

Call to Worship

Day by day, God leads us:
**to the deep, deep pools of peace,
to the green, lush lawns of grace.**

Day by day, Jesus calls us:
**to pour out ourselves in service,
to anoint the stranger with hope.**

Day by day, the Holy Spirit shows us:
**the community we could be,
the family we are called to become.**

— written by Thom Shuman on [Lectionary Liturgies](#).

Hymn

The church is wherever God's people

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1. The church is wherever God's people are praising,
singing God's goodness for joy on this day.
The church is wherever disciples of Jesus
remember his story and walk in his way.
2. The church is wherever God's people are helping,
caring for neighbours in sickness and need.
The church is wherever God's people are sharing
the words of the Bible in gift and in deed.

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of love,
we come trusting that your love has the power to defeat evil in the world.
Jesus shows us that your love defeats even the power of death.
You are with us through the darkest valleys so that we are not afraid.
We worship you with glad hearts, praising you in the name of our Risen Lord,
praying with the breath of your Spirit in us. Renew our strength and courage to face
whatever each day holds, so our lives will bring you honour and glory now and always.

**God of love,
we confess that too often we let the events around us shatter our trust in your
love. When terror strikes and innocents fall, we wonder if love can defeat
violence. When truth gets lost among misleading claims, we wonder if love can
prevail over lies. Forgive us, God, when we lose our trust in the power of your
love so soon after it raised Jesus from death's grip.**

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Holy Spirit, pour out upon us wisdom and understanding, that, being taught by you in Holy Scripture, our hearts and minds may be opened to receive all that leads to life and holiness. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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Assurance of Forgiveness

God the Creator brings you new life,
forgives and redeems you.
Take hold of this forgiveness,
and live your life in the Spirit of Jesus.

Scripture Readings

❖ Psalm 23

- ¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- ² The Lord makes me lie down in green pastures;
leads me beside still waters;
- ³ restores my soul and leads me in right paths
for the sake of the Lord's name.
- ⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil; for you are with me;
your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for the length of my days.

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❖ Act 2:42-47

- ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- ⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Together

The devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Sounds rather idyllic. It is a picture of the community of faith after the resurrection of Jesus. This story of the people gathered comes as part of the story of Pentecost, when the gift of the Holy Spirit came upon the people and many were baptized. In fact, we are told that "day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." (v47)

One might think that this was the picture of what the church was supposed to be and that we have messed it up. But really it didn't last long at all. People, being imperfect, got it messed up fairly quickly. Still, this was a glimpse, if even for a moment of how the church at its best might look. It was a little like the garden of Eden where all was provided. The needs of people were met by people sharing what they had and possessions and goods were distributed with the proceeds going to all as any had need. Some might say this is socialism, but really it is about God's people providing, caring, and being community with everyone being considered valued and worthy.

This vision did not last then and it is not sustainable now, but that does not mean that we throw out the ideal, but rather finds ways to strive for it. To show that people matter. In this case the story is about the community of faith, about how we can be in community with one another. It is about healthy relationships and care. It is about supporting one another, learning together, spending time getting to know one another, breaking bread together, whether it be in our homes, at a potluck lunch, or over communion. All of it and more held in prayer.

Just the other night as the choir met together, we spoke about the fact that almost no one is going to just walk into the church just because, but they may come because we have spent time in the community as people of God helping and spending time with them. Then, with an invitation to join together with us in worship, someone may accept, but what will they experience if they choose to come to worship?

This passage of scripture is about our health as the church, as a community of faith, as a congregation. Are we healthy? Are we as welcoming as we like to believe we are? I believe we are well on our way, but this welcoming hospitality does not come naturally and working toward this never comes to some final conclusion. Each Sunday we need to check in with each other, learn about each other, and make sure that someone who does choose to dawn our doors finds a healthy, vibrant, welcoming people of God.

What were the marks of a congregation that is truly together? Let's break that down again. First is being devoted to the apostles' teaching. For us that is the New Testament. This is not to say that the Old Testament does not have meaning for us, but the Christian faith is based in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus which is told in the Gospels and the letters of those who lived in those years following Jesus' life, those who were witnesses to the power of the Holy Spirit. Spending time reading, learning, and reflecting on the scriptures is essential to understanding what we are called to be and do. It is an important part of our worship services, but goes beyond just Sunday morning.

And speaking of the Holy Spirit. Remember this scripture is part of the bigger story of the gift of the Holy Spirit being given to the people. All of what they did they did because of the work the Spirit was doing in, among, and through them. That is still the case for us. The Holy Spirit is still at work in believers as individuals and in community. So as this message is shared and heard today, remember all of this is done together in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are the church because of God's love shown to us through Jesus and in the Holy Spirit.

So the church spends time in scripture and in learning. The church together also devotes time to fellowship and breaking of bread. Those coffee hours, potlucks, activities, including the shortbread sales, flea market, and even when just a few are gathered around a dinner table but are part of this church together, all of it is about fellowship. It is about caring for one another, learning about each other, spending time getting to know and trust one another.

