

Call to Worship

One: There is something deeper than trouble.

All: It is God's grace.

One: God's amazing grace;

All: Carrying, lifting, holding us in all seasons.

One: There is something more powerful than despair.

All: It is God's grace.

One: God's amazing love;

All: Seeing us through dark nights, waves of sadness, mountains of grief.

One: There is something longer lasting than pain.

All: It is God's grace

One: God's healing touch;

All: Bringing us hope leading us to joy, teaching us to sing.

Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom. Amen.

“Gracious Persistence”

1 Corinthians 13:Select Phrases, Isaiah 5:6-7, Luke 9:51, Hebrews 12:1-2

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The Bible is God's love letter to each of us. Scripture explains how to love ourselves and others in all situations. For God so loves the world that Jesus came to us from heaven to save us. The Holy Spirit sustains us, filling us with life with every breathe we enjoy. The Holy Spirit takes every thought and every feeling and turns them into prayer enabling God to rejoice with us, love with us, grieve with us and persevere with us. God will wipe away every tear. God is with us. God loves us. God will transform, redeem and resurrect everyone and the entire cosmos.

Jesus modeled gracious persistence and invites each of us to journey with gracious persistence. Grace is love freely, abundantly, constantly given. Persistence is being tenacious, resolute, determined to love in all situations. Scripture proclaims. **1 Corinthians 13:Select Phrases NLT “Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and love keeps no record of being wronged. Love does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, love never loses faith, love is always hopeful, and love endures through every circumstance. Love will last forever! Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.”** One aspect of hope is a confident expectancy in the promise of God. God promises love endures forever. God promises forgiveness, healing, renewal, abundant life and glorious eternal life.

Jesus' love is resolute. Jesus set his face like flint to reveal God's love and save us. The prophet Isaiah proclaims. **Isaiah 5:6-7 NRSV “I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who**

pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.” Jesus was resolute in loving all people. When the disciples urged him to not go to Jerusalem, to flee, to avoid the cross, to be distracted from graciously saving us. The gospel of Luke proclaims. **Luke 9:51 KJV** **“And it came to pass, when the time was come that Jesus should be received up, Jesus steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”** In all situations Jesus was steadfast, determined, tenacious, resolute in loving all people. We also are called to love all people in all situations.

All of us are under an enormous amount of stress. Change, even good positive, change that we want to undertake is difficult. Whenever we are faced with change our default is to change back to the status quo. Life has changed, our routines have changed, what is safe has changed. Grief is caused by any loss. All of us are grieving numerous losses from death to not be able to buy toilet paper, from unemployment or overemployment to a hug, from not being able to gather to sports. Each loss you are experiencing will need to be grieved. Grief brings back to your subconscious previous losses. Fear is a powerful emotion that supercharges reactions. Stress, change, loss, grief disrupts our eating, sleeping and exercise. All of this and more is disrupting to those who remain healthy. It is even worse for those who are ill or get coronavirus.

Jesus modeled that gracious persistent love will get us through this ordeal and all ordeals. Let us strive to be gracious to one another. Most of us at some point are going to melt down, get frustrated, overreact, get angry, say and do things we regret, blame others, be unproductive, lose hope, weep or be paralyzed by fear. Be gracious, loving, kind, smile. Have empathy for others.

We see a variety of these reactions by the disciples surrounding Holy Week. In every instance Jesus was gracious, resolute in love. Jesus told the disciples of his crucifixion longing for some empathy and support. The argued over who will get first place in heaven. Jesus asked them to stay awake with him and pray. They fell asleep. Jesus wanted to serve them washing their feet. They argued with him. Jesus wanted to enjoy a meal with them. Judas sold Jesus out and committed suicide. Jesus told them to be peaceful, calm and let the mob arrest him. Peter lost it, pulled a sword and cut off an ear. Mark ran away naked. They all betrayed Jesus. Peter wept bitterly. They cowered together behind locked doors in fear. And the disciples through the ordeal of Holy Week did other crazy outrages stuff. These are Jesus’ close personal friends. The resurrected Jesus appeared to all of them forgave them, loved them, went fishing with them and ate meals with them. Jesus brought this group together with gracious, persistent love. I believe that Jesus forgave Judas and united the resurrected Judas with them as well. In our current ordeal expect your family and friends to do crazy, outrages stuff. Respond with gracious persistent love.

The soldiers beat Jesus, spit on him, mocked him, drove reeds under his fingernails, twisted thorns into his head, nailed him to a cross. A convicted criminal ridiculed Jesus. Jesus told God to forgive all of them. Assured the criminals that they will join him in paradise. Jesus responded with gracious, persistent love. In our current ordeal expect people to do ridiculous, cruel stuff. Respond with gracious persistent love.

