



Desert Cross Daily Prayer, Scripture, & Devotion
Week of August 17—August 22, 2020

You are encouraged to gather with the members of your household and join the members and friends of the Desert Cross community; though we be in separate locations, let us worship together at 6pm.

(We will be reading and reflecting on texts from the daily and Sunday lectionary.)

***Please note: Pastor Doris has graciously written our daily devotions since March. The time has come for us to share this privilege beginning this week. We will alternate weeks creating devotions and prayers, lending our voices to God's word. I share this so you will know which shepherd of Desert Cross is calling you to prayer each week. -PA

Monday, August 17, 2020

Let us come before the Lord in worship and prayer united together by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray,

God of all peoples, your arms reach out to embrace all who call upon you. We call upon your holy name now and ask that you fill us with your Spirit and be with us as we pray together. Amen.

A reading from Isaiah 56:1, 6-8

¹Thus says the Lord:

*Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.*

⁶And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—

⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.

⁸Thus says the Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,

*I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.*

Devotion:

The Prophet Isaiah delivers the word of the Lord to the Israelites waiting for deliverance in difficult times. This prophecy serves as a “reset” in confusing times sharing what really matters to God and God's people. God calls upon Israel to faithfully continue to do justice, even in hard times, and to continue following God's laws of love for the other. It focuses a distracted and confused people to center on loving God and neighbor while trusting God is present and trustworthy.

The center of all of this is the temple and worship: God's “house of prayer.” Do those words sound familiar? When Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem and saw it being used as a haven for injustice, he cleansed the temple and quoted Isaiah, “My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers!” He then began to teach God's word in the temple to remind the people about what has always mattered most: doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. These timeless words of God delivered by Isaiah confirm that God's love is for all people. Always remember, in good times and bad, we are gathered by an inclusive God who calls us to follow the example of Jesus who loved unconditionally, lived prayerfully, and served sacrificially in simple but mighty ways.

A favorite prayer of Mother Teresa of Calcutta who lived just this way is The Fragrance Prayer by Cardinal Newman. She prayed this with her sisters every day after sharing communion together. It brings to mind the holy smoke of prayers rising from the house of God:

Let us pray,

Holy, holy, holy
Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Dear Jesus, help me to speak Your fragrance wherever I go.

Flood my soul with your spirit and life.

Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly,

That my life may only be a radiance of yours.

Shine through me, and be so in me

That every soul I come in contact with

May feel your presence in my soul.

Let them look up and see no longer me, but only Jesus!

Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine,

So to shine as to be a light to others;

The light, O Jesus will be all from You; none of it will be mine;

It will be you, shining on others through me.

*Let me thus praise you the way you love best, by shining on those around me.
Let me preach you without preaching, not by words but by my example,
By the catching force of the sympathetic influence of what I do,
The evident fullness of the love my heart bears for You.
Amen.*

(The Fragrance Prayer by Cardinal Newman and adapted by Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gathered into community through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us,

**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.**

We give our hearts to the Lord, who is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love. Amen.

Tuesday, August 18, 2020

We open our hearts and minds to blessing of God, as we gather together to hear God's word and pray.

Let us pray,
God of all peoples, Teach us as disciples of your Son to love the world with compassion and constancy. Make us glad and help us sing for joy in all things! Amen.

A reading from Psalm 67

*1May God be merciful to us and bless us;
may the light of God's face shine upon us.*

**2Let your way be known upon earth,
your saving health among all nations.**

*3Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.*

**4Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations on earth.**

*5Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.*

**6The earth has brought forth its increase;
God, our own God, has blessed us.**

*7May God give us blessing,
and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe.*

Devotion:

Bless, Blessed, Blessing! We all need blessing, especially now! And we need to bless others. When I was at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque IA, one of the holiest privileges for me was speaking the Benediction to my classmates and professors in our daily worship. When I was a lay church member, it was my favorite part of the service. Now as a pastor, one of the things I miss most in worship is the holy privilege of granting the Benediction upon our congregation. I see people lean in to those words of blessing and take them with them when they are sent from worship to live out faith in daily life.

Psalm 67 is considered the Lord's Prayer of the Old Testament. It is a joy because it is pure blessing and grace for God's people! Yet, we also learn that we are blessed to be a blessing. Psalm 67 is based on the blessing God gave to Aaron in the middle of the Israelites' desert wandering to remind them of God's presence and love (look it up in Numbers 6:24-26). You will recognize these verses as one of the Benedictions we say at Desert Cross. This Psalm takes the blessing a step further to include all peoples and to use the blessing outside of ourselves to *be* a blessing and make God's love known in the world. So, remember in the midst of our pandemic wandering, you are blessed to be a blessing. Be assured of God's love *for you!*

Let us pray,

Holy God, bless our hearts with your love, our spirits with your strength, and our hands with your mercy. May we be your prayerful people this day who bring our needs to you.

We ask your blessing of grace this day for all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit. Fill them with hope and healing.

