

"He who loves with purity considers not the gift of the lover, but the love of the giver." Thomas a Kempis

O Gracious God you have given us so much – so many blessings, so much that we can enjoy, so much that we need. And yet, it is knowing that you love us that truly sustains us and gives us hope and comfort and peace. For your love for us is unconditional. It is complete. It is selfless. And you showed us the perfect example of your extraordinary love when you gave yourself. When you came to be part of this human race, when you came to experience all that we do, when you humbled yourself to take on our sin, and then die so that we might be forgiven, set right, made new. And then you showed us that true love conquers anything – even death. And so, help us to have that kind of true love in our hearts. For Lord, we as individuals, as a nation and as a world are in need of love, acceptance, tolerance, civility. We are in need of understanding what it means to look at the people around us – in all stages and places of life, and acknowledge that they are human beings with feelings, with problems, with hopes, with concerns, with pressures, just like us. We are in need of understanding that we are not, and will not be all the same – in our thoughts, our lifestyles, our abilities, our backgrounds. But we are all the same in that we are all made in your image. We are all born with that divine spark within us. It's just that for some the flame grows, and for others it struggles just to flicker. And so we pray, that through our love, or rather your love in us, we would be able to ignite that flame in others. That by our words and actions, our attitude and demeanor, we encourage and lift others up. To show that, as Christians, followers of Christ, we want there to be peace and justice and a striving for the common good for everyone. As the Apostle John said, "Let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." May we live with your love in our hearts.

As we think of love, there are those we love that we wish to pray for specifically today. You have heard those on our prayer list, but there are others, and so hear us now as people in this sanctuary lift aloud the names for whom we ask your blessing.

Thank you again O Lord, for your love. And we pray that this day as we hear the men of Teen Challenge sing your praises and share their stories with us, may you continue to bless their lives and ministry, and may we be once again inspired by the way you work in our lives for healing, for transformation, and for using us as messengers of your good news.

we pray at this time “come, Holy Spirit, come.” Come and fill us. Come and fill us with your goodness, your peace, your wisdom, your contentment, your love.

"To confess your sins to God is not to tell [God] anything [God] doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the bridge." Frederick Buechner

O Loving God of holiness and grace, as we center ourselves in your presence, we say to you as the psalmist said, "Search me O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." Lord, in all honesty, this is a difficult prayer for us to pray, because it means we must be honest with ourselves and with you. It means we really do want you to show us what we have done that we shouldn't have, what we neglected to do or say, what we thought or said that brought you displeasure. It means that we actually want you to point out those areas in our lives that need change, that need cleansing, that need you to intervene. Because, we admit Lord, that we, by ourselves, are incapable of living the way we should - the way of Christ. And so we come to you, with our confessions. We come admitting that we are both saint and sinner at the same time, and yet we want to be more saint than sinner when we leave this place. And so we take this time to come now in silence, with our own personal prayers of confession, as we prepare our hearts and minds to take the body and blood of Christ, remembering his great sacrifice, and seeking to be worthy to call ourselves by his name.

Silence

Thank you O God, for your assurance of forgiveness and mercy and a new start. We pray that your breath of the Holy Spirit would fill us, that we might live boldly and faithfully for you each and every day, to all people we meet, in every way that we can. And Lord, we come also to this time to share together in prayer for those we care for. As St. James says, "The prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective." And so, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we lift up those who are on our prayer list this day, but we lift up others also. Hear us now, as people in this congregation lift aloud the names for whom we ask your blessing.

Thank you, Lord, for the peace and comfort of knowing that we have been heard. And through the rest of our time of worship, may you know our love and devotion to you, and our gratitude for you being in our lives. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

St. Augustine: "O Lord you made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

O Loving God, Creator God, Parent God, we have come to worship you in many ways - through our singing and music, through hearing your Word, through sharing love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters, and through the quiet of sitting in your presence, both speaking to and listening to you. And in your presence, Lord, we know we must be honest, for you know all our ways, all our thoughts, all our actions. Nothing is hidden from you. And so, in humility, we admit that sometimes our hearts are restless. We feel anxious, angry, frustrated, fearful. We let the news of the world get to us. We put pressures on ourselves and others that are unrealistic. We wonder at the meaning of our lives. Yes, our hearts are sometimes restless. We forget that you have made us for yourself. We feel that we must do things and handle things on our own, in our own way. Our pride pushes us to want to be "independent." And we sometimes wrongly feel as though we don't want to "bother" you, as if a loving parent could ever be "bothered" by a child in need. And yet, Lord, deep down, we want to find our rest in you. We want to have the faith that trusts in your will and your way. We want to have the peace and assurance that you are there and you will never let us go. We want to put our lives in your hands, confident that all will be well. And so we come seeking your forgiveness for our doubts, and asking for faith even the size of a mustard seed that trusts in your love, your timing, your presence. May we do our part by coming to you faithfully, by asking for and following your direction, and by trying to live the way you want us to live. So that our hearts are one with yours. At peace and at rest.

O God, we pray for that peace and rest for people around us. For loved ones and friends who are hurting, who are struggling, who are ill and in need of healing – both in body and spirit. We pray for those we don't know, but with whom we share our common humanity, our common desire for peace, civility, justice and even basic needs like food, water, shelter. The need is great, Lord, but you are greater. And so we come in faith to offer our prayer of intercession. You have heard those on our prayer list, but there are others.

Lord, we come as brothers and sisters in Christ, seeking to be examples of Christ to others, not only in our personal lives, but in the life of this church, John Wesley. We want to draw others to you by the way we are the Body of Christ in this community. And so, as one voice, one body, we say our John Wesley prayer together...

