

Grace and Peace to you all from God our hope and our peace.

On the last Sunday of our Easter season this year, we are gifted with a prayer from Jesus.

A prayer for a growing community.

A prayer of protection.

A prayer of thanksgiving.

And a prayer said to keep the faith – even in the midst of an uncertain future.

It was one of many prayers first shared by Jesus at the last supper – where he gathered with his disciples to share in a holy meal, to wash their feet, and to teach them how to love one another after his death.

And so perhaps, in light of this it should come as no surprise that prayer has become such a corner stone of our life of faith as followers of Christ.

We have come to face many a troubling time and have been blessed to have been brought through to the other side thanks to the prayers, support, and tangible care of the body of Christ.

And this is something we have done for thousands of years as we have come to gather together as a community of faith.

While some Christian traditions state that the Saints or a religious leader must intercede on behalf of prayers going before God - as Lutherans we understand that we can pray anytime – choosing to use the words that are on our heart or turning to written prayers that have guided the faithful for centuries.

Many of us likely learned to pray from our parents, grandparents, or Sunday school teachers.

Using simple prayers to mark our daily life like:

Come Lord Jesus be our guest.... Or      Now I lay me down to sleep ...

Yet, prayer can be so much more than simply a way to mark the passing of our days.

The late great Jewish Scholar Abraham Heschel once wrote – to pray is to *“open a window to [God]. To pray is to take notice of the wonder, to regain the sense of the mystery that animates all beings ... prayer is our humble answer to the inconceivable surprise of living. It is all we can offer in return for the mystery by which we live...”*

Many of us have come to know sense of this in our life of prayer. That prayer is a window to the very presence of God – even if we don't have the words to describe our needs and only a feeling in our innermost being.

In the eighth chapter of Romans Saint Paul teaches us that God hears the very inward groanings of our hearts and is already truly there and holding space for us to held as children of God.

It is moments like these that often feel like holy ground to me.

Moments where our lives come to meet the very presence of God.

And moments where we can be held in the prayers of others for us.

This is why I think this gospel passage is such a gift for us today. It shares that Jesus not only prayed for himself and his greatest needs, but also spend time praying for others in the midst of their worries and fears.

It's a gift many of us have been blessed to experience throughout our life when our cares and concerns are lifted before God by a friend, family member, or a community of faith.

A friend of mine, Rev. Erin Philips who also happens to be an Anglican priest serving the post-secondary community in Lethbridge, would often pray with me during my time as a university student there. She introduced me to a new form of prayer that we would pray together, and for one another from time to time. It's a prayerful meditation that was written by Julian of Norwich – dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Julian was a well know Christian mystic who became celebrated for her visions of divine love.

She lived her whole life in the English city of Norwich – and during her lifetime the city suffered the devastating effects of the black death and the peasant’s revolt – leaving much loss, grief, and worry to wash over the city as many lives were forever changed.

And in the midst of it all Julian penned this prayer that was to be said over and over until the truth of God’s promised peace rested within your soul – and the prayer went like this:

“All will be well, and all will be well, and all matter of all things will be well.”

It’s a prayer grounds our being in the promises we have received from God - that in life or in death, in sickness or in good health, in struggle or in strength – God’s promise to be with us, to care for us, and to hold us and those we love will remain.

It’s prayers like this that remind us that we are not alone.

That even while we may be isolated in our homes – we are part of a much larger body of Christ here at Holy Spirit and around the world who join in lifting one another up in prayer.

So perhaps for us as people of faith during this time of isolation, uncertainty, and worry we can use prayer to center ourselves on the very promises of God that carry us through each day.

Prayers for our own needs and cares.

Prayers for those we know and love.

Prayers for those we know are struggling during this time.

And prayers that propel us forward in courage to work as God's people within a new and uncharted world – bringing hope.

So today I would like to leave you with a reflective video of prayerful praise. It was created by Christine Valters Paintner and *The Work of the People* to honor the time and experiences many of us are now living in during this pandemic.

Experiences that call for our prayers of support, thanksgiving, blessing, and hope.

Video – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCYoikGal6U>

*PRAISE SONG FOR THE PANDEMIC - written and read by Christine Valters Paintner, from Abbey of the Arts and music by Giants & Pilgrims.*

And may this be so among us - Amen