



Mount Calvary Connected

December 22, 2022

Mount Calvary Connected is a weekly newsletter sent out at the end of each week. Our goal is to keep you connected to your church and your faith with messages from our pastors, information about upcoming activities at Mt. Calvary and more!

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LIVE STREAMING WORSHIP SERVICE INFORMATION

Mt. Calvary hosts live broadcasts of the liturgy at 8:45 AM Sunday mornings. The broadcast can be heard by tuning your radio to 88.3 FM if you are near the church. We also stream these services live over the internet. Simply visit www.mt-calvarylutheran.org and click "Live Radio Broadcast" from the home page on Sunday mornings.

Weekly worship bulletins can be found at: www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/

Readings & Sermon from the Past Sunday

Listen to the readings and the sermon from this past Sunday on our website: <https://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/sermons/>

A Message from Pastor Jonathan

Having a cold the week before Christmas has certainly changed my perspective a bit this year. Those who were in worship this past Sunday heard how close I was to losing my voice, and believe it or not, it got worse before it got better. And so, here I am, almost a week after symptoms first began, and even though I have tested negative multiple times for flu, covid, and strep, I'm still stuck with an on-again, off-again headache, a junky cough, and a voice that is a bit weaker than my norm, all on one of the busiest weeks of the year for clergy and church workers.

It's not the first time I've been sick during the lead-up to, or the time immediately after, a major church holiday. But, like I said, it does shift your perspective, and maybe even more so, shift your priorities. More and more each day, I'm finding myself having to buckle down and try to focus on the things that are most important for that particular day, while still keeping an eye on the big picture.

In all actuality, it's probably not the worst thing in the world...

During these days leading up to Christmas and immediately after, it can be so easy to get caught up in all of the things that must be done, both today, tomorrow, and beyond. And in that flurry of activity, we may miss the opportunity to live in the moment.

And this moment truly is a special one. The one in which we get to truly admire the meaning of Emmanuel, God with us.

And so, as you worship this weekend, whether at one of the Christmas Eve services, or even at the lessons & carols service on Christmas Day, allow yourself to be in the moment, to be fully present, not worried about what comes next or what comes after that, but focused on the sights, sounds, and meaning of this most wonderful time of the year.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

Annual Congregational Meeting

Our annual congregational meeting will be held after worship on Sunday, January 15th. The purpose of the meeting will be to approve last year's minutes, adopt a budget for 2023, and appoint and/or elect council members.

Missy Brodt, Todd Moss, Jeff Penrod, and David Raho have all been nominated for three-year council terms, with Cindy Solarczyk being appointed to complete a one-year term vacated by a previous council member. Pictures and bios for each candidate or appointee will be in next week's newsletter.

Upcoming Meetings/Events

WELCA: January 16th at 6:00 p.m.

Church Council: January 17th at 6:30 p.m.

Coffee Hour

The evangelism team will be having a coffee hour the first Sunday of every month. We will be offering refreshments before the Sunday service from 8 a.m. until 8:45 a.m. Hope to see you there!

Help Wanted

The Property Committee is looking to recruit a number of small job volunteers. Tasks might include replacing light bulbs, changing hardware on a commode, getting a lawnmower or snowblower ready for use, etc. The Committee believes we have a lot of talent in the congregation and wants to make greater use of it. Every small job handled by a member equals one less call that needs to be made to a vendor who may have a minimum visit charge or an hourly rate of \$50 or more. Volunteers who can be available on short notice are needed to help with set-up, serving, and tear-down after funeral luncheons. Interested parties should contact Mark Rychak or one of the pastors. A message could also be left with the church office at 814-266-4859.

Family Kitchen Opportunity

Mt. Calvary will be helping out at the Family Kitchen on Sunday, January 15 from 10-1. They are still doing take out on weekends so our responsibilities will include packing/taking out meals, washing dishes, and cleaning the kitchen. If you would like to volunteer, or donate cookies, please contact Mike Kozak at 244-6880. This is a great event to start the new year by helping those in need!

