

A Six-Part Worship Series on the Psalms

Send our roots rain

by *Karmen Krahn and Marlene Kropf*

INTRODUCTION

For the most profound and enduring prayers of all time, both Christians and Jews look to the psalms. Many centuries after these texts were first sung in worship, they continue to inspire our boldest and most intimate prayers. Their humanity compels our attention. Walter Brueggemann calls the language of the psalms our “mother tongue.” In them we recognize the kind of intimate and forthright language families speak to one another. “[The psalms] blurt out the truth without restraint!” Brueggemann writes. “When we pray these prayers . . . we too blurt out wonder and hunger that pertain to all of life. We blurt out the truth on behalf of others, those who have no voice for themselves.”

It is also the artistry of the language that makes the psalms unforgettable. With their vivid word pictures and pleasing rhythms, they capture our imagination and remain imprinted on our minds and hearts. The psalmist exults:

*The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.
The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness . . .
The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl,
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, “Glory!”*
(Psalm 29:7-9)

This is rich, symbolic language that names what often seems difficult to put into words.

Our vision of God as well as our response to God is shaped as we make these prayers our own. Describing worship as “world-making,” Brueggemann says that the ordinary and repeated actions of worship—praying,

singing, hearing the Word, offering ourselves to God—form and shape the character and mission of the community of faith. Just as ancient Israel gained and strengthened its identity by praying the psalms, we too gain a vision of God and God’s intentions for the world as we sing, pray, and study the psalms.

This six-part worship series offers congregations an opportunity to be renewed in faith, hope, and love through an encounter with the psalms. The purpose of the series is fourfold:

1. Deepen the congregation’s prayer life by praying the psalms together;
2. Expand appreciation for the artistry of biblical literature by examining the poetry of the psalms;
3. Understand and experience a wider variety of prayer in worship: desire, praise, confession, lament, justice, thanksgiving;
4. Enrich worship through the use of the arts: music, symbols, rituals, and visual elements.

HOW THIS SERIES IS ORGANIZED

For each worship service a psalm has been chosen as the centerpiece, illuminating some aspect of the overall theme “Send our roots rain” (a phrase taken from Gerard Manley Hopkins’s poem “Thou art indeed just, Lord”). Throughout the Psalms images of water, flowing streams, rivers, and fountains represent God’s abundant mercy and care. In contrast, images of thirst, withered grass, deserts, and wasted bodies represent the human condition apart from God.

A simple outline for worship is included for each service, with suggestions for visual art, music, a

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dramatic-musical call to worship, children's prayer, prayer of confession, sermon, response to the sermon, and sending.

Visual focus: We suggest a flowing, watery landscape as a visual center for the entire series. A more elaborate design might include lush plants with a flowing stream of blue fabric that ends in a pool of actual water. A simpler center could be a table draped in a shimmering blue cloth, graced by symbols that are somehow illuminated in the day's singing or proclamation. Otherwise, a table in blue with a lit candle in blue or green will suffice.

Dramatic-musical call to worship: Each service begins with a musical representation of rainfall accompanying the pouring of water. From the rear of the sanctuary or from a balcony, a single instrument (flute, clarinet, violin, etc.) plays the refrain of the theme song, "Rain Down" (*STJ* 49), in an exaggeratedly slow tempo. While the musical refrain slowly descends, a water-bearer walks forward carrying a large watering can (preferably in a neutral color) and pours water into a basin, or waters green plants in the visual display. The water-bearer pours out the water, then leaves the watering can behind as part of the landscape. (A more elaborate option is for two or three people to bear pitchers of water to the front.) The worship leader then stands near the watery landscape to lead the congregation in the spoken call to worship.

Music: A wide variety of options from *Hymnal: A Worship Book* are suggested to illuminate the images of water, streams, rivers, thirst, tears, showers, and pouring. In addition, music leaders may seek out other musical settings of the psalm of the day. If you have composers in your congregation, invite them to create new settings for the psalm of the week.