We ask your blessing of grace this day for all who are affected by this pandemic by distance, financial burden, stress, change, employment, sickness, grief, or loneliness. Fill them with your peace that passes understanding.

Be with all who work on the frontlines to bring healing and health back to our country and world. Fill them with your strength and joy.

We ask your blessing of grace on the new ways we live, work, and worship together, yet apart. Fill the distance with loving thoughts, words, and deeds. Help us to focus on Jesus and making his love for us and for all people known in what we do and what we say. Guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus, Amen.

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gathered into community through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us,

**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.**

We give our hearts to the Lord, who is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love. Amen.

Wednesday, August 19, 2020

We come before you, Holy God, to offer worship and praise and prayer.

Let us pray,

Gracious Father, you created us with diverse gifts and talents to be used for the good of all. Help us to work harmoniously for the glory of your kingdom. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

A reading from Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

[Paul writes:] ¹I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ^{2a}God has not

rejected his people whom he foreknew.

²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received **mercy** because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the **mercy** shown to you, they too may now receive **mercy**. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be **merciful** to all.

Devotion:

God is faithful. Human unfaithfulness does not undo God's faithfulness. Therefore, Paul writes, even though Israel has sinned, God has not rejected Israel. These verses are all about our favorite Lutheran topics, grace and mercy! This difficult passage relies on the mystery of God to explain how God's mercy overcomes sin and disobedience and not only that, but God's mercy crosses boundaries. God's grace and mercy are not reserved for the Israelites. God's grace and mercy are not reserved for the Gentiles. Or Christians. Or any other group you could name. No, God's grace and mercy are for *all* people. That was a new concept when Paul, a Jewish man, was writing, and he said it many different ways to get his point across that the blessing of God's gifts cross the boundary of the Israelites to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and beyond!

Paul emphasizes that human disobedience is canceled out by God's divine mercy. Isn't that good news we need to hear? Mercy seems to be a bit of a foreign concept in the 21st century, as well. There is much debate about who is in, who is out. Who is deserving and who is not. Who should be at the table and who should not. But Paul writes that God's will and desire is to cover all people in mercy so that by grace all are in and all are at God's table! A measure of mercy in all arenas of life today would go a long way. Meditate on mercy today and ask God to fill your heart with grace. Notice in the reading how Paul used the word "mercy" 4 times in 2 verses. That means "look at me, I'm important!" Embrace the mercy that is yours! Here are links to a few songs with lyrics about mercy. Listen to them now and/or in the days ahead to reflect on God's mercy and how we share it:

[Mercy](#), Matt Redman, Your Grace Finds Me

[Mercy, Mercy](#), Hillsong UNITED, Zion

Let us pray,

God of mercy, Fill our hearts with your grace and mercy. Help us to use our gifts to serve you sharing mercy with all people. Help us to reflect on what mercy means in our church, our lives, our families, our neighborhoods, our work, our country, and our world. We need you to show us how to be merciful in difficult times such as these. Fill our minds and hearts with the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge you bring, for from you and through you and to you are all things. To you be the glory forever. Amen.

A Prayer for the Power of the Spirit among the People of God

by ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton & Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry

God of all power and love, we give thanks for your unfailing presence and the hope you provide in times of uncertainty and loss. Send your Holy Spirit to enkindle in us your holy fire. Revive us to live as Christ's body in the world: a people who pray, worship, learn, break bread, share life, heal neighbors, bear good news, seek justice, rest and grow in the Spirit. Wherever and however we gather, unite us in common prayer and send us in common mission, that we and the whole creation might be restored and renewed, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gathered into community through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us,

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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.**

We give our hearts to the Lord, who is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love. Amen.

Thursday, August 20, 2020

We open our hearts and minds to the mercy and grace of God, as we gather together to hear God's word and pray.

Let us pray,

O God our defender, rescue your people from despair, deliver your sons and daughters from fear, and preserve us in the faith of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

A reading from Genesis 45:1-15

Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers

45 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.' ¹² And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. ¹³ You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." ¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

¹⁴ Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

Devotion:

If you've never read the epic story of Jacob's family in Genesis 37-50 starring Joseph, the beloved youngest son of Jacob, do so soon! It is an incomparable "rags to riches" story, full of nightmares/dreams, betrayal/forgiveness, despair/hope, sin/grace, cruelty/mercy. Yet Joseph always remains the same at his core. Through all his trials, he is humble, loving, and full of mercy. Joseph's story puts flesh on Paul's words we pondered yesterday about mercy.

At the tender age of 17, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers never to see them again. He eventually ended up the most powerful man in Egypt. In a time of famine, his brothers came from suffering Canaan to prospering Egypt asking Joseph (not recognizing him) for help for his father's family. Joseph had all power to punish his brothers, but instead of revenge, he had mercy upon them. He made peace with those who hurt him and reunited his family.

Notwithstanding his brothers' evil actions, God used Joseph to save many lives outside of his family. Joseph knew he was blessed to be a blessing and shared the mercy he had first received. This story tells us God works all things for good for those who love him. Hang onto hope in times such as these and look for the good happening. And may we each live out our faith to make good things come about that are in our power and sphere of influence.