Visits to Shut-Ins, Hospital, & Nursing Home Patients

Never hesitate to contact the church office if you, or a loved one, desires a visit from one of our pastors or a lay visitor. If you, or someone you know, is homebound, hospitalized, or in a nursing/care home, and wants or needs a visit or more frequent visits, we are happy to do so. We never want anyone to be missed. We try to get information on those hospitalized or placed in nursing homes, but please don't assume that info is given to us automatically. Call us!

Scheduled Worship Help

Ushers:

Saturday, December 24:

4:00: Mark and Deb Rychak

7:00: Kevin and Chris Oleksa

10:00: Todd and Jill Moss

Sunday, December 25: Todd Moss and helper

Readers/Communion Assistants:

Saturday, December 24:

4:00: Pastors

7:00: Kadiya Lingenfelter and Deborah McQuaide

10:00: Hayden and Mari Grace Lingenfelter

Sunday, December 25: Ray Leverknight

Those interested in volunteering may contact Pastor Scott to sign up.

Children's Sunday School

Children's Sunday School for youth in preschool, elementary, and middle school is ongoing! See Pastor Jonathan for more information.

Choir Reorganization

Several people have been asking about starting up a new choir! Between time lost over COVID and losing a couple of longtime choir members, we will be needing to start fresh! Over the years at Mount Calvary, we have sometimes worked with small numbers and sometimes included large groups of over twenty singers. Some have been strong musicians and others of modest ability. We have sung in unison and in parts. We have occasionally included ambitious music such as that of Mozart and Handel, and

even sung significant portions of the Messiah! The one constant is that we have worked with people who are available and are willing to give freely of their time.

This is an opportunity where anyone can participate. By singing in the choir, you yourself become a stronger musician. Singing is a form of prayer. Singing touches our souls. Singing in a group connects us in a spiritual way. For this September, it might be nice to tiptoe gently into a new season. I am thinking of beginning with some rounds and two-part singing. If this takes off, we certainly can be more ambitious!

Peoples' schedules are busy. In recent years, we have done Wednesday evening rehearsals for those who can make it. Sometimes I meet people individually. Sometimes people join in last minute at the choir warmup before the service. I often record parts and, these days, can send an audio text to help people be better prepared. Since I do not know everyone in the congregation and may not have invited you to sing, let me know if you would like to give it a try! Thanks so much! Talk to Dan Gresh after any church service or text or call at 814-659-5109.

Giving Tree

December contributions will go towards the Helping Hands ministry. Several families are being helped. There are paper ornaments on the narthex table with suggestions for donations. Please return items or money by December 18th so gifts can be delivered.

Poinsettias

Given in Honor of:

Loved Ones, given by Stan & Debbie McQuaid
Children & Grandchildren, given by Gayle Swartz
Logan, Jillian, Carson, Jocelyn & Cole, given by Mimi (Missy)
Jerry & Ruth Pozun, given by Children & Grandchildren
Hunter & Casey Bergman, given by Mom & Dad
Bethe H. Shaffer, given by Kim Stayrook
Children & Grandchildren, given by Bob & Cindy Solarczyk
Family & Loved Ones, given by The Layton Family
Children & Grandchildren, given by Paul & Krista Miller

Given in Memory of:

Loved Ones, given by The Solarczyk & George Families
Zakary Lonsinger, given by Mark, Shari, Kelsie & Jared
Loved Ones: Linda McQuaide & Zakary McQuaide Lonsinger, given by Bill, Cara, Kyle & Jordan Lonsinger