Two theme songs are offered here. With the prayer of confession each week, the familiar hymn "Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing" (*HWB* 514) may be sung; you might choose to use the refrain only. "Rain Down" (*STJ* 49) is a prayer for the abundance of God's love and grace to be showered upon the congregation. As part of the response to the sermon, it is sung as a conclusion to the psalm-prayer. Music leaders may want to vary the way this song is sung from week to week, adding solo voices and instruments as appropriate.

Children's prayer and the prayer of confession:

The time of prayer each week will have two parts: a children's prayer and a congregational prayer of confession. The typical approach to the children's time is often instructive. In this series, little instruction is

given—only a gentle invitation to speak and participate in the ritual and prayer. Children are invited to "come forward for prayer" rather than for a "story." The children's leader, understanding this change in role, will function less as teacher and more as pastor. Though reverent, the prayer and ritual need not be overly solemn; you are, after all, playing with your hands in a pool of water! Following the children's prayer, the congregation is led in a prayer of confession by a member who has written a psalm of confession related to the theme of the week. For example, in week 1, a psalm of confession might focus on what we desire apart from God or the distractions that compete with our desire for God.

Sermon: The preacher begins by making connections between the experience described in the day's psalm and the lived experience of worshippers. Each sermon should point listeners toward the promise of refreshment or renewal. As listeners are encouraged to claim the prayer as their own, they open themselves to the transforming work of God's Spirit.

To expand the congregation's understanding of the psalm, the preacher should highlight literary features that intensify meaning, noting the vivid language, the rhythm created by parallel phrases, the similes and metaphors, and the powerful emotions evoked by language.

The sermon can also explore the type of prayer being prayed: the prayer of desire, praise, confession, lament, justice, or thanksgiving. People will be encouraged to explore or practice personally this type of prayer during the week.

Responding: At the conclusion of the sermon, the congregation prays the psalm, concluding with "Rain Down." On the last Sunday of the series, the congregation is invited to gather at the Lord's table to give thanks for all God's blessings and especially for the renewing gift of the bread and cup, endless source of nourishment and refreshment for our souls.

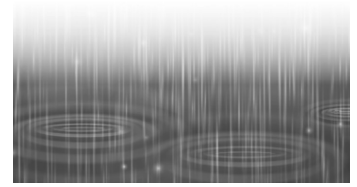
Sending: The words of blessing, based on the psalms, encourage people to offer the strength and refreshment they have received to others during the week.

During the week: Sunday worship will be enriched if members are praying the psalms during the week—focusing either on the psalm for the coming Sunday or the one for the Sunday just past. In either case, consider distributing prayer cards or bookmarks on which the psalm-prayer has been printed. A graphic artist in the congregation might be asked to design the cards.



Week One

Desire: *My soul thirsts for you* (Psalm 63:1)



Text: Psalm 63:1-7

Prayer for the week

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
My soul thirsts for you;
My flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
(Psalm 63:1)

Call to worship

Leader: With thirsty hearts and souls,
we gather for worship.
From busy lives that often feel dry and empty,
we come yearning for God's presence.
In the midst of distraction or anxiety,
we seek the Lord's face.

All: *Lord of life, all our longings are known to you;
send our roots rain;
refresh us and make us whole.*

Music

HWB 231 "Oh, Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit"
HWB 331 "If Christ Is Mine"
HWB 456 "Shepherd of Souls, Refresh"
HWB 474 "I Hunger and I Thirst"
HWB 493 "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"
HWB 495 "O Let All Who Thirst"
HWB 500 "As the Hart with Eager Yearning"
HWB 514 "Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing"
HWB 515 "Jesus, Rock of Ages"
HWB 582 "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah"
HWB 595 "Jesus, Priceless Treasure"
HWB 606 "Oh, Have You Not Heard"

Children's prayer

Props: a pool or basin of water, pitcher of water, small cups, a basket of crackers.
Invite the children to come forward for prayer. Begin by offering each a cracker, inviting the children thus:

In the name of Jesus, I give you this cracker.
I invite you to chew it slowly and let it make you thirsty.
[commune in silence]
I am going to pray a line, and then you may respond with "I thirst for you."

