

First Presbyterian Church of Granada Hills
Lent 2024 Bible Study

I Was a Stranger...





A Message From Pastor Lance....

There's a kind of rhythm to the world that God established at the beginning: the rhythm of day and night, the rhythm of weeks and years, and the rhythm of the seasons. Throughout the year, God established festivals in the Hebrew scriptures. These festivals served to remind the people of God's faithfulness.

After Jesus' life on this earth, new holidays replaced the old festivals. For many of us in the Reformed tradition, these holidays and seasons within the liturgical calendar become times of reflection and growing closer to Christ.

The season of Lent is a time of repentance and penitence, when followers of Jesus seek to grow closer to Him through fasting, prayer, meditation, and almsgiving. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and ends before Easter. Ironically, Ash Wednesday lands on February 14th this year... Valentine's Day.

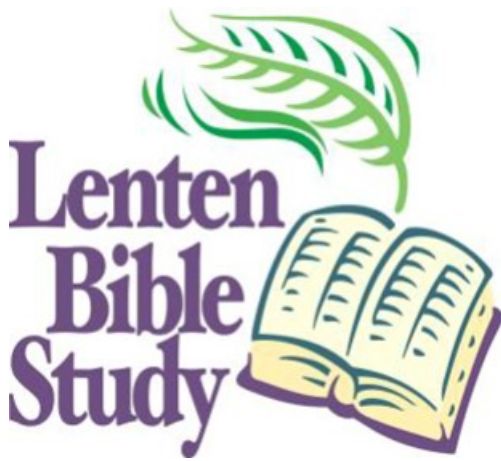
Sometimes people celebrate the season of Lent by giving something up. The idea of giving something up is not meant to show your piety or make us feel better about ourselves; it's meant to help us identify with Jesus Christ. Every time we crave the thing we've given up, we're meant to say a prayer, "Thank You, Lord Jesus, for giving up Your throne in heaven to come to this earth; thank You for dying on the cross so that I might live." When we compare our "sacrifices" with the sacrifices of Jesus, we are humbled, and we are drawn closer to our Lord and Savior.

Another practice that is often lost during Lent is almsgiving. It is common among those who observe Lent to take the money that would have been spent on the thing given up and give it to charity. In other words, if we give up a \$5 latte everyday for Lent, then we devote \$5 a day to charity.

This year during Lent, First Pres. will be focusing on the word "stranger" in the Bible, sometimes translated as "resident alien" or "sojourner." In Matthew 25, Jesus says, "*When you've done it to the least of these, you've done it to Me.*" Who are the least of these? The hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the prisoners, the fatherless, and the strangers.

Let's devote this season of Lent to considering how we treat those who are different from us, the stranger. How can we be more welcoming to them? And in so doing, how can we be more welcoming of Jesus?





Our Lenten study for 2024 year will be centered on the topic "***I Was A Stranger.***" Each study will be centered on the sermon message for that week. The following are the sermon titles:

- Feb. 14** "From Ash We Have Come" (Ash Wed.)
- Feb. 18** "Seeing the Image of God"
- Feb. 25** "The Church: Past, Present and Future" (no study is provided for this week)
- March 3** "Levitical Code"
- March 10** "Father to the Fatherless"
- March 17** " Jesus Was a Homeless Man"
- March 24** "Wayfaring Strangers" (Palm Sunday)
- March 31** "As It Is In Heaven" (Resurrection Sunday)

Included is an exposition and Bible lesson for each week to provide further individual and/or group study on the above messages. Unless otherwise noted, the New International Version will be used (NIV) .

A hymn or praise song is included with each Bible lesson that enhances the message and assists you in your devotional time with the Lord. The lyrics have been provided along with a YouTube access when available.

You are encouraged to take a few moments to pray before you begin each study and ask the Lord to prepare your heart for what He wants to share with you. Let's join together as a community as we journey to the cross towards the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior!



A FRANCISCAN BENEDICTION

*May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths,
and superficial relationships so that you may live deep within your heart.*

*May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.*

*May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer pain,
rejection hunger and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort
them and to turn their pain into joy.*

*And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe
that you can make a difference in the world, so that you can do what
others claim cannot be done, to bring justice and kindness
to all our children and the poor.*



ASH WEDNESDAY



Lent, the season between Epiphany and Easter, lasts forty weekdays and six Sundays, beginning on Ash Wednesday and culminating in Holy Week.

Traditionally, the season is marked by penitence.

What does penitence mean to you?

What reasons might you have to be penitent? _____

Often people choose to “give up” something or fast for Lent. (i.e. a specific food, social media, television, etc..) Fasting is a spiritual discipline and was not only practiced by the prophets and the Israelites, but by Jesus.

In **Isaiah 58** , God states His people did not fast with the right or correct heart. For them it had become just a meaningless ritual. God doesn't accept a person's fasting when it isn't connected with a sincere heart of obedience. In **58:4**, what reason does God give to the people when He doesn't choose to hear their prayers or honor their fasting?

Isaiah 58:6 God asks the people; *“Is not this kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”*

Before fasting, ask the Lord to tie up loose ends in your life so you can move forward unhindered. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the things that you are holding onto that God is calling you to release. (i.e. unforgiveness, grudges, jealousy, envy etc.)

Illustration: In the movie Forest Gump, we see Forest running with his leg braces on but as he continues to run, they begin to fall off and he is set free! What do you need to be set free from?

Isaiah 58:7 What does God ask you to share and provide? _____

Joel 1:14 When locusts were going to invade Judah and desolation by starvation and drought were about to occur, what did the Lord direct the people to do?

What was coming? _____

Note: When “*the day of the Lord*” is written in the Old Testament , it is when God directly and powerfully involved Himself in the course of events.

