



Desert Cross Daily Prayer, Scripture, & Devotion
Week of August 3—August 8, 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.)

Monday, August 3, 2020

Let us come before the Lord in worship and prayer; though physically distant, we are united into community by the power of the Spirit of God.

Let us pray,

Gracious Lord, we are grateful to begin another week, though our spirits are weary. Help us to find joy in your presence, despite the circumstances of this pandemic. Deepen our faith so that we can look to you for our hope; we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

A reading from Isaiah 55:1-5

¹*Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.*

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.*

³*Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.*

⁴*See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.*

⁵*See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.*

Devotion:

The importance of feeding people who are hungry is a theme that is woven throughout Scripture. God wants all of God's people to have adequate food to eat. In this text from Isaiah, the focus of God's benevolence is clearly extended in v5 to include all the nations:

*⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.*

In yesterday's gospel we read about how Jesus tells the disciples not to send the people away hungry but to provide food for them. Feeding the hungry and helping the poor and homeless and needy are basic Christian values. As people of faith and followers of Christ, we are all called to this mission to provide and care for the needy.

Yesterday, I was dismayed to read this headline in the Los Angeles Times:

Almost 30 million Americans didn't have enough to eat last week. The article went on to explain that this meant that at some point in the last 7 days (ending July 21) 30 million Americans reported they had not had enough to eat. The Census Bureau's Weekly Household Pulse Survey further reported that for 5.42 million Americans the situation was even worse – they indicated that they “often [had] not enough to eat.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has put millions of Americans out of work. They had been receiving an extra \$600 per week benefit, but that was scheduled to stop at the end of July. As of this writing, there has been no replacement aid legislation passed by Congress.

Recently a new advocacy ministry in our synod has been started. LAMA – Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Arizona will address the issue of hunger and food insufficiency. As Christians we are called to participate in the work of advocacy. For more information and to add your support to this important ministry, contact: director@lamaz.org. On the national level, go to <https://www.elca.org/advocacy> for more information about the ELCA's advocacy program

Let us pray,

God of the covenant, you gather all people into your kingdom, and you promise us food from your tree of life. Nourish us with your Word, that empowered by your Spirit we may love and serve one another and the world you have made. We pray for the Spirit to empower us to act – to supply the physical needs of the poor, the powerless, the hungry, and the homeless.

God of grace, dispel the fear and anxiety produced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Heal the sick, grant your peace to the dying, comfort the grieving, and protect all the care givers from this infection. Grant insight to the scientists and researchers working on a vaccine and other drugs to combat this virus. Make us wise in our personal response to this pandemic. Guide our political leaders as they make decisions that affect our lives and our livelihoods. Help us to battle this virus as one nation united together around a common goal. Provide a safe path forward to school administrators, teachers, students, and parents as they make difficult and complex decisions about opening schools. Help us to remember that you are with us always.

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 4, 2020

We come before the Lord in worship and prayer, united by the power of the Spirit of God.

Let us pray,

Gracious God, draw us close into the circle of your love and open our ears to hear your voice of grace above the noise of the world. We are so very grateful for the gift of faith and we humbly ask that you increase and deepen our faith and help us to love our neighbor during these unusual times; we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

A reading from Romans 9:1-5

¹I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—²I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. ⁴They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Devotion:

In this section of Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he addresses the place of Israel in God's saving plan. He opens by highlighting how Israel's heritage and legacy include being God's children, having God's covenants, being given God's law, participating in worship of God, and receiving divine promises. Yet, they do not recognize Jesus as the son of God, as the Messiah, and Paul laments this.

Faith is a gift from God and, as people of faith, we cherish this gift. Sadly, there are people we care about, perhaps family members or neighbors, friends, co-workers, or colleagues who have not embraced this gift. They are missing out on the hope, the forgiveness, and the grace that our faith provides.

Some may have actually turned away from their faith because they have been hurt or rejected by the church in which they were raised. Others may have gone off chasing shiny objects that have lured them from the faith of their mothers and fathers. Some are turned off by churches that do not respect the separation of church and state and endorse a particular political viewpoint, or are unwelcoming to people who may love differently than they do. The more ancient style of worship may be a turn off to some. And, of course, many unchurched people view the church as too judgmental and hypocritical. What can we do?

