

# *A Congregation in Prayer*

## *COVID-19*

*March 15 through June 19*

In Honor of ....

Doctors, Nurses and all Medical and Emergency Service personnel

In Memory of ...

All those who have lost their lives to COVID-19 around the world

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## **2020**

*FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH*  
*GOLDSBORO, NC*

## Foreword and Acknowledgments

“Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God our Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5: 19-20).

Our congregation’s response to COVID-19 has been “learning, adapting, and being at our creative best” (Pastor Lonnie). March 14, 2020, we closed our doors on orders from the Governor to protect ourselves from a deadly virus. On March 15, 2020, Mary began online worship services involving our members: songs (Jayson), reflections (Elders), prayers, creeds, scriptures (our members from our youngest to our oldest).

Women of the Church and our Deacons immediately began calling, sending cards, and taking food to members. Deacon Chair Anne Fidler asked for weekly prayers and artwork. Robin Wilson read the prayers over the telephone. Our church united in its mission for members of the congregation to be its ministers. *A Congregation in Prayer* reflects our congregation’s deep faith and loving care for each other. Every word is a testament to our Lord. Even though our doors at 1101 East Ash Street were closed, our hearts were open. We continued to gather as our church family in love.

Thank you to Nona, Ruth, and Jean for continuing to take care of church responsibilities. Special gratitude for our Mary Taneti. She worked tirelessly – often until late night hours – to ensure that FPC would worship and pray with each other.

May the words and art in this book be a spiritual blessing to you. Kathryn Spicer

“Dear God, you bring light into darkness. Be with those around the world who are sick and alone. Dear God, let your light shine through me. Amen.” (Eleanor Metzler)

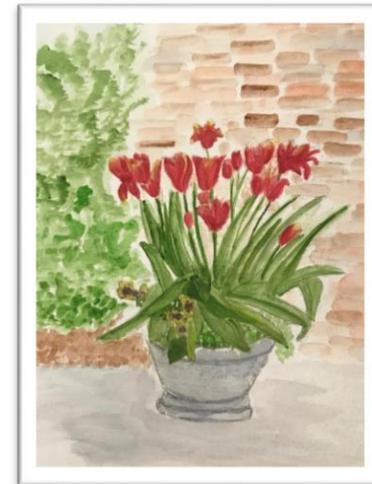
Foreword and Acknowledgements: Kathryn Spicer  
Editing: Kathryn Spicer, Rosalyn Lomax, Mary Taneti  
Closing Reflection and Prayer: Rev. Dr. Lonnie Darnell

caring, speaking to us in a gentle, divine whisper, saying to us as God did to Elijah: “What are you doing, my child, here or wherever you are? Are you weary, afraid, overwhelmed by it all? Know that you are in My presence and I am with you.”

### PRAYER

Almighty God, who out of chaos created life and beauty and peace, we trust You to be with us in this time of global fear and alarm. We hold in prayer our First Presbyterian Church congregation and the collective suffering of our world. Especially do we grieve precious lives lost and vulnerable lives at risk. We pray for ourselves and our neighbors, as all of us stand before an uncertain future. O God of stillness and quietness, in this pandemic whisper to us Your words of reassurance and hope. Draw close and do not pass us by. Help us to be safe and reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity. Call us to profound trust in your faithful presence—You, the God who does not abandon; You, the Holy One, great and powerful, yet known to us in a gentle whisper. May we, Your Church, now and always be ready to offer comfort and love to all, in Your holy name. Amen. (Pastor Lonnie)

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Art by Robin Wilson

## Final Reflections from 1 Kings 19:9-13

<sup>9</sup>There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

<sup>10</sup>He replied, *“I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”*

<sup>11</sup>The LORD said, *“Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”*

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup>After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. <sup>13</sup>When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, *“What are you doing here, Elijah?”*

We close this booklet of readings, reflections and prayers with the realization that all of us at First Presbyterian Church, and the whole world, are living through a period of deep disruption, chaos and anxiety. Every aspect of life has been changed. The people, places and things we hold most dear have been disengaged from us, and the normal order of everyday living has been utterly upended. The prophet Elijah was in a similar place. Rejected by his people, chased by corrupt authorities, he was the last standing prophet in Israel. Lonely and afraid, disconnected and heartbroken, Elijah waits for God.

But God does not arrive—that is, in the way that Elijah expected. God was not in the wind, not in an earthquake, not in a fire and tempest. In fact, the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is and was and is to come, this God became known in a gentle whisper.

Friends, God is in the gentle whisper. Though the wind may be of hurricane strength, the earth shakes with incredible force, and fires scorch through the land, yet God is present and nearby, but as a gentle whisper of peace to our weary hearts and troubled souls. As we navigate this pandemic, may we remember the quietness, the tenderness, the absolute continual closeness of God. In all the chaos and fear, God is ever present, ever knowing, and ever

Almighty God, you alone strengthen all that is weak. Bless us as we pray for we are weak with fear, uncertainty and chaos. Bind us together with your love so that we may trust in your compassion and mercy. Lead us each day by your wisdom so that we may not stumble. Grant us your healing and fill us with your spirit. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen. (Mary Taneti)

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Lord, in these days of fear and uncertainty, strengthen our faith and deepen our love for our neighbors. Help us to focus, not on our own inconvenience, but on the troubles and needs of others. Use this crisis, God, to bring out the best in us, to unite us where we have been divided, to remind us that we are all children of God, that no man is an island. Help us to find hope in the flowering of our city and to remember God’s promises. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the facing of these days. Amen (Barbara Ann Vinson)

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Dear Lord, I pray you heal the people with the corona virus because God can do that. He heals sick people and makes them feel better a lot. And make it hot outside for the flowers and so we can run in the sprinkler. (Rory Blackburn)

Dear Lord, I pray during this time of uncertainty for the isolated. I pray especially for those living in elder care facilities with limited contact from friends and family. Wrap them in your love that they might feel comforted. Amen. (Ali Blackburn)

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Loving and merciful Father, thank you that your help is in the name of the Lord, your name; you are God with us. Please make us ever mindful that you are our strong defense in every circumstance. May we feel your very present help in these troubling and frightening times; remind us that you have not given us a spirit of fear.

Fill us with your spirit of love to think of others, pray for others, do for others, especially the helpless, the vulnerable, the lonely. Remind us how very blessed we are as individuals and as a church, and keep us grateful as you heal your world. We pray in Jesus’ name, Amen. (Rosalyn Lomax)

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Heavenly Father,

In these times of uncertainty and fear, we thank You. Thank You for the blossoming dogwoods, the tulips peeking up from the ground, the stunning array of colors in the azaleas and the happy chirping of the robin as he prepares his nest for his pale blue egg. Thank You for this season, abundant with new life, which reminds us that no matter how bad things may seem right now, life will begin anew one day. Your canvas is our comfort, and we thank You for this and all our many blessings. Amen. (Will Spicer)

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Dear Lord,

I pray that there be a concern for the elderly and for people with serious health conditions that they be spared from this deadly disease. I pray that you protect and comfort them in this time of uncertainty, and I pray that you keep this virus from continuing to spread. May my prayers help in guiding our leaders in making the decisions that affect our lives. I pray that they be truthful and communicate clearly with the public. Let there be truth and empathy by the people setting policies for our protection. Amen. (Emma Jordan)

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Almighty God,

How blessed we are for the example you have set for us. During your son's final time on this Earth, he washed his disciples' feet as an example of love. Love is not simply warm feelings, but instead an attitude shown through our actions. We pray to you now, during this difficult time in our lives, may we know how to show our love by our service to others. May it be through the simple act of sending a card in the mail or a phone call to check-in. We ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we love from afar. May we continue to love each other, as you have loved us! In Your name we pray, Amen. (Meredith Gurley)

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Jesus clearly explained ahead of the coming crisis that his disciples needed to truly Believe in Him, Trust in Him, and Know that He and the Father were One. Jesus encouraged them by revealing His plan for them to continue His work after He was gone, doing even greater works than He had been able to do in those three short years. How would that be possible? He made them a promise, "Ask me anything, in My name, and I will do it" (verse 14). He was saying to them and to us, Trust Me.....I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (verse 6). I will help you. There is power in believing and in trusting.

Allow me a short illustration that you have surely heard before.

On July 15 of 1859, a famous tightrope walker named Charles Blondin had a line placed across Niagara Falls, spanning a quarter of a mile between the US and Canada. In front of a cheering crowd, he then proceeded to walk across it (160 feet up in the air) pushing a wheelbarrow in front of him, as the pounding water drowned out all other sound. Reaching the other side, he stepped down to acknowledge the applause of the crowd. He approached them asking, "Do you believe that I can walk back on that tightrope without falling off?" "Yes," they replied. "Do you really believe I can make it?" he asked. "Oh, Yes," they replied, "we've just seen you do it!" "Then," said Blondin, "who will get into that wheelbarrow?" "Not a chance," they replied, "It is too dangerous!"

Let us not be timid bystanders, afraid to trust the promises of our Lord. As we begin the next chapter at FPC with our interim pastor Rev. Lonnie Darnell on board, let us diligently seek to do God's work in a meaningful and healthy way. Our church is made up of loving committed members who have shown their concern for each other and for those in need, both within and outside our walls. Remember how Jesus encouraged His disciples (and us) to continue His work, even in fearful times, counting on His promise of aid through his Holy Spirit.

In the words of Pastor Darnell, "We should see ourselves not in a survival mode, but learning, adapting, and being at our creative best."

With God's help, let's do it! Amen. (Ann Hunter)

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## Reflections on John 14:1-14 from Sunday, May 10

Today's scripture reading takes place after Jesus washes the feet of the disciples and predicts that Peter will deny him. The first four verses of this chapter are Jesus comforting his Disciples. "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." In God's house are many mansions, homes, rooms. He has a place beyond our comprehension prepared for us for eternal life but we must BELIEVE. In verse 6 Jesus goes on to say he is the only way to God the Father. Not ONE way but the ONLY way. We must BELIEVE.

