

PRAYERS, SONGS AND PSALMS

Louie V. Andrews

I love the Bible, especially the Psalms. I don't know when the love affair with the Bible began. It might have been when Mrs. Cartledge let me be a robber as we acted out the story of the Good Samaritan. Perhaps it was when Mrs. Sneed told the stories of the missionary journeys of Paul. I was blessed to grow up in a home where the Bible was read and discussed daily. But my love of the Psalms began in 1975 at a place known as Camp Hanover. Dr. Isabel Rogers stood before our group and read Psalm 139. It is the one which begins, "O Lord, you have searched me and known me." Dr. Izzie closed her Bible and challenged us to rewrite what we had heard. I have been rewriting the Psalms ever since.

The Psalms were written over a period of 500 years by kings and poets. The ones with which we are most familiar are songs describing the wonder of creation and the reign of God as an eternal king. In *Psalms of Creation*, the world is not only perfect but functions according to the parameters created by the law of God. These songs transmit a joy that often seems too good to be true. The skeptics challenge this perceived perfection. Over a third of the Psalms reflect anger, bitterness, and even resentment toward God. *Psalms of Lament* often begin with rage, sometimes holding God accountable, but always acknowledging without the mercy and grace of God, we are without hope. Finally there is a new song sung with joy even in the midst of peril. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Though I walk through the valley of death, you are with me." *Psalms of Re-Creation* are written with clear eyes and a wounded heart. They recognize God's holy imagination in both creation and humanity. The poet sings it is our responsibility to join God in maintaining that beautiful imagination.

For the past five years I have written prayers used in worship. Most are rewrites of the Psalm of the Day. Occasionally events ranging from Pentecost to Memorial Day will demand a more contextual prayer. I have chosen some of my favorites to be included in this booklet. The first three sections include Prayers of Creation, Lament and Re-Creation. The final section includes prayers from Advent to Thanksgiving. I hope you might use these as an addition to your daily devotions. My greatest wish is these prayers will inspire you to encounter all of the original Psalms.

Everything I know about the Psalms comes from the genius of Walter Brueggemann. His personal instruction and written words have been my inspiration.

Sue Fulton has taken a great deal of time from her golf game and grandchild to edit these prayers. Her eyes are worn beyond repair from my misuse of the English language.

Jamie Heard saved copies of all the original prayers. This made it possible to skip wading through 250 bulletins. She also placed these prayers on the church web site.

But most important is Deb. To write requires going into a dark silent place hoping to find some light. Somehow Deb understands my need to take those trips. My understanding of love begins and ends with her. Surely living with a minister guarantees one's place in heaven.

PRAYERS OF CREATION

ADORATION

Gracious God, from Your imagination was born the mountains, rivers, and oceans. We are in awe of Your creative genius. Mold us, O Creator, that we might always be Your finest design. Blessed Jesus, the perfection of Your life models God's highest intentions. Guide our feet, and our hands, and our hearts that we might strive for your righteousness. Holy Spirit, come among us. Place within our souls a love for God's creation and a reverence for Christ's perfection. O Three in One, make us one with You.

GOD OF CREATION

O Lord our God, how magnificent is the works of Your hands. You called creation into being with a single word. You divided the mountains and oceans with a single thought. You ran Your fingers through the dry dust forming river beds and spacious lakes. Trees point their heads to the sky in adoration. Flowers illumine the landscape with colors beyond our imagination. We stand in awe of Your holy craftsmanship. O Lord our God, how magnificent is the works of Your hands.

GIVING THANKS

We give thanks, O God, for this sanctuary, this holy place. We come with our different histories and different stories to this sacred place. We come with our joys and our sorrows. We come with our praise and complaints, but most of all, we come to give thanks. We lift our hands in praise for the beauty of this earth. We lift our heart in praise for Your covenant of grace. We lift our mind in praise for the expectations You place upon us. We come to this place, as different as night and day, but one in You. Heal us, restore us, challenge us, enlighten us. This is the day You have made. Together we rejoice in it.

HOLY INSTRUCTION

With whom shall I compare You? All other gods are created in my likeness. They flatter me, encourage me, indulge me, and even serve me. But You will exist regardless of my presence. You and You alone are God, and in You I will put my trust. Teach me Your ways that I might walk in Your path. Teach me Your ways that I am not left to my own desires. Teach me Your ways in order that I am not easily deceived. Teach me Your ways that I might rise beyond what I never imagined possible. Teach me to be merciful. Teach me to be gracious. Teach me to be slow to anger. Teach me to be more loving. Teach me Your ways, O God, that I might know a truth beyond my own limited imagination.

GIFTS

For tongues that proclaim Your word, we give You thanks. For voices that lift Your name in praise, we give You thanks. For hands that clean, mop, rake, plant, and renew, we give You thanks. For strong backs that carry wood and food, we give You thanks. For curious and inquisitive minds that raise questions, we give You thanks. For eyes that see beyond the moment and memories that recall the past, we give You thanks. For hearts that love, forgive, and exhibit compassion, we give You thanks. For ears that listen to You and others, we give You thanks. For the church, Your blessed and bewildering creation of recognizable grace, we give You thanks.

PRAISE

We search the skies for answers and are comforted by the majesty of a thousand lights flung across the sky. We walk through the valleys of our own discontent and hear the rushing waters of life giving hope to all of creation. The heavens proclaim Your righteousness. The hills and valleys boast of Your handiwork. We praise you, O God. The light of Your dawn fills our heart with hope. The joy of Your sunsets reminds us that even in the darkness You are to be exalted. We sing our songs of praise to You, O God, for You are our Alpha and Omega.

A NOISY GOD

O Mighty One, who will not keep quiet, forgive us when we ignore Your voice. You call us to acts of justice, forgiveness, mercy, and grace. You expect us to sacrifice our time and talents. You demand we worship You and You alone. But all we desire is Your blessings and salvation. Tune us into Your voice of righteousness. Let us be in step with Your desire for shalom. Capture us with Your songs of joy and reconciliation. Let us be amazed by Your melodious harmonies. May they liberate our ears, and our heart, and our soul.

THE MESSYNESS OF LIFE

Gracious and loving God, our media outlets daily scream of injustice perpetuated against the very essence of life. We try to look away but are drawn to tragedy much like a moth to the flame. Speak a word of hope. Fill our ears with stories of wholeness and reconciliation lest our hearts be hardened by the noise of the day. Allow Your steadfastness and faithfulness to meet. Permit Your righteousness and peace to kiss. Allow Your shalom to spring from the ground, feeding our hopes and dreams. Make this a new day, a good day, a holy day.

TRUTH

O God, who is Truth beyond all truth, hear our prayer as we humbly come before You. We easily embrace the chatter that collects so easily in our ears. We claim the vision of others. We collect half-truths without a moment's consideration. Then, the words from our mouth hardly resemble the truth from Your word. Teach us the truth of steadfast love. Teach us the truth of forgiveness. Teach us the truth of respecting each other. Teach us the truth that is uniquely You. Teach us Your enlightened path that we might be a light to others.