Christianity, if it is false, it is of no importance, and if it is true, it is of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important. C.S. Lewis

O God who is greater than we can even begin to comprehend, whose power and creation stretch across galaxies and universes, and yet whose love and compassion and grace is as intimate as knowing the very number of hairs on our head, we come in awe and worship and gratefulness this morning. We come to be reminded that our Christian faith is of infinite importance. That both our life here on this earth, and our life on the other side is determined by our faith and how we live it out. Lord, in this world of material obsession, overbooked schedules, political posturing, sensationalism, feel good pursuits, we confess that it is often too easy for us to confuse our priorities and turn our attention away from the One we are to follow in our life – Jesus Christ. It is easy for us to think that so many other things are important, and yet those other things have no eternal impact on our lives. Those other things cannot forgive our sins, heal our wounds, offer us love, give us inner peace, or prepare a place for us in heaven. Only you can do those things. And so forgive us when we are lukewarm in our Christian walk. Give us courage, strength, desire, and passion to live our lives each and every day, knowing that our Christian faith is the most important thing in our lives. That, as Jesus said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be given you.”

Lord, this day, we lift our prayers for those around us. There is hurt and sorrow and suffering and injustice both here and in all parts of your world. And we have faith that our prayers do matter. That you do hear, and that it pleases you when your children pray with and for one another. And so we lift up those who are in need. You have heard those on our prayer list, but there are others...

Lord, thank you for this time of quiet renewal, of knowing we are heard, we are loved and that we can have faith in your will and way. And help us to continue to be inspired to so live to the highest and best that we can. As we seek to follow Jesus Christ, in the way we live and the way we pray...

Lord's Prayer

Prayers by Martin Luther King, Jr., in his honor this weekend

Eternal God, out of whose absolute power and infinite intelligence the whole universe has come into being, we humbly confess that we have not lived as we should. We have all too often lived by our own selfish impulses rather than by the life of sacrificial love as revealed by Christ. We often give in order to receive. We love our friends and hate our enemies. We go the first mile but dare not travel the second. We forgive but dare not forget. And so as we look within ourselves, we are confronted with the appalling fact that the history of our lives is the history of an eternal revolt against you. But thou, O God, have mercy upon us. Forgive us for what we could have been but failed to be. Give us the intelligence to know your will. Give us the courage to do your will. Give us the devotion to love your will, in the name and spirit of Jesus we pray.

God grant that right here in America and all over this world, we will choose the higher way; a way in which humankind will live together as brothers and sisters. A way in which every man will respect the dignity and worth of all human personality. A way in which every nation will allow justice to run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. A way in which men will do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. A way in which men will be able to stand up, and in the midst of oppression, darkness and agony, they will be able to stand there and love their enemies, bless those that curse them, pray for those that spitefully use them. For this is the way that will free us and bring us once more into that society which we think of as the brotherhood of all men. This will be that day when white people, colored people, all people will join together and stretch out with their arms and be able to cry out: "Free at last! Free at last! Great God Almighty, we are free at last."

O Lord Jesus, you said that you are the truth and the truth will make us free. And so, may we, like MLK, Jr. live out your truths of love, compassion, mercy, understanding and justice for all people. And in that care and concern for all, we bring to you those who are in need of your presence, your touch, your healing, your comfort.

Silent Prayer

Lord's Prayer

A.W. Tozer - "Sometimes I go to God and say, 'God, if you never answer another prayer while I live on this earth, I will still worship you as long as I live and in the ages to come for what you have already done in my life.' You see, I'm already so far in debt to God, that if I were to live one million millenniums I couldn't pay Him for what He's done for me."

O Lord God, as we come to the close of another year, it is a time when we often look back and reflect on the good, the bad, the joyful, the painful, that has happened to us over the past 12 months. We look back and think about the ways we were, and the ways we weren't, the people you want us to be, or even the people we want ourselves to be. We had times when our thoughts, our attitudes, our actions brought others and ourselves, and hopefully you, joy and pleasure, and we felt good about ourselves. There were other times when we were less than our best, and we are humbled and contrite. And yet, Lord, we know that you have always been there for us. Ready to forgive, to strengthen, to comfort, to guide, if we only would come to you and listen to you. You have indeed given us so much already, and done so much for us already. You have given us life and this beautiful creation we live in. You have gifted us with skills and abilities, family and friends. You have answered our prayers – sometimes the way we want, other times the way you knew was best. You have showered us with blessings along the way that have proven your love and presence in our lives. And in this Christmas season, we know that you gave us the ultimate gift when you gave us "you." And we could never repay you for any of that. And the good news is – you don't want us to. You don't ask us to even the score, or to settle accounts. You only ask us to love you and love others, and to live in a way that expresses that love. And so, as we look ahead to 2018, may we live in such a way that shows that love – to all. May we be grateful for all that you have done for us. May we never take you, or our lives or our loved ones, for granted. And may you help us to grow even stronger in our knowledge, our commitment, our service to you and your kingdom here on earth.

Lord, we come also to pray for others – those we love and those who are heavy on our hearts. There is a lot of pain in this world, and at this time of year, the pain can feel greater and more hopeless. And so we lift up those that are in particular need. You have heard those on our prayer list, but there are others.