Leader: O God, I am your child and

Children: I thirst for you,

Leader: I know that you love me and

Children: I thirst for you.

Leader: When I am happy or sad, when I don't know what to do,

Children: I thirst for you.

Ritual and prayer

Say: Water reminds us that God's love quenches the thirst of our heart. [*while pouring*] Like the rivers and oceans from which all water comes, God's love runs deep. God's love runs right through the church as much as it runs through our mouths and our bellies. I invite you to drink this water as you imagine God's love running through you. [*distribute cups*]

O God, you have refreshed our mouths with your Word. You have filled our hearts with your love. We are filled with your joy, and this is why we praise you. Amen

Prayer of confession

A worshipper offers a personal psalm confessing ways we are distracted or drawn away from our desire for God. Conclude with "Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing" (*HWB* 514) or its refrain, followed by appropriate words of forgiveness and assurance.

Sermon

What are our deepest desires? For what do we truly long? When we look honestly at our lives and our hidden dreams, we recognize that much of what demands our energy does not last. Psalm 63, a passionate prayer of desire, names our truest and deepest longing: to be at one with the living God. When we find our truest desires satisfied with God's refreshment, we become a people of praise who joyfully honor God in our hearts and in our lives.

Responding

The prayer for the week (Psalm 63:1) is prayed by the entire congregation, concluding with the song "Rain Down."

Sending

May the God who satisfies all the longings of our hearts
strengthen and refresh you with the water of life.

Now go in joy and offer the gift of life to the thirsty ones you meet.

Week Two

Praise: You visit the earth and water it (Psalm 65:9)



Text: Psalm 65

Prayer for the week

Praise is due to you, O God.
You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
The river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain;

you water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.
You crown the year with your bounty.
(from Psalm 65:1, 9-11)

Call to worship

Leader: With joyful hearts,
we gather for worship.
Our hearts are filled with gratitude
for the abundant gifts we have received from God's hand:
sun, rain, shelter, food, and love.
In every moment we are dependent upon God's provisions.
Today we open ourselves again to the gift of life,
offering praise for all we have received,
and waiting expectantly for the refreshing of God's Spirit.

*All: Lord of life, all our longings are known to you;
send our roots rain;
refresh us and make us whole.*

Music

HWB 35 "Many and Great, O God"
HWB 36 "God of Our Strength"
HWB 48 "All Creatures of Our God and King"
HWB 61 "Let All Creation Bless the Lord"
HWB 88 "Still, I Search for My God"
HWB 96 "We Plow the Fields and Scatter"
HWB 97 "From the Hands of Your Earth"
HWB 98 "Sing to the Lord of Harvest"
HWB 156 "All Things Bright and Beautiful"
HWB 170 "The King of Love My Shepherd Is"
HWB 521 "Come, Thou Fount"
HWB 557 "O God, in Restless Living"

Children's prayer

Props: a pool or basin of water, small stones randomly sprinkled. *Invite the children to come forward for prayer.*

Say: I invite each of you to choose a stone and to hold it in your hand as a very precious thing. *[stone selection and silence]*

Now imagine it as the one way you will tell God you love God. I am going to pray one line, after which you may respond with "This is my praise."

Leader: O God, everything I have comes from you, and

Children: this is my praise.

Leader: I need you for every single thing, and

Children: this is my praise.

Leader: I came to worship to tell you I love you, and

Children: this is my praise.

If this is my praise and I drop it in the water, I know two things . . .

[drop stone in the water then observe how . . .]

- 1 The stone makes a circle [indicate], and from that we know that God is in the middle of everything we do. God deserves our praise.

