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Prayers of the People – Edition 3

++For whenever you are so led to pause, reflect, and pray++

(Drawn from the Worship Resource for Sunday, April 5, 2020, prepared for First Baptist Church in Needham, Massachusetts during COVID19.)

Lighting the Candle of Life

(You may wish to light a candle or use the photo of our Candle of Life as a focus.)

All: We light the Candle of Life — a candle that represents community, spirit, and the fullness of all of life — birth and death and all of the transitions in between and beyond.

Time of Reflection

- What does humility represent to me? In the face of hubris and self-assertion, how does Jesus' example of humility speak to my life and my choices in this season of self-isolation and care?
- Where are the places of turmoil, upset, fear, anxiety, and questioning for me today? How may I recognize and find a way to welcome Jesus where I am, as I am, today and this week? Can I recognize and welcome Jesus into the messy, anxious, grieving places of my life?

Reading or Special Music (Online) *Prayer of Thomas Merton*[1]

(You may choose to pray or recite this prayer of trust within unknowning written by the monk Thomas Merton. Or, listen to Kate Campbell sing it online at: www.katecampbell.com/music/for-the-living-of-these-days/ *and click on* Prayer of Thomas Merton.*)*

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going
I do not see the road ahead of me
I cannot know for certain where it will end
Nor do I really know myself
And the fact that I think
  that I am following your will
Does not mean that I am actually doing so
But I believe that the desire to please you
Does in fact please you
And I hope I have that desire
  in all that I am doing
I hope that I will never do anything
  apart from that desire
And I know that if I do this
You will lead me by the right road
Though I may know nothing about it
Therefore will I trust you always
Though I may seem to be lost
  and in the shadow of death
I will not fear for you are ever with me
And you will never leave me
  to face my perils alone

[1] Words by Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* © 1958 Abbey of Gethsemani. Music by Kate Campbell © 2006 Large River Music (BMI), Kate: Piano, Vocal.

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Prayers of the People

Prayerful Meditation

Be gracious to us, O Most Holy God,
For even though our hearts know praise and thanks, we live in distress.
We watch as daily life shifts again and again and a virus claims the lives of thousands.
We keep a physical distance and yet offer all the compassion we can muster toward those within our reach, whose days are dominated by pain and suffering.
We look within ourselves and see the sorrow that fills those inner places of despair.
Come, Holy Lover of creation, our times are in your hand.
Let your radiance shine upon us; save us with your steadfast love, for we would be your servants in this time and place, the bearers of your unstoppable compassion.
Hear now our prayers for those in pain and need, for all those whose strength fails because of misery, the prayers we can find words for, and those that rise up through the silence within.[2]

We Hold in Prayer…

(Many of the prayers are requests from members of our congregation during this season of COVID19. They are offered here for you to join our community of faith in keeping vigil and praying for you and the world today.)

As a community of faith gathered in Spirit when we cannot be in person, we offer our hearts and voices in prayer where we are, as we are, entrusting the Spirit's moving among us and responding far beyond our individual reach and influence…

For the people of Jonesboro, Arkansas, reeling from the chaos of tornados in addition to COVID19. For them and all communities impacted by disasters and crises made further complicated and painful by the necessary precautions of the virus…and for souls living in such communities we know personally whose names we speak aloud… ***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer…***

We hold persons awaiting results from being tested for COVID19 and persons who have tested positive in healing prayer and relief from their symptoms. We also hold individuals who are living with presumed COVID19, who are experiencing unidentified respiratory illness, and who are quarantined due to exposure. For their healing rest, full recovery, and relief from anxiety and fear…and for souls in these groups we know personally whose names we speak aloud… ***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer…***

We offer gratitude for scripture that challenges us to critically reflect and ponder at this time… and for Christians around the globe who must enter Holy Week and Eastertide in significantly

[2] Peter Bankson and Deborah Sokolove, *Calling on God: Inclusive Christian Prayers for Three Years of Sundays* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2014), 49 (paraphrased).