As the psalmist says, "Let the words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart, be acceptable to you O Lord, our rock and our redeemer." In the name of the one whose birth we celebrate, Jesus Christ our Lord, as we stand and sing together the prayer he taught us,

Lord's Prayer

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. And then the Word became flesh and made his home among us.” John 1:14

O Loving, Amazing, Unfathomable God, it really is beyond our comprehension to fully understand what it means for the Creator God of the universe, at home in the peacefulness, the beauty, the love, the comfort, the glory of your eternal kingdom, to want to leave that, and come and be a flesh and blood human being. To be part of this world that is full of pain, suffering, cruelty, confusion, uncertainty, illness, and more. Why, Lord? Why would you want to put yourself squarely in our shoes, and fully experience all that we go through? To share in our struggles, our difficulties, our fears, our frailties. What kind of love is that? And yet, O Lord, we know that it is a love that is persistent, that is unwavering, that is unconditional and that is complete. Yours is a love that indeed bears all things, hopes all things, believes all things and endures all things. When we hurt you, you don't lash out, you don't give us the silent treatment, you don't turn away, instead you continue to want us, to want to bring us back into a right relationship with you. When we lose our way and do that which we shouldn't, you are not there shaking your finger at us, rather you are there ready to forgive us if we just ask. When we, like the prodigal son, want to go off and do things our way, on our time, you don't force us to other action, instead, you allow us to use our gift of free will to go our way, and yet you are always there, ready to welcome us back, with open arms and forgiving love. That is why you came. To show us just how much you do love us. To show us how much you want to bring us to you, and save us from the perils we so often make for ourselves. And so Lord, we pray that in this final week of Advent, that we would not only reflect on the love you have for us, but how we show you our love for you. Through our worship, our prayer, and mostly through how we love others. We remember that Jesus said, “Love, as I have loved you.” Help us to do so, O God.

And it is others we think about now, as we lift them up in prayer. You have heard....

In the spirit of praise and worship and the joy and music of this day, we offer our voices together as we sing the prayer Jesus taught us.

We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God." - Thomas Merton

Loving, forgiving, mighty God, we lift up to you our praise, our thanks, our love, our lives. There are other places we could be this morning, but we have chosen to be here. To worship you, to listen to you, to be changed by you, to offer ourselves to you, because we know that we need you in our lives. For you are the one, the only one, who knows all things, who loves unconditionally, who offers strength and hope that goes far beyond what people and things of this world can give. And we are humbled, and we are grateful. And yet, Lord, we confess that we sometimes distance ourselves from you. We don't like what's happening to us or our loved ones, and we blame you and question you. Pressures get to us, and rather than come to you for help and calm and guidance, we become impatient and frustrated, and we make problems worse. Things don't go the way we want, and we complain to you rather than trust you. Yes, we are sometimes not at peace with you and we hurt ourselves because of it. And Lord, at this season of the year we are reminded once again that even though we distance ourselves, you continue to want us. You want us so badly that you came as a human to be with us. You were not content to let us go about our sinful and haphazard ways. You came to love us, to forgive us, to show us how our lives can be meaningful, peaceful, content. And so, in this Advent season, let us indeed pray Come, O Christ, Come into our lives and show us the way.

Lord, we come this day also to bring others closer to you in and through our prayers. We know that our country, our world is in need of your healing, your tolerance, your wisdom. We know that those around us need a sense that you are there. For there are some for whom this season is not jolly. There has been loss, there are health issues, there are concerns that cannot be alleviated by singing carols or decorating a tree. And so we ask for your deep and abiding presence for them. There are specific people we wish to mention. You have heard those on our prayer list.

Lord, in this season, when we know that there may be guests in our church, there are those who think about you more during Christmas, there are those who are looking at where their lives will go in the new year. And so we pray that we would be a people and a church that shares your love and acceptance and offers ways to draw closer to you. And so, we pray our John Wesley prayer together...

Rev. Tony Evans “God will meet you where you are in order to take you where He wants you to go.”

O loving God, forgiving God of hope and promise, we are grateful for this day, for this time of worship, and for the Advent season that is upon us, as we await, once again, the coming of Jesus Christ our Lord, and all that means for us. And we are grateful too, that you do indeed meet us where we are. For we confess that we are often in different places. Sometimes we have that faith of a mustard seed, believing that you can do all things, and other times we confess that our faith falters, and we find it difficult to believe you really care, we wonder where you are. Sometimes our hearts are filled with compassion, and we are willing to reach out, to sacrifice, to give. Other times we confess that we are self-centered and stingy with our time, our patience, our money. Sometimes we walk in humility, submitting ourselves to your will, and other times we confess we want you to work and act in our time and in our way. And so Lord, forgive us and thank you for meeting us where we are. And thank you also that you want to take us to someplace new. To higher living. To more holy living. To more Christ-like living. And especially in this season where we celebrate that you want to come into our lives, may we have the desire and the commitment to put you first, to follow you and your ways, even when it is difficult. Trusting in your presence, your peace, your hope and your guidance in all we do.

Lord, we come with both that for which we are grateful and joyful, and we come with that which weighs heavy on our minds. We think of the world around us, and we think of those close to us. And for these we pray. You have heard those on our prayer list, but hear us now, as people in this congregation lift aloud the names for whom we ask your blessing.

You see, it isn't that prayer is powerful. But God is powerful, and to pray is to give ourselves, our loved ones, our situations, over to this enormous power.

O Mighty and Majestic God, what a comfort and peace we find when we do give ourselves to your power. When we stop trying to play God, when we stop trying to figure it out on our own, when we stop wanting to do things our way, and in our time. For then and only then can we be assured that the One who is sovereign, the One who knows all, the One who has power over all things, has our lives firmly in his wise and loving embrace. And prayer is the means by which we draw on that power. Forgive us, Lord, when our prayers are rote and repetitive, when we speak without really putting much thought into what we are saying, when we come to you out of duty rather than love. Help us to remember that we are talking with the God of the universe, and our prayers matter. Because our lives matter. Our actions and words matter. And we want our lives, our words, our attitudes, our actions, to be pleasing to you. For we want to be the people you want us to be. And that can only happen when we come to you in prayer. And we thank you that you are always, always available to us.