MEDITATION

Gracious God, my unspoken thoughts remain between You and me but the words I speak are heard and interpreted a thousand ways. Make my speech as pure as a mountain stream. Make my words a reflection of Your grace and mercy. Keep my tongue above reproach and when I fail, as I so often do, keep my wayward words from falling on sensitive ears. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to You, O Lord, my rock and Redeemer.

HOLY COVENANT

O God of mercy, grace, and steadfast love, we pray that You remember Your covenant. We, who marvel at Your creative powers, remain dependent on Your mercy and forgiveness. We, who claim to be Your people, cling to the idea that You alone are God. Transform us with grace and clothe us with love that we might live as caring and compassionate people. Make us living symbols of Your covenant. Blessed be You, O Lord, creator and sustainer of life, forgiver of sins, and lover of all. Remember us as You remember your covenant.

ADMIRATION

O God, we marvel at Your creative genius. We are surrounded by an array of colors that reach into the sky and embrace us with compassion and grace. Never let us grow weary of gazing toward the Blue Ridge Mountains. Never let us take for granted the sounds of a laughing brook or geese taking flight across the horizon. This is Your land, O Lord and we are just renting space for a moment. Who is the King of Glory? It is You, the creator of the heavens and earth.

WE WHO TAKE OURSELVES TOO SERIOUSLY

We who proudly occupy the center of our universe come to You in prayer. Hear us as we remind You how our world should be run. Give attention to our voices for Your almighty concentration seems to be slipping. Listen to us! Our wisdom and experience assures us we know how You should proceed. We have waited so long. Our patience is wearing thin. For goodness sake hear our prayers, respond to our needs, and act on our intuition. We humbly offer these words, never forgetting You are the potter and we are the clay.

PRAISE AND WONDER

On a winter's day we stand on the highest pinnacle and marvel at Your handiwork. On a summer's night, as the stars fill the sky, we never doubt who determined their place. Autumn evenings regale us with a radiance of color. Each spring morning awakens us with cascading waters of life. Every day is a monument to Your creative touch. Yet You demand more. You would have us believe what we cannot behold. Do you command Leviathan or the demons that interrupt our sleep? You ask us to look into the depths of the ocean or the abyss of our being and still see Your handiwork. How is that possible? Are we to acknowledge or even praise what we will never understand? We need help, O God, if we are to concede Your mystery might be greater than our vision.

PRAYERS OF LAMENT

AWARENESS

Gracious God, we have spent our forty days in the wilderness, sung Palm Sunday melodies, walked through Holy Week, and celebrated your resurrection. We have sat in the darkness, longing for the light and been overwhelmed by the radiance of Your glory. But now, at the end of these forty plus days, we ponder all we have experienced. Are we different? Are we indifferent? Are we more holy? Are we more cynical? Continue to walk with us, God, for our journey is not over. Continue to walk with us, God, for our journey has hardly begun.

A QUIET GOD

God, are you there? We read of your appearance on mountaintops. Preachers proclaim Your power. Choirs sing of Your majesty, yet we have experienced none of the thunder ourselves. We long for a word. We strain for a whisper. We beg You to enter our den of confusion with an utterance of grace. We have heard the stories. We have observed the exultations of others. We are faithful, yet our faith sometimes feels incredibly thin. Surprise us, O God, with a hint of Your holy breath.

THOSE SLIGHTLY FLAWED

God, could You give us a break? We know perfection is expected but so often it is out of our reach. We are not making excuses, just stating facts. We try hard, most of the time. But when we get tired, when we have had more than enough, sometimes, for no good reason, we fall short of Your expectations. We ask forgiveness for being less than You desire. But Your bar is set so high. Cut us a break when we fall short. We don't always do our best but we are trying to improve on our imperfection.

O Perfect God, we who are less than perfect, bring to You our imperfect confessions. We who are flawed, insult Your righteousness with our attempts to excuse our blemishes. Every confession we offer is followed by an implausible explanation. Why do we confess when we rarely believe we have actually sinned? It is an unholy conundrum that should hinder our flawed excuses from reaching Your Holy Ears. Yet You hear, and respond, forgiving both our iniquities and our blemished admissions of guilt. Be patient with us, O Holy Parent. Never withhold from us Your overflowing fountain of grace.

PONDERING

Gracious God, I have spent my forty days in the wilderness, sung Palm Sunday melodies, walked through Holy Week, and celebrated your resurrection. I have sat in the darkness, longing for the light, and been overwhelmed by the radiance of that light. But now, at the end of these forty plus days, I ponder all I have experienced. Am I different? Am I indifferent? Am I more holy? Am I more cynical? Continue to walk with me, God, for my journey is not over. Continue to walk with me, God, for my journey has hardly begun.

FORGIVENESS

Gracious God, help us to see beyond our own vision. We are too quick to catalogue folks into small parameters and then criticize, without listening to their story, without feeling their pain, without knowing their past. Each of us has a different history. Each of us has walked dissimilar roads. Help us to open our heart to another's journey and our ears to another's narrative. Deliver us from ourselves, for in our desire to be righteous, we often become self-righteous. Transform us into a people who care beyond our own needs and act accordingly. We will need Your help to make this transition. Be patient with us. Be merciful when we fail. Celebrate with us when we occasionally get it right.

DELIVERANCE

We who are caught in this vortex of wrath and confusion called a Presidential election, desperately pray for your calming hand upon this divided land. Sensibility has been replaced by slander as trust and decency have been unapologetically ignored. No one is innocent. Every side hurls accusations and slanders based on active imaginations rather than truth. We are being destroyed from within.

We call on You who weathered the rage of Pharaoh. We call on You who sang a song of hope on the banks of Babylon. We call on You who turned the cross of death into an avenue for life. Deliver us from our ambitions. Rescue us from our intoxication with power. Free us from this rage that divides our nation and devours our communities.

Is there no balm in Gilead? Heal us, O God of Life. Heal us, O Spirit of righteousness. Heal us, O Son of God.

COMFORT

O One who walks with us beside still waters, will you be with us when the waters are far from calm? We cry out to You, not because of physical pain, but soulful sorrow. While we cling to Your promises of life over death, we are still overwhelmed by the reality of dying. The loss of a friend or a loved one leaves a void that is not easily filled. We pray constantly for another's health. We pray unceasingly for the families of those experiencing loss. But now, O God, for just a moment, we selfishly pray for ourselves. Sometimes the caretakers need a moment to mourn. Sometimes the comforter needs to be comforted. As we begin to walk through our personal dark valley, show us the way home Lord, show us the way home.

TAKERS

Holy God, we who are not so holy dare, to lift Your name in prayer. Holy is the air that You have given us to breathe. Holy is the water that quenches our thirst. Holy is the land that cushions our feet. Holy is Your gift of life.