[drop a second stone, say "this is my praise"]

- 2 The circle spreads out to the edges [indicate], which reminds us to share God's love with others.

Now I invite you to drop your praise stones in the pool and say, "This is my praise." *When all the children have participated, conclude with:* This is the pool of God's love, filled with the praise of God's people. Amen.

Prayer of confession

A worshipper offers a personal psalm focusing on the inadequacy or incompleteness of our praise to God. Conclude with "Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing" (*HWB* 514) or its refrain, followed by appropriate words of forgiveness and assurance.

Sermon

Praise is "our duty and delight," in the words of the Westminster Catechism. In this psalm, praise is offered for God's awesome deeds in the past—creation and deliverance (vv. 5-6); for God's daily gifts of abundance that nourish the earth and bring forth food (vv. 9-13); and for forgiveness of sin (v. 3). What are the gifts of praise? What difference does it make whether we remember our Creator and live with gratitude? Invite the congregation to experience the refreshment of life and vision that is the fruit of praise. (For more on the formative nature of praise, see *Israel's Praise; Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology*, by Walter Brueggemann [Fortress Press, 1988]).

Responding


The prayer for the week is prayed by the entire congregation, concluding with the song "Rain Down."

Sending

May the God who gives abundant gifts to each of us
fill you with praise;
may your gratitude overflow in joyful sharing of God's gifts
at home, in your community, and at work.

Week Three

Confession: Wash me . . . and cleanse me from my sin (Psalm 51:2)



Text: Psalm 51

Prayer for the week

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy

blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
(Psalm 51:1-2, 10)

Call to worship

Leader: With penitent hearts,
we gather for worship.
Though it is hard to be honest with ourselves,
with each other and with God,
we acknowledge that our lives
are not what we hope they will be.
We have not loved God
with our whole heart, soul, and mind;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Today we want to see ourselves and each other
as God sees us—
with eyes of mercy, compassion, and love.
Today we want to receive God's cleansing grace.

*All: Lord of life, all our longings are known to you;
send our roots rain;
refresh us and make us whole.*

Music

HWB 128 "Create in Me a Clean Heart"
HWB 133 "Out of the Depths I Cry to You"
HWB 136 "From the Depths of Sin"
HWB 440 "I Believe in You, Lord Jesus"
HWB 141 "The Sacrifice You Accept, O God"
HWB 145 "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"
HWB 150 "Wonderful Grace of Jesus"
HWB 433 "Go, My Children"
HWB 446 "Wade in the Water"
HWB 469 "Bread of the World"
HWB 510 "O Christ, in Thee My Soul"
HWB 565 "My Faith Looks Up to Thee"

Children's prayer

Ritual props: a pool or basin of water, a towel. *Invite the children to come forward for prayer.*

Say: Imagine for a minute that you've been outside playing in the dirt. You come into the house with dirty hands and hold them up like this [*demonstrate*] so you don't get anything dirty. Now, keeping your hands this way [*uplifted*], we're going to pray. I invite you to say after each line, "Create in me a clean heart."

Leader: O God, we lift up our hands because you promise to make us clean.

Children: Create in me a clean heart

Leader: Sometimes we turn away from you;

Children: create in me a clean heart.

Leader: Sometimes we want things that you don't want for us;

Children: create in me a clean heart.

Leader: Show me the things that are important to you, and

Children: create in me a clean heart.

We imagined dirty hands, uplifted in the house. Sometimes we come to God's house the same way, and we lift our hands in prayer. God has promised to cleanse our hearts with forgiveness and love. Imagine now that this is a pool of forgiveness. [*stir the water*] Come and wash and be assured that God's love is for you. [*wash hands in the water; dry with a towel, offering assurance of God's love with joy and care for each one*]

Prayer of confession

A worshipper offers a personal psalm focusing on the sins and failures that separate us from God and from one another. Conclude with "Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing" (*HWB* 514) or its refrain, followed by appropriate words of forgiveness and assurance.