Joel 2:12-17, What does the prophet Joel remind the people to do? _____

How is God described? _____

Note: One of the ways to express mourning and repentance in the Jewish culture was to tear one’s clothes. It was a way to demonstrate their grief in regards to their sinful ways. However, Joel was concerned the people’s repentance was just following a tradition rather than having a true heart of repentance. Sincere repentance is to turn to God and away from our sin. It is surrendering to God.

Matthew 6:1-6 What does Jesus say about our attitude when doing a charitable deed? _____



God cares about our motives when we do kind deeds; just as He cares about our motives when we fast.

Matthew 6:16-21 How does Jesus describe the hypocrite’s action? _____

The title of the series Pastor Lance is sharing during the Lenten season is “***I was A Stranger...***” Take a look at **Zechariah 7:8-10** and write down what the LORD was telling His people to do.

Zechariah 7: 11-12 How did the people respond? _____

Zechariah 7:12b-13 What was God’s response? _____

2 Corinthians 5:20 What are God’s people called? _____

What do you think the word “*ambassador for Christ*” or “*minister or servant of God*” means? _____



Verse 1

*Alas! And did my Savior bleed and did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?*

Chorus

***At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight, and now I am happy all the day!***

Verse 2

*Was it for crimes that I had done, He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! Grace unknown! And love beyond degree!*

Chorus

Verse 3

*Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker died, for man the creature's sin.*

Chorus

Verse 4

*Thus might I hide my blushing face, while His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness, and melt my eyes to tears.*

Chorus

Verse 5

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay, the debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away 'tis all that I can do.*

Chorus

Go to fpcgh.org/lent for our Lent Music Playlist

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT – FEBRUARY 18, 2024



Sermon Title: “Seeing the Image of God”

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.’ Genesis 1:26a

What do you think it means for us to be made in the Image of God? _____

What do you think it means for others to be made in the Image of God? _____

What do you think it mean for immigrants to be made in the Image of God? _____

Do you think we are all made in the “image of God?” _____

Consider the following two quotes:

“To be an image bearer of God we are called to mirror and reflect God’s glory and to display His character.” R.C. Sproul

“God has put humans in something like an angled mirror in His world so that He can reflect His love, care, and stewardship of the world through humans so the rest of the world can praise the Creator through humans. The image of God is to reflect God to the world and the world to God.” N.T. Wright



Our heart, thoughts, words, and actions are meant to express the moral attributes God shared with us by making us in His likeness. Loving, compassionate, gracious, forgiving, kind, holy, faithfulness, truthful, and merciful are all descriptions of the character of God. Let’s take a look at a few of them and how God’s Word reveals a detailed portrait of God’s character.

Exodus 33:19 The Lord is _____

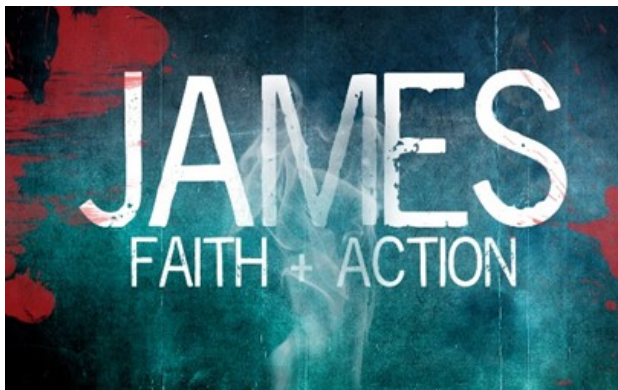
1 Samuel 2:2 The Lord is _____

2 Chronicles 12:6 The Lord is _____

Psalms 33:5 The Lord loves _____

Psalms 86:15b The Lord is _____

Nahum 1:7 _____



The New Testament book of James (Iakob or “Jacob” in the Old Testament) is a practical book written to the Jewish Christians in which the emphasis is on Christian conduct. He points to the actions that should naturally flow from those who are filled with the Holy Spirit, and he greatly criticizes favoritism, partiality, and the oppression of the poor. We are called to love everyone equally-especially the poor.

In **James 3:1-12** we have the well-known Scripture passage on the usage of the tongue- the small muscle that can either heal or hurt, encourage or discourage.

3:5 The influential tongue – small but mighty!

3:6 The destructive tongue – like a forest fire!

3:7-8 The untamable tongue – no one can tame the tongue!

3:9-12 The inconsistent tongue – to bless or to curse!

James 3:9 states: *“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness.”*

Stop! Read verse **9** again...carefully, thoughtfully this time. What is James saying here?

Who is made in God’s likeness? _____

Are God’s children using their tongues to curse the very people that are made in the *“likeness of God?”* Is their tongue blessing and cursing at the same time? What is James’ point?

James doesn’t beat around the bush! He is straightforward and gets right to the nitty gritty of how we are to live as Christians under the rulership of Jesus Christ! We are called to demonstrate our love for Him by submitting to His calling and reflecting His love to all those around us. James challenges us with a question in 3:13 *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let that person show how by good conduct that their works are done in the meekness of wisdom.”* Later James tells us wisdom comes from above. We are called to be gentle and yield to Christ’s authority and be full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. In 4:7, James tells us how to live a life that honors the Lord by telling us to submit and draw near to Him. He challenges each believer to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts. We can make the mistake of thinking that the fruit of the Spirit-love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22) comes from our own efforts; but Paul makes it very clear that we are crucified in Christ and we are to live and walk in His Spirit and submit our often stubborn and prideful ways to Jesus’ authority.

James challenges each person to be God’s image bearers and not just “talk the talk” but to “walk the walk!” (See Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7)

In **Titus 3:7** and in **Acts 17:29** we are called “*Heirs and God’s Offspring.*” What do you think that means? _____

God doesn’t just call a “select few” to be His image bearers. We are all called to be a reflection of His mercy and grace. However, with that said, **Jeremiah 9:23-24** reminds us that we can not do this on our own. What does it say God “*delights*” in?