Barbara L. Barker, Florence Barker & Clair Barker, given by Jim, Caryn, Harrison, Health & baby Ondesko
Luther & Kathleen Horner & Jenneal F. Crowley, given by Cindy & Al Buday
Catherine Oleksa & Albert Sojak, given by Keven & Chris Oleska
Clair & Florence Barker and Barb L. Barker, given by Rian Barker
Mike & Pauline Nider and Paul & Ann Kormanik, given by the Nider Family
Thomas/Petkosh Family, given by Rodger & Debbie Thomas
Ami & D.J. Shaffer & Donald Shaffer, Jr., given by Kim Stayrook
Andy Peretin, given by Nancy Peretin & Family
Loved Ones, given by Marge Balogh
Our Loved Ones, given by Jerry & Marybeth Heinze
Mary Pauline Read and A. M. Read, given by Nancie Read
Linda McQuaide, Dale Middleton & Zak Lonsinger, given by Stan & Debbie McQuaide
Elaine & Dean Sterner, given by the Sterner Family
Kelly Michaud, given by Randy Sterner
Doreen Griffith, given by Sterner Family
Denise Hayes, Jane & Harold Penrod, given by Susan & Jeff Penrod
Raymond & Dorothy Hite, Sr., given by Joyce, Jason, Suzanne & Sophia Hite
Ray Hite, Jr., given by Joyce, Jason Suzanne & Sophia Hite
Benny & Phyllis Petrarca, given by Joyce, Jason, Suzanne & Sophia Hite
Dan Warman, given by Susan & Rachael Brandau
Norma Culp, given by Michael, Ashley, Gabriel & Elias Kozak
Loved Ones, given by Hadley, Harper & Hudson Pozun
Linda McQuaide, given by Mark, Shari, Kelsie & Jared
George & Pearl Pearson, given by Krista & Paul Miller
Leroy & Avonel Miller, given by Paul & Krista Miller
Paul Swartz, given by Gayle, Chris, Tiffany, Wendy, Keith & Grandchildren
James & Dorothy Pozun, given by Children, Grandchildren & Great Grandchildren
Mary & Otto Kendzora, given by Joyce, Jason, Suzanne & Sophie Hite
Glenn A. & Laverne Trent, given by Daughter, Joyce Spangler & Granddaughter, Brittany Spangler

World Hunger Gifts

Given in Honor of:

Children & Grandchildren and In Memory of Loved Ones, given by Dick & Lois Sholtis
Shannon, Justin & Kate, given by Gloria Reed
Parents & Grandparents, given by Jamie & Katie McMullen
Grandchildren, Hadley, Harper, Hudson and Penelope, given by Ruth & Jerry Pozun

Given in Memory of:

George, Jean, Debbie, Linda Jean & Brian Tressler, given by Wayne Tressler

Parents: Charles & Louise Ling and Sister: Beverly Kocis & Sister-in-Law Maxine Ling, given by Kathy Ling & Karen Giunta

Loved Ones given by Susan & Rachael Brandau

Kathryn Zeger, Rev. Henry Reed & Violet Reed, given by Gloria, Shannon & Justin

Rev. Ron Reed, given by Gloria, Shannon, Justin & Kate

Departed Loved Ones, given by the Layton Family

Howard Hiltz, given by Wilma Hiltz & Family

Parents & Loved Ones, given by Rick & Lois

Parents, Kenneth & Stella Stull, given by Sharon E. Stull

Parents, given by Ruth & Jerry Pozun

2023 Offering Envelopes Available in the Narthex

The envelope numbers have been changed from the prior year. Those who donate apart from an envelope should make note of their new number once the new year begins. Those who presently don't have envelopes, but desire them, should contact the church office.

Altar Guild

We are reorganizing for 2023. We can never have too many helpers for this important service, so if we haven't approached you yet, please tell anyone you see cleaning up after services that you'd like to help. Join us any time. We'll show you what to do!

Communion Bread Sign-ups

Communion bread sign-ups for 2023 are low. Though a number of families have signed up for a month at a time lately, this is not necessary. Please sign up to donate bread for even a week so we might be reminded of how there is one bread for the one Body of Christ.

Alpha Course

Mt. Calvary will be hosting the Alpha Course beginning February 21st. The 11 weekly sessions will explore Christian faith. Watch for sign-up information in early 2023.

Give Now for Eastern Europe Crisis Response

Lutheran Disaster Response is accompanying our companions in Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Moldova, as well as such ecumenical partners as Lutheran World Federation and Church World Service, in their humanitarian responses to the crisis. These partners provide refugees with immediate support and supplies such as food, blankets, water, and hygiene kits. Your gifts designated

for "Eastern Europe Crisis Response" will be used entirely (100%) to provide support for people impacted by conflict in the region.