As I sat in the Lowes parking lot patiently waiting for AI to buy a few "project items," I watched the many people of all shapes and sizes hurrying in and out. It was interesting to see what purchases were in their baskets that they felt they "needed." Wouldn't it be wonderful if we use this time of staying at home to stop and consider our spiritual or eternal homes as much as we have our temporary homes? Maybe God is reminding us we are not in charge. However, he has promised us eternal life through the gift of his Son Jesus. We must BELIEVE.

Prayer: Dear God,

We do give you praise and thanks for our many blessings. Calm our fears of the unknown. You have prepared a place for us for eternal life. Help us, Lord, to believe with our whole hearts, to be more faithful about our prayer life, to be more diligent about studying your word and being your servant here on earth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen (Hettie Grisette)

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The 14th Chapter of John, verses 1-14, speaks volumes to us today as we find ourselves in a world that is whirling in fearful uncertainty. In verse 1, Jesus says quite clearly, "Let not your heart be troubled, Believe in God and in Me." The Message version of the same verse is blunt: "Don't let this throw you. You trust God, don't you?"

When Jesus spoke those words, He was preparing his disciples for what was coming. In just the space of a few days, they would have their world turned completely upside down. The leader in whom they had put all their hopes would be arrested and crucified, and they would be desperately trying to find their "safe place" to wait out the danger and figure out their next step. (Sound familiar?)

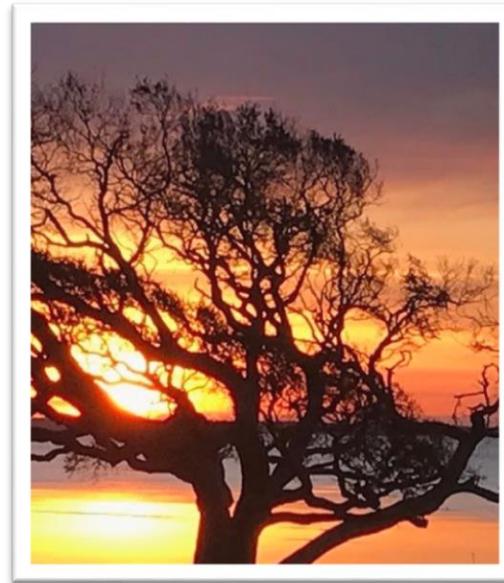


Photo by Ellen Jordan

Almighty and gracious God, we come to You this day with praise and adoration for all the blessings and mercies You have shown us. Our hearts overflow with love and thanksgiving for You and Your creations. For the clear blue skies, warm temperatures, and beautiful blooming flowers, we thank Thee, Lord.

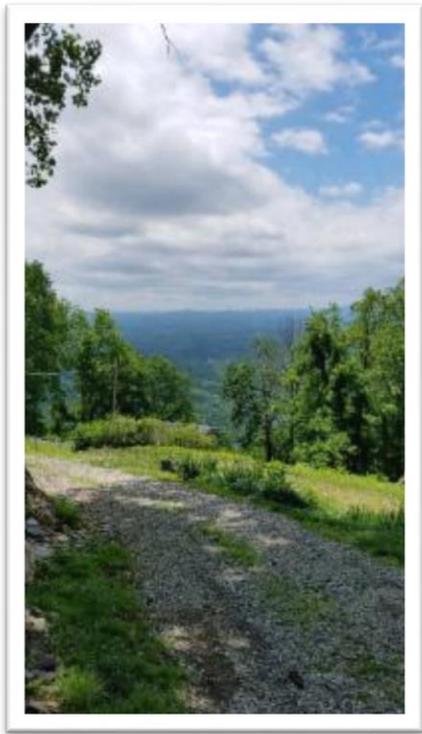
We ask for Your forgiveness of our sins, our wrong-doings, and for our stumbling to follow You as You would like us to. Bring us back to You and Your ways.

Please continue to be with us and help guide us as we navigate through these unsettled and uncertain times. As always, be with everyone who has been affected by the global pandemic, those who have lost loved ones, and all the brave, caring people on the front lines. Pour out Your peace, hope, and understanding on us so that we are mindful of others and show Your light and love to all those we may come in contact with.

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." ~John 16:33

We pray and ask all this in Your Son's holy and precious name. Amen! (Ellen Jordan)

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We pray and remember -  
Fear is present, but there does not have to be hate.  
Isolation is also there, but it does not have to be loneliness.  
Panic buying? Yes, but not meanness.  
We now wake up to hear birds singing in large cities.  
Windows are open with people singing, so those who are alone can hear them.  
Meals, keeping in touch with neighbors-- Churches, Temples, Mosques and Synagogues all welcome and help homeless, sick, and sad people and families.  
Lord, We find such peace and comfort when we give our trust to you.

The happiness that follows brings kindness, showing Love and Hope. So Lord, we pray for you to continue to guide our way as we live today and every day. Keep us awake to your Love and Hope. In your name, I ask all these things-- Amen.

(Photo and Prayer by Beth Kannan)

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*Hold our hand, God. Lead the way. Help me be good every day. Let me know what's wrong and right. Keep us safe day and night. Let us know what you have planned and God, lead the way and hold my hand. Amen* (Beth Kannan and Lola King)

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In verse four, the shepherd has brought out his sheep and he goes on ahead of them. It is important to understand the definition of the relationship described here. The shepherd is not a cowboy. Cowboys “drive” cattle. Shepherds “lead” sheep. The Good Shepherd does not stampede us toward salvation. He calls his flock. We know His voice. We follow Him knowing that His way is the right way. It is God’s way and it leads to salvation and eternal life.

Finally, in verse five, Jesus proclaims that the sheep “will never follow a stranger, in fact they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” It is important for the flock to stay together under the watchful eye of the shepherd. Sheep fare best together. Those sheep who stray away are often easy prey or fall victim to hardships.

We are living in chaotic and confusing times. We are facing a new normal. We are anxious and nervous. We are confused and often feel alone and isolated. We have been separated from the flock and we struggle to understand. It is important now, more than ever, to listen for the Good Shepherd’s call. To know His voice, and His voice alone, and not confuse it with other voices we may hear. We must believe that following that marvelous voice will return us to the flock, with its safety and community, and trust that no matter how distanced we feel, God has not abandoned us, and He never will. (Bill Royall)

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During our current pandemic situation, life can seem pretty disorganized and out of routine. Just like the flock of sheep, we can very easily become scattered and separated from each other when confronted with turmoil. Unfortunately, there are people in the world who try and take advantage of these situations for their own benefit. Through false news and ongoing scams, we are placed in situations whereby we don’t know what is truthful and who can be trusted. As Christians, we know that our shepherd, Jesus Christ, is truth and life. We need to actively seek his counsel and knowledge through reading his Word and continuing with fellowship (incorporate physical distancing and universal masking). Through social media and participating in our church Sunday services online, we can continue our fellowship connections until we can all be together again without restrictions. Hold steadfast to daily meditations with Jesus and reach out to a neighbor, friend, or fellow church member to say hello and to help provide for their needs as able. By following our good shepherd, Jesus, we will be directed toward the green pastures in life and will be guided through current and future difficult situations. In Christ we put our trust, hope and faith. (Scott Gibson)

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It is striking to me that when the women learned that Jesus was no longer in the tomb and had risen and the two men who had gone to Emmaus saw and finally recognized Jesus that both women and the two men immediately rushed back to tell the disciples. When we realize that Jesus our Savior has risen and is saving us, should we not rush to tell anybody? Do we?

Secondly, it occurs to me that the two men going to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus until He blessed the bread, broke it and gave it to them. This is what He had done at the Last Supper and is what we experience every time we have Communion. Does this open our eyes so that we really recognize Jesus? What do we do? What should we do? (Borden Parker)

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### **Reflections on John 10:1-19 from Sunday, May 3**

#### The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

In this passage, Jesus is explaining His role and His relationship with those who believe. He is explaining this to the Pharisees who are having a difficult time understanding the meaning of Jesus' illustrations. Jesus begins by likening Himself to a good shepherd who leads his flock to the safety of the sheep pen and enters through the only way that is right which is thru the gate. When the Pharisees fail to understand this example, Jesus then turn the explanation of the relationship and His role as being one who is like the gate to the sheep pen. All who enter must come through Him.

Possibly one of the most important aspects of this passage deals with the relationship that Jesus, the shepherd, has with His followers. Beginning with verse three, Jesus states that the shepherd calls "his own sheep by name and leads them out." The sheep know the shepherd's voice and follow him. This reflects the personal nature of this relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. He knows the sheep with the same intimacy that we have with our friends and neighbors.

Often, several shepherds and their flocks would converge on a watering hole and the flocks would become intermingled. How do the shepherds keep track of their own flock in such a chaotic and confused assembly? The answer comes when it is time for the shepherd to move on. He would use a distinctive call which the sheep recognize, and the sheep from his flock would make their way to him.

Heavenly Father,

Today on this Holy Saturday, we wait with uncertainty and a sense of dread for Easter morning. What will we do if we can't celebrate your resurrection with our families, with good food, laughing children, and an Easter Egg hunt? Lord, help us do what your disciples did on that first Holy Saturday...they waited...and they rested. Help us to see this day and this pause in our lives as a time to rest and reflect on the unimaginable sacrifice you made for us. Help us to delight in our moments to rest so that we may be renewed in our strength and our faith.

Help us, Lord, to be patient, knowing that you are with us and the glory of your power is all around us. Let your Holy Spirit descend upon us and give us peace as we wait. For surely, "joy cometh in the morning." Psalm 30:5

Amen. (Lynn Branch)

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Ever-present Father,

Bless us with Faith. Faith that you are in control and by trusting you we can experience peace.

Bless us with Hope. Hope in the discovery of medications and vaccines to protect us. Hope in the wisdom of our world leaders.

Bless us with Love. Love in our homes where families are adjusting to "too much togetherness."

May we know the Joy that comes from asking and knowing your presence is with us.