1 Peter 2:11-12 How are we to conduct ourselves? _____

Note: Both the Romans and the Jews practiced “social and stratified separation.” (Acts 21) If a Gentile walked into a temple complex they would find the courts and sections divided. Some people were allowed to come closer to the actual house of the Lord than others. Can you imagine walking into your church and being told where you could sit and where you couldn’t simply because of who you are? (The Gospel on the Ground by Kristi McLelland-pgs. 148-149)

Titus 3:8 If we are faithful to God and believe in Him, what should we be careful to maintain and why? _____

1 Peter 1:15-16 What does God call you to be? _____

Part of God’s character is His faithfulness to us. According to **1 Corinthians 1:9**, what has God called us into? _____

What does it mean to have “fellowship” with Christ? _____

Continuing in **1 Corinthians 1:10-11**, what does Paul encourage the people in Corinth to do if there are divisions among them? _____

Many things can “divide” people as well as “unite” them. What could some divisions be?

What could “unite” people together? _____

If all humanity is created in God’s image, how does that change our attitude toward others?

What is the best way to honor God's greatest creation-humanity? _____

God calls us to see every person valuable and treat each individual with dignity, respect, and honor (not just those who are like us or those we like).

How can you live "strategically and purposely" for the Lord? Think of your vocation, your home or your community. What actions could you do to be an image bearer of Christ?

When we make the mistake of placing ourselves in the center of God's story rather than putting the Lord in His rightful place at the center, then we squeeze Him out and are not living according to His plan. As ambassadors of Christ, we are to act as His representatives and be a reflection of His love. We are created to be in relationship with others at home, at work, in the community, and in the world.

Micah 6:8 What does God require of you? _____

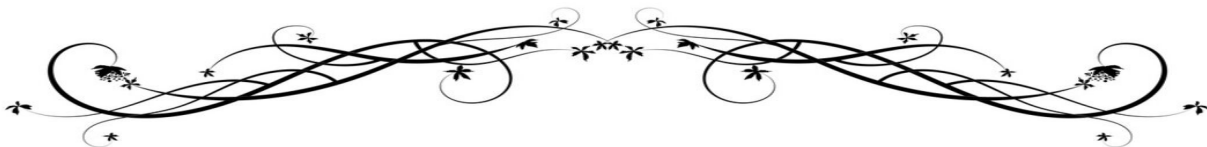
James 3:13 How are your works to be done? _____

Ephesians 4:24 When we are created according to God's plan, what do we possess?

We are created in the image of Jesus Christ and inherit His righteousness and holiness. But if we rebel against the Lord, we are no longer being effective ambassadors of Christ and we tarnish His image.

Therefore, according to **Ephesians 4:25-32**, what do we need to put away?

Ephesians 4:32 What are we to do? _____



LORD OF LIGHT, YOUR NAME OUTSHINING

Lord of light, Your name outshining. All the stars and sums of space.

Use our talents in Your kingdom as the servants of Your grace;

Use us to fulfill Your purpose in the gift of Christ Your Son.

By the toil of faithful workers in some far out lying field.

By the courage where the radiance of the cross is still revealed.

By the victories of meekness through reproach and suffering won.

Grant that knowledge, still increasing, at Your feet may lowly kneel;

With Your grace our triumphs hallow, with Your charity our zeal;

Lift the nations from the shadows to the gladness of the sun.

By the prayers of faithful watchers, never silent day or night;

By the cross of Jesus bringing, peace to all and healing light.

By the love that passes knowledge, making all Your children one.

Abba, as in highest heaven, so on earth Your will be done.

Howell Elvet Lewis, 1916 Cyril Vincent Taylor, 1941

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SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT – FEBRUARY 25, 2024

This week's challenge: find a comfy chair and spend 15 minutes with your Bible in prayer.
Nothing is more important than building an intimate relationship with Jesus.

SOLITARY THRONE

(Romans 12:1)

*The right to rule my life, O Lord, that I claimed as my own.
The vanity toward which my fickle heart was ever prone, I yield it all!
I know the right to reign is Yours alone.
I freely abdicate to You the solitary throne!*

*The vision His cross my burdened conscience cheers,
He woos my heart with Calvary love all distance disappears!
Hard frosts and winter blasts cannot my glory dim;
He drew me with the cords of love, espoused my soul to Him!*

I'M GRAVEN ON HIS HANDS

(Isaiah 49:16)

*The crown of thorns has passed away from off our Savior's head;
and glory scars adorn the brow where once our Savior bled;
the Roman spikes have passed away which pierced His hands and feet;
now on display, He bears the prints of Victory complete!*

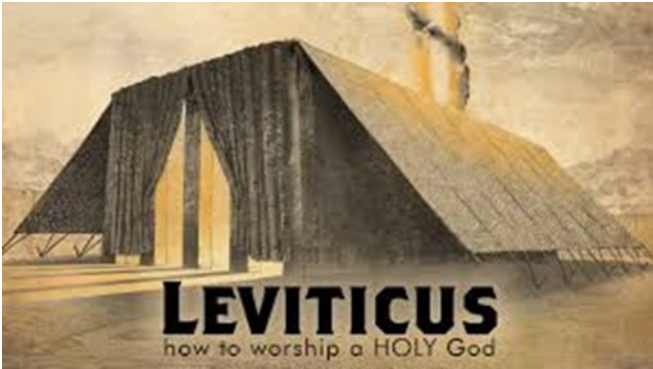
*The soldier's sword has passed away which tore the Savior's side,
now angels gather 'round to see the wounds by which He died!
The sin He bore has passed away! The prints remain above;
reminders of the price He paid and monuments of love!*

*From Green Pastures – Devotional Poetry
Edward Miller*

***Serving the least of these is a sterling
reflection of our King!***



THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT – MARCH 3, 2024



Sermon Title: “Levitical Code”

Have you ever read the book of Leviticus? There are stories about people who have set for themselves the goal of reading through the Bible in one year, and they start with Genesis. Usually the story ends with how the reading of the book of Leviticus kept them from achieving their goal. If you have read the book, what did you think of the book? If you haven't read, do you want to? Why or why not?