First and foremost, let us continue to pray for those who have not embraced the gift of faith. Invite them to be part of our community. Forward one or two of the worship videos to your kids and grandkids, or your neighbors. Share these prayers and devotions with someone who might be having a hard time being alone so much during this pandemic. Share the link to Stories of Joy with your coworkers and colleagues. Suggest the meditation resources on the Desert Cross website to someone who is having trouble sleeping at night, or the mental health resources to someone who is struggling to find their peace. A neighbor with small children might like the virtual VBS resources. They may not watch the video or open the prayers, but the gesture of welcome and care will still be received and appreciated.

Faith is a gift from God and it is between the person and the Creator, Redeemer, and Spirit of God, but as people of faith tasked with sharing the good news of Jesus we can provide nudges of grace. And, of course, the best sermon one can offer is a life full of love and lived with compassion and kindness for all.

Let us pray,

God of grace, we pray for all those who are unchurched or estranged from the church. May we be instruments of your grace to any who are outside of the circle of your love. Open their eyes to the gift of faith that is right before them, help them to move into the sphere of your love and grace.

God of love, help us to heal the broken and wounded relationships in our families and among our friends and neighbors. Especially during this time of pandemic, we are all so emotionally vulnerable to hurt feelings. Help us to bring grace and love into those tender spaces where hurt is present.

Almighty and merciful God, in our pain, our weariness, and our anxiety, especially regarding this COVID-19 pandemic, surround us with your care, protect us by your loving

might, and permit us to enjoy health and strength and peace.

O most loving Father, you want us to give thanks in all circumstances and to lay all our cares on you, knowing that you care for us. Grant that the fears and anxieties in this mortal life may not hide from us the light of your immortal love shown to us in your Son, 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,

**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 5, 2020

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

Let us pray,

We desire that the Holy Spirit would open our hearts and our minds to the wisdom of the Holy Scriptures; we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

A reading from Genesis 32:22-31

²²[At night Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. ²⁴Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." ²⁷So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." ²⁹Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." ³¹The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

Devotion:

I have always had a special fondness for this text. I have done my share of wrestling with God over the years – I have wandered far away from the faith and feel like I have circled the mat with God on many occasions. For years I skipped church completely and then I went to church, but I was more wary than worshipful.

The good news is that God wins every wrestling match – God won with Jacob and God won the match with me. There are no doubts that we may have, no confusion about sin and judgment and grace and forgiveness that draws us back into that wrestling mode that is any match for God. God's strength and goodness always prevails. God will always take us in, embrace and bless us.

This is an unsettling and disruptive time in our lives, a time when our doubts and anxieties about our own goodness and worth may make us combative. Many are afraid for themselves or for the people they love, many are worried about their lives and their livelihood. There is a lot of fear and anger over what we are enduring on all sides of the political map. This is a time when our human brokenness wants to shake a fist at the heavens and yell a few choice words. Where are you, God and why are we going through this? You want to fight with God; God can take it. God's loving hold on you is strong enough to win any wrestling match. God has got you. You can trust that you are covered by God's grace and mercy. (If you are experiencing spiritual anguish, then the DCLC pastoral staff is also available for support.)

Let us confess our faith,

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile us and make us new.
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church;
to celebrate God's presence,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray,

Lord, thank you for each moment,
for the midnight moment,
the loneliness,
the fretful wondering.
for the watchful stars,
the long ache,
the sleepless wait,
for my restless heart
and the hope straining in me.

Focus me
to see whatever comes as a gift
and to praise you in it.

Lord, thank you for each moment,
for the high-noon moment,
the job,
the necessary routine,
for the sweaty struggle,
the high risk challenge,
the impulse to change
for my fierce heart
and the courage gathering in me.

Ground me
to wrestle with whatever comes as a gift
and to praise you in it.

(Excerpted from "**Thank You for Each Moment**" by Ted Loder, from the book
"Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle," © 1984 Innisfree Press, Inc., Philadelphia,
PA.)