In the name of Jesus, our strength and redeemer, we pray. Amen. (Ellen Best)

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Heavenly Father, thank you for watching over us during these uncertain times we are facing. We pray that you continue to take care of those currently facing hardships and let them know that you are with them all the time. We ask that you continue to keep those essential employees safe and that they may continue to do their jobs and not be in harm's way. We are also praying for the students who are finishing up their school year and who are missing not only their friends and teachers but also sporting events, proms and graduation that they have looked forward to for a long time. We are so thankful for the many blessings that you have bestowed upon us and pray that you will continue to watch over us during these trying times. In your name we pray. Amen. (Kate and Davis Hunter)

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### Reflections on Luke 24:13-35 from Sunday, April 26

The days after the Crucifixion were days of calamity and turmoil for the followers of Jesus. The two who were on the road to Emmaus were not a part of the eleven remaining Disciples, but they were clearly within the inner circle. Their minds were so fixed on “everything that had happened” that they were “kept from recognizing” Jesus when he joined them, even after he explained to them “what was said in the Scriptures concerning himself.”

Are today's followers of Jesus being kept from recognizing Jesus because of the calamity and turmoil generated by COVID-19? Our community of worship has obviously been impacted by restrictions in place to preserve our health and physical welfare. Should our spiritual welfare be impacted, too? The answer is NO. Just as Cleopas and his companion recognized Jesus upon the breaking of the bread (“their eyes were opened”), our Resolution should be and will be to recognize Jesus in our lives each and every day that passes.

We can take heed from the doctors and health professionals that fight the virus in the front lines at great personal risk on a daily basis. The followers of Jesus took up the Cross in the days and months after his death at great personal risk with the same Valor, inspired no doubt by his reappearance on the road to Emmaus as further eyewitness evidence of his Resurrection from the Tomb. Let us be inspired this day, this moment, in the same way! (John Dees)

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To understand the possible lesson, one must look at the beginning of Chapter 24 of the Gospel according to Luke. Three women, one of whom was Mary Magdalene, the beloved friend of Jesus, went to the tomb on the first Easter morning and found it empty. Luke says that they saw two men in “dazzling apparel” who said, “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” The women left and told all of this to the 11 disciples and to the rest, but none of the 11 apostles and others believed the women. Later in the passage, two of those who did not believe were going to Emmaus which is about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking about what had happened to Jesus who drew near them and went with them. They, however, did not recognize Jesus. When the men reached the village, they requested that Jesus stay with them since it was close to the end of the day. When Jesus was at the table, he took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to them. That was when they recognized Him, but He vanished out of their sight. Then although it was late in the day, they immediately rushed back to Jerusalem where they found the 11 gathered together and those who were with them. They immediately said, “The Lord has risen indeed.”

## Reflections on John 20:19-31 from Sunday, April 19

When the Disciples told Thomas about their first meeting with Jesus after the resurrection, he did not believe that it was true. He required proof. He needed to see and touch the wounds from Christ's crucifixion before he would believe. We will never have the opportunity to see the physical scars from the crucifixion. As Christians we must have faith. Faith is the basis of our belief and trust in God. It is a firm belief in something that we did not witness. Although Jesus made numerous appearances in the forty days after his resurrection, we can only witness this through words in the Bible. Jesus knew that there would be doubters—those that questioned his resurrection. Today, it seems so easy to be like Thomas, but when problems arise, faith and belief in God is the path to follow. (Harold Rose)

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As I read these familiar verses from John, what leaped off the page to me was the word "Peace." Jesus said the word to his disciples not once, not twice, but three times in this short passage.

He greeted his friends with this word; he used it again after he had shown them his wounds, saying he was sending them peace, as his Father sent peace to him. And then he breathed on them, giving them the Holy Spirit. He used the word *peace* a third time a few days later when he met his disciples again. This time Thomas was present to examine Christ's wounds for himself to allay his doubts.

Peace is what we need to hang onto in these troublesome times. Not doubt, like Thomas, though it is very easy to identify with him and demand data. But peace. Our lives have slowed down to a pace we have never known. There are no demands, few responsibilities. Life is in slow motion.

If we can embrace the quiet, enjoy the sunshine, listen to the birds, read a book, rejoice at Andrea Bocelli's singing "Amazing Grace" acapella in a lonely square, maybe we can find the peace that Jesus was talking about.

Maybe we can even feel the "spirit blow down," as we sang in Jason's cantata last fall. That is my prayer for all of us. (Barbara Ann Vinson)

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Good morning, fellow FPC members!

We are all rightfully concerned, if not consumed, about the corona virus; however, the explosion of spring with all of its new green growth and exotic blooms from trees and plants is a very visible sign that God is the Creator and the world continues to be here for us to enjoy and nurture.

Doing farm chores recently, I have almost daily seen preening tom turkeys strutting and fanning about and clucking hens. Last week for two consecutive days I saw an unfamiliar avian predator flying some 10 feet above the fields and never saw him land. A buoyant flyer, and contrary to its size, it could change direction almost like a butterfly. It had a narrow body, long pointed wings that moved gull-like. It was dark on the topside and white underneath. After consulting two bird ID books I believe it was a Mississippi Kite, which if correct, is the first one I have ever seen.

This pandemic does not seem to have peaked, but I choose to believe that this fleeting rare creature is a harbinger of hope for all of us and for our children and grandchildren. Our hope is in the Lord, but the harbingers of hope are present before each of us. I miss the congregational meetings at FPC but am nourished by the online and phone communications such as the Order of Worship.

"If I had only...

Forgotten future greatness

And looked at the green things and the buildings

And reached out to those around me

And smelled the air

And ignored the forms and the self-styled obligations

And heard the rain on the roof

And put my arms around my wife

.....and it's not too late."

By Hugh Prather as quoted in *Disciplines for the Inner Life*

(Tim Haithcock)

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Dear Lord,

We thank you for keeping us safe during this time of pandemic. Please help us to feel like we are together even when we are not. Encourage us to take this time to grow as Christians and become stronger in our faith. Please give strength to those who are in the frontlines of the battle against this virus. Help them to feel appreciated and help them to stay safe. Thank you, God, for the wonderful gift of spring time and for the warmth of the sun. Your gifts bring us happiness and security during uncertain times. Thank you for your Son our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. (*Prayers of the People* by Thomas and Trotter Sumner on 4-19-2020)

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God our Father, as the world stands still in hesitation and fear, we are reminded to walk in joy and hope as companions on the road with Jesus, whom you raised from the dead to be our Lord, and because we know you are alive, we ask you to walk extra close to us and to your people all over the world. At times it seems that we are traveling without a map; guide us, Lord.

Help us to encourage one another. We pray for the doctors, nurses, mailmen, and grocery store clerks, for all the workers that face danger in their everyday life, we pray for their safety.

Father, we thank you for our families and the extra time we have shared together. We thank you for our church and pray that we will soon be able to worship with our fellow members. Please send healing and comfort to those in need. Give us insight so that we may reach out to the members who are sick or lonely or just need a reassuring word.

Thank you, God, for our church. Thank you for our past ministers. Please help the team who is searching for our new minister. We are excited to meet the person you send to us.

Almighty Father, we know that you are in control of the whole world and everything it holds. We ask you to enter our hearts minds and bodies so that we are able to make a difference in the world. We know this is only possible with your help. Please hold our hand a little tighter as we walk together. We love you, Jesus. Amen. (*Prayers of the People* by Lilly and Katharine Eason and Joyce Wooten on 4-26-2020)

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Shock!

Disillusioned!

Emptiness!

Scared?

A Resurrection of the dead. Really?

As we approach the most important event in the history of mankind, at least to Christians and believers around the world, the above words might very easily describe the people of the early first century when a lowly carpenter from Nazareth came to save mankind and ended up on a cross to save our pitiful, stiff necked souls. But many of these same words might very easily describe the times that we are living in right now, that have come upon us so suddenly.

COVID-2019. Keep our distance, 6' or more from each other; even loved ones to a certain degree. Wear a mask in public even if we're not sure that a simple cloth mask will do us any good, especially since so many are worn improperly. And now, of all of the days of the year for our beautiful Sanctuary to be closed, at Easter no less, it will be shut off to us like Jesus's tomb, prior to Sunrise on Sunday. What do we do as believers to fully comprehend the resurrected Christ and all who call him Lord and Savior?

On our knees we pray, my dear Heavenly Father, 2,100 years ago, you sent your precious son Jesus to redeem and save us. As Scripture recalls, many of us rejected you then, and sadly, many more reject you today. Adding to many people's misery, is the Pandemic Virus we're experiencing. Yet you, and only you are the only one we can put our trust and faith into, even more so than any proposed vaccine. Instill in our hearts a true compassion for our fellow man who quite possibly is hurting like never before! Help us, Lord Jesus, to be the light that shines so brightly on those whose world is filled with so much darkness right now. As we all hit the silence and stillness of the weekend prior to Hosanna in the Highest on Sunday 'morn', let us all say: In the name of your precious son, Jesus, the CHRIST, who liveth and reigneth forever and ever, our Alpha and Omega, Amen.

Inspired by Him, written by Wiley Leonard

P.S.: "Please know that you're never alone." Tony Bennett

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But why a donkey? Zechariah 9:9 says "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and

having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” So His entering Jerusalem was a fulfillment of the prophecy. And yet, how could this be considered triumphal? Many believe that it represents the triumph of humility over pride, of meekness and gentleness over anger and aggression. And it represents his taking everything on himself so that we could know salvation. Our greatest enemies of sin and death were defeated! The crowd must have known the magnitude of this moment as laying down their clothes or palm branches was a sign of victory, triumph, peace and eternal life. They also excitedly kept shouting Hosanna, which means “save now,” crying for deliverance.

On that first Palm Sunday as well as today...Hosanna indeed! (Lee Futrelle)

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### **Reflections on John 20:1-18 from Sunday, April 12**

This is when Mary went to the tomb early in the week after Jesus’ burial. She went and saw that the tomb stone had been moved.