Now to be fair, it can be difficult to read. But it is also rich in symbol and significance, meaning and magnitude. It is necessary to read it for what it is and what it teaches us instead of expecting a story or a historical narrative. And remembering its purpose is key to understanding its depths.

The book of Leviticus is all about holiness. It's about the holiness of God and the holiness of the people of God. What do we mean by the word holiness? It is simply the state of being holy. So what does it mean to be holy? The Merriam-Webster dictionary has several definitions. 1) exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness, 2) DIVINE, i.e. *for the Lord our God is holy—Psalms 99:9* (King James Version), 3) devoted entirely to the deity or the work of the deity, 4) a: having a divine quality, b: as if sacred. One possible definition might be this. Holy means set apart as sacred, perfect in goodness and righteousness, completely clean, and without blemish or flaw. God is holy and because of this holiness, things or people that are unclean, imperfect, or sinful are not able to withstand being in God's presence. Write a definition of the word holy using your own words.



So in the book of Leviticus we see instructions for the nation of Israel in how to worship this holy God. The instructions serve a dual purpose. Because while it serves as the Israelite Book of Worship (like we Presbyterians have), the book also instructs the people of God in how to live a holy life, which is centered around their worship of God. What makes this set of instructions so remarkable are the details

that are included. As we consider the stranger (the theme of our Lenten season), these instructions for life do not neglect the outsider but include them as a natural part of life. In fact, we see in these extensive instructions a foreshadowing of what Jesus, the Son of God, gave as the greatest commandments. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.* (See also **Matthew 22:37-39** and **Mark 12:29-31**). The people of God were given ways of living that provided for those who lived among them who had no land of their own (rules about gleaning in the fields) nor a means of providing for themselves. The people of God were not to oppress the outsider/alien but were to treat them as they would themselves. And they were not to make separate, “special” laws for the stranger. The stranger was subject to the same laws that they, the people of God, were subject too. There is no distinction between them.

Read **Leviticus 19:9-10, 33-34; 23:22; 24:22; Deuteronomy 24:14-19**. What are the specific laws given in these verses? _____

Read also **Matthew 5-7**.

This is the Sermon the Mount. Is there anything in this teaching of Jesus that tells us how we are to treat strangers/outsideers? Explain. _____

What does this mean for us? How are we to treat the stranger among us today? Most of us don't have fields where we can leave parts behind so that others can eat. It means we have to find new ways of providing for others. If nothing else it reminds us that we are to be thoughtful and considerate of others as we live our lives. As followers of Jesus, we too are called to live holy lives worshipping our Lord God in everything that we do. So how are we to live? What are some practical steps that you can do this week? _____

What are some steps that the church is already doing? _____

How might you participate in what the church is doing? _____

Spend some time praying that the Lord will guide you in the coming days. If you like, you may write your prayer below.



Hallelujah

JESUS REIGNS



He Reigns

Verse 1

*It's the song of the redeemed rising from the African plain
It's the song of the forgiven drowning out the Amazon rain
The song of Asian believers filled with God's holy fire
It's every tribe every tongue every nation
A love song born of a grateful choir.*

Chorus

***It's all God's children singing, glory glory hallelujah
He reigns, He reigns, it's all God's children singing
Glory, glory hallelujah! He reigns (He reigns)***

Verse 2

*Let it rise above the four winds caught up in the heavenly sound
Let praises echo from the towers of cathedrals to the faithful gathered underground
Of all the songs sung from the dawn of creation some were meant to persist
Of all the bells rung from a thousand steeples none rings truer than this.*

Bridge

*And all the powers of darkness tremble at what they've just heard
'Cause all the powers of darkness can't drown out a single word.*

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**A FATHER OF THE
FATHERLESS, AND A
DEFENDER OF THE
WIDOWS, IS GOD IN HIS
HOLY HABITATION.**

- PSALM 68:5



Sermon Title: “Father to the fatherless”

“The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow.” Psalm 146:9a

We continue with the theme of God’s love for the stranger, the alien, the widow, and overall those who are marginalized. This includes the orphan; the one who has no father either from birth or in any time during their childhood. This one has no one to protect him or to teach him or even to model for him what it means to be a male in the society that he lives in. In Old Testament days if a child could not be taken care

of, he was in dire straits to get what he needed to live away from his mother. She would be trying to make a wage that she could pay for her family’s needs. The Lord God had specific commands to His people for the welfare of the fatherless child. If one’s father was gone and the mother’s absence was due to working, even as a prostitute, or due to desertion of her child, the youngster became an orphan.

The Torah clearly stated that any male who would mistreat or oppress an orphan would be held under the penalty of death! (Exodus 22: 20-23, Deuteronomy 24:17)

Proverbs 23:10 -11 says:

*“Do not move the ancient boundary, or go into the fields of the fatherless;
for their Redeemer is strong; He will plead their case against you.”*

Their Redeemer is the Lord God and He is very strong.

When we get to the prophets, a time when Israel was an established monarchy, care for the orphans was one of the ways the people would show their obedience and humility before the Lord. Jeremiah reminded the people that strangers, aliens, and orphans should not be oppressed. This was not like the pagan nations that surrounded Israel. In these countries children, and especially orphans, were sacrificed to the gods and used for barter or slave labor. In the New Testament the Apostle James defines “pure and undefiled religion as visiting orphans and widows in their distress.” It meant caring for them, even taking them into their homes.