And Lord we come with others on our hearts and minds. We come with prayers for our country and world. Lord, we are in need. We are in need of civility, we are in need of peaceful conversation, we are in need of people willing to take the high ground in their words and actions. We are in need of leaders, officers, executives who are more concerned about the greater good, than with personal gain. We are in need of people who refuse to use their power or position to take advantage of others. We are in need of justice and responsibility and discipline. We are in need. And so we come in humility praying for those who may not be willing to pray for themselves.

And for others, Lord. Those we know..

Prayer is not doing, but being. It is not just words but the beyond-words experience of coming into the presence of something much greater than oneself.” Kathleen Norris

O Mighty, Sovereign, Creator God, as the Bible says, “Who is like you, O Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, working wonders?” Yes, O God, when we come to you in prayer, when we pause to actually think about Who we are talking to, we know that we are in the presence of one who is much greater than ourselves. And when we think of your greatness – of your power, your love, your mystery and majesty, we are humbled. For we know our place before you. And in our humility, we are reminded that we have not always fulfilled your desire for us and for the way we are to live. We have strayed, we have been apathetic, we have let pressures and people get to us, and we have felt our own needs and desires to be most important. But in your presence, we must face the fact that it is not all about us. That while you love and care for each one of us so intimately, you love and care equally for all your world. And your call to us, is to love you and to love one another. Even when it is difficult, even when it is inconvenient, even when it takes work and sacrifice. For you love us always, even when we are difficult, even when we are unlovable, and you gave the ultimate sacrifice – your life, for our salvation. And so may we have eyes that see beyond, and hearts that reach beyond our own concerns and daily duties and issues of life. And see the world and the people around us through your lens. And may we do all we can to live as the Bible says, “ Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.”

Lord, we come humbly before you with our prayers for others as well as ourselves. For those who need healing, of both body and mind. For those who need hope in life, feeling so desperate, they find it easier to escape through drugs or alcohol. For those in other countries, where situations are tragic, and it is so easy for the rest of the world to turn a blind eye – like the Rohingya Refugee crisis. For those who need to know you care and that you are present. And we pray for those of us, whom you have asked to be your instruments of love and hope and justice. May we be an answer to pray for others around us.

Lord, you have heard....

"To confess your sins to God is not to tell God anything God doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you do confess them, they become the bridge."

Frederick Buechner

Lord God, first of all, we come to you with thanks. We thank you that we know you, that we can trust in you, that we can find peace and comfort and direction in our lives because you are in our lives. And we thank you, Lord, that you know us – individually and intimately. And Lord, when we really reflect on that, it is freeing to confess our sins. For we all have failings and frailties; we've all done and said things we wish we hadn't; we've all not done something we should have done. And we feel pain or guilt or disappointment in ourselves. And it does us no good to try to hide it or to wish things were otherwise. This is the way it is. As Buechner said, "You know it anyway." And so when we come to you, admitting what is on our hearts – honest and transparent to you, then we can truly feel a melting away of the heaviness we feel. For we know that your forgiveness is immediate and complete, and when we lay our burdens, our sins, at your feet, you say to us, "Your sins have been forgiven. You have a new start, a clean slate." And that is a relief, a joy, and it gives us hope and encouragement to live our lives as Christ taught. And so, Lord, in just a moment, we will come in silence and in honesty to make our confessions, to bring our lives to you. But first, we wish to lift up others who are in need.

There are many, Lord, who are hurting or needing peace or guidance or healing. You have heard those on our prayer list, and hear us now people in this congregation lift aloud the names for whom we ask your blessing.

In silence

Lord, we pray that we may leave this place, desiring to "sin no more," but to be pure in heart, compassionate in our actions, and faithful to your word. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Rev. James Harnish tells the story of a man who came home one day to find that his wife had put up a wall hanging that read, "Prayer changes things." However, 24 hours later, the wall hanging had been removed. She asked her husband, "What's wrong? Don't you like prayer?" He said, "O yes, I like prayer. I don't like change."

O Loving and Holy God, we come to you in prayer because we believe prayer does change things. However, we know that when we enter into your presence in a real and genuine way, then we open ourselves to your changing and transforming power in our lives. We open ourselves to be changed. And that can be scary. For Lord, sometimes we don't want to face ourselves. We don't want to admit that there are parts of us that need changing. We don't want to feel less than the best. Because it hurts, and it's disappointing, to ourselves and to others, and so we'd rather just not think about it. But in your presence, we have no choice. For you know every part of us. There is no hiding, no faking it, no pretense. We are who we are, and we've done what we've done, and yet, the incredible part is that you love us still. You love us with a love that will never let us go. You love with a love that wants us to change so that we know what it is like to live in union with you. To feel like our lives are in your hands, and that we do not go this journey alone. But that we have the Sovereign, loving, powerful God of the universe on our side. And so, forgive us Lord, and may we pray as the Psalmist did, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Yes, O God, search us and help us to search ourselves. And then grant us the strength and determination to do the hard work of confession, repentance, and change. Thank you for your love and your power to change us.