She ran back to tell Peter and John. They ran to the tomb where they found that the strips of His clothing were laid out and that his head covering was folded in the corner. The disciples ran back home, but Mary went into the tomb. She saw two angels, one at the foot and one at the head where Jesus had lain. The angels asked her, “Woman, why are you weeping”? She told the angels that someone had taken away her Lord. She turned around and saw a man standing there. He asked, “Woman, why are you weeping”? She, thinking he was a gardener, begged the man to let her know where Jesus was so she could take him away. Jesus said, “Mary!” She looked at him and said “Rabboni” (teacher). Jesus told her not to cling to him because he had not yet ascended to His Father, but to go out and tell the brethren. She went out and told the disciples that Jesus was ascending to His Father and your Father and to my God and your God.

This passage is the heart of Christianity. It is proof that God sacrificed His only Son so that if we believe in Him and ask him for forgiveness for our sins, we will be granted everlasting life. Jesus was the only mortal who died and was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. He was a man, like no one before him or after who was perfect in every way. He loved everyone and was a messenger of God. (Suzanne Corbin)

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Father God, thank you for the opportunity to worship you through technology. As we view this service from our homes, your word tells us to be still and know

that “I am God.” Sheltering in place during this pandemic has helped us to do that. As we stay away from work and school and the usual everyday activities of our normal lives, we’ve been given time to read the Bible, spend time with our families, observe the beautiful spring time around us, and ponder the future. Even with this terrible virus threatening us, we see your hand at work in making changes for the good of your kingdom. For some, this pandemic has been a terrible trouble, families have lost loved ones, jobs have been lost, the economy of our country has been damaged. Millions of people have been sickened worldwide and thousands have died. We pray for the safety and security that only you can bring. Lord, in your mercy, heal our land of this terrible virus.

Father God, we pray for wisdom to better understand your word, for courage to stand up for your commandments, and for strength to do your will. Let your Holy Spirit guide us and lead us down your righteous path. We pray for your healing and peace to each person and family.

Heavenly Father, we pray for our church, and we pray for your blessings upon our new interim pastor, Lonnie Darnell, as he takes on the job of temporarily pastoring our church. We pray for your guidance to our pastoral nominating committee as they prepare for the arduous task of finding a full time pastor, and Lord, we pray for our country. Be with our leaders and guide them to lead our people with honor and love and wisdom from above. Let your Holy Spirit be in the hearts of us all that we will humble ourselves before you and keep you in our hearts always. We thank you for your mercy, and for your amazing grace that is beyond all understanding. We thank you for loving us. We thank you for forgiveness through your precious son, Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Prayers of the People* by Malcolm Shearin on 5-10-2020)

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God of love and life, we thank you for the gift of this day, Good Friday, a day you showed to us the example of your unconditional love. Willingly you gave, your son, to die on the cross, for our sins. How wonderful and marvelous is your love that we receive it freely. Grant that we remain ever grateful for your sacrifice. Grant that nothing impedes us from proclaiming the crucified Christ and his resurrection. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. (Mary Taneti)

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Dear God,

I come to you today with a heavy heart, with a heart that has felt much sadness in the past week, a heart that is breaking at the news of a friend's cancer diagnosis, the murder of a man at the hands of an officer that was sworn to serve and protect, riots in the streets causing damage and destruction to property leading to peaceful protesters and law enforcement officers being injured....or worse, families whom I love losing loved ones, and COVID-19 cases rising in our state. I miss my friends, my church, my family, my daughter's school, and the list goes on. Lord, I think of how many times you've felt heartbroken. The Bible tells us that you are close to the broken-hearted, you give rest to the weary, you heal us and give us peace. In 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, we are assured that "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." Dear God, I thank you for these promises and reminders. As I sit here on this gorgeous day listening to the birds sing, looking up at the big blue sky, and enjoying the cool breeze, I feel the Holy Spirit reassuring me that I am rooted in your promises, in your peace, and in your love. I know many feel the same way I do. It is a heavy time. I pray our collective hearts begin to heal and in that healing they emerge more just, humble, loving, gentle, patient, and kind. Make us instruments of your peace, Father. In your all-healing name I pray. Amen. (Emily Byrd)

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### Reflections on Matthew 21:1-11 from Sunday, April 5

March is over and April has arrived. Not "April" our favorite donkey who usually visits us at FPC every year this time. No! This is the month of April – bringing with it Holy Week and today Palm Sunday. Matthew tells us the people spread their garments and waved palm branches shouting Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. They wanted this man to save them from oppression. But soon this sound would turn to taunts of "crucify him."

In today's world, we have our own problems like those of long ago. We want to be secure, safe and saved from difficult times. Our world is awash with fear, the unknown, and distrust.

We wave our imaginary palm branches today and cry out for our salvation. We know that the crucifixion was on the way for Jesus and yet we also know why! Because "Our King is coming" in him. He will not abandon us. He asks us as Christians to hold tight to our faith, help each other, believe the good news. In Isaiah 41:10, it says "Don't be afraid for I am with you. Don't be discouraged for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Hold fast, pray and despair will be replaced by a God of hope and love."

"Hosanna in the highest heaven." (Ellen Henderson)

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In recent years, who can forget the joy on our little one's faces as they process down the aisle waving palm branches on Palm Sunday. And, of course, we all have come to anxiously await the entrance of "April," the beloved donkey who reminds us of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

I wonder what it must have been like to be in the crowd that first Sunday when Jesus made his "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem. We are told that Jesus knew that he was going to be arrested by the religious leaders who would mock and ridicule him and ultimately deliver him for crucifixion. And yet, he came to Jerusalem, in the most public and humble of ways, fully knowing his fate. Instead of a great spectacle typically associated with kings and rulers, Jesus came as a gentle savior full of love and grace and mercy.

When Jesus said “Lazarus, come out” of the grave after he had been dead four days would almost assure Jesus a death sentence. Some believed the soul hovers over the body hoping to re-enter. After 3 days the body starts to decay and the soul moves on. So one can see why Jesus waited so long before going and raising Lazarus. This would make sure everyone knew Lazarus was dead and starting to decay. Jesus wanted all to know who He is. He is Christ, the Son of GOD. The Jews who were there returned to Jerusalem and spread the word of what they had seen with their own eyes and believed. Jesus is the Messiah. Caiaphas, the high priest, said it is better “that one man should die for the people than for the whole Jewish nation to be destroyed” by the Romans. (A servant, Willis (Bill) Stanley)

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John: fisherman, part of Christ’s inner circle (along with James and Peter), the “one whom Jesus loved,” given the responsibility to take care of Mary, “Here is your mother. From that time on, this disciple took her into his home” (John 19:27). He is also the man who gives us two of the most powerful and comforting words in our Bible: “Jesus wept.”

When I was a child, my family suffered a heartbreaking loss. Too young to make sense of the immense and lonely sadness, I remembered my loving Sunday school teacher’s reading the story of Lazarus and his sisters’ grief. “Jesus wept.” Wrapping myself in those two words, I was comforted that Christ wept for human heartache, like mine.

Christ knew that He would command Lazarus to come back to life; He was not weeping for the death. Instead, He was weeping for His dear friends’ significant grief over the loss of their brother.

In the same passage, our compassionate *human* Christ gives the divine order to Lazarus to “come out!” (John 11:43). He promised Martha and Mary that “if you believed, you will see the glory of God” (John 11:40). Jesus, capable of bringing the dead back to life, is the same Jesus who understands our human feelings.

News reports blare that this is a time of fear, isolation, uncertainty, loneliness. However, we know our divine Lord understands and is present with us. We know that He embraces us with divine compassion. We know this because “Jesus wept.” (Kathryn Spicer)

*Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name;*

*Make known His deeds among the peoples!*

*Sing to Him, sing Psalms to Him;*

*Talk of all His wondrous works!*

*Glory in His holy name*

*Let the hearts of those rejoice who*

*Seek the Lord!*

1 Chronicles 16: 8-10

Dear Heavenly Father,

It seems like there is a lot of uncertainty around us.

So many people need prayers...

For those whose health is compromised by the coronavirus or other health issues.

For those who suffer from economic impact from the virus.

For health care workers and first responders, and other public servants who put themselves in harm’s way for us.

For our leaders of our country, states and cities, as they seek to help manage this challenge.

God, it can be overwhelming, but tell us not to be afraid and this too will pass.

In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen. (Coleen Leeper)

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Dear God, you bring light in darkness. Be with those around the world who are sick and alone. Dear God, let your light shine through me. Amen. (Eleanor Metzler)

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Art by Kim Brogden

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Dear Lord,

As our minds are anxious and cluttered with everything that we see and hear on the news and social media, may we take time to be mindful of all that we have to be grateful for right now.

Instead of dwelling on all that we cannot do, may we take time to do the things that we always wish we could do when our lives are so busy.

Help us to use this "slowed down" time to: spend more time with You; read the Bible; spread Your love to our neighbors; enjoy the simple pleasures of life - a meal with family, a game with our children, a walk outside, the beauty in nature; reach out to a shut in; meditate - quieting our minds and listening for your voice.

We know that You are a God of compassion and unfailing love. May we remember this as we live in thankful awareness of Your Presence. Amen

(Teresa Smith)

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When neighbors ask, who healed him and where the healer is, he responds, "I am the man." If you want to see God's work, look at me. Look for Jesus in my blindness. Look for him in the recovery of my sight. Why search elsewhere? The healed man is what his Jewish neighbors are not. They think they see but they do not. He sees light both in blindness and in sight. He is what the disciples are not. They do not see beyond sin. He instead sees light and shows God at work.

May God grant us eyes to see God at work in this season of anxiety, confusion, vulnerabilities, and viruses! (James Taneti)

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### **Reflections on John 11:1-45 from Sunday, March 29**

The Lazarus story is longer and more detailed than most Biblical stories. The story is too complex to analyze in a few sentences, but here are a few things I got out of it.

The story illustrates that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He wept with his friends who were grieving. He cared for them individually and personally; then He used His divine power to perform a miracle by raising Lazarus from the dead.

The story shows that our prayers are answered in God's ways and in God's time. Martha and Mary sent urgent word to Jesus that his dear friend was very sick, but Jesus did not respond immediately.