All of these commands were to make sure that both Israel and the Church of Christ would be seen as the people of God to the surrounding world. Israel was to be a light to the nations; the church was to show the love of Jesus Christ

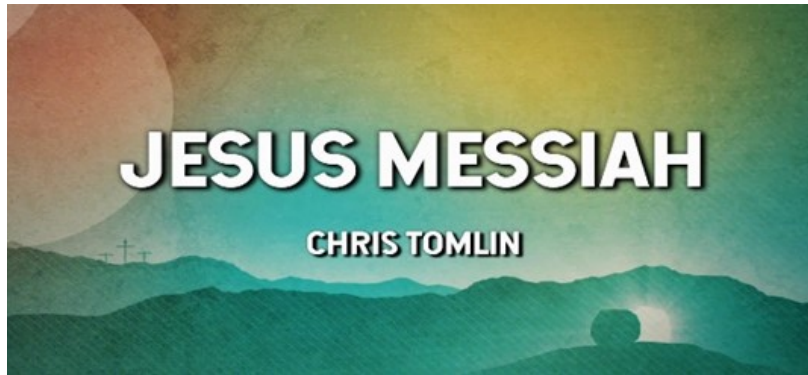
Psalm 146:7-9 reminds us that:

*“The LORD upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets prisoners free, gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,
the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the alien,
and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but He frustrates the way of the wicked.”*

This Psalm was to be sung in the courts of the temple. It speaks of an involved God who is One who responds to the alien, the blind, the hurting, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. That is who He is. Jesus Christ shows us who His heavenly Father is. He is the one that we worship and He is our example to follow!

Consider the following words from the prophet **Isaiah 1:17**:

“ Learn to do good; seek justice; defend the orphan; plead for the widow.”



*He became sin, who knew no sin that we might become His righteousness
He humbled Himself and carried the cross. Love so amazing, love so amazing!*

*Jesus Messiah, name above all names. Blessed redeemer, Emmanuel
The rescue for sinners, the ransom from Heaven -Jesus Messiah, Lord of all
His body the bread, His blood the wine broken and poured out all for love
The whole earth trembled, and the veil was torn. Love so amazing, love so amazing.*

*Jesus Messiah, name above all names. Blessed redeemer, Emmanuel
The rescue for sinners, the ransom from Heaven- Jesus Messiah, Lord of all
All our hope is in You, all our hope is in You. All the glory to You, God, the light of the world.*

*Jesus Messiah, name above all names. Blessed redeemer, Emmanuel
The rescue for sinners, the ransom from Heaven-Jesus Messiah, Lord of all
Jesus Messiah, Lord of all. You're the Lord of all The Lord of all*

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The prophet Jeremiah gives a stern warning from the Lord at the temple gate. He instructs the people of Judah to hear the word of the LORD as they come to worship. Here we see God's heart and concern for the marginalized people.

Jeremiah 7:3-8 How are the people to treat the alien, the fatherless, or the widow?

Exodus 22:21-24 God's requirements are to be followed. What does He say about how the people were to treat an alien, widow, or orphan? _____

How will God respond if these instructions are not followed? _____

Deuteronomy 24:17-18 What does the Lord say about the marginalized people? _____

What does God want His people to "remember?" _____

“

God is not only close to the fatherless.

He is a Father to the fatherless.

But more than that, God is a Father to all who puts their trust in Him.

”

Simplicity
of Heart

Crystal Storms from [Simplicity of Heart](#) shares the following:

“I grew up in a single-parent home. My mom never married. She raised me by herself. I’ve never even known the identity of my father. So when I read verses in the Bible that spoke about the fatherless, my heart ached. They pointed out what was missing from my life. The emptiness I felt. But as I continued to read and study God’s Word, I noticed those verses that once pierced my heart pointed to the closeness of God to the fatherless.”

Deuteronomy 10:18: *“He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.”*

Most of the time when we hear the word “father,” we have good memories. We are grateful for our fathers’ protection and provision and are humbled when they continue to love us even when we disobey their instructions. However, even if we didn’t have a loving earthly father, we all know what the characteristics of a caring-loving father should be.

The LORD'S Prayer

When Jesus introduced the Lord's Prayer, He could have chosen a number of different words to begin the prayer, but He chose to start with the words "Our Father." Have you even thought about why He would begin the Lord's Prayer that way? What are your thoughts?

Psalm 10:14 What does God see and consider? _____

What does the "victim" do? _____

How is God described? _____

Write out **Psalm 68:5** below:

James 1:26-27 You have already read from week one about the tongue and how it can be cruel and destructive. How is it described in vs. **26** and what does James say is worthless?

What type of "religion" does God our Father "accept?" _____

We are all part of God's family. He is a Father to all of us and has demonstrated His love for all .

What does it mean that God watches over the strangers? _____

Why do you think they are in the same category as orphans and widows? _____

How does God's heart for the stranger shape your heart? _____



FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT – MARCH 17, 2024

Sermon Title: “Jesus Was a Homeless Man”



THE HOMELESS JESUS

Homeless Jesus is a bronze sculpture by Canadian sculptor Timothy Schmalz depicting Jesus as a homeless person, sleeping on a park bench. This is in the grounds of Liverpool Parish Church of Our Lady and Saint Nicholas, opposite the famous Liver Building.

Have you thought of Jesus being homeless?

When reflecting on this concept, refer to Jesus’ words. **Matthew 8:20** *‘Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.’*

How would you have treated Jesus if He showed up homeless in your neighborhood?

Why don’t we treat the homeless the same way?

Seeing how Jesus identifies with immigrants

Abram was the original Biblical immigrant.

Genesis 12:1-2

“The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”

The message here is *‘you are blessed so as to be a blessing’*. How can we look and treat immigrants, even illegal immigrants in record numbers, as blessings from God?