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altered ways and distances and yet continue to study, pray, and invite their faith to be stretched and transformed…***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow…***

We pray for the dedicated individuals who staff healthcare and medical facilities, known and unknown to us. For their health and wellbeing, for restorative rest and nourishment, and continued psychological and spiritual care… and the steadfast support and concern of their loved ones…and for souls in these groups we know personally whose names we speak aloud… ***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer***

We hold persons in assisted living facilities whose routines and sense of familiarity are being altered as they are moved due to COVID19….We acknowledge the isolation, loneliness, and despair at being cut off from seeing relatives and other residents and staff…for these dear souls, their beloved family and friends, and the staffs who are committed to keeping residents safe while they continue to work under the threat of the virus… and for souls in these groups we know personally whose names we speak aloud… ***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer…***

We offer thanks for space, perspective, and time to breathe as well as time to be creative that being home is allowing many people ... ***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow. W***e also pray for people who are now working from home and finding their workload greatly increased and the shift to staying home stressful and difficult… and for souls in these groups we know personally whose names we speak aloud… ***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer…***

We acknowledge the longing to be able to be in community again and await in hope and certainty for the day we are able to worship in word and song in the same space. We are grateful for the gifts of song and prayer that are not bound by space but can be shared together over the phone…***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow…***

We offer prayers for the health and well-being and the ongoing concerns of loved ones, friends, and neighbors with whom we cannot be near. We also offer prayer for persons who has lost their jobs for the duration of stay-home orders. For the millions of persons facing financial instability and uncertainty, who have lost health coverage, and who are struggling to maintain basic living obligations…and for souls in these groups we know personally whose names we speak aloud…***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer…***

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We offer prayers for students of all ages who are endeavoring to continue learning through trauma, uncertainty, disruption, disappointment, fear, limited resources, and unplanned shifts in "classroom" space. For doctoral students defending years of researched dissertations to online committees, graduating college students trying to finalize school careers with uncertain next steps, and high school seniors in flux over how to proceed beyond an end date. For educators who are learning new technologies on the fly as they work tirelessly to provide adequate and effective teaching, administrators and staff who are maintaining and flexing educational infrastructures, and for parents who are now attempting to ensure children are not falling behind while sheltering at home…and for souls in these groups we know personally whose names we speak aloud…***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer…***

We celebrate with households who have welcomed adopted and fostered animals into their home during COVID19. For the unexpected benefits and joys of becoming an animal's new human family and the comfort and goodness animals at home and in nature offer us each day…and for the beloved pets we now name…***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow…***

We offer thanks for the forms of technology that are making this experience more bearable. For phone calls, internet, and telecommuting as well as movies, gaming, and forms of entertainment and education…and for the persons who continue to work each day to ensure these services work effectively and continuously***…Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.***

We speak the names of souls who have died and hold their loved ones in continual prayers of condolence and deep peace…. For these lives, the lives lost to COVID19, and the souls who grieve this day… ***Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer…***

We speak the names of souls who celebrate birthdays and anniversaries this week and share in the joy of their lives and presence among us***…Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.***

And for the prayers of our hearts that you, Holy One, know even when words cannot hold them… ***Hear my prayer, O Lord.***

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

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Benediction

(Speak these words of benediction knowing that you are part of a loving community of faith. If you lit a candle at the beginning, you may wish to blow it out now.)

One: Our blessing to one another is that we are here for one another, that we are with one another, that we celebrate and remember one another along the journey.

ALL: We extinguish the Candle of Life, but the Light continues to shine within us. As we pass the peace we carry the Light of the Candle of Life from this hour into this world and beyond, offering peace, hope and light wherever the journey leads.

Passing of the Peace

(Picture in your mind's eye the faces of beloved souls with whom you would share the peace of Christ in person if you could, and offer each one your blessing of peace.)

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

One: Let us greet one another in peace as we prepare for the journey ahead.

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