The story reminds us that we need to hold on to our faith in easy times and in hard times. Thomas said, "let's go" even though he knew that if the disciples went with Jesus to Bethany they all might be killed. Martha said, "I believe you are the Christ" even when she thought her prayers for Lazarus had not been answered.

We are living during a pandemic, and we are worried and scared. We are praying for this virus to go away and for things to get back to normal. We cannot worship together in the sanctuary right now, but we can hold tight to our faith and to one another. We need to trust Jesus to be with us during these difficult days and to answer our prayers in His own way and His own time. (Chris Martin)

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### **Reflection on John 9:1-41 from Sunday, March 22**

Seasons of tragedies can be times of difficult questions. They are also opportunities to look for God. This week we are reading about a man whom John does not even care to name. The gospel writer calls him “a man born blind.” The story is not about the man born blind, but about those who can see but still do not see. It is about Jesus who opens our eyes to see God’s glory.

Jesus and his disciples were in the temple city Jerusalem. It was a season of crowds and of festivities, unlike the present times. It was during the annual feast of tabernacles. Jesus was looking for his hour of glory, and disciples for their share in the glory. Each of them understood glory differently.

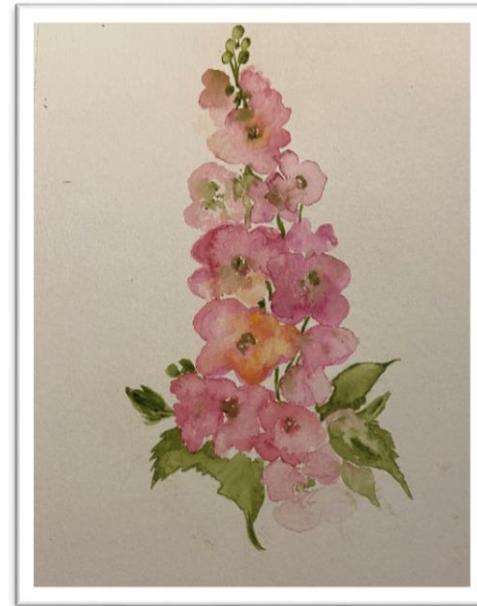
They came across a man born blind. Pay attention to the narrator’s plot. He makes the blind man dumb as well, mutes his voice, in the first eight verses. Disciples speak. Jesus speaks. Not surprising, disciples ask a theological question, “who sinned, he or his parents?” a question that a typical Jew would ask, a question we ask during the seasons of pandemics, personal tragedies, and natural disasters.

Jesus doesn’t ignore our questions. “Neither he nor his parents,” Jesus assures. Jesus turns their attention to someone else. Jesus invites them to look beyond, look for God who is at work in our tragedies. He encourages them to seek and find a God who does not abandon us in hurts, vulnerabilities, and doubts. God who does not give up, even when we give up. God works closely with us in our loneliness, disabilities, and vulnerabilities. Looking at our wounds, we would be looking for whom to blame or blaming ourselves. Looking at God, we will find reasons to celebrate and glorify God.

The story continues, moves from dialogue to action. No more words, but works. Jesus spits, makes mud, and puts it on his eyes, and says “go, wash yourself.” Jesus does not fix the disability, but tells the man what he can and should do with his abilities. Jesus shows the blind man the way out and shows him the resources, innate and external, the way to the pool of Siloam. The Sent One Jesus sends the man to the pool called Sent (Siloam). The blind man cannot see, but he can walk. Jesus wants him to draw from this ability to overcome his disability. It sounds like our worshipping online when social distancing restricts our ability to congregate. We are called to do what is within our abilities to overcome tragedies like these.

In the second half, the gospel-writer activates/animates the blind man. The protagonist now sees, and speaks, sees clearly and speaks eloquently. Jesus and disciples disappear. The healed man sees better than his neighbors. He sees God’s glory. He speaks better than disciples. He shows disciples how to witness.

This is a special prayer for children. Lord, during these difficult and frightening time, please shower your love and blessings especially on children. On infants being born into a world where they miss the loving touch of their grandparents, siblings and sometimes even their father. On toddlers just learning to play with others and not understanding why they can no longer see their friends. On children who rely on school meals for proper nutrition and who are now going hungry. On special needs children who are struggling with disruption and a routine that is vital to their wellbeing. On children who have lost a parent to this virus and now face life without a mom or dad. On high school and college students whose plans for graduation, prom and their future education have been upended. And children of all ages who miss their family, friends, teachers, team mates and church family. We ask that you give parents and other caregivers patience and kindness as we navigate this new and troubling world. Comfort our children, hold them in your loving arms, shelter them from fear and grief. We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. (Barbara Bradshaw and Henry Huneycutt)



Art by Barbara Bradshaw

To all our First Presbyterian Church family...

In these confusing and uncertain days in which we live, it is important to remember that there is someone far greater than we are that is in charge. The God who loved us so much that he was willing to sacrifice his son for our salvation still loves us and will see us through these times. We must remember that especially during this time we do not need to lose our focus on the source of our salvation. Like Peter, we strive to be like Jesus, but we lose our focus and begin to sink down and mire in the troubled waters that surround us.

We read an interesting statement by someone on Facebook a few days ago regarding God's power.

- We have become a society that worships and makes idols of sports figures so God has closed the stadiums
- We have become a society that worships and makes idols of entertainment figures so God has closed the theaters
- We have become a society that takes our places of worship for granted so God has closed the Church doors

Throughout scripture God uses all things, good and bad, to further his kingdom as he deems necessary. God will place trials in front of His children to test them.

This is such a trial. In light of that statement, we all have various resources and talents that God can use during this time. I sincerely feel that the proper use of our combined resources and talents to help those in need and those who battle for us will result in a blessing not only for those who receive but those who give of themselves.

Here's hoping and wishing that each of you has the best Easter ever. We are blessed, and always remember that it was the willing sacrifice and Jesus' resurrection that has given us the greatest gift of all, salvation from sin and eternal life. Just like our places of worship, we often take our families and friends for granted until we can't be with them. Do yourself a favor, call your family and friends this weekend, and let them know how much you and God love them. It might make a difference to someone...including you.

This is us saying we miss and love you folks dearly,

Happy Easter, friends.

(Bill and Lisa Royall)

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**John 19:30: Jesus said, "It is finished."**

Before his death Jesus endured several hours of humiliation from soldiers and the crowd of people who wanted him crucified. When he asked for a simple request of water, they had the indignity and hate to give him a sponge filled with vinegar to quench his thirst. After all the torment and pain, the fulfillment of the Scripture was at hand. Jesus declared his ordeal was over and stated, "It is finished." At that time, he gave up his spirit to his Father and our Lord and Savior. He died for our sins on that day and still asked for forgiveness for his killers. (Eddie Radford)

**Luke 23:46: Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."**

Along with my good memories of Easter, my mind always comes back to Jesus on that cross, wearing a crown of thorns, being vilified by Roman soldiers. When he was dying, he uttered words from Psalm 31:5 that he had known from childhood, "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit." He reminds us that God is in charge, and that we will be with him some day.

This Easter we pray that If it be thy will, please end the suffering of the world so we can all come back to your house of worship. Amen. (Fred Lomax)

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Heavenly Father, we come to you today in uncertain times. We as a people do not deal with change well, even when it's a change for the better. Jesus told his disciples, when he ascended into heaven, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, I will be with you always." These were comforting words because Jesus knew that the disciples would be facing a time of change and they met this change with bickering fear and uncertainty. Then when Pentecost filled them with flames of fire, they knew what God's plan was. Heavenly Father, open our hearts and let us know what your plans for us are. Open our hearts and help us deal with these times of uncertainty with love and kindness. Amen. (William and Jewel Sauls)

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**John 19:26–27: Jesus said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.”**

As Jesus was dying, He saw his mother standing at the foot of the cross and called out to her to witness his suffering. These words, though painful, must have comforted Mary who understood that her son was thinking of her, even as he suffered.

Next he spoke to the beloved disciple, saying, “Here is YOUR mother,” not MY mother. Jesus was asking the disciple to care for Mary after His death, to become her son.

In these difficult days, let us remember that Jesus wants us to acknowledge the pain of others and to care for them. Despite our lamentations on Good Friday, we still sing, Emmanuel, God with us. Always. (Barbara Ann Vinson)

**Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34: About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).**

Hanging on a cross between two thieves, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Using the same words David said in Psalm 22 over 1000 years before the crucifixion, Christ opens a window to the clear message that He is indeed the foretold Messiah. This man hanging on the cross for our sins is no ordinary man. He is the great “I AM”: past, present, and future. (James Spicer)

**John 19:28: Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”**

“... So that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” (John 19:28) Jesus said, “I am thirsty” as he was dehydrated from hanging on the cross by his arms, nails in his hands, gasping for breath for 6 hours. He was exhausted, he had been tortured for hours, he was a human and he was thirsty.

As Psalm 22 prophesies Jesus's torture on the cross, Psalm 22:15: says, “My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.” Jesus said “I am thirsty” so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Psalm 69:21: “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.”

Jesus said “I am thirsty” because he needed to moisten his mouth so that he could have the last word before he died. (John Parker IV)

Heavenly Father, we know you are in control of everything that is going on in this world. You are a God at work. You are presently working in *all things* for *your* glory and for *our* good.

You are a sovereign God; even during this pandemic, you are in control. Sometimes it is hard to understand the why of certain events, but we can be assured and praise your name that you are still on the throne. You promise to use all things, good and bad, for the ultimate good of those who love You and are called according to Your purposes (Rom. 8:28-29).

Things all around us are being shaken. But You are unshakeable! We choose faith, not fear. We choose to trust You. Help us use our time wisely. Use us to bring great glory to Your Name.

Please give our leaders great wisdom. We look to You to provide for our needs. We are totally dependent on You.

