tomorrow you will be disconnected from your heart and you will be kept alive only by virtue of certain machines. When your heart is finally restored and the operation is over and you are recovering, you will eventually awaken in a special recovery room. You will be immobile for as long as six hours. You may be unable to move, or speak, or even to open your eyes, but you will be perfectly conscious. You will hear and you will know everything that is going on

around you. During those six hours, I will be at your side and I will hold your hand, exactly as I am doing now. I will stay with you until you are fully recovered. Although you may feel absolutely helpless, when you feel my hand, you will know that I will not leave you.’

“It happened exactly as the nurse told me,” the man continued. “I awoke and could do nothing. But I could feel the nurse’s hand in my hand for hours. And that made all the difference!”

It does make a difference when someone comes alongside us when we are in need. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. In some instances the Holy Spirit comes with power. At other times, the Holy Spirit comes as guide. But there are times when we need a friend, a counselor, a comforter. Then the Holy Spirit serves in those capacities as well.

The concept of the “advocate” came from the Hebrew word *goel* meaning the advocate or redeemer. Every family was supposed to have such an advocate or *goel*, to make things right when it all goes wrong. In the Old Testament, Boaz was the *goel* for the widows Naomi and Ruth. Job speaks of the need for a redeemer, or *goel*, who will restore his reputation. That’s why it was a tremendous act of faith when, just as it seemed that everyone abandoned him, he proclaimed, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God ...” (Job 19:25-26).

The *goel* redeemer, which in ancient times was the nearest male relative who was responsible for protecting a person's interests when that person was unable to do so, is our spiritual power of attorney.

This is the image that Jesus draws upon when he speaks of sending an Advocate, a *goel*, that is the Holy Spirit. Jesus refers to the Spirit as “ANOTHER advocate . . .” Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus has been the *goel*, advocate and comforter for humankind but particularly for those who were suffering. Saying there will be ANOTHER, Jesus is saying that the same Spirit that was in Jesus is the Spirit that will be with us in our time of need. The writer of John’s gospel is very clear that this is why Jesus departed from this world so that his Spirit could be available to every person in this world who opens himself or herself to him. This is the importance of the Trinity – Father, Son and *Holy Spirit*. The same Spirit that created this world and then became flesh in Jesus Christ returned so that he might be available to every believer for guidance, for comfort, for empowerment, for clarity of mission and for strength as we seek to be Christ’s people. All of this is wrapped up in that short phrase, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever . . .”

In other words, it is God himself who comes alongside us any time we are hurting or in distress. God is our Comforter, our Counselor, our Advocate, our Companion, our Friend. This is amazing good news to everyone who calls upon Christ in a time of need. The God of all creation does not forget us nor forsake us. Rather, whenever we are hurting, God the Spirit comes alongside us. This is the foundation of our hope. We are not alone. We don’t have to depend on our own strength. This makes it possible to survive. Emmanuel – this is God’s promise, God with us – alongside of us, within us. It is the very definition of Christian hope. We have expectation with confidence. (*If you are able, watch the video “The God Who Sees.” Unfortunately it can only be viewed through the internet:*

<https://godwhosees.com/#the-film>)

What is this kind of help called? I believe it is called “Hope.” Trusting, hoping, that God is here with us. We may walk through darkness and pain but God will not ever abandon us. God is with us and God will see us through to the light and peace.

Our help is here right now. Do you believe that? Well, at least some in our congregation do. I sent out a request earlier this week asking people to think about hope and what gives them hope. I asked for the following sentence to be complete: "I am hopeful because..." Here are the responses:

From Esther Welch: I can't imagine having a hope without faith. The other day a friend and I were discussing the pandemic, by phone at long distance, of course. Her question was, "Do you think God is trying to tell us something. My reply, "yes I do." He is reminding us to have faith. Two of my Psalm 25:4-5. Verse 5 ends with "my hope is in you all day long." That means 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. What more do we need than we have been blessed in our life time? Even though we have and will have doubtful and frightening happenings we will also have positive and hopeful ones that continue and will continue to be covered by the caring love and support of the Holy Spirit. Love, hope, faith and peace to all.

From Cyndi Dickson: You asked about what we find hopeful. I feel hopeful for the future of our communities when I see communities and individuals working together in a disaster. When a madman with a gun murdered 11 precious souls at Tree of Life synagogue people from all over the city came together to pray and hug each other. The local Muslim community spearheaded fund raising for the families of the victims.