When Jesus says “I was a stranger and you welcomed Me...” (**Matthew 25:35**) He’s referring to how all peoples are to be regarded. Do we look at strangers as if they were Jesus?

When were you a ‘stranger’ to a new group of folks, a new city, a new church? What were your expectations or apprehensions meeting ‘strangers’? _____

God tells us how and why strangers are to be treated kindly.

Leviticus 19:33-34 *‘The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.’*

Does God’s command change your perspective on strangers, and if so, how?

Jesus gives us specifics as to how we treat strangers.

Matthew 25:35-36 *‘I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me.’*

But He also tells us the consequences of not treating strangers as Himself. Throughout this chapter, the emphasis is on the indifference to those in need and to the Holy Spirit’s calling. It’s not as much what we do but what we don’t do that concerns Christ.

Verse 41 *‘Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’*

Is the above Bible verse a frightening passage to you? Explain and praise God for His Grace!

There are others just as scary! When Jesus sent 72 disciples 2 by 2 to all the neighboring villages and towns to spread the news of the Gospel and the arrival of Jesus, they were to take nothing extra for the trip. If the people accepted them, they were to 'let their peace stay on them'. But if not accepted:

Luke 10:10-12 *"But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.' ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town."*

How does that make you feel? Why do you think Jesus is this harsh?

Summarize **Isaiah 58:10** in your own words: _____

The picture of Jesus warning of coming judgment upon an unfruitful Israel can be found in **Matthew 21:19** with the story of Jesus cursing a fig tree with leaves and yet it bore no fruit. It withered at once!

Jesus always loves us and has our best interest at heart. He rebukes us to return us to the right path, leading us back to God and the Kingdom of the Heaven! He wants the stranger and the immigrant to be cared for by us the same way He cared for them. They are just as much God's creation as members of a church, city or country. We, nor no one has an exclusive on God's love. So, if we're not caring for the disenfranchised, He tells us the perilous consequences because He doesn't want to lose us. He loves us so much as to be uncomfortably honest with the full measure of unlimited grace at the ready.

The easiest time for a reasonably empathetic person to show caring, kindness and compassion towards others comes when there is a natural disaster, devastation, unfair invasion, sickness, loss of loved ones, witnessing abuse of the innocent or people desperately fleeing oppression. We just passed the 30th anniversary of the Northridge earthquake. Columnist Dennis McCarthy commemorated the date recalling people who stepped up to answer the needs of those most dramatically affected, i.e. heroes of those days. To quote one of the people he interviewed: "I think we learned this week that if everybody acted this way to each other when there was no earthquake, we'd all be better off." Dennis reflected, "Thirty years later, I just wish we had listened."

One additional warning of humbleness when doing good deeds:

Matthew 6:2-4 ² “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.



How can we keep in our hearts and minds that all peoples are made in the image of God?

When we act kindly toward others or fail to act, not necessarily out of malice but of disregard, we are doing so to the ‘least of these’.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to do something kind just for Jesus?

Matthew 25:40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.’”

“Be Thou My Vision ”

*Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light*

*Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word. I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son. Thou in me dwelling and I with Thee one.*

*Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise. Thou mine inheritance, now and always.
Thou and Thou only first in my heart High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art*

*High King of heaven, my victory won May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall. Still be my vision, O ruler of all.*

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PALM SUNDAY – MARCH 24, 2024



Sermon Title: "Wayfaring Strangers"

1 Peter 2:11-17

Home plays a large part in our culture. Home Sweet Home. Welcome Home. There's no place like home. Home Alone. People want to find, create, and live in a place that they can call home. Describe what your ideal home would be like. _____

Is your ideal anything like the place you currently live? What is similar? What is different? What would you like to change? _____

In the Old Testament the nation Israel often turned away from the Lord God which would lead to unpleasant consequences. During the lifetime of the prophet Jeremiah a large percentage of the people of Judah were taken into exile to live in Babylon. They were removed from their homes in the promised land and taken to live in a foreign land. God sent them a message through His prophet Jeremiah. Read **Jeremiah 29:4-14**.

What does this passage instruct the people living far from home against their will to do?

Why does God want them to do these things? _____

Is there any hope in this passage? If so, what is the hope? _____

At the time when Jesus was walking on earth, the Jewish people were living scattered throughout the Roman Empire all around the Mediterranean. Their faith remained centered in Jerusalem and in the Temple. It was customary for the men, at least (and usually with their families), to travel to Jerusalem for the three big festivals that were instituted by Moses (prescribed in the book of Leviticus), the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover), the Festival of Weeks (First Fruits), and the Festival of Tabernacles. The Jewish people attended as often as they could, depending on the distance they had to travel. Many of them lived outside of the promised land. And yet for them the promised land was still considered home.

In the first letter we have from the apostle Peter, he is writing to the followers of Jesus who had been scattered throughout the known Roman empire due to persecution. We will remember that for several years after the death and resurrection of Jesus His followers lived and worshipped together in Jerusalem. It was only after the death of Stephen and the intensified persecution that the believers who began to be known as Christians traveled away from Jerusalem in search of a safe place to live. They were living in places that were not for them “home”. Because of their faith/belief they had become immigrants.

Read **1 Peter 2:11-17**. How does Peter address his friends to whom he is writing? _____

In this passage what instructions does he give? _____

How does this message compare with the message that Jeremiah gave to the exiles in the passage above?



In both of our passages the people of God find themselves living away from the place that they consider their home. They were living as immigrants (or wayfaring strangers). Have you ever lived in a place from home?

If yes, what were the circumstances that brought you to that place? _____

If no, what would be difficult for you if you were in a situation of living as an immigrant or away from the place that you consider home? _____

Read **Philippians 3:15-21**. In this passage the apostle Paul was telling the believers in Philippi to follow his example. If you remember Paul's background, you will recall that Paul himself was born a Roman citizen which was an unusual thing for a Jewish person. According to this passage where does Paul say his citizenship is?