Sermon

This sermon provides an opportunity to explore the true nature and purpose of confession. Literally meaning "truth-telling," confession invites us to be honest about who we are. Because we cannot be cleansed and healed until we confess our need, confession is essential for spiritual health—both individually and corporately. The good news is that when we speak the truth and name the distortions and weaknesses in our lives, God graciously offers forgiveness, remembers our sin no more, and creates a new heart and mind—a new being. Cleansed and refreshed, we celebrate God's goodness and mercy and live in freedom and peace.

Note that Psalm 51 has often been set to music; singing our prayers of confession can be a powerful way of experiencing penitence and forgiveness. (For more background on confession, see *Liturgy of Liberation*, by Theodore Jennings [Abingdon, 1988]).

Responding

Psalm 51:1-2, 10 is prayed by the entire congregation, concluding with the song "Rain Down."

Sending

May the God who cleanses us from sin
grant us a clean heart and a fresh start.
Go in freedom and joy
to offer God's grace to others.

Week Four

Lament: I wither away like grass (Psalm 102:11)



Text: Psalm 102

Prayer for the week

Hear my prayer, O Lord;
let my cry come to you.
For my days pass away like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.

My heart is stricken and withered like grass.
for I eat ashes like bread,
and mingle tears with my drink.
But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever;
your name endures to all generations.
You will rise up and have compassion.
(from Psalm 102:1, 3-4, 9, 12-13)

Call to worship

Leader: With troubled hearts,
we gather for worship.
In the midst of struggle,
in pain or grief or despair,
we long for God's presence;
we need to know that God is with us.
Today we cry out to God for healing and peace.

All: *Lord of life, all our longings are known to you;
send our roots rain;
refresh us and make us whole.*

Music

HWB 134 "Babylon Streams Received Our Tears"
HWB 148 "By the Waters"
HWB 248 "My God, My God, Why"
HWB 275 "Lift Your Glad Voices"
HWB 290 "Spirit, Come, Dispel Our Sadness"
HWB 292 "Away with Our Fears"
HWB 336 "When Peace, like a River"
HWB 419 "Lead On, O Cloud of Presence"
HWB 497 "Come, Ye Disconsolate"
HWB 519 "Shepherd Me, O God"
HWB 559 "O Thou, in Whose Presence"
HWB 561 "Give to the Winds Thy Fears"
HWB 567 "How Firm a Foundation"
HWB 575 "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"
HWB 578 "The Lord's My Shepherd"
HWB 579 "Lift Every Voice and Sing"
HWB 653 "Abide with Me!"

Children's prayer

Props: a pool or basin of water, a bottle, a vase or jar, a towel. *Invite the children to come forward for prayer.*

Say: I invite each of you to dip a finger into the pond and put a little drop of water in your hand. Hold it there for a moment and imagine that you're holding a tear.

[moment of silent reflection]

Maybe it's yours, maybe it's someone else's. Hold it gently. Because we are in worship and because we have tears in our hands, it is right to give all our tears to God. I invite you to respond after me, "Let my cry come to you."

Leader: O God, sometimes when I'm disappointed my tears are long and warm.
When that happens,

Children: let my cry come to you.

Leader: Sometimes my tears come suddenly and strongly.
When that happens,

Children: let my cry come to you.

Leader: When I am scared or hurt, when I'm sorry or sad,
God, I ask you,

Children: let my cry come to you.

Ritual and assurance

The psalms have promised that God gathers all our tears in a bottle (Psalm 56:8). Let's gather those tears today. *[Using a vase, bottle, or jar, have children fill the container using their hands. Prompt them with suggestions, allowing them to add their own global, local, and personal concerns as they choose. With each naming, add a palmful of water.]*

Begin: For children of Nigeria . . . for kids in school with no friends . . . for people who have trouble learning . . . for boys and girls who are scared at home . . . for children around the world with no food or beds . . .