Love yourself. Be kind, gentle and gracious to yourself. Expect yourself to be exhausted, emotional, unsure. Be gracious and persistent in your love for yourself. Jesus set boundaries. A morning person Jesus regularly got up early, went for hikes, sought out high vistas and prayed. Jesus took time to sit down and enjoy meals with friends and strangers, to visit people in their homes, to travel. Jesus celebrated weddings with wine. Jesus wept for friends hurting. Jesus wept at funerals. Jesus helped his mother and father. Jesus went fishing. Jesus lamented in prayer that at times earthly life is cruel, difficult and arduous. Jesus laughed, danced, smiled. Jesus was grateful and rejoiced.

Some of these next ideas are inspired and intermixed with some insights from Pastor Emily Scott. You will lose focus, forget and be unproductive. Your brain won’t function as well. Stress messes with your sequencing so ordering your thoughts gets hard so be gracious, persistent in love and try to take and do things one at a time.

Limit news and taking in coronavirus information to once a day and a set short amount of time to do it. Take in the big picture so your actions are in line with the new reality. Next, prioritize so you spend most of your time focusing on the tasks that are truly important for you. Assess your gifts and resources to determine how best to serve others, to meet the needs, in the current moment. Make time to breathe deep, sleep, exercise, eat and play. Similar in talking to others take time to talk about our current ordeal and then agree to talk about

other things. If you are living with others designate certain times of the day as coronavirus conversation free zones.

- Savor the sweet spots. It might be snuggling down under the blankets when you first wake up, or enjoying your favorite beverage, listening to music, looking at art, creating something, doing a puzzle, playing a game, resting. Linger in the moments that give you comfort.
- Do less. Most of us are capable of doing well 50 – 75 % of what we did before the crisis hit. Let some stuff go and streamline what you can.
- Sometimes you will need to triage. For all of us there are moments when we need to jump in and make something happen. For some of us our work demands are more urgent, intense and critical. It is good to move fast, but remember you will need to move slow and rest in between.
- Adapt, pivot and be nimble. We are in a world that is very different and changes moment by moment. How can you adapt to love others and yourself in our new reality?
- Trauma will emerge. Your body and mind will likely at some point shut down and your emotions will likely run wild. Past traumas will merge with current traumas and color our days. Pay attention to the signals your body is sending you and make time and energy to process and address yourself.
- Keep doing the rituals that nourish you. You might need to adapt them. If you had a ritual of talking to a friend on walks. Arrange for each of you to walk at the same time and talk via the phone. Before coronavirus what gave you energy. Find ways to do those things.
- Remind yourself that you are not God. God has already rescued the world. You are not being asked to rescue the world. We are all in this together. There is an abundance of people doing good in every setting. Relax, trust others to do their part while you do yours.
- Acknowledge the mess, then reframe. Is there good that is emerging? Are people loving? Think about all you have. Make a list of that for which you are grateful. Reframe from thinking of all you can't do to all that you can do. What fresh opportunities are available to you?
- In short be kind, gentle, compassionate to yourself. Be gracious and persistent in your love for yourself.
- Humanity has journeyed through numerous ordeals. Our current ordeal may get worse before it gets better. Our gracious God is with us and will enable us to make it through this ordeal together. And there will be moments of beauty, laughter and joy in the midst of the struggle. Give yourself permission to enjoy these moments.

Hebrews proclaims. **Hebrews 12:1-2 NLT** “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, Jesus endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now Jesus is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.” With God’s help let us strive to be gracious and persistent in our love for ourselves and others. Amen

Prayers of People

Everpresent God, Help us for we are frightened, worried for others, concerned for our world. Please comfort us and fill us with hope. Please show us how to turn worry into love, fear into kindness, anxiety into empathy. Help our strong watch out for our weak, our young take care of our seniors. Help each one of us to do our part to halt the spread of this virus. Please send strength and courage to the doctors, nurses, all health care workers, first responders and police on the frontlines of this battle, fortify them with the full force of Your healing powers. Please send wisdom and insight to the scientists, researchers and lab workers who are working around the globe to discover tests, treatments and a vaccine. Please fill all leaders with compassion, courage and wisdom choose wisely and act quickly. Please energize and keep safe all who work to serve us, grocery staff, those making deliveries, take out servers, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, mechanics, skilled labors. Sustain those who are unemployed. Please help us resist the urge to hoard and instead grow in sharing and giving. Please show us how we can safely help others. Please help us love ourselves and others with gracious persistence. Please help us see that we are one world, one people, one family who will rise above this pandemic together. Send healing, renewal, shalom to Kathryn _____ and the people we now name in our minds ///.

Bless all people with your dazzling, invigorating light. We rejoice in birthdays, the gift of life, anniversaries, love shared, the abundance of goodness in our lives. We rejoice and are grateful for that we name in our minds ///. We marvel that you hear all our prayers spoken, thought, felt, and searching for expression. We praise you Holy Spirit for uniting us across space in a prayer you taught us to pray together. Our Father...