And Lord, we pray for change for others too. We pray for change in our world, our country. We pray for change in the way we, as nations, as leaders, as citizens, interact with one another. Help us all to be less adamant to make our rights, our opinions, our concerns heard, and be more willing to hear others. To engage in conversation in which we put ourselves in another's shoes. To be less judgmental, and more empathetic. To be willing to find ways of compromise, to focus on what is most important, to find a path for the greater common good of all. Help us to follow the way and words and wisdom of Jesus Christ. There are individuals we pray for as well. You have heard...

Lord, as we think about our families, our community, our country, we know that we, as a church, can make an impact. We can share the good news of Jesus Christ, and the difference he can make. And so, today we pray our John Wesley prayer together...

"Prayer is not monologue, but dialogue. God's voice in response to mine is its most essential part."

Andrew Murray

Loving and Eternal God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer of our lives, we come in the quiet, seeking to settle our minds from the world around us, and to give our full attention to you. Help us to leave behind the concerns from wherever we've come from. And help us not to look ahead to the needs and activities of this day. But be within us, so that we can be present to you in body, mind and soul. For Lord, we can talk to you, in fact you want us to talk to you, sharing with you those things that are on our hearts and minds. But we are not always so good at listening. We have preconceived ideas of how we want you to answer us. We often think we know what's best anyway, and so we don't really want to hear what you have to say. Sometimes we just haven't put our God ears on. We surround ourselves with so much other noise, that we fail to hear your "still, soft voice." We fail to even pause, to stop and set aside our phones, our to-do lists, our calendars, and even give you the time to speak to us. Forgive us, Lord. For not only do we sadden you when we don't listen, but we do ourselves a disservice. We forego the wisdom, the guidance, the comfort, the peace you can give us. Help us to remember the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who said, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" May we hear your word to us today.

Lord, we come to you in prayer because we trust in your power to make a difference in the lives of those we love. We believe in your sovereignty to change things, to help in places of need, to bring hope in places of despair. And so we lift to you those who are on our hearts and minds this day. And even as we think of those we know, help us to be mindful of those who feel lost and forgotten. Those in parts of the world where simple necessities such as food and water are in short supply, and where medical care is scarce. Those who are oppressed by governments and power hungry forces who devalue human life. There is pain in places we cannot see or understand, and yet you know, O Lord, and we pray for that which we cannot see, but that which causes you and your children sorrow and suffering. May we never take for granted the peace, the prosperity, the freedoms, the health, the simple pleasures we so enjoy. And now, in love and care, we bring others to you, and so hear us now as people in this congregation lift aloud those for whom we ask your blessing.

And now, Lord, we pause in stillness to be in dialogue. To not only speak, but to listen...

Jerry Bridges: "Prayer assumes the sovereignty of God. If God is not sovereign, we have no assurance that He is able to answer our prayers. Our prayers would become nothing more than wishes. And so having trust in God's sovereignty is our foundation, and prayer is our expression of that trust."

Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen, as King David said, "Blessed are you, O Lord, for yours is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all." And O God, there are times when we need to remind ourselves that you are sovereign. That you are powerful. And that you do care. Recently we have seen so much destruction and devastation, so much loss, so much senseless violence, disturbing accusations, continued threats, and it seems like the bad news is never ending. And we sometimes wonder where to turn. What's going on? And yet, Lord, in our better moments, we know that we must turn to you. Because you have shown us that the ultimate victory and glory is yours. When evil and injustice and violence was perpetrated on your son, Jesus Christ, even the earth shook so hard a wall in the temple was torn in two. And yet, you turned the tables – you brought about resurrection. And death became life, despair became hope, fear became confidence and grief became joy. And only you, our sovereign God can do that. And so help us not to be afraid, not to despair. But rather help us use these times of difficulty to examine our own lives. Help us to be more aware that life is fragile, to be aware of what is truly most important, of our relationships, of our call as Christians living in this world. May we be less prone to talk about others, to judge their words and actions, and be more diligent to look within.

And certainly Lord, we pray for so many who have affected by the recent tragedies. For those in California, as so many have lost homes, property and lives. We pray that the winds would subside, and that the firefighters could find the strength and energy to continue to battle the blazes. We pray for the ongoing relief efforts in Puerto Rico, for the forgotten in Mexico, and those whose lives are forever changed by the hurricanes that have hit. And we pray for those near and dear to us. You have heard....

Lord's Prayer

I want to share something Pope Francis said about prayer. He said “Prayer unites us; it makes us brothers and sisters. In prayer, we all learn to say “Father”, “Dad.” In prayer, there are no rich and poor people, no, as the Bible say, Greek or Jew, servant or free, there are only sons and daughters, sisters and brothers.” And so together, let us pray.

Holy and gracious God, we gather for worship as people of your kingdom. As those called from different places in life, different abilities, different interests, different personalities, and yet, all one on Christ Jesus. And there is something beautiful in that. And today, as we celebrate World Wide Communion Sunday, when people from across the globe are sharing together this day in Holy Communion, we celebrate the different ways you have made us. And we celebrate that we seek to live in unified faith with one another. For it is not easy, Lord – to live in this world. We want to be examples of love and peace and understanding. And yet sometimes we fail, and we ask your forgiveness. For your calling is full of paradox that seems to make no sense and defies all worldly logic. Enemies are to be loved, not hated; outcasts are to be embraced, rather than disregarded or scorned; the humble and the meek are lauded, not the rich and powerful. In your kingdom, life springs forth from death, and childlike faith, not human knowledge, is the way to wisdom. Salt, mustard seeds and yeast are the commodities of choice, not gold or silver or precious jewels. This is the kingdom to which we have been called as disciples of Christ. Give us courage to embrace this way of living, faith to trust the Lord we serve, and joy as we become kingdom builders in our church, our community, in our homes, in our lives.