Where does Paul say the believers in Philippi's citizenship is? _____

How about you? In this country (the United States of America) there has long been a tradition of being very patriotic and very proud of being of a citizen, though this has been shifting in recent years. Sometimes people would consider themselves first and foremost an American. It was their most important identification. In your opinion, what would the apostle Paul say about this tendency to place such importance on citizenship to an earthly nation? _____

Ultimately, according to this passage where is your true citizenship? Where is your homeland as a follower of Jesus Christ? _____



Spend a few minutes praying to the Lord God that he would continue to enlighten you about what it means for you to live here as an immigrant from heaven.

Master, Let Me Walk With Thee (Maryton)

Verse 1

*O Master let me walk with Thee
In lowly paths of service free
Tell me Thy secret
Help me bear the strain of toil
The fret of care*

Verse 2

*Help me the slow of heart to move
By some clear winning word of love
Teach me the wayward feet to stay
And guide them in the homeward way*

Verse 3

*Teach me Thy patience still with Thee
In closer dearer company
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong
In trust that triumphs over wrong*

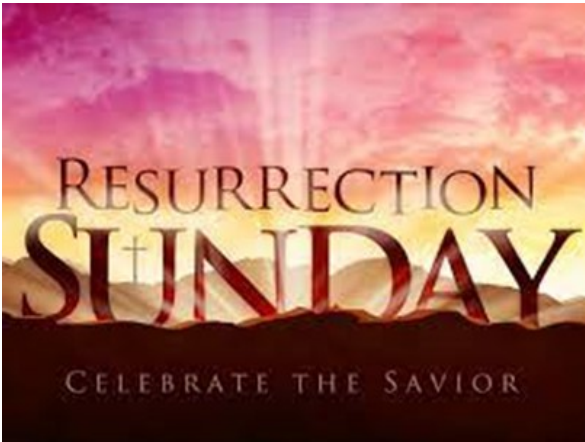
Verse 4

*In hope that sends a shining ray
Far down the future's broad'ning way
In peace that only Thou canst give
With Thee O Master let me live*



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RESURRECTION SUNDAY – MARCH 31, 2024



Sermon Title: “As It Is In Heaven”

Revelation 7:9-12

During the time of severe racial unrest in our country, the Christians who were seen as allies and advocates of racial justice and equality used this section of scripture to bolster their stance. It was hard to fathom how believers in Jesus (who were the working-class Jew), could hold clear prejudicial views about minorities. Though rarely spoken, what and who these brothers and sisters supported showed their attitudes and beliefs.

Revelation 7 speaks to the number one reason God created rational beings to both take good care of the physical world and, more importantly, be in relationship with Him. He gave humanity a choice to freely love and adore Him; to glorify (ascribe worth) and bless Him. What is also incredible is that the Lord loves His Image Bearers, every one of them parentheses scripture parentheses. He delights in us and gives us what we need to live even an abundant life (John 10: 10). The scripture states that, “*We love because He first loved us*” (John 4: 16). Experiencing our being valued and enjoyed, for being who we are and for no other external reason, creates us a well-spring of gratefulness. God loves the particulars as well as He loves the masses.

Revelation seven: 7:12 depicts a huge praise meeting. Imagine the Los Angeles Colosseum only 10 times as large which would make over one million people. Obviously, there was even more there at this celestial meeting; they are the uncountable. Then see who these people are and where they come from. St John mentions four descriptors of these people. They are from every nation, every tribe, all the people, and all the tongues, in the world.

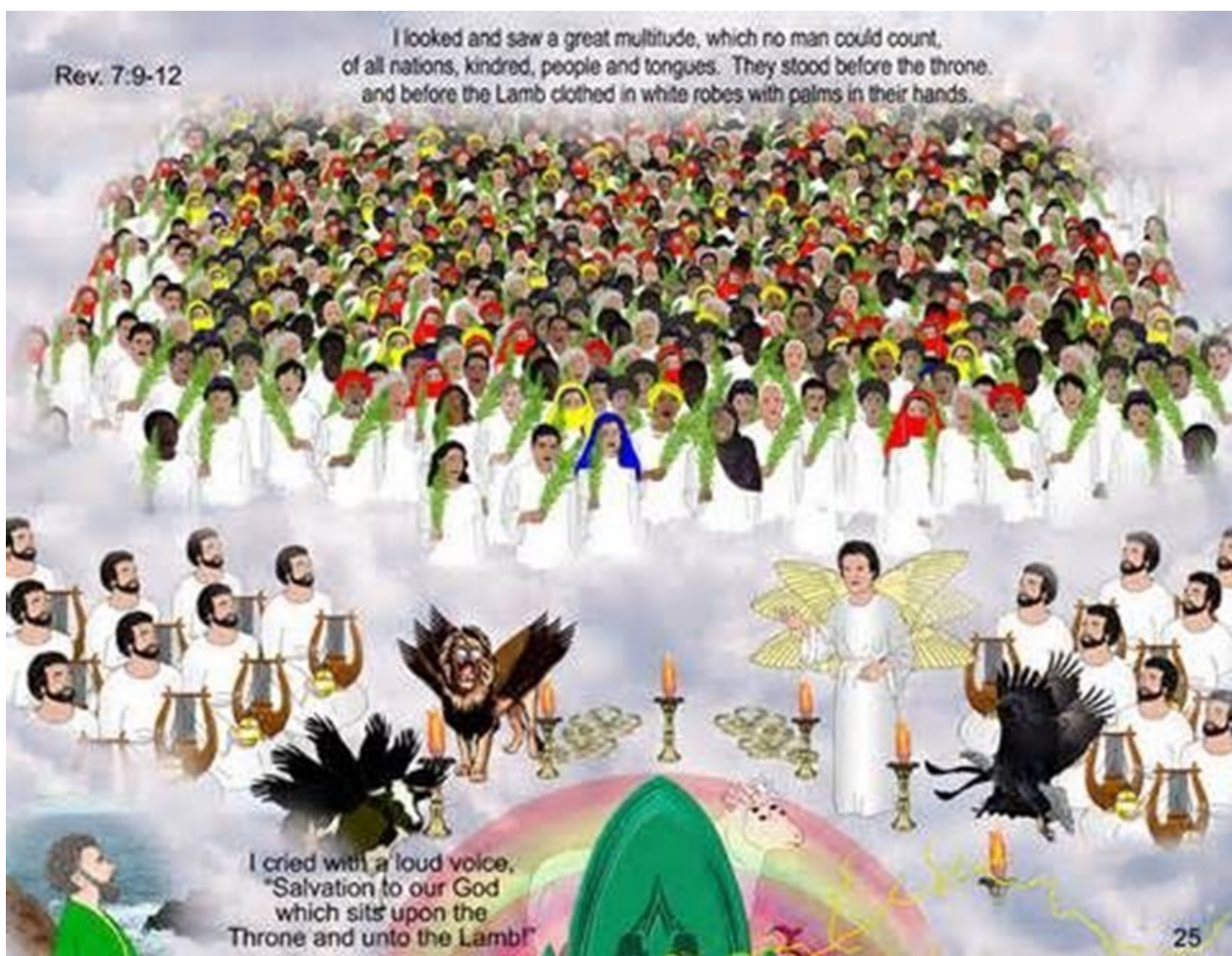
This mega colosseum is filled with every expression of humankind, His created Image Bearers. All are there as followers of the Lamb; no one is excluded. Not the black slave, the Indian castile, not the Holocaust Jew, the Bolivian peasant, or the Russian surf or any other marginalized people. The poor, the mentally challenged, the handicapped the sexually diverse, the schizophrenic are all called to the grand celebration!