God of grace, protect all the hospital workers, heal the sick, grant peace to the dying,
comfort the grieving, give hope to the anxious and despairing, and joy to all of God's
children.

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.

Thursday, August 6, 2020

Let us come before the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, to offer worship and
praise and prayer.

Let us pray,

Creator God, we give you thanks for our life and for the many blessings that we have
received. Transform us into the people we were created to be; in Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

A reading from Psalm 17:1-7, 15

¹*Hear a just cause, O Lord; give heed to my cry;
listen to my prayer, which does not come from lying lips.*

²*Let my vindication come forth from your presence;
let your eyes be fixed on justice.*

³*Examine my heart, visit me by night,
melt me down; you will find no impurity in me.*

⁴*I have not regarded what others do;
at the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent.*

⁵*My footsteps hold fast to your well-worn path;
and my feet do not slip.*

⁶*I call upon you, O God, for you will answer me;
incline your ear to me and hear my words.*

⁷*Show me your marvelous lovingkindness,
O Savior of those who take refuge at your right hand from those who rise against
them.*

¹⁵*But at my vindication I shall see your face;
when I awake, I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.*

Devotion:

**⁶*I call upon you, O God, for you will answer me; incline your ear to me
and hear my words.* ⁷*Show me your marvelous lovingkindness,***

Don't we all need someone who will listen to us; someone who wants to hear and listen to what is on our mind, to the needs and desires that are in our heart? To be human is to need to be heard, to be recognized. The psalmist shows us here that he has this kind of a personal, close relationship with God, a relationship in which he trusts that God hears him and will respond.

None of us has been prepared for this season of disruption that we are living through. None of us was prepared for this alteration in how we live and work. Some of us don't even believe this crisis is real. Some of us are struggling to determine what is an appropriate response to keep ourselves and our families safe. There is an amorphous sense of anxiety and fear and confusion about the future surrounding us all.

The message of the psalmist is to come to God, come to God with all of your feelings and God will hear you and listen. Pray your fears and confusion and God will listen. I find myself journaling my prayers as a way to sort out how I am feeling during this time of isolation. (There is information on the Desert Cross website about journaling as prayer, or contact Pastor Doris at dnolan@desertcross.org for more information.)

Also, please don't be shy about calling on your friends and family and your church staff for support during these difficult days. We are brothers and sisters in Christ and we need to support each other as we make our way through these difficult times.

Let us pray,

Gracious God,
We pray this day for our nation, heal the divisions that are growing deeper. Help us to unite as one people sharing this beautiful land together.

We pray for healing for all those who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, from COVID-19 and all other illnesses.

Bless and protect medical professionals, first responders, health care workers, and all whose jobs are considered essential.

Bless and give wisdom to school administrators, teachers, and parents as they work out ways to provide our children with a good education during these days of COVID-19.

Help us to make wise decisions that protect us and our families. Bless and protect the unemployed, the poor and those experiencing financial insecurity.

We pray for the children and youth, the widows and the powerless; all who are fearful, anxious, and stressed by the limitations imposed on their lives by this pandemic.

We pray for our leaders; give them wisdom and compassion so that their focus will be to provide for and protect their citizens.

We pray for the church, during this time when we must maintain physical distance because of love for our neighbor. May we be patient and make wise decisions about in-person gathering, based on care of our community.

Deepen our faith, increase our hope, and strengthen us in love; we pray this in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. 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.

Friday, August 7, 2020

We come before the Lord, to offer our worship and praise and prayers of intercession.

Let us pray,

Gracious God, we praise and thank you for the gift of another week lived in your love. Forgive us for our shortcomings and grant us the mercy to forgive ourselves for our failures this week, and give us hope for tomorrow; we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

A reading from Acts 18:24-28

Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. ²⁷ And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.

Devotion:

The writer of the book of Acts is a skilled writer. In a few short verses he tells us the story of the relationship between this charismatic preacher named Apollos and the power couple Priscilla and Aquila who nurtured him in the faith toward a more accurate understanding of the good news of Jesus. It is significant that they took Apollos under their wing; it gives us a model for how to respond to the newly passionate in the faith.