Lord, we come to you, knowing that you have the power, the presence, the love and compassion to help those who are in need. Lord, we know the devastation in Puerto Rico, and we pray that there would be unity in working together effectively and efficiently. We can't even imagine the extent of the problem, and in many ways it is unprecedented and uncharted waters. And so we ask that wisdom, patience, and yet a sense of urgency be with leaders and decision makers. There are others, Lord, who need your healing, your comfort, your guidance, your peace. You have heard those on our prayer list, but hear us now as people in this congregation lift aloud other names.

We know that when we confess our sins you are faithful and just to forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We are grateful for this table of Christ, and in his name we pray, amen.

"Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. No. The way to trouble God is not to come at all."

Dwight L. Moody

Ever-present, Majestic, Sovereign God, we come. We come. We come, because we really do want you, our Loving God, to help us, guide us, heal us, comfort us. And yet Lord, Mr. Moody is right - too often we don't come to you, many times thinking you have other things, other people more important than us and our concerns. And yet, Lord, when we think this way, we diminish you and your love for us. Just because we can't grasp how you can love each one of us unconditionally and individually; because we can't grasp why or how you even want to be part of our everyday lives, then we easily dismiss bringing you into our lives. And we hurt ourselves by neglecting to seek your wisdom and direction and the hope you can give us. Other times, we assume we know your will and what you want, and therefore, we don't need to actually talk to you and ask you. But again, we hurt ourselves when we don't stop to hear your

voice either of affirmation or of challenge to our thoughts . And so we ask your forgiveness. And we seek to remind ourselves that just as we want our children to love us and want to be with us, share with us, so you want us to be with you in that same kind of relationship. And we thank you.

Lord, there are many who are on our hearts and minds today. We pray for those in Mexico hit by yet two more earthquakes. We pray for the people of the Caribbean, particularly Puerto Rico, whose lives have been devastated by the hurricanes. We pray for government officials, early responders, and for their families here who are worried about their loved ones, unable to properly communicate, and unable to be physically there to help. We lift up our country and the continuing debates and racial tensions that are proliferating rather than easing. Lord, please bring to our land a sense of commonality and desire to work together, to understand one another, and to speak and act in ways that are good for all the people. Lord, help our leaders, and help us, to listen to one another with open ears and open minds. To be less prone to state our opinions and more willing to engage in calm and honest discussion. Help us remember the fruits of your Spirit are peace and patience and kindness and gentleness. May we bear those fruits in our lives, our land and our church.

Lord, there are others...

O God, we seek to pray for our church, John Wesley, for we are your voice and vehicle to share your good news with those around us. This is what you have called us to do, and we wish to do our best. And so hear us, as we pray together our John Wesley prayer...

Philip Yancey “We are not put on earth merely to satisfy our desires, to pursue life, liberty and happiness. We are here to be changed, to be made more like God in order to prepare us for a lifetime with him.”

O Loving, Living, Creator God, thank you for the gift of this day. Thank you for the peace that we feel when we come and be still before you. When we at least try to set aside the worries and concerns and to-do lists of the day, and remember that we are in the presence of a God who loves us, who calls us by name, who forgives us and who wants the best for us. And Lord, we acknowledge that when we are in your presence, we must face ourselves, and see ourselves as you see us. And while there are many times when we have tried to be our best and do our best to be like Christ, there are other times when we do not. When we look out for our own desires and interests first, and neglect to respect someone else’s feelings or way of life. When our motivations for our actions are based on what we want, what is convenient, what is best for us. As Yancey reminds us, life is more than just self-seeking pleasure. Our purpose here is to be made more and more like you, into the image in which we were created, so that we, like Christ, can bring your kingdom here on earth, and prepare ourselves to live in your heavenly kingdom forever. And so we ask that today you help us honestly look at our lives, realign our priorities, adjust our attitudes, and seek to live in a manner that is worthy to bear the name of Jesus Christ, Christians in our homes, our church, our workplaces, our community.

And Lord, we give you thanks for the events this weekend, in which we were able to reach out and serve and help others, with the money we raised, and the labor we offered. As Jesus said, we should seek to serve and not be served, and so we lift up all who supported the golf tourney and big fix. We ask your help this weekend, as we seek to raise money for the ministries of our church. We pray for the weather, for the volunteers, for those who will come through these doors, that your spirit of joy and love and fellowship would be felt and known by all. And we pray for those who are hurting, and needing healing, comfort, strength, guidance, support. You have heard....

"We have little control over the circumstances of life. We can't control the weather or the economy, and we can't control what other people say about or do to us. There is only one area where we have control--we can rule the kingdom inside. The heart of every problem is the problem in the heart."

Warren Wiersbe – pastor, author, theologian

Lord God, our Creator and Loving Father, we come humbly before you reminded once again that we do have little control over the circumstances of our lives, or the lives of others. And we want to trust in you, and come to you, no matter what happens. It's just that sometimes we wish things in this life and world were different. We are saddened by the devastation and suffering caused by recent hurricanes and earthquakes. We feel for the loss felt by so many people, which sometimes makes us feel at a loss ourselves. And yet, as we watch the news, and look at all that is happening the world around us, we confess that sometimes we create anxiety within ourselves, conjuring up all kinds of scenarios, fearing the worst, finding ourselves glued to that news to see else is going on. When, as Wiersbe says, we must first look at what is going on within us. As we are concerned about the storms hitting our nation, may we also be concerned about the storms in our own lives – the anger, the worry, the fear, the frustrations that affect our attitudes. As we are concerned about the pain and suffering caused by damaging winds, may we also be concerned about the pain and suffering caused by our damaging words – to and about others. Yes, Lord, give us an honesty about ourselves, and help us to rely on you, so that we control our actions, our thoughts, our way of life, no matter what our circumstances.