But we who are not so holy, pollute Your air, poison Your water, and disfigure Your land. We who are not so holy take, and take, and take, never realizing the consequences of our greed. We who are takers, have lost our holiness by inhaling and ingesting that which we have polluted. Transform our hearts and minds and attitudes in order that Your holy creation might be restored.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

As death and destruction dominate our headlines, as chaos and calamities control our innermost thoughts, we request a moment's respite to restore our fleeting sanity. For many, the home, our sanctuary from the storm, has been challenged by sickness or mental fatigue, failing to offer relief from our confusion. Quiet our quiet places. For others, the economic stress of the season complicates finances already compromised. We pray for those who are impoverished, malnourished, or imprisoned. Peace is a concept with multiple implications consistently complicated by those competing for their own particular transparency. We all pray for peace but we seldom weigh the cost of this sacred request. Open our ears and eyes to ancient voices begging to be heard for the first time. Open our hearts to holy words of justice and reconciliation. Hear our prayer, O Prince of Peace.

GRACE

In the midst of our chaos, where everyone has an answer but no one seems to have a clue, we pray for grace. As the world comes at us so fast we forget if we are coming or going, we pray for grace. Your holy grace does not quell our confusion nor does Your gentle grace turn back our clocks. Grace simply reminds us of what was and what can be again. Fill us with Your hope. Capture us with Your love. Restore us with Your forgiveness. We pray for grace. We pray for grace. We pray for grace.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

O Holy Word, in a world dominated by threats and violence we long to hear Your promise of peace. Calm our troubled hearts. Heal our wounded souls. Fill our battered ears with a song of hope. Break through the silence that becomes a breeding ground for fear and disillusionment. Speak, O Holy Word; speak, O Holy Calm; speak, O Holy God, that Your words might bring respite to a weary world.

SILENCE

Gracious God, many have come to this Holy place seeking your sanctuary. Life is often filled with chaos, confusion with a constant soundtrack of loud clashing noises. We come, seeking sacred silence. We come seeking Holy nothingness. We come seeking a moment's respite, giving us a brief glimpse into Your blessed peace. Clear our minds that we might sit, silently. Relieve our tension that we might rest, silently. Open our hearts that we might rejoice, silently.

AGAINST THE DARKNESS

God of heaven and earth, God of night and day, God of heaven and hell, we pray for Your holy presence in the darkness of our lives. We wish every day would only be filled with light and joy, but that is never the case. Relationships are sometimes strained, life throws us curves at inopportune times, and newspapers are filled with stories that break our heart. It often seems that darkness and chaos is around every corner. Center us, O God, that we might remember that You have already entered every dark place. Center us, O God, that we might take a deep breath before taking our next step. Center us, O God, that our hearts might find a holy direction even as our eyes are betrayed by the darkness of the hour.

LOOKING FOR GOD

Elusive God, we have been told that we are never without Your presence, yet often we feel separated from that essence which is truly holy. Help us to expand our spiritual horizons. Assist us in remembering You are not confined to a particular place or a particular day. If we see You in a sunrise, let us embrace You for the entire day. If we experience You through the beauty of a flower, let all of creation be a reminder of You. Help us to see You in the very essence of another. Let our heart be open to encountering You even in those places which seem especially dark and dreary. Open our eyes to the mystery that is You.

THE LENGTH OF GOD'S DAYS

Gracious God, there is nothing You have not seen. Through plagues, wars, drought, earthquakes, hurricanes, and other horrors, You remain steadfast in love, unfaltering in righteousness, and resolute in justice. We, your faithful people, often treat each calamity as the end of our world. Give us patience to rise above the chaos. Give us faith to see beyond the immediate. Then give us the resolution to march forward into our chaos knowing there is tranquility on the other side of any crisis. Give us Your sense of history. Give us Your certainty in tomorrow.

HUMILITY

Humble us, O God, that we might hear more than our own voice.

Humble us, O God, that we might envision more than we normally see.

Place Your spirit upon our heart, place Your word in our mind, place Your love in our soul, place Your energy in our frame, place Your very being in our spirit.

Humble us, O God, that we might hesitate before we speak.

Humble us, O God, that we might meditate before we congregate.

Humble Us, O God, that we might be obedient to more than rash and ill conceived thoughts.

SEARCH ME

Search me, and know my thoughts. Search me, and know my desires. Search me, and leave me exposed to the pure light that comes only from You. Allow that light into every dark corner of my soul. Allow that light to explode through the shadows. Allow that light to leave me washed and cleansed with Your healing energy. Then, O God, allow Your light to be reflected in all that I think, say, and do. Make my light an instrument of Your shalom.

WAITING IN SILENCE

Often the louder a person speaks, the less we desire to listen. To hear You, O God, we must silence the “white noise” that occupies our lives. To hear You, we must want to listen. To hear You, we must be open to rhythms which are not our own. To hear You, we must be willing to experience something new, something fresh, something bold. To hear You, we must be silent. Help us, O God, to ache for Your holy word. Fill our lives with silence that we might hear the joy, the exuberance, the tranquil fury that is You.

GOD KNOWS US

Sometimes, when the day is long and the way is weary I desire to be alone. Everyone understands this but You. You, who are in charge of the universe, You, who must never have a moment's rest, refuse to grant absolute solitude. Before a word is off my lips, You know it. Before a thought embraces my being, you are aware of it. You are the presence that fills my void. You are the hope that transcends my sadness. No matter how often I beg for a respite from Your eternal grace, stay. You have searched me and known me, and I am Yours.

HELP

O Lord, where will our help come from? Will it come from massive institutions built by human hands or from money lenders who trade on human misery? Will it come from strangers anointed as experts or from friends with the best of intentions? Will we reject them all and only trust in ourselves? Where will we find our strength, our resolve, our hope?

O Lord, You have delivered our souls from death; will you also deliver our life from despair? Give us the strength to reject false securities. Give us the courage to be comforted by Your promises. O Lord, our source of salvation, let us find our help in You.

IMPATIENCE

We are an impatient people. We look at the world, Your world, and question Your sense of compassion. Why is there war? Why is there hunger? Why is there injustice? Why is Your imprint on the human experiment so faint? Sometimes we lose faith in You and in ourselves and certainly in our neighbor. We don't really expect an answer. Sometimes it just helps to confess our doubts out loud.

PEACE

God of Shalom, our headlines burn with a new incident each day which threatens the very existence of our world. An international airplane is brought to the ground by fear and incompetence. Innocent families are forced to flee into the mountains because of religious persecution. Missiles fly to and from Gaza as noncombatants once again become the main recipient of death. Even children fleeing drug wars in Central America find our borders closed as we debate the legitimacy of their cries for compassion. We claim answers but are finding no solutions to the fear, the anger, the hatred, the ignorance, and the arrogance that often result in brothers and sisters seeking each other's blood. We, whose faith looks up, desperately seek a word of hope, a moment of respite, an example of reconciliation, in the midst of this human madness.