Conclude: We give these tears to the God of compassion. In the name of Jesus we pray for each one of them. Amen.

Prayer of confession

A worshipper offers a personal psalm focusing on the brokenness, grief, pain, and despair suffered by the congregation and the world beyond. Conclude with "Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing" (*HWB* 514) or its refrain, followed by appropriate words of forgiveness and assurance.

Sermon

Psalms of lament provide a pattern of prayer for desperate times. We do not hide our misery from God; we do not pretend that all is well. Instead, we name our grief, acknowledge our misery, and shed bitter tears. The prayer of lament is cathartic. Naming our woes and crying out to God opens a pathway to new awareness of God's presence. This is especially true when we lament together in the community of faith, writing or singing our own psalms of lament. God's healing grace becomes palpable, and we find strength to continue to be faithful in the midst of struggle. (For more background, see *Psalms of Lament*, by Ann Weems [Westminster John Knox Press, 1995]).

Responding

The prayer for the week is prayed by the entire congregation, concluding with the song "Rain Down." It would also be appropriate to include prayers for healing in this service.

Sending

May the God who knows our sorrows
and gathers all our tears in a bottle
bring healing and peace to every troubled soul
and to the world in which we live.

Week Five

Justice: Like rain that falls on mown grass (Psalm 72:6)



Text: Psalm 72

Prayer for the week

Give [rulers] your justice, O God;
 may they judge your people with righteousness,
 and your poor with justice.
May [rulers] be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
 like showers that water the earth.
May righteousness flourish and peace abound.
 (from Psalm 72:1-2, 6-7)

Call to worship

Leader: With hearts longing for justice,
 we gather for worship.
When children are hungry or when adults cannot find work;
when greedy nations go to war or when refugees flee for their lives;
when the earth is exploited or when prejudice blinds,
 we plead for deliverance.
May fresh showers of God's justice fall on us and our world today.

All: *Lord of life, all our longings are known to you;
 send our roots rain;
 refresh us and make us whole.*

Music

HWB 66 "O Worship the King"
HWB 70 "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"
HWB 179 "Blessed Be the Lord"
HWB 367 "For the Healing of the Nations"
HWB 370 "O Day of God, Draw Nigh"
HWB 372 "O Healing River"
HWB 185 "Hail to the Lord's Anointed"
HWB 189 "To Us a Child of Hope Is Born"
HWB 261 "I Will Sing the Lord's High Triumph"
HWB 408 "O Day of Peace"
HWB 409 "What Does the Lord Require"
HWB 600 "O Bless the Lord, My Soul"

Children's prayer

Props: a pool or basin of water, a watering can, and a towel. *Invite the children to come forward for prayer.*

Say: Before it rains, we see clouds. They are above our heads. After it rains, we see puddles. They are below us, at our feet. And in between the clouds and puddles is where we pray. I invite you to close your eyes and listen.

[create rain sounds by pouring water from watering can]

We're going to pray now, eyes closed, in between the clouds and puddles, and I invite you to respond after me, "Let it rain on the earth."

Leader: O God, we need your fairness, *[rain sounds]*
For those who have been treated unfairly,

Children: let it rain on the earth.

Leader: The world needs your strength, *[rain sounds]*
For those who are weak or tired, or who have no choices,

Children: let it rain on the earth.

Leader: The world needs your peace, *[rain sounds]*
For the ways we fight and argue and hurt each other,

Children: let it rain on the earth.

If you would like God's love to rain down on you, then I invite you to place your hands under the water while I bless you. *[Raise watering can while saying, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Dry hands with available towel and dismiss.]*

Prayer of confession

A worshipper offers a personal psalm focusing on the ways we suffer from or participate in injustice. Conclude with "Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing" (*HWB* 514) or its refrain, followed by appropriate words of forgiveness and assurance.