Those times of gathering to work and worship, meals and conversation are as important as reading scripture. These opportunities to be together build our bonds of trust. It is about relationship building and when we are good together, people who join us, who may not know us, can sense our love for one another.

It is important that our bonds of trust and community do not become closed and insular. Christian community is about welcome, and just as the love between God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit outpoured into the making of creation, so our love cannot stay bound but rather overflow, just like that cup that runneth over in Psalm 23. Overflowing love that extends welcome and hospitality to anyone that enters these doors.

Finally, the mark of a healthy community of faith is one that prays together. If there is one area that we can and need to strengthen our congregation it is that of prayer. Professor at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis, Rolf Jacobsen writes, "In prayer, we...do several things: Give ourselves to God, receive God fully, praise God, plead for mercy and justice, express trust, and listen for God's voice in our lives."¹ Prayer is the connector and the connection to God. It is vital for the health, well-being, and future of our church.

Everything about us hinges on prayer. We are called to pray as individuals, but certainly as a community. We pray in worship, and we can be more diligent about our prayers when we come together for all the other activities of the church along with devoting specific times for pray throughout the month and year. We can hold each other and this congregation in prayer each day or as often as you think of it. No prayer goes unheard and each one is answered. It may not be answered as we hoped, but prayer is answered and it is always with the understanding that God knows, sees, and understands what we cannot.

¹ **Jacobson, Rolf.** [Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread, and Prayers - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)
Accessed April 28, 2023.

As I write I think of the many sports stories we have seen where a number, slogan, or symbol is placed on the team's jerseys to show solidarity. In January, NFL player Damar Hamlin collapsed during a game. Some weeks later, the NFL showed support for the 24-year-old on his road to recovery announcing that on a particular week all 32 teams would be encouraged to read a special message before kickoff as a unified show of solidarity for Hamlin, who remained hospitalized in the ICU. His own team, the Buffalo Bills have been wearing his Number 3 to show support.

As Christians we are not always so overt about our support of one another, though we can choose to be. But to have that type of team connection, that when one is down and out others know it and are there to support, or when it is a time of celebration we celebrate together, when it is time to work or worship, we are all in. This is something to strive for. It is a witness that will be undeniable in the community. If word got out about our love for one another and any one who connects with us that would be amazing and would speak with and without words about who we have become and are becoming because of God's love, the power of resurrection and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

The power of "together". Together we are the church. Together we can transform lives and community. Together we break bread, eat our food with glad and generous hearts, praise God and have the goodwill of all the people. And maybe, just maybe, the Lord will add to our number those whose lives are also being transformed because together we work, worship, praise God and share our lives with one another.

I speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Prayers of the People

Holy Spirit, who moves within and among us, around us and ahead, we thank You for the fellowship we have in You.

You are the bond between us, who breathes into the life of our community that perfect unity of love that is one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Inspire us, we humbly pray, that in the life that we share together as a community of faith, as Church, people may know themselves loved as Jesus loves.

May we be communities of reconciliation, seeking restorative justice, building bridges, making connections, reaching out to others, to the glory of Your holy name. Especially we pray for people in challenging places; in countries recovering from earthquake, in places where there is war, in situations where people have been hurt by the actions of others, and where relationships are fractured.

God of peace, may the love with which the Good Shepherd tends all the flock, restore the image of God in us all.

Gracious God, after whom every family on earth and heaven takes its name, we thank You for deep relationships, for opportunities to give and to receive,

to listen and hear what another is saying, to serve one another and celebrate every kindness. In moments of silence we bring to You now our thoughts and prayers for those whom we, like the disciples, bring to Jesus today that he might bless them.

Jesus, Crucified, Risen and Ascended Lord,
You intercede for us before the throne of God, thanks be to You!
Holy Spirit You, help us to pray in sounds too deep for words,
thanks be to You! Creator of life, You call us to life anew;
thanks be to You!

These prayers we offer to the one in whom we live and move and have our being, to whom be all glory and praise and as Jesus taught us we pray together...

[30th April, 4th Sunday of Easter | The Church of Scotland](#)

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to the offering

With thankfulness we give in gratitude and joy.
With prayerfulness we give in sacrifice and love.
With hopefulness we give in commitment to God.

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Hymn

There's a spirit in the air

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| 1. There's a Spirit in the air,
telling Christians everywhere,
"Praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working, in our world!" | 2. Lose your shyness, find your tongue,
tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today! |
| 3. When believers break the bread,
when a hungry child is fed,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world. | 4. Still the Spirit gives us light,
seeing wrong and setting right:
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today! |

5. When a stranger's not alone,
where the homeless find a home,
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.

6. May the Spirit fill our praise,
guide our thoughts and change our ways.
God in Christ has come to stay.
Live tomorrow's life today!

7. There's a Spirit in the air,
calling people everywhere;
praise the love that Christ revealed,
living, working in our world.

"There's a spirit in the air" words by Brian Wren, John W. Wilson

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Benediction

As you leave the sanctuary today,
may you know the hope to which God has called you,
experience the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
and trust his incomparably great power for us who believe.

—based on Ephesians 1:18-19

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