RESTRAINT

Gracious God, it has often been part of our nature to strike when unfairly accused. Our pride can lead to inevitable actions which are often later regretted. We even justify our actions by claiming Your guidance prompted our response.

Make us less angry. Make us attentive to the needs and desires of others. Make us a people driven by reconciliation instead of our own self-importance. It is a big world out there. Help us to be the ones restoring Your shalom by refraining from personal crusades. Make us an instrument of Your peace.

DELIVERANCE

God of both night and day, deliver us from the darkness that clouds our judgment and threatens our sanity. In the day, when the light exposes all shadows, we clearly see the road that leads into tomorrow. But at night, when our minds begin to wander, we dwell on the possibilities that stem from our fear of the unknown. While we cannot change what will be, we pray for the strength to face that which is inevitable. Lighten our darkness that we might separate truth from fiction. Lighten our darkness that we might witness Your presence in the unfolding of both our days and nights.

ACHING

O God, we often struggle with our emotions in light of the events that flash across our screens of social media. We see pictures that disturb us and messages which inflame us. We turn to our neighbor only to discover they are equally confused. Between a rock and a hard place, we turn to You. We don't know what to think and we hardly know what to pray. We long for silence, we long for a respite, and we long for answers that have escaped us. We confess our fear, our confusion, and our anger. We ache for peace and don't even know what it is. Lord, help us and our world in our hour of discontent.

FORGIVE US

We, who dare to come to your table, humbly ask that we be made clean in Your sight. Forgive us for a word spoken in haste or in anger. Forgive us for thoughts that went unspoken but remained in our minds. Forgive us for the times we were not thinking at all and someone was hurt by our disregard. Make us aware of our actions or lack of actions toward others. Help us to see, feel, and act righteously. Make us instruments of Your shalom.

DARKNESS

O God, the Psalmist makes assurances that You will deliver us from the snare of the fowler and from deadly pestilence. The Psalmist promises that You will protect those who do not know Your name. We pray for loved ones, we pray for peace in our valley, we pray for Your hand in the midst of international turmoil. We pray and wonder if our prayers are heard. We pray and struggle with Your active presence in our lives. We pray and even feel guilty when we demand so much while we give so little. Forgive our discontent. We are such impatient souls and yet, we long for a word, a sign, a reminder that in the darkness of the night You will show us the way home.

BROKEN

We, who listen to Your voice but fail to respond to Your word; we, who long for Your vision but fail to grasp Your handiwork; we, who speak and see through our own voice and experience, humbly ask for Your forgiveness. Help us to see beyond our needs. Help us to love beyond our context. Help us to be in solidarity with the broken, the wounded, the poor, and the imprisoned. Allow us to understand often it is our desires that lead to brokenness, our needs that lead to wounds, our appetites that lead to poverty, and our fears that imprison others. Open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts to Your kingdom.

WILDERNESS

Gracious God, as we enter this season of Lent, as we enter this wilderness of our own discontent, walk beside us. We are often the last to seek confession and the first to need it. Our eyes wander toward the shortfalls of others, and we ignore this opportunity, this blessing, to open our souls to you. Hear us as we silently come, leaving our egos behind. Hear us as we honestly come, bringing our fears, our doubts, and our temptations. Hear us as we privately come, bringing our souls to you.

FOR DIRECTION

How can we find love, where will we find joy unless You, O Lord, be our guide? How can we learn, when will we fully understand unless you O Lord, prepare us? Tattered, battered, and bruised, life has left us hardened and unrelenting. Break through the citadel that has captured our soul. Help us to risk discovering a new direction along Your holy avenue. Search us. Allow us to hear the thoughts of our soul. Open to us those words that we hide from others, those words that burn within us, those words that cripple us and yet those words that must be released in order that we might find freedom from that which haunts our very being. Heal our souls, transform our thoughts, make us whole.

PARALYZED

It is not sin that paralyzes us. It is our inability to claim our shortcomings. We are like a child with crumbs around our mouth and a lie on our tongue. We hide, unwilling to admit the obvious. We are captured by fear and retreat into silence. Happy are those who acknowledge the secrets of their heart. Happy are those who have the courage to say, "I have sinned, have mercy on me." O Lord, help us to find our hiding place in You.

PRAYERS OF RE-CREATION

CALM OUR SOULS

Gracious God, make us laugh. Pry open our lips, cemented by worry, and sketch a smile across our face. Tell us one of Your stories. Remind us how You made the sea dry, causing every man, woman, and child to laugh at the power of Pharaoh. Humor us with quail running free in the desert and rocks gushing forth water. Startle us with clouds of fire and tablets of stone. Tell us once again of a boy against a giant, fireworks at Mount Carmel, overmatched lions in a not so fiery furnace, a birth witnessed by shepherds and kings, and death being trumped by the two of clubs. We take life so seriously. The lines in our face are made from trying to straighten out the wrinkles in our lives. Make us laugh at Your astonishing deeds.

REQUEST

Gracious God, voices crash upon us speaking dim versions of truth. They are loud distractions reflecting a thunderous response to human greed rather than daily needs. We are attracted by their banter and turn, for we have lost our way. We have witnessed a world swallowed by consumerism and dominated by might, leaving us helpless. Rescue our hearts from its entrapments. Keep our feet from stumbling down life's enticing path. Lift before us Your cup of salvation that we might drink, that we might be restored, that we might be rejuvenated by Your refreshments for our soul.

TRUST

Protected only by the whims of Your desires we wildly tumble into life's rapids. The waters crash upon us, beaconing with icy fingers and tossing us as if we were ragdolls. Desperate and frantic for calm waters we cry out, hoping to find an ounce of meaning. Instead we encounter your whisper of grace, "Be calm." O God, Your vision begins where our dreams end. How can we trust what we cannot imagine? How can we believe in what we cannot see? Put a new song in our hearts that our conviction might extend beyond the constraints of our experience.

LOVE

Love us, O God, like a mother loves her first born. Love us, O God, with a grace as pure as falling snow. Love us, O God, despite who we are. Love us because of who You are. Love us in the morning as the sun announces a new creation. Love us in the evening when shadows expose our fear and desperation. Love us when we are most desirable and love us when we are not. Love us again and again and again and again until we actually believe love is possible. And then help us love one another.

CALM

Gracious God, we placed our dreams in the hands of others and been left exhausted. Wounded by the experience, we lift our wounded hearts to You. Calm the waters that have flooded our nation. Ease the tensions that have left families divided and communities paralyzed. Challenge us to lead the way in creating Your new heaven and earth. Dare us to renew conversations that begin with inspired solutions rather than hateful rhetoric. In these complicated and difficult days to come, make us instruments of Your peace.