Financial Update

When the council gathered to review financial reports through the end of October, there was once again much good news to celebrate. Due to fluctuations in the financial marketplace, our overall financial holdings are down for the moment. But eventually, we'll find ourselves ahead of where we were a year ago. As for income, it's tracking slightly ahead of budget, with expenses under budget by an even greater degree. Thanks to the fine work of Mark Rychak and members of our Property Team we recently received an insurance reimbursement for much of the damage done by inconsistencies in our electrical supply.

With the holiday season soon upon us, please remember that December is the month that makes or breaks the year. If you have fallen behind in your customary giving, or have not yet made your donation for the year, please do your best to catch up by the end of the year. Thus far, things have been coming along just fine. Let's make sure to keep it that way as the year closes and as large, year end expenses start to appear. Thanks in advance for your faithfulness and your generosity.

Birthdays and Anniversaries for the Week: December 25 – December 31, 2022

Dec. 26 - Nicholas Berkey, Christine Oleksa, & Lenora Streilein

Dec. 28 - Ethan Gawlas

Dec. 29 - Noelle Berkey, Leland McQuaide, Matthew Osborn, & Leonard Strihan

Dec. 30 - Christie Philibin

Dec. 31 - Brett Reitnauer, Charles Schenkemeyer, & Jeffrey Wingard

Remember those that prayer has been requested for:

Linda & Dick, Claudia Plows, Maddie Pierce, Gladys Haupt, Bill & Linda, Jose & Family, Dave, Tom, Lt. Hunter Bergman, and Lt. Dylan Merchant, Harold, Rick, Shirley, Debbie, David, Lauren, Billy, Barb, Sara Solarczyk, Jackie Janak, Jack, Corinne, Joan, Dan, Natalie Zerby, Pastor Scott Custead, Luella Koontz, Al Lindner & Family, Bob, Dawn, Stacy & Josh, Bob Trotter, Bill Layton, Deb Zilch, Bennett, Cassy Sojak, Paul Miller, Keith Mayket, Ruth, Pete, Teplitza Family, Ken, John Nerone, Dane Wisner, Jeff, Irene, Karen, Erin, Susan Dyers, Bob McMullen, Wyatt George, Larry Hockensmith, Jean Pellon, Mike, Corey, Pastor Jonathan & Family, Roxanne Horner, Miriam Horner, Becky Lilja, Kathy P., Al Johnson, Chris, Donna & Danny, Cheryl, Jennifer & Family, Jaime, Matt & Ashley, Landon, Linda Haberkorn, Lorraine, Joe, Donna, Danny & Family, Becky Jo, Bill, Linda & Family, Mary, Mary Jane, Janice, Rick, Don, Mabel Ann, Betty, Cathy, Cindy, Jill, Theresa & Family, Dean, Madi & Family, Patty & Family, Sydney & Family, Paulette, Ron, Andrea, Mary Ann, Midge, Rayford, Lois A., Nicole, Trent, Kyle, Anna, Beverly, Sondra, El Warshel, Audrey Rubis, Carol, Katey, Janice, Trina & Family, Jake Wissinger, Candi Walker, Dave Brehm, Chrissy-Baby Emma, Wyatt, Gerald Barrick, the Shreffler Family, Louise, Kim, Devin, Laura & family, Dorothy, Jo Ann, John Alt, Jan Mertz, Denny, Jill Lisson, Jaci, Dominic Megia, Jackie Hauger, Sharon, Barbara, Louise & Family, Dennis, Mary M., Joel Penrod, Tim Miller, Cathy T., Paul Brodt, Kim Stayrook, April & Schuyler, Alan, & Pastor David Louder.

Condensed Worship for Sunday, December 18, 2022

Prayer of the Day

P: Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that hinders our faith, that eagerly we may receive your promises, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-16

The Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted."

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

P: Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock; shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.

A: In the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up your strength and come to help us.

P: Restore us, O God; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

A: O Lord God of hosts, how long will your anger fume when your people pray?

P: You have fed them with the bread of tears; you have given them bowls of tears to drink.

A: You have made us the derision of our neighbors, and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

P: Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

A: Let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one you have made so strong for yourself.