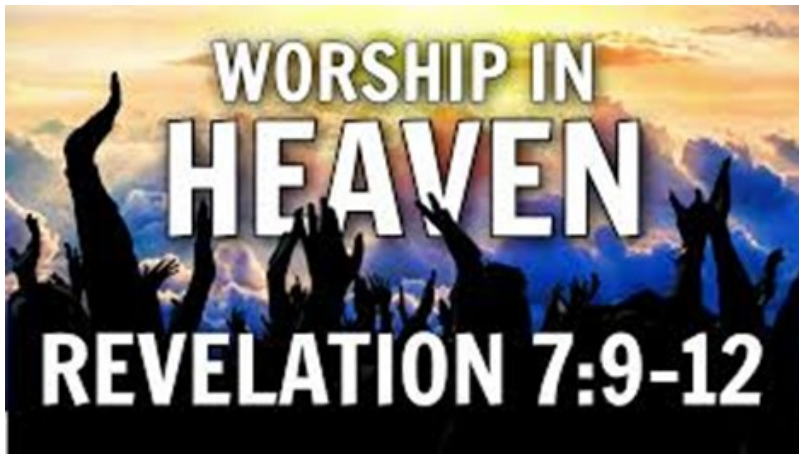
Everybody is there, there are no exclusions. And now the most glorious experience of this amazing event: it is what that multitude can do for God . This is now on display. The angels and the heavenly hosts watch and agree with what the humans are saying.

They worship and they give acknowledgement, a love to our Lord. Verse 12 says *"Amen! So be it!"* This is who You are Lord. *"You are the blessed One, , glorious, wise, giving, honorable, powerful and mighty.* It is also saying, *"We bless you, glorify You, call You wise, We thank You and honor You, oh most powerful and mighty One."*

All the multitude does this, all the Imaged Ones together that is humankind, the body of Christ, the Church Universal belonging to our (triune) God; that is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus dies for all the people, as the song says, *"...red and yellow black and white, they are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."* Embrace the unity that our diversity calls for. We are all partakers of the life of our resurrected Lord!





Revelation 7:9- 12

“After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever.”

What will heaven look like?

Who will be there?

Recently the pope said: *“True Christians do not build walls.”* Do you agree or disagree with this statement? _____ Why? _____

What does the view of heaven described in Revelation do to your view of building God’s kingdom here on earth? _____



Let Us Adore the Lord

Song by John Michael Talbot

*In the love come from God, I now entreat you
Put away all your cares and be free of every possession
Coming freely to love and to serve and to honor the Lord let us adore the Lord
With a pure heart and mind let us adore the Lord our God.
For He is the Lord God Almighty for the indwelling Father
and the Son and the Spirit we pray.
We should keep for Him always a dwelling place
Within our soul where the Lord always can stay let us adore the Lord
With a pure heart and mind let us adore the Lord our God
And let us adore the Lord
With a pure heart and mind let us adore the Lord our God
So let us abide as the people of Jesus
Holding fast to His life. Holding fast to His words
Holding fast to the love of the Good Shepherd we must never lose heart
for His love has overcome all the world.
So let us adore the Lord with a pure heart and mind
Let us adore the Lord our God and let us adore the Lord
With a pure heart and mind let us adore the Lord our God*

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Closing Benediction

*May the Lord grant you peace
May His love shine down, love shine down
And meet, your every need
And keep your feet from stumbling
And fix your eyes on the mark, on the prize
As you go, may you rest in Christ
Receive His grace to love all men
In spite of all our differences
May your words be filled with life
That crumble walls of fear and pride
Take up the cross to serve the least and the lost
As you go, be the hands of God
Cause He is your strength and your victory, yeah
He comes behind you and heals
He is the cup and the portion
Your banner and shield
So be released. Be blessed, be free
Live and move as the Spirit breathes
As you go, go with God, go in peace*

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