MOTHER EARTH

Gracious God, the heavens are proclaiming Your righteousness. Let us join in their proclamation. We pray for waters unpolluted by poisons. We pray for skies free from toxic waste. We pray for the wisdom to understand our contribution to the contamination of Your magnificent creation. We pray for the courage to act on this wisdom. On this day we dedicate the Mothers, let us remember that the lives of tomorrow's children depend on a new reverence for Mother Earth. Help us, O God, to care for the wonderful works of Your hands. Help us, O God, to live in harmony with the waters we drink and the air we breathe.

PRAISE

I will praise the Lord with every fiber of my being. Because Christ has risen, each day becomes a new opportunity for life. Let me sing a new song. Let my chords of joy quell the discord that surrounds me. Let me open my hand to a stranger, disarming the distrust that might be between us. Let me hear the song of the wounded, allowing their pain a sweet release. Let me shoulder the burdens of the weary, giving them a moment's rest. Let me sing a new song of hope, gentleness, and peace. Let me sing of the love of God to a world captured by fear and distrust. Let me sing as if their lives depended on it.

GOD OF ALL TIMES

"Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless the Lord forever." God, it is easy to bless You as we are wrapped in the glory of nature. It is easy to worship you when the day is bright and the sky shines upon us. Help us to bless You when the shadows creep in our direction. Help us to worship You when our joys have turned to sorrow. Help us to call out Your name when our way has grown uncertain and darkness covers the face of the earth. Help us to taste and see that You are good. Help us to remember that those who take refuge in You become a blessing to others.

THANKFULNESS

We give thanks, O God, that You are not created in our image. What do we really know of mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and patience? It is so difficult to be merciful toward those who deserve no mercy, or loving toward those who have no love within them. Teach us Your ways, O God. Help us, Your flawed and finite creation, to aspire toward infinite compassion and grace. Make us a reflection of Your image, Your perfection, and Your mercy.

THANKS

Gracious God, it is so natural to complain first and then seek the facts. Often life drops surprises upon us and we react, often too early, seldom without restraint. We give thanks, O God, that you are a paramount of tolerance. Our ways, our often troubling ways, are witnessed by You. Yet with control beyond our understanding, You wait, allowing us the chance to witness our imperfections and choose the road to reconciliation. Thank you for your patience. Help us to choose such wisdom when we confront those who have wronged us. Thank you for offering us a variety of ways to seek peace and harmony in our relationship with others.

GOD IS ALWAYS THERE

Light cracks open the darkness of night and another day begins. It is Your hands, O God, which stretches the canvas from yesterday into today. With light, there is sound. With sound, there is hope, and where hope abides, dreams return. Be with us, O God of morning, noon and night. Heal our brokenness, restore our vision, and release our imagination that we might live in the light of Your resurrected glory. Let your light bring new vision to our eyes. Let Your song bring angelic melodies to our ears. Let your presence restore our weary souls. We awake in Your glory. We live in your splendor. And when we sleep, we rest calmly in Your holy presence.

GOD'S LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Gracious God, the Psalmist wrote, "You have turned my mourning into dancing and clothed me with joy." Teach us to dance. Teach us to take each day as an opportunity for something new, something refreshing to brighten our day. Darkness can dominate our lives. Tragedies are far too common in this age of instant news. Turn Your light on an infant speaking her first word. Turn Your light on a child learning his multiplication tables all the way to ten. Turn Your light on a young man saying I love you for the first time or a young woman cashing her first paycheck. Turn Your light on the extraordinarily ordinary events that we too often ignore. Turn Your light on Your hand always working to heal our world.

GOD'S FEMININE SIDE

Gracious God, on this day when we celebrate motherhood, we give thanks for Your ability to be more than we might ever imagine. You gave the universe and all that reside within it life. You have nurtured creation: feeding us with rain, enriching us with sunlight. You have taught us to be gentle and kind. You have encouraged us to be merciful and forgiving. When the time is right, you have given us the independence to live our own lives and make our own choices. When we fall, you pick us up and embrace us with a calm that diminishes our failure. You whisper us back to life and restore the confidence that was lost. We give You thanks, O Mother of creation, O Mother of our soul.

PEACE

Come, Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, and heal our anxious souls. We cry out for peace and fear you might actually be listening. Are we willing to accept the sacrifice true peace demands? We walk in the shadows created by our own body of work. We claim to love the light yet avoid stepping into the rays of your mercy and reconciliation. Mend our wounds; inspire our vision; create in us a new heart. Allow your cleansing waters to flow upon us, stripping us of our fear, filling us with Your calm. Come, Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace. Heal our anxious souls.

HOPE

God of hope and possibilities, each one of us dreams. Each one of us visualizes a new day filled with distinct possibilities only You can imagine. Because we are more than one, our dreams are as varied as the colors of the rainbow. Because of our differing histories, our visions are radically different. And yet we all dream of a less hostile environment for each child. We all dream that our elders might be treated with dignity. We dream of safe homes and productive gardens. We dream of a harmony and peace where joy trumps fear. We dream of a world where tenderness is seen as a virtue and peacefulness is taken for granted. We dream of Your new heaven and new earth.

GOD OF ALL AGES

Gracious God, throughout our lives Your face has taken many shapes. Our childlike eyes saw You as an old man seated in the clouds. Our youthful eyes envisioned You as a rebel with a heavenly cause. As we matured, so did our understanding of You. Once we called for Your wrath; now we cling to Your grace. O God, who comes to us wherever we are, we praise You as the source of our hope and salvation. Fill us with a new vision of Yourself each day that we might dare to dream, that we might dare to live in Your image.

THE DAWN

Just before dawn, the blackness of the night matches the chill in the air. Shine forth into the darkness of my night. Explode my fears with rays of warmth, melting the frost within my soul. With the dawn, shadows retreat, exposing the colors of a new day. With the dawn, anxieties thaw, nourishing life with blessed dew. Why do I think that you have left me? Why do I forget that Your love is steadfast? Why am I surprised by each new dawn? You have turned my mourning into dancing, and I will forever bless Your name.

GRATITUDE

Often life crashes down upon us in a way that causes a paralysis of all memory. Having been there before has no bearing on the fear that encompasses us. Each moment, each choice, each fear seems new. But You, O God, remember. For that we give You thanks. Refresh our memories that our courage might be restored. Refresh our vision that the way might be clear. Refresh our faith that our fears might be vanquished. O God of the past and future, steady our hand in the moments before us.

NEW CREATION

O God, creator of all that lives, lover of all that is created, forgive us when our acceptance of others is less than holy. You imagined each one of us. You celebrate our ethnic origins, our gender, and our sexual orientation. You claim us regardless of our financial standing. Your compassion and mercy are universal. Hate and prejudice are human emotions birthed from inhuman experiences. Forgive us when we lose our humanity. Forgive us when our fear replaces Your universal truth. Forgive us when we step outside the parameters of Your creation and invite others into a hell of our own making. Teach us to love each other as You have loved us.