We yield ourselves to Your refining fire. Teach us all You want us to learn. Change us to fit us for Your Kingdom. Thank You for the blessings in this trial. We choose to count this difficult trial as joy, waiting with great anticipation to see Your miracles flow from it. In Jesus' Name, Amen! (Ruth Smith)

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"A honey bee fruitfully spreads POLLEN from blossom to blossom as Christians fruitfully spread the WORD from person to person." Photo by Bob Kemper

Father, we thank you for another beautiful spring day that you have given us to praise, honor, and serve you. Guide us to do your will and show your love to others in small acts of kindness and compassion.

We thank you for your promise to always be with us. You are the anchor that holds us secure in these troubling days. We pray for everyone that has been affected by the corona virus worldwide. We pray for wisdom, strength, and perseverance for all health care providers and others working on a cure for this dreaded disease. We pray for comfort and compassion for everyone suffering physical, emotional, and financial problems during this time.

We thank you for our church family and pray that you will bless each member. Keep us safe and guide us as we strive to serve you.

In Jesus's name, Amen. (Troy and Joyce Pate)

*I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore  
that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being,  
let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again.*

Stephen Grellet

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Gracious God, we praise You and thank You for Your gift of creation, a constant reminder of Your love for us. The beauty of nature and the joy of family and friendships are happy blessings.

We praise You for Your ever present love and guidance at First Presbyterian, where the Holy Spirit has always helped us be a strong family of faith.

Thank you also for our caring church staff, Mary, Jayson, Nona, Ruth, and Jean, who have worked hard and conscientiously to keep our weeks running smoothly during this unprecedented time.

We are grateful for Your plan of sending our new interim pastor, Lonnie Darnell, to lead us in worship and share his ministry with us.

With grateful hearts, we thank You, Amen. (Susan Stackhouse)

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The Seven Last Words of Christ  
Meditations for Good Friday 2020

**Luke 23:34: Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”**

In many bibles, the words of Christ are printed in red, to signify the importance of the words and / or to differentiate among speakers. When I see the words of Christ in red, I reflect upon the passion, the sacrifice, the love of God. During this season, let each of us focus upon the Word – “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.” Luke’s rendering of some of the last words spoken by Christ are important in our lives, our families and our community. Forgive – a powerful word that Christ, even at the end of his earthly life, asked of God towards the people. As the children of God, we can learn from Christ and practice what Christ did, not just ask “What would Christ do?” and not just at Easter but throughout our lives, in all circumstances. (Michael Jordan)

**Luke 23:43: Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

Jesus’ exchange with the criminal in the twilight of Christ’s human ministry portrays all that he had been teaching to those who followed him. The criminal acknowledged his sin before Christ and asked to be remembered by Christ. Through the Lord’s love and grace of each sinner, he promised the criminal a place in heaven that day when death overtook them. This simple sentence from Jesus has been a great comfort to all believers through the ages. In one of his last earthly moments of ministry, Jesus assured us of the forgiveness of sins and of life everlasting through him. (Carol Branch)

Heavenly Father,

Help us to pray like the Psalmist when he prayed, "I pray to God and wait for what He will say and do." Loneliness, confusion, doubts are all part of the human condition, and the corona pandemic has pushed anxiety and fear to new levels, and we know that many of us are tired and mentally fatigued from the constant strain and negative news of the world, but we also know that the worst never lasts. We acknowledge that we as a people have a short memory and our current isolation is both different and more disorienting than any of us has ever seen. We yearn for the physical presence of each other and how we yearn for the real presence of each other together in your house of worship. We have people in our congregation who are sick and infirm and who live in greater risk of this pandemic. We have people in our city and county who are laid off and cannot work and people and children who experience food scarcity. We pray for relief and help for all including Italy, New York and other distressed communities. We pray for the heroes in our medical community, first responders, and all those who work tirelessly against the pandemic including sanitation, grocery store and blue collar workers everywhere. We pray for strength and wisdom of our leaders, the scientists who are cooperating on a vaccine or other therapies. Even in this distress we joyfully celebrate Easter because of its eternal message of hope and promise through a resurrected Savior. We know that Christ has left us in the presence of a mighty helper in the form of the Holy Spirit. We believe in the promise of Paul in Romans, "may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Lord, we confess our many shortcomings. The God of Israel condemned idols and often severely punished his chosen people for worshipping idols. As a country we have often pursued an ever growing economy in an ever rising stock market as if it were the ultimate of all things. We have not prayed, cared, nor visited enough, not spoken out enough against injustice, not acted as stewards of God's earth and as recipients of your incredible grace. When we have often fallen short in service to the least of those among us in your name. Lord, help each of us to follow the example of the blind beggar: when he heard that Jesus was passing by he cried out loudly, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me." So Lord, now we are living in critical days and we must encourage one another and build one another up. Each of us has a ministry here at First Presbyterian Church. Help each of us to fill that ministry as we remember the prayer of the psalmist, "those who trust in God are like the Zion mountain. Nothing can move it." A rock-solid mountain you can always depend on. Mountains encircled Jerusalem, and God encircles his people. He always has and He always will. Oh, God of mercy, hear our prayers. Amen. (*Prayers of the People* by Tim Haithcock on 4-12-2020)

Gracious God, you enter lovingly and mysteriously in our lives when we lock ourselves in due to fear and timidity! Enable us to recognize your empowering presence in our tensed moments and terrified minds. Help us to find ways we can be present in the lives of people, next door and yonder, during these challenging times.

Almighty God, you defy the walls and doors we build for ourselves with anxiety and doubts! Help us discern the healing you have already unleashed in this world through your life, death, and resurrection of Jesus your son and our lord; Make us appreciative of the ministry of healing healthcare professionals and first responders are engaged in.

Risen Lord, you pronounce peace on minds held captive to misinformation and insensitive partisanship. Open our eyes to see your image in those adversely impacted by COVID-19 in the US and around the world. Melt our hearts with compassion that we may radiate your peace and forgiveness in this troubled world.

Missionary God, you sent us out into this world of pain and pandemics and gave us your Spirit to strengthen us! Grant us courage so that we confess your name in the midst of tragedies and confusions.

The Holy Breath, cultivate life eternal in this valley of death and make us harbingers of the future you have prepared for us and all your people scattered in every land. (James Taneti)

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Heavenly Father, as we cope with this new lifestyle in this unprecedented age, I am so grateful that I am a member of First Presbyterian Church. How ironic that Presbyterian Women chose the Holy Spirit for this year's study. It is through your Holy Spirit that we have remained a church family and felt your love for us. Thank you for feeding us your Spirit through the sharing of daily prayers and messages from members and worship programs for each Sunday. We are grateful to be living in the age of technology that makes this sharing of the Spirit possible. Thank you, Father, for the Spirit of God delivered to our door with palm fronds.

Please continue to send your loving Spirit to us as we cope with each new day. Bless all who are ill and bereaved and keep safe those who work tirelessly to keep our world functioning during this global health situation. May everyone feel your loving Spirit. Amen. (Evelyn Rose)

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Dear Heavenly Father

Boy, if we ever needed you, we need you now! You are the only one who can get us through this scary, uncertain, disconnected time. We can see you in all the scientists and health care workers that are working tirelessly to save others. Please keep them all extra tight in your arms as they face each day.

You have taught us not to worry and to put our trust in you. This is easier said than done. One strategy to help here is to try to find the silver linings. Thank you for the gift of extra family time. It is a highlight every day to see mothers, fathers and children outside enjoying this beautiful spring. Many are living at a little slower pace now due to sheltering in. So they walk, ride bikes, draw stained glass window driveways, have rainbow scavenger hunts, create neighborhood flowered crosses and spend quality time together.

More and more people are doing extra special things for others. There are no class or race or economic barriers. We are all in this together and are looking out for each other.

Churches cannot meet in the traditional way, but it reminds us that the church is the people and not the building. Technology has allowed our worship to continue. It spreads your word while teaching us and giving us a feeling of community. Our church family is there for each other—a call, a text, a trip to the store, a walk in the sunshine. Your ways are more evident now than ever.

This is also a good wake up call for us to put things in the proper perspective and to realize what is important. We confess that sometimes it takes something this drastic to get our attention.

Help us to look to you for strength, guidance, peace, and calm. Let us continue to put others above ourselves and remember the silver linings.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. (Charlie & Hannah Rouse)

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Spirit of God, breathe on us the breath of life. Shower on us your healing mercies. Grant us your peace and help us to overcome this phase in our lives. Protect those who are affected by the virus, provide for those who take care of others, teach us to love without any reservations. Help us to be patient and kind to everyone. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen. (Mary Taneti)

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“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction and faithful in prayer.” Romans 12:12

Dear Heavenly Father,

As I sit on my sunporch and see the beauty of your creation, my heart swells with gratitude. The sky is a beautiful blue, the clouds are white and puffy, the birds are chirping and enjoying a bath, the dogwoods are full of pretty green leaves, and even the old clay pot with Hostas is pretty. Thank you, Dear Lord!

However, Dear Lord, there are many people in your world suffering because of COVID-19. They find it hard to see much beauty in anything. What they do see is death, sickness, fear, despair, confinement, lost jobs, lifestyle changes, interrupted schooling, and vanishing dreams.

Be with all those who have been hit hard in this situation. Give them the “peace that surpasses all understanding.” It is a scary time. Let us know you love us, that you are in control, and that we can rely on you. Please give us hope and a promise of joy to return.

Father, bless all the medical teams and first responders who are working so hard to save lives. Bless our leaders who are doing the best they can with the unknown. Bless teachers trying to reach their students, parents coping with EVERYBODY being quarantined at home, and even young children learning to do for others.

“Lord in Your mercy, hear our prayers!”

In Christ's name we pray, Amen. (Linda Brown)

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Dear Heavenly Father, please hear our prayers we pray for our family, friends, and loved ones. We pray for our church and our first responders. Please watch over us and guide us in these days to come. We pray for our community, our pets and we thank you for all of our many blessings. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen. (Anna Kate Leonard)

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Dear Lord, hear our prayer of hope . . . .

Help us become a positive factor in the recovery of our world. . . inspire us to help those who suffer from illness, loneliness, or financial need.