I feel hopeful for that same reason when I see brave souls selflessly putting their own health at risk to serve the needs of others. And I feel hopeful for the future when I see young people become passionate about the environment and social justice.

If these brave people can rise above their own pain, fear, and feelings of discomfort, and become the hands of God perhaps there is hope for us yet.

From Dot Tinari: Help, I think I can do this, I believe in miracles, I can feel it in my heart. I learned from a bible passage to live one day at a time and, God never abandons us, we get knocked down, get up and keep going. There is always HOPE .

From Gail Shaffer: In a few weeks, PA house bill 2412 will come before the senate. If it passes, Real Estate will once again be open for business. Since I am on a very tight time line for selling my home, the situation has caused great anxiety and helplessness. However, no matter what the result, I am hopeful that God will give me calmness and a peace that passes understanding. I WILL be taken care of!!

From Jen Bush: I am hopeful because I see the good in people demonstrated every day. No matter what life/the world throws at us, people are good and that shows in the little things being done to support each other daily. Hope does not only rest on ourselves but also in the people around us. Sometimes when things seem lost and hope is fading someone will do something that may be small and insignificant to some but may mean a glimmer of hope for someone else. Small acts of kindness are what keeps hope alive.

From Eleanor Karpa: When I was young, I believed my grandparents were my lifeline. Later after a long process and a lot of years, I realize without a firm belief in God, our Savior, life can be very fearful, lonely and most especially scary now without a someone and someone being there for you.

From Donna Jagiela: I am hopeful that Jesus will keep his word that I will see my daughter Kimberly when I go to heaven. She died in a car accident at age 27, 13 years ago.

From Linda Bowers: I got a much appreciated uplifting book when I had run out of anything other than gruesome murder mysteries to read. I had placed the order several weeks ago and on the day I

was desperate for something else two books from Guideposts arrived. I felt very loved that God would pay attention to such a small need. He Loves ME !!!!!

Jesus said, "I will not leave you. I will not abandon you. I will send you a *goel*, a counselor, an advocate, a comforter, a friend who will care for you, who will offer you hope when there is none to be found, help when you are helpless, comfort when you can find none, and life in the face of death." I am hopeful, because Jesus is Emmanuel – God with us, forever. Amen.

PRAYER

Creator God, Source of all that is glorious and awesome, comforting and common, Divine Presence in all that lives and moves upon the earth, surround us with the assurance of your continued presence in every aspect of our lives.

God, there are times when our lives seem to be going along smoothly. We have worked hard to put things in order so that we feel in control. The paths we have chosen seem sure and clear. But just as we feel settled, something seems to happen and life throws us a curve. It is at those very moments when we need you most, when our faith is challenged and we are scrambling to straighten everything out again.

Help us to remember that in these moments when the world around us is crumbling, we are not alone. You are there to see us through and even carry us along, holding us up in ways that are often unperceivable. May we not only feel rest and comfort by the assurance of your presence, but also guidance and wisdom having received the knowledge of what to do next.

Assured by your presence and love, we pray that you would heal and sustain those of us and those we love who are ill or troubled. (add your own prayers)

We pray that you would protect and sanctify with your presence our homes, our communities and our churches.

We pray for your guidance for leaders in this country and in every community around the world. Motivate them with your will. Touch every heart with an awareness of the preciousness of your creation that we might act in defense of creation, our home, our neighbors, and this planet.

This is our prayer we offer you this day. Amen.

HYMN On Eagle's Wings

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord
Who abide in His shadow for life
Say to the Lord: "My refuge, my rock in whom I trust!"

Refrain: And He will raise you up on eagles' wings
Bear you on the breath of dawn
Make you to shine like the sun
And hold you in the palm of His hand

The snare of the fowler will never capture you
And famine will bring you no fear
Under His wings your refuge, His faithfulness your shield

Refrain

You need not fear the terror of the night
Nor the arrow that flies by day
Though thousands fall about you, near you it shall not come

Refrain

BENEDICTION

Wherever you are, continue to speak of what God has done.
Remind everyone that, despite everything, God loves us.
Wherever you find yourself, continue to sing of what God is doing.
Rejoice that God has not left us orphaned, but makes us one with everyone around us.
Whenever you can, continue to imagine what God will do. We will witness to that hope which seems to distant, yet is as close to us as our hearts.

And may God greet your prayers with constant love;
may Christ Jesus give you life through his own life;
and may the Spirit of truth abide with you and within you, always.
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
in the name of Christ. Amen.