GROWING OLDER

When I was young, I fully comprehended who You were. I visualized Your face, I understood Your ways. You were my God, standing with me against all my enemies. When I became older, I realized it was You who knew me, touching my face and forgiving my ways. Now I am Your child, standing with You in the midst of Your community. Today I put my trust in You, for the visions of yesterday are nothing when compared to the possibilities of tomorrow.

THANKSGIVING

O Lord, each night brings dreams of unfinished business and unresolved possibilities. At night, within the darkness of our limited imagination, our hearts mourn over what we perceive to be possible. But you, O God, who sees beyond our yesterday and into tomorrow, caress us with the coming of the dawn. You turn our mourning into dancing, our mornings into possibilities. We praise you O God. In faithfulness You heard our cry. In faithfulness you responded. In faithfulness our hearts will sing of Your goodness and grace. You are our God and we will sing Your praises.

HOPE

Come, Lord Jesus. Touch us with Your words of hope; convert us with Your acts of mercy; restore us with Your covenant of grace. Too long we have dwelled in darkness, holding onto contrived alliances and putting our faith in worn out phrases. Come, Lord Jesus. We long to be made anew. Our bodies are worn and bruised; our hearts are broken and empty. Come, Lord Jesus. Inspire us with your holy imagination. Capture us with your unending compassion. Come, Lord Jesus, for You are God.

NEW VISION

Gracious God, forgive us when we are betrayed by our heart and mind. Often we see that which seems too difficult and we turn away. Often stories are placed on our heart which seem doomed to failure, and we forget nothing is impossible with you. Remind us where hope is lost, You are there. Remind us where only darkness resides, You still offer light. Change our vision and our heart that we might find opportunities for life where only death seems to rule. Give us the courage to trust in You.

AN OPPORTUNITY

In the midst of our summer respite, an unannounced wind dashed across our mountain, leaving us breathless. Communication was in disarray and basic necessities questionable. And yet we never felt alone. You, O Lord, transcend cell phones and the internet. You, O Lord, brought us together as neighbors who cared for each other. We give thanks for the love and the compassion you have written across our hearts. Continue to point us toward the hurt and the lonely, that we might truly be Your people.

BALM IN NELLYSFORD

In the beauty of this moment, in the tranquility of this place, we boldly come. In our joys, we come. In our brokenness, we come. Lift us up, O God, in order that we might not only rejoice together but that we might bear each other's sorrow. Make us one in our prayers, in our songs, and even in our laments. Make us the chalice that fills the souls of others. Make us a balm that heals.

SPECIAL DAYS

SUNDAY

The time has come. The audience finds a comfortable seat hoping for a word of consolation but expecting less. All eyes focus on the center stage. The Holy Words have been read. Like each Sunday before the preacher attempts to perfect on perfection. The notes are shuffled out like a gambler dealing his hand. The real gamble is that someone will listen and God will not be displeased. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight."

How often are the words softened to protect the guilty?

How often are the words shrilled to accuse the innocent?

How often are the words tainted by my own beliefs?

How often are the words stained by my own disbelief?

How often are the words acceptable in the sight of my Rock and Redeemer?

The heavens are telling the glory of God! But am I?

Once again it is Sunday. Once again I will step behind Your Holy Word. Once again I will look out at a weary and wary audience. Once again I will open my mouth. For once, let it be filled with Your grace.

ADVENT

I long for the light of your salvation. As the days grow shorter, so does my patience. I wait, wondering if the news will be good. I wait, trusting You have remembered Your promise. I wait, believing the sunrise will dispel all shadows. Some scoff at my faith, amused that I should find comfort in nonsense or confused that I discover truth in fairy tales and myths. Other rage, "You expect miracles! Your prayers are wasted. You are nothing but a fool." But I have seen traces of the dawn. I have heard the stories of the faithful. I still cling to the hope of a new morning.

Come Lord Jesus! Break through the darkness before my resolve weakens.

Come Lord Jesus! Enlighten me with radiance before my soul is extinguished.

Come Lord Jesus! Capture my heart with Your grace.

CHRISTMAS EVE

A girl, a woman, actually a child, pondered the gift of her God. She gazed into the eyes of her husband and declared, "Our son shall set all prisoners free." Joseph shook his head and mumbled, "Foolish talk from the lips of one so young."

She grasped the hand of her betrothed and continued, "Our son will open the eyes of the blind." Joseph gently covered her mouth. "Speak softly. The neighbor's might be listening."

She pulled her newborn to her breast and avowed, "Our son will lift up those who are bowed down. "Please Mary, be quiet or Herod will pay us a visit."

"You don't understand. He will watch over the stranger. He will exalt the orphan and the widow. We will execute justice for the oppressed. God has promised it."

A man, a husband, a carpenter pondered the insanity of his wife. "Why have I been chosen to listen to such childish nonsense? Folks will call me deranged."

Mary kissed his lips and whispered, "No my darling. They will call you holy."

THE WEEK AFTER CHRISTMAS

The mysteries under the tree have been revealed, the last dish washed and placed on the shelf and the January bills are still a few days away. For a brief moment, we have the chance to reflect on the gift of Christmas. We give thanks for Your imagination, O God. We give thanks that the genesis of forgiveness was revealed in humility. We give thanks that the offering of holy love was recognized by the lowly. We give thanks that the ordinary gave birth to the extraordinary. We give thanks for this miracle we call Christmas. O God, may You forever surprise us with Your gift of grace. O God, may You forever expect us to be the givers of Your gift of love.

NEW YEAR

In a week when resolutions are broken faster than they are made, we stop to remember You as the God of the covenant. The eyes of Noah feast on a rainbow and the covenant is established. The dreams of Jacob incorporate a ladder and the covenant is renewed. The hands of Moses chisel a rock and the covenant is placed in stone. The hearts of wise men follow a star and the covenant becomes flesh. Every year your holy resolution remains constant. "I am Your God and You are my people." Let our New Year's resolution be, "You are our God and we are your people." May all our words and actions this year begin with this sacred remembrance.

BAPTISM

After nine months, and nine hours, a miracle is born. Ten fingers, ten toes, a ten in every way. "Thank you Jesus," exclaimed the parents. "We will never forget Your gift to us."

Nine days later the minister proclaimed, "Relying on God's grace, do you promise to live in Christ and teach the stories of Jesus to your child?" The parents proclaimed, "We do!"

Nine years old and this child is quite a young man. He can throw a football twenty five yards, make eight of ten from the free throw line and play the piano like Mozart. He flies ninety miles an hour from practice to games, rehearsals to concerts, projects, parties, and if nothing else comes up, goes to church. But something always seems to come up.

Nineteen and proud he brings her home. They are young but in love. They swear they will make it work. Reluctantly the parents agree. What else can they do? "Promise me you will call the Reverend. We need to make sure the church is available."

"Mom, could you do that. I can't remember his name."