Open the hearts and minds of our leaders, Lord, and guide them to make wise choices concerning the reopening of our cities and states.

Protect the doctors, nurses and other caregivers who are working selflessly to cure corona virus patients.

Envelop the earth, Lord, with your healing love and grace; encourage us to have patience and understanding when we feel inconvenienced.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. (Ellen Eubanks)

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“Photo of a honey bee bringing pollen into the hive... like a hot dish to a church social.” By Bob Kemper

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Dear Heavenly Father;

Hola-it's me-Anne with an e.

What a couple of weeks we have had--the pandemic has caused cancellations, postponements, changes to schedules, toilet paper hunts, zoom meetings, masks, elbow bumps--to name a few of the changes.

But we have had prayers of the day; meaningful worship services online, calls from friends checking in on us, darling children bringing over palm branches, and palm cross pens, flowering of the Cross on Easter. We are resilient, and as Christians we turn to God in times of fear and uncertainty. Please show us how to face the challenges posed by this pandemic. You are our strength and refuge, Lord; you listen to our fears and calm us when we are troubled. Help us as Christians to show others compassion in this time of uncertainty.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen. (Anne Fidler)

Romans-12:15 “Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.”

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Dear Jesus, thank you for this day, for my family, church family, and friends. I miss them so much. I pray that everyone will stay well and that we will all show kindness. Thank you for this time with my family. I am learning a lot and I love to play. I hope to see all my friends when the sun is bright. In Jesus' name, amen. (Rett Ellis)

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Thank You, God, for all of our doctors that work with the patients. Thank you, God, for our military that are serving and protecting our country. Thank you, God, for all who help those in need. Thank you, God, for our church family and the love we have for each other. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. (Hinton Crocker)

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Dear Heavenly Father, we come to you with a grateful heart, for the gift of motherhood, the gift of life. We are so thankful for moms everywhere and what they do for our families. We thank you that you are with us in all our unique journeys. We thank you that you are the great *I am* and you are over every part of our lives. We thank you that your ways are perfect, and you oversee our sometimes hard journey. Dear Lord, today we pray for refreshing, for joy, for grace, wisdom and great peace, for all moms and women who nurture and lead, in Jesus' name. Amen. (Paula Howell)

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Prayer of the day

Hello May and hello church family!

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” -Anais Nin

I pray that this month serves you well and serves our country well. Our people will start to venture out of their homes. My hope is that we are able to be with loved ones and mindfully restore our livelihoods with care and mercy, and without fear and disdain.

As my late Grandmother would always say, “May the Lord keep you safe and in His care.” (Mary Ellis)

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Art by Mary Ellis

Dear Heavenly Father,

As we come to you in prayer, please raise up our faith. Give us strength to face what lies ahead. Give us wisdom to do the right things for ourselves and our family and friends. We feel that we are under siege as an invisible enemy creeps into our countries, states, counties and our communities. We are afraid of the unknowns that are out of our control. We know that you love us beyond our comprehension and that as long as we continue our faithfulness to You we will survive this troubling time. You want what is best for all of us. Protect us from our fears and calm us. Thank you for all the people on the front lines who risk their safety to keep us safe and to tend to the people in need. Don't let us forget to remember those around us who may need a helping hand. Let us remember what is most important to us, family, friends and the love we have for You. You have given us this beautiful spring and also hope. Let us not take anything for granted in the coming months. Let us be good Christians and do for others. In Your Name we pray, Amen. (Suzanne Corbin)

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God I ask that you will be in our presence as we worship from different places and at different times and hope that you will bring our hearts together as one. I pray that you will open our eyes so that we can see your presence among us. I pray that you will open our ears so that we may hear your voice and your word will bring comfort to us during this time. I pray that you will open our minds so that we will trust in your protection so that it will relieve some of the fears and insecurities that we are having during this time. I pray that you will open our hearts so that we will put you first before all else and that we will remain living as your faithful disciples. I pray that you will strengthen our spirits so that we remain hopeful during this time when many are feeling isolated and alone and I pray that you will open our mouths and use our voices to lift one another up in spirit and to praise your name. To God's name be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Margaret Burgess)

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Dear God, on this Easter morning we thank you for giving us your only son. Let us rejoice for He has risen. Amen. (Dean Gurley)

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Dear Heavenly Father,

*“Thank you For the beauty of the earth,*

*For the beauty of the skies,*

*For the Love which from our birth*

*Over and around us lies.”*

Thank you for the time to notice and appreciate these gifts and be with our families.

Thank you for the doctors, nurses, medical personnel, first responders who are caring for those suffering from the coronavirus often at great personal risk. Surround them with your love and protection.

Thank you for farmworkers and those working in grocery stores, drug stores and all other essential occupations who are working to provide food and medicines. Thank you for the volunteers who are serving in food banks, delivering Meals on Wheels, soup kitchens, and places offering food to those who are in need. Surround them with your love and protection.

Thank you for all the doctors and scientists around the world who are working on testing, vaccines and cures so that we can return to our lives. Surround them with your love and protection.

Father, be with those who are suffering with Covid19. Comfort them and give them your peace. Be with those who have lost loved ones from this disease. Be with those who are out of work, lonely, hungry and afraid.

Lord, help us to always think of others and how we might assist those who are suffering most during this pandemic. Help us to remember our brothers and sisters all over the world, and help us to come together as your church universal.

*“For the joy of human love,  
Brother, sister, parent, child,  
Friends on earth, and friends above;  
For all gentle thoughts and mild:  
CHRIST, our GOD, to Thee we raise  
This our Sacrifice of Praise.”*

In Your Holy Name we pray, Amen. (Brownie Doss)

*Quotes from the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth”*

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Dear Lord, thank you for this opportunity to come together this morning to worship on Pentecost Sunday. We are so blessed to have this technology today to worship as a family of faith during this pandemic. We come together with a variety of mixed emotions: we are worried, scared, isolated, confused, sad, angry, hopeful, loved, encouraged, blessed and faithful. Please calm our minds from the worries and stresses of the week so we can open our hearts to hear today’s message in both word and song. In your name we pray. Amen. (Lisa Royall and Carson)

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Today we celebrate God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, who draws us together as one people. At the ascension Christ ascended into heaven to reign with God in power and glory. On Pentecost God sent the Holy Spirit to show us the way, the truth and life of Christ. Dear God, let the spirit of truth abide with us so that we may live in hope, grow in faith and keep the commandments to love because God is love and that is why we are able to love. *Love the lord your God with all your heart. Love your neighbor as yourself.* (Josie, Revel and Wagner Wilder)

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Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time together, we thank you for this day, we thank you for the people that made it possible. We take some time to acknowledge our graduates of the class of 2020, those in high school, those in college and beyond. We thank you for the many blessings you have given us as students and those that you have put in our lives for support financially, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We thank you for our prayer warriors and the leaders of this church that have helped support us through our time in school as students. We ask your continued grace and blessings over us as we embark on the next portion of our lives whether that be career or higher education. We ask for your continued guidance and support during whatever life brings for us next. We ask for your peace and your mercy and your forgiveness over this time in our community of uncertainty. We thank you for the many things and the many blessings you provide for us and thank you for the class of 2020. We ask all this in your Holy and precious name. Amen. (Rebekah Perez)

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Dear God, thank you for this Palm Sunday and bless everyone. I miss church. Amen. (Lily Spicer)

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For all my brothers and sisters in Christ – the children of God wherever they be: Philippians 1:1: “Paul and Timothy to all God’s people, together with the overseers and deacons. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

2:1-4 “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.” (NIV)

Almighty God, loving Father, we remember your words of instruction as delivered in Psalms 46:10: “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” (NIV)

We see among the isolated, the sick, and the dying a love beyond measure from all parts of this earth, an earth rendered still and plunged into the valley of death which has brought forth great goodness, compassion, service to others, and humility among all peoples.

You have restored, through these dark days, the family togetherness we have so sorely neglected on a personal and worldwide level. A quiet balm now shouts loudly as the human spirit stands in the dark and calls upon the Light, resulting in selfless action to elevate suffering, hunger, and loneliness. A positive bond has become outwardly visible among strangers who now share in this awakening of inner strength and love throughout all the earth.

May your boundless love, grace, and mercy give us hope and solace as we walk with Christ through these troubled days and be assured that out of great tragedy comes understanding and peace.

Within your kingdom on earth, may we be instrumental in glorifying you by our thoughts, words and deeds. In the name of our beloved Savior, Jesus Christ.

So let it be written, so let it be done. (Linda Stevens)

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“I know the Lord is always with me, I will not be shaken, for He is right beside me.” (Psalm 16:8)

Gracious heavenly Father, we come to you with thankful hearts for all the many blessings that you shower upon us daily. We are not worthy of Your gifts. We pray that Your Holy Spirit will enter our hearts and guide us through these unknown times. We ask that You give us the wisdom and power to follow the great commandments to “Love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls, and with all our minds and to love our neighbors as ourselves” (Matthew 22:37,39). Forgive us, Lord, for our sins and shortcomings and for not putting our trust in You. Let us be mindful that You are always with us during our toughest battles and our greatest joys. Lead us Lord to do Your will through the Holy Spirit today and always.

“Precious Lord, take our hands.

Lead us on, let us stand.

We are tired, we are weak, we are worn.

Through the storm, through the night,

Lead us on through the light.

Take our hands, precious Lord,

And lead us home.”

In Jesus’ sweet and precious name, we pray. Amen. (Phyllis Patterson)

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Heavenly Father, please help us to be strong as we deal with this Coronavirus. We know that you are with us always, in our hearts and minds. As Deacons we are staying in touch with our members to let them know we are thinking about them and miss them very much! We also offer to help them in any way that we can, running errands, picking up groceries so they don't have to venture out. We miss being together as a Church Family, and we pray this will be over soon. Until then we will remain strong and steadfast in our love for you. Please be with our Interim Pastor Lonnie Darnell and his wife Robbie. We look forward to our time with them here at F.P.C. In thy name we pray, Amen. (Pam Jennette)

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Dear God, thank you for this day. Thank you for the life we live and for making each person different. Thank you for Jesus who died for us so we can go to heaven one day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. (Matilda, Lily, James and John)

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Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of life. Lord, even in the midst of uncertainty and chaos we thank you for being with us from our very first breath of life until our last. Thank you for our church and for the leaders that you have given us to get us through this tough time. Allow us to follow you and bring light to the world in this darkest of time. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. (Eliana and Jessica Judd)

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Loving and merciful God,  
We praise you for your glorious creation with its daily reminders of the Resurrection in every blossom of dogwood, daffodil, and azalea. We praise you for your Son Jesus Christ, whose wondrous love stuns us anew in this season of Lent.