P: And so will we never turn away from you; give us life, that we may call upon your name.

A: Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

Second Reading: Romans 1:1-7

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles

for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God!

Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

P: The gospel of the Lord.

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Scott Klimke

This weekend's appointed readings from Scripture feature a contrast we might be tempted to call a paradox or an enigma. Put simply, God wants to talk and then not to talk. As for talking, in our reading from Isaiah, God wants to communicate desperately. God says to one of the kings of Judah, "Ask me for the whopper of all signs and I'll give to you. Ask as deep as hell or as high as heaven and you wanted be refused." This God very much wishes to communicate with us. But then, we get our psalm where God hasn't been talking.

Three times the psalmist speaking for the nation originally and now for us exclaims, "Restore us, O God; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved." The "let your face shine upon us" part of this threefold refrain speaks to a break in communication; to the perception that God has turned away from us. The God who wants to talk in our first reading suddenly doesn't seem to want to talk in our psalm. And so, which is it? Does God want to communicate? Or does God want to huff, puff, and pout; breaking off communication when the relationship is tested?

Before digging into these questions too deeply, let's add one final wrinkle. In our reading from Isaiah, Ahaz, the king of tiny, little Judah, refuses to name the sign that will reassure him of God's care and strength as hostilities with other nations grow. Ahaz says he doesn't want to put the Lord to the test. This has a certain faithful ring to it. Maybe Ahaz wants to avoid what happened at Massah and Meribah when Israel did put God to the test.

The incident at Massah and Meribah is mentioned more than once in the Old Testament. It's one of the most regrettable incidents in Israel's history with God. In the gospels, Jesus' ability to withstand temptation in the wilderness is, in part, represented as canceling out Israel's failure at Massah and Meribah. What happened at this biblically infamous location was that Israel asked God for the sign of water after God had carried Israel through the Red Sea, after God had sweetened tainted water at Marah, and after God had overwhelmed Israel with good, healthy refreshing water at Elim. And by the way, all this happens in the just a couple of chapters. As it's presented, Israel's disbelief at Massah and Meribah is as comical and outlandish as it is sinful. One might understand why Ahaz would not want to act similarly. But Ahaz, misses the boat, we're told. In his wary refusal to ask for the whopper of all signs offered by God, Ahaz puts God to the test himself. According to the language of our text, Ahaz wearies God; wears God out; tests God's patience. And so, the plot thickens. Sometimes we get God's face. Sometimes we get God's backside. And in real time and space it can be hard to discern which is which; hard to know whether God is or is not in the mood to communicate. Oh, if only God's thoughts were our thoughts and God's ways, our ways. What's the deal! Does God want to communicate or not? And if God does desire to communicate, how do we know when it's time for us to spill our guts or to look and to listen for God's communicate? To be sure, these can be troubling questions which come with twists and turns which can complicate the process of arriving at an answer. But I also don't think we want to overcomplicate the process as well.

In the first chapter of his gospel which we hear from today, St. Matthew tells us that God wants to communicate with u so much that God left the glories of heaven to be with us in the birth, life, suffering, death, and burial of his Son Jesus. Please hear and understand! It's no small thing to call Jesus "Emmanuel" as Matthew says we can do today. In Jesus, God is with us. In Jesus, God has forever made it clear that God wants to communicate with us. And by the way, Matthew ends his gospel the same way he begins it; by telling us that God is with us in Jesus; that in Jesus God is with us so God might communicate with us in the most intimate and personal way possible. Yes, with the final words of Matthew's gospel, Jesus says to the Church of which we are a part, "And lo! I will be with you always; even unto the end of the age." You can't get much clearer than that. Through the birth, life, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, God has forever said, "I want to communicate with you and I will communicate with you always; even unto the end of the age."

But does this mean we no longer get God's backside; no longer have to live through breaks in communication with God? Well, I'll leave the final answer to God as I should. But in the meantime, I will say silence can be an answer; silence can be a form of communication. For instance, one of the things I like to say is that when someone throws a firecracker at you, they want a firecracker back and you shouldn't give it to them. Through your silence, you'll communicate you're no amateur to be goaded and played. Through your silence, you'll communicate that childish and sinful games are out for you. But as we acknowledge that silence can be a form of communication, it also may be that in our relationship with God we can mistake silence for that which is not silence. Far from dealing with God's backside, we just may be looking and listening for God in the wrong places or God may feel God has already said what needs to be said.