A WEDDING BLESSING

May your eyes never age. Time furiously marches forward forever leaving us bruised. Your skin will never be this soft; your hair will soon lose its shine. May you always behold each other as you do today, seeing beyond the flaws. Like an old wine, age gracefully together.

May your touch remain tender. Young lovers quickly ignite a flame, lighting the sky with their fury. They rival two lions at play and when they collapse, their mutual conquest is complete.

Old lovers are aroused by touch, a gentle reminder of ties past, a promise of things to come. Softly, then passionately, a crowded room is emptied by the intertwining of their fingers.

May your hearts remain whole. Too many promises go unfulfilled. Too many vows are never taken seriously. Too many couples kiss and proceed toward an ending rather than a beginning. Your hearts will be broken but thankfully hearts can be mended through time, unselfish love, unrelenting devotion, and a paradigm requiring two rather than one.

Look into your eyes. Grasp each other fingers. Caress each other's heart. Young love is fragile. But mature love is forever.

LENT

Gracious God, it is not sin that paralyzes us, but rather our inability to claim our shortcomings. Too often we are like a child with a crumb on our lips and a lie on our tongue. Embarrassed by our failure, we hide, unwilling to admit the obvious, reluctant to confess our transgressions. Remind us, O Holy One, there is no sin beyond forgiveness, no heart beyond mending, and no soul beyond the clemency of your grace. For with You there is deliverance; with You there is salvation; with You there is joy. Blessed are those who have the courage to shout, "I have sinned, have mercy on me." Teach me your ways, O God. Lead me in your truth. Do not remember what I did yesterday; only remember Your steadfast love. Nothing that I have done excuses my iniquity. Nothing I could say pardons my transgressions. Only in You is there redemption; only in You is there deliverance. Ashes touch my forehead reminding me of death. Ashes touch my heart, reviving this stillborn soul. Ashes touch my feet, inciting them to step into the wilderness. Walk with me, Lord. Walk with me.

A COMMUNION PRAYER

Mysterious God, we struggle with the magnitude of Your being for Your very essence is beyond our imagination. But we understand what it means to be broken. Each of us has suffered the loss of one near to our heart. Each of us has experienced a moment which left us emaciated. We understand defeat better than victory for every loss is burned deep within our soul. In Your brokenness You become one with us. In our brokenness we become one with You. O Lamb of God, broken, lift up our hearts. O Lamb of God, broken, lift up our souls. O Lamb of God, restored, grant us your peace.

PALM SUNDAY

Jesus, why do You poke fun at us? Why did You choose a colt rather than a stallion? Why did You parade with the poor rather than the religious leaders? Why did You play the role of a jester rather than a mighty warrior? Everything about Palm Sunday seems so wrong. Open our eyes to Godly rather than earthly kingdoms. Open our hearts to holy moments rather than pomp and ceremony. Open our minds to heavenly imagination rather than mortal demonstrations. Transform us into Easter people, converted by the power of Godly love.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. God, we are so tired of Lent, why can't Jesus come now? Why must we be teased by the choir and their celebratory tunes? Why can't we join the parade just like they did so many years ago? Why must we wait one more week? Why make us lift the cup or pray in the garden? Why must we hear the mob or visit Calvary? Why not roll away the stone now? Save us from the coming week. Save us from having to examine ourselves one more time. Save us, merciful God, from ourselves.

MONDAY

We are uncomfortable, O God, with the steps Holy Week asks us to take. We prefer to be a Christmas people, celebrating new life and new vision. We long to be an Easter people, rejoicing over restored life and renewed vision. Yet You would have us grapple with death and sin and failure and sacrifice and eventually the cross. You, who are perfect, expose our imperfections. You, who are holy, highlight our ungodliness. You, who are loving, lift up perfect love for our imperfect examination. And we tremble. Help us, O Holy One, to look within and without as we struggle through this darkness that leads to Your eternal and embracing light.

TUESDAY

As we step into Holy Week, forgive us if we become distracted or confused. We run to the parade, not even sure what it means. We come to the Table, looking for Elijah and miss the Messiah. Like Peter, we deny our faith; like Judas, we betray our faith; like Matthew and James, we run from our faith; like Thomas, we doubt our faith. Why must You suffer? Why must You die? Why must we be held responsible? If we choose to walk through Holy Week, it is a confusing and difficult journey. Walk with us Lord. We don't want to walk by ourselves.

WEDNESDAY

Together, and alone, we enter this season of passion. Together, and alone, we confess sins against You, sins against each other, and sins against our self. Together, and alone, we look to the cross and are grateful and yet repulsed. We are glorified by Your love, we are humbled by Your grace, and yet we know it is our sin that made Your presence necessary. Have mercy on us, for we continue to sin. Have mercy on us, for we still fall short of Your holy expectations. Have mercy on us and grant us Your peace. Together, yet very much alone, this is our urgent prayer.

THURSDAY

We come, O Lord, to Your table of grace. We come with our baggage, our fears, our worries, and our weariness. We come with our hopes, our dreams, our joys, and our expectations. We come to You, O Broken One. We come to You, O Mended One. We come to You, broken and in need of mending. We come to You, desiring mercy and anticipating grace. We come to You, just as we are. Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

We who have experienced brokenness flinch at the words, "Broken for you." We who have poured out our lives for others struggle with the words, "Poured out for you." While it is in our nature to sacrifice for others, we hesitate at the thought of perfection being compromised. Such is the mystery of communion. Broken Lord, heal our broken hearts. Broken Lord, heal our broken world. Broken Lord, pour out Your love on all people, that we might celebrate Your mercy and Your grace together.

FRIDAY

Where are You? We, Your people, are trying to understand this unholy moment and You are nowhere to be found. We need Your voice. The world, our world, Your world is on the brink of destruction and You are silent. My God, why have You forsaken us? Here we are suspended between heaven and hell. Our adversaries gloat. Our friends are nowhere to be found. Break from Your heavenly sanctuary and join us in this real world. Everyone speaks but You. Why must we endure this holy hush?

SATURDAY

Why is there is no special name for this day? Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday but only Saturday. Of all our holy days isn't Saturday where we most often reside? We live between death and resurrection. We live amidst uncertainty. We live through the rise and fall of human solutions. We live in the darkness waiting for the light. Saturday is the day we want to give up. Saturday is the day our dreams have turned to nightmares. Saturday is the day we think we have run out of options. So we kneel in the shadows, praying for the dawn. We wait and hope. We have nothing left but You.

EASTER MORNING

Gracious God, because we trust that You love us more than we love ourselves, we celebrate life over death. Confused by the concept yet overwhelmed by the message, we celebrate life over death. We live in a culture of disorder. Each day we grow older. Each day we witness the lack of trust and the creation of new enemies. Each day anger and rage dominates our conversations. Each day we move further away from Your peaceable kingdom. Yet, You refuse to move further away from us. Let Easter trump our rage. Let Easter trump our disorder. Let Easter trump our fears. Let Easter always remind us that You are always doing a new thing. Let Easter always be our celebration of life over death.