Let us pray,

We pray with the words from the 19th century hymn, *My Faith Looks Up to Thee*:

My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine!
Now hear me while I pray,
take all my guilt away;
O let me from this day
be wholly Thine.

May Thy rich grace impart
strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire;
as Thou hast died for me,
O may my love to Thee
pure, warm, and changeless be,
a living fire.

While life's dark maze I tread,
and griefs around me spread,
be Thou my guide;
bid darkness turn to day,
wipe sorrow's tears away,
nor let me ever stray
from Thee aside.

When ends life's transient dream,
when death's cold, sullen stream
shall o'er me roll,
blest Savior, then in love,
fear and distrust remove;
O bear me safe above,
a ransomed soul. (*ELW 759, Public Domain*)
Amen.

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gathered into community through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
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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.**

We give our hearts to the Lord, who is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love. Amen.

Friday, August 21, 2020

We open our hearts and minds to the unity of God, as we gather together to hear God's word and pray.

Let us pray,

Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the Lord who made us. For the Lord is our God, and we are the people God shepherds, the flock God guides. Amen. (Psalm 95:6-7)

A reading from Psalm 133

The Blessedness of Unity

*1 How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!*
*2 It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.*
*3 It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.*
*For there the Lord ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.*

Devotion:

This short poem calls for unity in a divided kingdom. It is the perfect response to the story of Joseph who brings unity among his brothers in a time of conflict. Psalm 133 tells us that God is blessed when all brothers and sisters of the human race live together in unity. The lavish image of the precious oil running down Aaron's beard shows the extravagant nature of unity. The dew of Hermon shows unity is needed just as much as moisture is needed on the mountains of Zion which receive little rain.

In this time of national and denominational church division, what does unity look like for you? Reflect on the words for unity: harmony, unison, accord. Where are the places we see unity giving hope that we could build on? God's dream of shalom needs unity to be accomplished. In what small ways might we work toward unity in our homes, neighborhoods, cities, and churches that might display the precious gift harmony?

Psalm 133 unifies all our readings showing us that prayer, mercy, and unity all come together in God's blessing of eternal life in Jesus Christ through his grace. The Apostle Paul brings it home in Ephesians 4:1-3, "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." May we embrace unity this day hopeful that we might walk the earth as brothers and sisters in all things.

Let us pray,

Lord of harmony, bind us together. Grant us your peace that passes understanding. Bless us with the Holy Spirit who is the bond of peace between the Father and the Son and between all of God's people. Send your healing waters where they are needed, bringing health and wellness to our sickness, pain, and anxiety. Strengthen our churches, communities, country, and world, with your mercy, grace, and love that we might be one as you are our one Lord. Let us feel your presence among us, guiding our feet in the way of peace, and may the Peace Prayer of St. Francis be our prayer this day:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Gathered into community through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us,

**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.**

We give our hearts to the Lord, who is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love. Amen.

Saturday, August 22, 2020

We open our hearts and minds to the healing of God, as we gather together to hear God's word and pray.

Let us pray,

God of grace, guide us with your word into your way of love. By your spirit nurture our hearts to receive the seed of your word that we might grow in faith, hope, and love. Amen.

A reading from Matthew 14:34-36

34 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 After the people of that place recognized him, they sent word throughout the region and brought all who were sick to him, 36 and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Devotion:



Do you know where we are in the gospel story? This map references the Feeding miracle, walking on water, and the destination of Gennesaret. This passage ends the miracle story of Jesus walking on the water in the storm to the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples made a declaration of faith in Jesus and literally put themselves in his hands on the stormy waters.

The gospel of Mark actually says they were headed to Bethsaida but the wind blew them to Gennesaret. No worries, Jesus unloaded the boat and got to work.

There was healing work to be done wherever Jesus went. His fame preceded him, and Matthew says Jesus allowed people to touch the fringe of his cloak and be healed. The fringe on his cloak would have been purple tassels that Jews placed as reminder's of God's commandments. Remember Jesus' summation of the commandments? Love God, Love your Neighbor. I imagine people's hearts being healed by God's love.

Jesus met the needs of suffering people when they came to Him for help no matter where he was. No matter where we are, what storm we find ourselves in, we can put ourselves in Jesus' hands in faith that he is with us in the boat and out of the boat. And when we find ourselves in unexpected places, we might look for God's work to be done even among strangers. There is always ministry to be done and Jesus is always with us. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray,

Lord of the sea and sky, storms rage around us and in us, and we long for you to still the storm. Help us to trust you. Fill us with love for you that overflows as love for our neighbors. Bring healing and faith to all who call on you. Help us to find purpose when we are in unexpected places in our lives. Let our hearts feel your presence and the comfort of your Holy Spirit. Help us to open ourselves to you and follow where you lead. Lord, may Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer be ours today:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference. Amen

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit

Gathered into community through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught us,

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
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