As for God feeling no further communication is required, this was Israel's problem at Massah and Meribah. After deliverance at the Red Sea, tainted water sweetened at Marah, and plentiful water at Elim, Israel didn't need another water sign. Many water signs had been given out and not in some distant or forgotten past. Conversely, the case was quite different for Ahaz when he refused to ask for the whopper of a sign God had offered. History tells us Ahaz wasn't king for very long and we don't know how many international incidents he had managed prior to the international hostilities referenced in our reading from Isaiah. With no backlog of prior communications, our reading from Isaiah reports that the God who wants to communicate was in fact ready to communicate. The moral of the story is that communication, or the lack thereof, requires context. If it's been said before, God might not say it again. Then again, if something needs to be said because of new players or new circumstances, God will say it. We just want to make sure we don't miss it.

This brings us to the possibility that the silence we attribute to God is really our failure to look and to listen for God in the right places. Remember! As I said last week, God is most likely to be where there is nothing; or at least nothing by world's standards. Today, in our reading from Isaiah, God comes to the king of a tiny nation harassed by two other nations. God shows up where there's nothing; where there seems to be less of a hand to be played. Then, on our reading from Matthew, God shows us for the salvation of the world in a relationship between Joseph and Mary which seems to be broken and headed for extinction. Again, God shows up where there is nothing. And remember too that God as God shows up where there's nothing God may bring a message that departs from our expectations.

It's what happens when God is with you first and foremost through the Jesus who is Emmanuel. This God with us, this Emmanuel, this Jesus is on his throne, is at his wisest, is at his most powerful when he goes to the cross and lays down his life for his friends; knowing full well that we wouldn't always act like friends. This is not what we would have done. This is not what we would have expected at all; any more than we would have expected God to be with us first and foremost through a first century peasant who hailed from the most backwater part of an already backwater nation. And so, if you think you're dealing with God's backside and the associated break in communication, maybe you are. Don't miss the call for repentance and change. Or there may be communication, you may just be looking for God in all the wrong places or overlooking what God has already said. Again, please hear and understand. With Jesus the proof, God wants to communicate. Never forget it! When remembered, God's costly pledge to communicate in Jesus has a way of redefining silence and reorienting expectations. Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

P: As we prepare for the fullness of Christ's presence, let us pray for a world that yearns for new hope.

P: God our shepherd, let your Spirit move with power throughout the church. Give discernment and wisdom to our bishops, pastors, deacons, and lay leaders. Take away our fear, so that we serve and love, confident that you are guiding us. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: God our source, awaken us to the beauty of the earth and the marvelous variety of life. Unite humankind in repairing and caring for your creation. Protect creatures and habitats in peril due to rising seas and warming temperatures. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: God our vision, raise up leaders in every nation who dream of freedom and justice for all people. We pray for the work of international organizations that promote peace and human rights, especially Amnesty International. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: God our helper, come to the aid of all who cry out to you. Shelter migrants, refugees, and those fleeing war and famine. Bring relief to individuals and families experiencing hunger, homelessness, or impoverishment. Comfort any who are isolated or lonely. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: God our Emmanuel, you are with us in our life together. We give you thanks for gathering us in worship and fellowship, and we remember those who cannot be present. Watch over those who travel. Heal the sick and speed their recovery (especially). God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: God our hope, you bring life out of death, and you promise to be our God forever. Shine upon the faithful who now rest in the fulfillment of your promise and bring us also into your blessed reign of peace. God, in your mercy,

A: Hear our prayer.

P: God of our longing, you know our deepest needs. By your Spirit, gather our prayers and join them with the prayers of all your children. In Jesus' name we pray.

A: Amen.

Blessing

P: May God direct your ways in peace, make you abound in love for one another and for all, and strengthen your hearts until the coming of our Lord Jesus. Almighty God, Father, ✠ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. **Amen.**