EASTER EVENING

When we are beyond exhaustion, when our strength is gone and the day has hardly begun, when we have reached the end of our rope with nothing left to give, You surprise us with Easter. Like the season in which it resides, one day all life is gone and suddenly, miraculously, new colors and fragrances burst from the ground. Easter stands above our trials and tribulations. Easter explodes into our darkness and offers hope. Easter is an affirmation of birth and a proclamation of rebirth. On this Resurrection Day, let us sing our praises to the author of life.

MEMORIAL DAY

Gracious God, we know that conflicts arise when peace has no longer been deemed possible. We know being drawn into these conflicts often seems unavoidable. We know that sometimes the fault is ours. On this Memorial Day, we ask your forgiveness for us and our enemies. Without forgiveness and reconciliation, peace is only a momentary pause.

Eternal God, we pray for families who have lost loved ones in war. Their sacrifice and sorrow is worth more than a day of remembrance. Death has forever marred the landscape of their dreams.

Righteous God, make us more holy. While our youth stand ready, help us who are older work harder to eliminate war. By saving our youth, we truly honor the memory of those who freely gave their lives.

PENTECOST

Come Holy Spirit. We, who hide behind the walls of our insecurities, cry out for Your words of calm. We, who find the dawn of each new day to be daunting, cry out for Your light. We, who seek wisdom in the midst of confusion, cry out for Your sanity. Come Holy Spirit. Bring to us the revelation of God's new creation. Bring to us a promise of peace and reconciliation. Bring to us a reminder that God is always with us. Capture us with the spirit that inspired disciples to sing and doubters to believe. Come Holy Spirit. Come enflame our hearts and souls with the good news of your Pentecost revelations.

PENTECOST

Come Holy Spirit, fill our lungs that we might breathe your creative air.

Come Holy Spirit, fill our heart that we might be enflamed by Your sacred word.

Come Holy Spirit, fill our soul that we might be renewed with Your grace and truth.

Come into our fears, our inhibitions, and our anxieties.

Come into our past, our present, and our future.

Come Holy Spirit, fill our lives with hope and vision.

Come Holy Spirit, fill us with Your dreams.

9-11

Gracious God, fifteen years ago the sky rained fire, changing both our lives and our attitude toward life. Loved ones and the naivety of a nation were lost. On this day, be with the families of those who mourn. On this day, be with the police, firefighters, and rescue workers who remember. On this day, transform this nation that we might become agents of reconciliation even as the madness of hate still surrounds us. Make this day more than a memorial. Make this a day where our resolve is always tempered by Your attitude of grace. Make us a better people, a forgiving people, a people dedicated to more than anger and revenge. Help us to follow Your commandment to love our enemies.

THE BLUE RIDGE IN AUTUMN

For months the heat and humidity has left us breathless. The dog days of August, brutal and unending, have sapped our energy and imagination. But the days grow shorter. A harvest moon swells in the sky and our weariness is given relief by the thought of higher ground. O to be in the Blue Ridge Mountains in autumn, drinking the refreshing breezes and lingering in the healing shadows of a land touched by God. As the majestic forest changes into its fall line, royal green opts for the rainbow as the hillside explodes into a thousand shades and hues. Streams appear out of midair, enlivening the body and invigorating the soul. The air is as sweet as fresh picked corn. Come and experience perfumes which shall never be duplicated. O to stand on Humpback and feel the strength of the Almighty. O to ride the Skyline Drive on a bicycle and understand God's grace and mercy. O to climb Crabtree and marvel at The Creator's imagination. The Psalmist called the mountains outside Jerusalem, Zion. But each autumn, God is surely to be found walking along the heavenly trails of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

WORLDWIDE COMMUNION

We come this day, not as one, but as many. We come this hour, not of our own accord, but through Your holy wishes. Break the bread, this day, for a world that is broken. Fill the cup, this hour, for a world that is thirsty. As You have borne our grief and carried our sorrow, extend Your grace throughout your creation. Let us drink, this day, with men of all nations. Let us drink, this hour, with women of all cultures. Let us celebrate the bread and cup with all Your children. This is the day we all lift Your cup of salvation. This is the hour we all give thanks and praise.

SAINTS

We give thanks, O God, for those who have made our way easier. Through their imagination and generosity, the road they walked has been made straighter and easier to climb. We have been inspired by their courage and faith. They cared for the wounded, sought after the lost, lifted up the lame and fed the hungry. They lived lives dedicated to serving You and serving Your people. Give us the strength to continue their dreams. Give us the laughter that filled their days. Give us the boldness to follow their example of living according to Your word. O God, we believe that in life and death we belong to You. We celebrate the life they lived and the promises You keep.

VETERANS DAY

Gracious God, as we honor those who have proudly served through their time and sacrifice, we also acknowledge the call to arms is far from glorious. War leaves us broken and divided. War exposes the ugliness of humanity. War confirms our primal dependence on our inhumanity toward one another. For the sake of those who so nobly serve, cure our warring madness. For the sake of those who are pawns in the midst of conflict, deliver them from the killing fields. For the sake of all who claim You as the Prince of Peace, direct us toward a holier path.

COMMUNION

We, who are joyful, give thanks that Your gift of love has been shared with us. We, who are broken, ask that You bind our wounds through the breaking of the bread. We, who are confused, desire clarity as we come together to share the cup. We, who are tired, request to be energized by Holy presence. We, who are all of the above, seek a word of hope and a song of praise. Together, we, your people, gather to be blessed, loved, forgiven, and released from all that would crowd into our minds during this time of Holy Silence.

THANKSGIVING

“Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in God.” The Psalmist proclaims the words that are on our heart. Often confused by life we trust in our own devices and find ourselves further entwined by the mysteries of life. And then we turn to You. In the midst of doubt and uncertainty there is a consistency in Your glory which gives us confidence. We gaze upon the sunrise and see You. We celebrate the colors of the season and see You. We rest our weary souls in the promises of Your son and see You. We bless You at all times, O God, for You have redeemed those who trust in You.

CHRIST THE KING

How can I stare into a light brighter than the sun, and not be blinded? How can I gaze into a void emptier than a West Texas sky, and find peace. The fool cries, There is no God!” Why can't they open their eyes, their hearts, their souls to a presence by which everything finds meaning? Sometimes, when I cannot see tomorrow for today, I look into Your face and discover a new dawn. Sometimes, when the clock rushes ahead of my pace, I search Your eyes and am halted by Your timeless grace. Sometimes, when life speaks in undistinguishable volumes, I focus on Your lips, and hear a quiet word of grace. Fear disappears, the impossible becomes conceivable, life has a meaningful pulse when overshadowed by Your face. Come, O King Eternal, shine upon us that we might be restored. Shine upon us that we might rejoice in the glory of Your salvation.