We openly confess our unworthiness. We marvel at your forgiveness. We seek your understanding when we question our current crisis or seem ungrateful for comfortable homes and plentiful resources. We know so many others have less desirable circumstances than our own.

We do thank you for all of our blessings. We thank you for the medical community responding to the pandemic. Please grant them safety as they risk their lives to uphold their vows to help others. Please guide researchers who seek a vaccine.

We pray for all victims of the coronavirus: for those suffering from this illness; for the families of those who have not survived; for those whose economic stability has been threatened; for those who live in fear of this enemy or any other threat. Let us not be discouraged, for your word tells us you have "not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Grant us wisdom and courage for the facing of this crisis. Grant us peace, for you are with us through every storm. Thank you for our strong and loving staff and congregation, a true family. Bless our efforts to support each other, to know we are never alone but are always together as the body of Christ. Bless us as we worship today in our homes; remind us that *you* are our sanctuary wherever we are, and we are one in the Spirit. Amen. (*Prayers of the People* by Rosalyn Lomax on 3-29-2020)

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Almighty and gracious God, we come to you today with praise and thanksgiving for your Son, Jesus Christ, and your word, our Bible.

Jesus went to Nazareth, on the Sabbath and went to the synagogue. He stood and read Isaiah 61:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me to proclaim good news for the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (John 4:16-21).

Almighty God, give us the strength and wisdom to study and believe your word and not be like many in the Nazareth synagogue. We know that Christ is the fulfilment of the prophet Isaiah.

Give us faith to be Christian examples in our church and community.

Be with us as we are challenged by this global pandemic.

Be with our civic leaders in these challenging times that they make wise decisions for the good of all your people.

Bring us back together in your House, FPC.

In your Son's holy name. Amen. (Dan Blackshear)

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Dear God, thank you for this day, the hope that it brings. Help us to remember how much you love us. In your name we pray. Amen. (Beatrice Byrd)

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Our dear loving heavenly Father, we give thanks for this beautiful Easter time when all the earth comes alive. Thank you also, dear Lord, for the words of the Bible, the promise of eternal life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. (Hope Derby)

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I want to say to our church family we have truly missed being with you. We look forward to being back together! We have read and watched news and all become experts on all the issues. So much so we all should take a break and enjoy ourselves for a moment. I read an interesting anecdote that gave me a good chuckle and made me think about how we need to be patient and trust in God. I want to share that before the prayer I shared.

One Sunday morning at a small Southern church, the new pastor called on one of his older deacons to lead in the opening prayer. The deacon stood up, bowed his head and said, "Lord, I hate buttermilk."

The pastor opened one eye and wondered where this was going. The deacon continued, "Lord, I hate lard." Now the pastor was totally perplexed. The deacon continued, "Lord, I ain't too crazy about plain flour. But after you mix 'em all together and bake 'em in a hot oven, I just love biscuits."

"Lord, help us to realize when life gets hard, when things come up that we don't like, whenever we don't understand what You are doing, that we need to wait and see what You are making. After you get through mixing and baking, it'll probably be something even better than biscuits. Amen."

Romans 8:28 NASB

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

Heavenly Father, we come to you praying for guidance, peace, and understanding. Our hearts are heavy and our minds filled with the issues that our community, state, nation, and world are dealing with. Fill us with your spirit, and help us to find peace through our faith in you.

We ask that You guide the doctors, nurses, and all the people working with the sick, and protect them from harm. Help the sick to heal. Heal our hearts. Help us to appreciate all people for their worth, and to love one another.

Lord, heal our country and the great issues we face. Heal the wounds caused by oppression, discrimination, division, prejudice, hatred, and misunderstanding. Bring us to a place of harmony and growth, where all are welcome, all can participate, and all can prosper. Fill our hearts with your spirit.

Help our world heal not only from all our issues but from not knowing you and following your Word. Fill us all with your spirit, and help us to open our hearts and minds and allow you in. Forgive us of our sins, and help us to walk closer with you. Amen. (Kent Warren)

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Dear most gracious heavenly father, we come to you to celebrate the accomplishments of our graduates. We thank you, Lord, for allowing us, the members of First Presbyterian, the opportunity to have shared in their lives and for each of them to share in ours. We look forward to continuing to share in their lives and for them to continue to share in ours.

We know with graduation from high school Frank Best, Grace Boros, Bess Gibson, and Hunter Wilson will have opportunities to chart their paths into adulthood. For Rebekah Perez and Katie Gibson, completing their doctorates puts them further down their chosen adult path, but as we know, Lord, we all need your guidance and direction.

We pray that each graduate will hear and follow the words from Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." We know sometimes we may veer off our paths, but, Lord, please allow the members of this church to be ever present to assist each of our graduates as they move along their paths. Please grant the graduates, their families, and our members the wisdom to know how best to acknowledge you, Lord, and the faith to guide our graduates and others to follow the path you have set.

Lord, we know that as our graduates embark on their next paths, be it college, trade school, or work, they may feel afraid or discouraged. We pray that in those times they will recall your words to Joshua "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1.9). We pray that your words will be with them wherever they go and will grant them the strength and courage they will need to accomplish all that you have set out for them.

Lord, we celebrate these young people and thank you for each of them and their families. We pray that you continue to bless them in all that they do.

Finally, in the words of a familiar Irish blessing asked regularly in my home, I ask this blessing on each graduate:

*May the road rise up to meet you;*

*May the wind always be at your back.*

*May the sun shine warm upon your face*

*and rains fall soft upon your fields.*

*And until we meet again,*

*May God hold you in the palm of his hand.*

Amen. (Shelby Duffy Benton)

Gracious and Holy God,

As we navigate through uncharted waters with this Pandemic, we ask that you guide our church and its leaders on how best to serve our congregants, neighbors, families, and our community while also remaining peaceful and law-abiding citizens.

We especially pray for healthcare workers in hospitals and clinics across the nation and globe -- that you will safeguard and protect them and their families from this virus as they seek to care for those left vulnerable to the disease.

We pray for our elected officials here at home, and those throughout our nation and world. Grant them wisdom, sound judgment, and humility to bring about peace, resources, and security in communities where financial instability exists, healthcare is insufficient, and panic and anxiety abound.

Sovereign Lord, we ask you to help us break through the gloom, walk with us in struggle, and let your light of hope peek into our hearts. In the midst of these health and environmental challenges, we need you to remind of us of our blessings.

Lead us, gracious God, to live in the way of Jesus, engaged with the world, and trusting in your abundance and salvation. Remembering the counsel of the Apostle Paul, teach us, O God, to give thanks for all gifts, and in all circumstances, knowing that all things work for good in the lives of those who love you. Set us free from the negative, by way of gratitude and thanksgiving, for we are your people and beneficiaries of a cosmic love that holds us dear. We pray these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. (*Prayers of the People* by Sarah Evans on 3-22-2020)

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Eternal God, thank you for waking us up each morning. Though we would like to hear that something has changed for the better, we only hear of more places shutting down, people affected by the virus, social distancing, work days cut down, shortage of food and essentials, more doubt and confusion.

Amidst this hopeless situation, you alone are our hope and comfort. Help us to lean on you and your understanding. Provider and comforter, we thank you for the ways we can still be together, gather as virtual communities, provide for each other, pray, and encourage one another.

Grant that as we wait for things to change that your peace may be with us. Have mercy on us, O Lord, and hear us as we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen (Mary Taneti)

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Dear Lord,

Thank you for being our refuge and our strength in times of trouble, for we know that we can find peace in you for you have overcome the world! We ask that you help us set our minds on things above instead of our earthly worries. Please continue to provide us peace when we are anxious, strength and endurance when we are faint, patience when we are restless, and compassion and understanding at all times, for we know that you will deliver us from this challenging time. We look forward to the time we are able to congregate and worship you and see our brothers and sisters in Christ again, but until then we pray for the healthcare workers on the front lines combating the effects of this virus. We pray for those trying to make ends meet because of layoffs, reduction in work hours, or simply being unable to be open. And we pray for those just trying to keep their families, friends, and loved ones safe and healthy. We ask all of these things as well as those things weighing on our hearts as we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. (*Prayers of the People* by Ali Blackburn on 5-3-2020)

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Let us pray,

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for this beautiful day you have given us. We know that all that we have is from you. Lord, help us to be still and know that you are God and we will praise you. You are our God, and we will exalt you. We give thanks to you, for you are good and your love endures forever.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

Father, let your face shine on us your servants. May your face shine on all those affected by the Coronavirus, watch over them. Father, comfort the families affected by this pandemic. Lord, may your wisdom instruct all who are caring for the sick, for all those searching for a cure. May your strength pilot them.

Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer

We pray for our church, our congregation, and our loving staff. Bless us as we support and care for each other. May your way direct us in all our efforts and your power preserve and keep us. God, we pray that your Holy Spirit will fill us and your shield defend us. Father, we lift up to you all honor and glory and praise. Through your love, may we remain joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. Amen. (*Prayers of the People* by Toby Brown on 4-5-2020)

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**FLOWERING OF THE CROSS**  
We come and flower the cross in the front lawn of our Sanctuary any time on Easter Sunday. Please bring flowers from your yard or feel free to use the greens available in buckets right near the cross. Maintain physical distancing (6 feet apart) allowing families to finish flowering the cross before you do the same. Thank you for your participation.  
Happy Easter!



**HAPPY EASTER**  
**4-12-2020**