New Testament scholar Matthew Skinner has written a new book: "Acts: Catching Up with the Spirit." Here is an excerpt:

Acts was written to remind churches at the end of the first century that they stood in the legacy of God's faithfulness to the first generations of Christians. Acts wasn't pining to return to the past, as if to say, "I wish Peter and Paul were still alive; they'd know what we have to do next." Acts was declaring that the word of God could still be heard, as it has always been, in the corporate existence of the church. God's salvation manifests itself in the ways ordinary people once bore witness to the power of the good news, and how that power still brings people into nurturing communities, exposes and heals injustices, and creates new friendships that are not restricted by old lines of separation. As a result of that power, the people of God experience newfound wholeness and boldness through worship, learn to walk in the forgiveness available for the evils they have committed and suffered, encounter God in times of sufferings, and do their part to nudge the world toward alignment with God's intentions for humanity's well-being. (pgs 114 – 115)

In these unprecedented times, when our ability to gather in person has been suspended out of neighborly love, as we wonder about the future of the church, let us find hope in the story of Acts when the church met new challenges and opportunities and continued in its faithful proclamation of the good news of Jesus. May the Desert Cross community find new ways to "nudge the world toward alignment with God's intentions for humanity's well-being."

Let us pray,

God of our mothers and fathers long gone and treasured,
God of our grandchildren yet to be and awaited,
God of our years, our days, and even of this moment:
Our lives are deeply rooted in miracles before us,
Our faith is richly set in courage running thick,
Our vocation is shaped by all those
who have risked for your purposes.

And now, in our remembering, we are made mindful
of our own place of call, and
our own time of obedience.

We pray for ourselves and for your whole church,
courage beyond our easier timidity,
vision beyond our present tense,
restlessness beyond our ready settlements, and
yielding beyond our will to manage.

Give us appropriate yielding that we may be like our remembered
ones in freedom and love for you. We pray in the name of Jesus
whom we remember until he comes again. Amen.

(This prayer is from the book "Awed to Heaven, Rooted to Earth: Prayers of Walter Brueggemann, edited by Edwin Searcy. © 2003 Augsburg Fortress)

God of grace, we pray that you will heal the sick, protect hospital workers, give peace to the dying, comfort the grieving, bring laughter to the children, give hope to the young, and calm to the anxious; we pray in Jesus' name. 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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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 8, 2020

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

Let us pray,
Gracious God, we are grateful for this weekend and the sabbath rest that it allows. Help us to focus on resting in you; draw our hearts into the circle of your loving embrace. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

A reading from Matthew 16:1-4

The Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test Jesus they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' ³ And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." Then he left them and went away.

Devotion:

Human beings are always looking for signs. Life is complicated, the future is always uncertain and unknown (even if we like to pretend that it is not; that self-deception is one more thing the corona virus has taken from us). We are people trying to make sense out of this complex life that we have been given on this wild and beautiful and sometimes unfathomable earth in which we live. So we study the sky and the oceans and try to find signs of what has been and what is to come. What we are looking for are signs of hope.

Jesus points us to the sign of Jonah; by this he means that we should look to the three holiest of days that tell us all we need to know. Jesus points us to his death and resurrection; the empty tomb is the only sign of hope that we need.

As people of faith, as we face all of the stress and uncertainty of these unusual times, let us stay centered in the joy and promise of the resurrection.

Let us pray,
Holy Spirit of God, grant us the courage to confront our fears and confess our failings. Transform us into people who practice mercy and offer love to all.

Loving God, in whom we place our trust, we pray for our nation as we face continued suffering and uncertainties during this pandemic. Give wisdom and compassion to the leaders in our country as they make important and difficult decisions that affect all of us.

We pray for all affected by this virus: the front line medical providers, the EMTs, all hospital and care facility workers, scientists and researchers, all who are ill with this virus, all who are ill in body, mind or spirit from any cause, the homeless, unemployed and those with inadequate financial resources, the lonely and the anguished, the fearful and the despairing. Comfort all who mourn.

Give us courage to face these days not with fear but with compassion, concern, and acts of service, trusting in the promise of new life through our Lord and Savior, 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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Give us this day our daily bread;
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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.