And certainly, Lord, we do pray for those so affected by recent events – people who may now feel forgotten in Houston, for those in southern Mexico who have lost lives, loved ones and homes, for the people right now in Florida, waiting and watching in uncertainty. May you be with them, and may they and we trust in your power and the promise you give that you are ever present, ever loving, and, as the Psalmist says, you, God are our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the waters roar and foam though the mountains tremble with tumult. For you are our Lord and our God.

Lord, there are others...

O Lord God of hosts, who is as mighty as you? Your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them. The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it—you have founded them. Psalm 89:8-11

O Lord God, we know that you are sovereign over all your creation. We know that you love your creation – you called it “very good.” And yet we know that both humanity and the creation were broken when sin entered in, and therefore creation too suffers and struggles. And this week, with Hurricane Harvey, and the loss and devastation we have seen in Houston, we bring to you our pleas of mercy and help for those who have been so severely affected. We trust in your love for them, we trust that you cry too, when you see your children suffering. And so we ask that you would be at work in and through the people in that area. For those trying to get food and water to those in need, for those providing medical assistance, for those working to find shelter and necessities for those who are displaced, in despair, and fearful for their future. Lord, we know that you can spread blessings along the way, in many ways, and we pray that your presence would be felt. We pray for efficiency, for wisdom in the decisions that must be made, for patience in the times of trouble, for hope to be felt, and for love and compassion to rule.

And Lord, for our world, we pray. For continued tensions over bomb threats and military exercises in North Korea. For all those concerns we hear and read about in the news. And we also pray, Lord, for those who are lost in the news – those who are the forgotten – the poor who live in streets and villages around the world, where they don't have running water, or proper sanitation or enough food. We pray for those who are caught in human trafficking, those forced into a way of life that we cannot even imagine. We pray for those with physical or mental disabilities, who live in countries where they are cast aside, and uncared for. May we never take for granted the privileges we have here, and may we open our hearts to be generous with our prayers, our awareness and our resources.

Lord, there are others we wish to bring to you...

"The spiritual life is first of all a life. It is not merely something to be known and studied, it is to be lived."

Thomas Merton,

O Loving, generous, merciful God, we are grateful for this time that we can, as Jesus said, "come away" from the busyness of our lives, and settle our hearts and minds and bodies, sitting quietly in your presence. For this time of worship gives us a sense of calmness, gives us a more proper perspective on our lives, and gives us time to focus our attention on you. And we are made better for it. And we thank you. But we do also know that our Christian life is not to be something different, something separated from who we are or what we do on a daily basis. While we might want to separate our work life from our family life, or our volunteer activities from our home life, our Christian life should define who we are, and should guide all our thoughts and actions every minute, every day. We truly are meant to live our faith. And, so Lord, for those times when we do not talk or act like a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, we ask your forgiveness. For those times the world gets to us, for the times we are weak instead of strong, for the words we say which hurt rather than help, we humbly confess and seek to be made new. We give you thanks that at this table of Communion, we are forgiven, cleansed and offered a new opportunity to begin again.

And Lord, we are grateful that we live in a country where we can worship in freedom, where we live in relative peace and prosperity, where our voices can be heard. And with all the tensions our country is currently experiencing, with a seeming propensity for people to want to fight and argue and protest, help us instead be grateful for what we have, and live as thankful people, not angry people. Help us to see what is good and right around us, and not focus on what is harsh and destructive. Lord, these are difficult times, and we pray that we, living as Christians, can be an example of how to interact with one another, how to listen, how to speak, how to share and compromise and be tolerant of differing thoughts and opinions. As the psalmist says, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O God."

Lord, we come also to pray for others.

"We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God."

Thomas Merton

O Loving and Mighty God, as we come to the close of this week, we pray, as the hymn says,... "For the healing of the nations, Lord, we pray with one accord. For a just and equal sharing of the things that earth affords. To a life of love in action, help us rise and pledge our word, help us rise and pledge our word. All that kills abundant living, let it from the earth be banned – pride of status, race or schooling, dogmas that obscure your plan." Yes, O God, it seems that every day we are hit with another incident of non-peace – of violence, hatred, killing, vitriolic language, conflict. Of racial tensions and injustices, of political divides, of harmful reactions and over-reactions. And, Lord, we acknowledge there is self-righteous anger on all sides, which leads to even more division and intolerance and tensions. We confess our own compliance in all of this, when we can't even talk to family and friends about issues without raising our voices, or our blood pressure going up, or needing our opinions be heard. Lord, may you send a calmness among us and our country and world. May we, as those who call ourselves Christians, remember and live out those fruits of your Holy Spirit – kindness, gentleness, self-control. May we fight against For Lord, indeed we cannot have peace with others if we do not have peace with ourselves or with you. And so, Lord, may your church universal, as well as this church, John Wesley become even more committed to share the good news, the great news, of Jesus Christ, so that those around us who do not know you, will come to know you, so that lives are changed, so that tolerance and understanding will be felt, so that compassion and care for all becomes the goal of our country and our world. We pray that your church, the Body of Christ, this Body of Christ, would be a force of love and acceptance and a beacon of what it means to truly follow the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

Lord God, we thank you for the opportunity we have had this weekend to share hospitality to strangers, as you have commanded. Thank you for everyone who helped with our Spaghetti Supper, for their time, energy, desserts, and for the money that was raised for Heroes in Transition. We thank you for tomorrow and the opportunity to provide water and fruit to runners, and thank you for all who help make this happen. And we pray that in some small way, what we have done the weekend will show the church, your church, in a positive light to all who have been touched by the people of John Wesley. Lord, we come to pray for others as well. You have heard....

And Lord, as we close this time in prayer, and we know that we are called as individuals and as a church to be peacemakers, to be those who draw others to you, so that they may know you, and so we pray the prayer of our church together....

And we pray, Lord, for those who don't know of your love. Who don't believe because they can't understand, or they haven't been told, because they feel unlovable, or even because they want the position of God themselves. There are a variety of reasons, and it is not ours to know or judge, it is only ours to love. As you commanded us to. And so open our hearts and our eyes that we might see those in need, and be, as Martin Luther said, "Little Christs" to them.

"A marble cutter, with chisel and hammer, was changing a stone into a statue. A preacher looking on said: "I wish I could deal such changing blows on stony hearts." The workman answered: "Maybe you could, if you worked like me, upon your knees.'" A.T. Pierson

Loving and Ever-present God, we come to you, reminded of the words of St. Paul, "Now to our God, who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." And we admit, Lord, that too often we limit what you can do in our lives, because we don't rely on your power or strength or direction. We don't come on our knees. The time we set aside to be in prayer to you is either non-existent, or we just say rote prayers with the same words, not really putting our heart and soul into understanding that we are talking to the God of the universe, the God who created us and loves us and wants the best for us in all areas of our lives. Forgive us for thinking we can and should do things on our own. For just as a loving parent wants to help and encourage and guide their children to make good and right decisions and actions, so you want to help and encourage and guide us in the same way. And so we come once again to surrender ourselves to you. To come humbly, and to worship and praise you and love you and ask for your presence to be at work every day, in all ways, so that we may live with hope and assurance and peace and love for all.

And Lord, as we think of love for all, we pray for this country. We are saddened by the events in Charlotte, where violence erupted, people were killed and injured, all because we can't learn to live in love and peace with one another. Lord, forgive us as the church universal who has not done a good job in promoting your peace and tolerance and understanding for all your children. Forgive us as individuals who are guilty of judging others, of making assumptions, of not looking out for the common good of the people around us. Send your Holy Spirit of love and justice and kindness to enter into the hearts and minds of all of us. That calm and peace and civility may rule our land.

Lord, there are others...

Thomas a Kempis early 1400's. The Imitation of Christ. Considered one of the most widely read devotionals other than the Bible. In fact, other than the Bible, no book has been translated into more languages.

“Be not angry that you cannot make others as you wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be.”

O Loving and Forgiving God, we come to you first, to give you thanks and praise for so many things. For the gift of another day of life, for the love of family and friends, for the beauty that is around us, for the health we have, for the joy of being on Cape Cod, the freedom to gather for worship, the list goes on and on. And O God, we are most thankful for you and for your love and presence in our lives. And we do confess, Lord, that too often we do look at the speck in someone else's eye, and ignore the board that is in our own. We judge their thoughts and actions, we wish they would change, we focus on their faults, we become frustrated. And in doing so, we show our own self-righteousness, our propensity for putting ourselves on a higher level. Forgive us, Lord. Help us to see ourselves honestly as you see us, and then help us also to see ourselves as you want us to be. And help us make the changes we need to become that person. So that we might indeed imitate Christ in our lives.

Lord, as we gather, we come with love and care and concern for others. There are those near and dear to us with issues around health, job, relationship, emotional and spiritual difficulties, family issues, and we pray for your healing, your direction, your strength, your comfort, your peace. There are those we don't know, but we wish for them a better life. Those in other countries who have little or no medical care, or clean water, or even a bed to sleep in. Those in countries whose leaders bring oppression, violence, fear. Forgive us, in our insulated part of the world, where we have so much and take so much for granted. May we find ways to be better stewards of what we have, and to help those who are in need.

There are specific people...

“To have God speak to the heart is a majestic experience, an experience that people may miss if they monopolize the conversation and never pause to hear God’s response.” Charles Stanley

O Lord God, we are grateful for this time that we can come away from the world, into this sanctuary, to sit quietly in your presence, and to pray – to talk and to listen. Lord, we confess that we are sometimes clumsy in prayer. We don’t always know what to say, or how to say it. We think there must be a right way and a wrong way, which is not true. You want to know all, yet we often hold back, thinking that maybe our thoughts, requests, concerns are too trivial. That you have other people, other issues to attend to. Forgive us, O God, and help us remember as Augustine said, “You love each one of us as if there were only one of us.” And help us remember to pause and listen. We ask for your help, but then we don’t stop to pay attention. So enable us in our prayers to just still our minds and wait for the thoughts you send our way. That we might know that majestic experience of having you speak to our hearts.

We thank you for the joys of summer, for family and friends, for the ability to see and hear and experience the beauty that surrounds us here on Cape Cod. We thank you for the gift of another day, and we thank you for you and for your love for us. And we pray, Lord that your Spirit of peace would descend upon our world once more. As we hear of the threats of North Korea, the chaos in Venezuela, yet more violence in Germany last night, people left to die in a hot trailer, political turmoil at home and abroad, we need to pause and remember that we do indeed live in a broken world, and that while things may happen around us, we need to focus on what happens within us. How we need to not let these things make us anxious or afraid, but how we need to find our strength and our peace in you. May these things make us more diligent to live our lives properly, to be the ones who speak with gentle tongues, who reach out in love and compassion. May we live the counter-cultural life of Jesus Christ.

There are specific people....

And now, in the quiet and silence, we listen for you , O God.