Sermon

Though one of the strongest biblical images of God is of a just Judge, the people of God have not always made justice a priority. Psalm 72 focuses especially on the call to rulers to act justly. Though it is important to proclaim a vision of just national and political leadership, it may be more important to examine how leaders in the church and parents in families "rule with justice." Who or what may be exploited in your congregation? Who needs deliverance and freedom? What would it look like for the influence of those who lead to be like rain falling on mown grass or showers watering the earth? Use visual, dramatic, and musical arts to show a compelling vision of God's justice that can inspire our prayers. (For more on the relationship of worship and justice, see *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship*, by Paul J. Wadell [Brazos Press, 2002]).

Responding

The prayer for the week is prayed by the entire congregation, concluding with the song "Rain Down."

Sending

May the just and righteous Judge of the universe
bring freedom and peace to rich and poor,
to young and old,
to all of God's creation.
Now go in peace, living justly,
and honoring God with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Week Six
Thanksgiving: Give thanks to the Lord . . .
For he satisfies the thirsty (Psalm 107:1, 9)



Text: Psalm 107

Prayer for the week

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good;
for God's steadfast love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
those God redeemed from trouble.
Some wandered in desert wastes;
hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and God delivered them from their distress.
Let them thank the Lord for steadfast love,
for wonderful works to humankind.
For God satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry God fills with good things.
(from Psalm 107:1-9)

Call to worship

Leader: With thankful hearts,
we gather for worship.
We give thanks for God's steadfast love,
turning parched lands into springs of water.
Today we eagerly wait for God to satisfy the thirsty
and to fill the hungry with good things.

All: *Lord of life, all our longings are known to you;
send our roots rain;
refresh us and make us whole.*

Music

HWB 4 "Unto Thy Temple, Lord, We Come"
HWB 19 "Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty"
HWB 161 "We Give Thanks unto You"
HWB 296 "Here from All Nations"
HWB 471 "Eat This Bread"
HWB 580 "My Life Flows On"
HWB 598 "A Wonderful Savior Is Jesus"
HWB 615 "Shall We Gather at the River"
HWB 619 "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken"
HWB 638 "God Is Working His Purpose Out"

Children's prayer

Props: a pool or basin of water, a teapot, cup and saucer, tray, or baking sheet. *Invite the children to come forward for prayer.*

Say: We will use water from the pool to make tea. *[immerse teapot to fill]* Who has had a tea party before? *[invite brief sharing]*

A tea party reminds us of the church, of the way we gather together to share God's love.

With our tea set, we also have a cup and saucer. What do you think a saucer is for? *[invite responses]*

The saucer is to catch the overflow. As we fill the teacup, let's imagine God's love being poured out on the church.

How much love does God have? *[pour a small amount, stop]*

Does God have more love than that? *[pour more, stop]*

The psalms say God's love is steadfast, *[pour more, stop]*

The psalms say God's love is forever, *[pour more, dose to top]*

What we know, through Jesus, is that God's love overflowed, *[lavishly overflow the teacup, letting it spill into the saucer and tray beneath it]*

God's love overflows. We are here to catch it.

Shape your hands like a saucer *[gesture]*, and pray after me. You may say, "We give thanks."

Leader: For what's in the teapot

Children: we give thanks.

Leader: For what's in the cup,

Children: we give thanks.

Leader: For the way your love overflows,

Children: we give thanks.

Leader: Pour out your love on the whole world.
We promise to catch it and share it with others.
Because you love us so much,

Children: we give thanks.

Prayer of confession

A worshipper offers a personal psalm focusing on the ways our lives are diminished and distorted by ingratitude. Conclude with "Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing" (*HWB* 514) or its refrain, followed by appropriate words of forgiveness and assurance.

Sermon

Meister Eckhart said, "If the only prayer we ever pray is 'thank you,' that will suffice." Do you agree? What makes thankfulness an essential spiritual practice? Through the prayers of desire, praise, confession, lament, justice, and thanksgiving, we have been invited to expand our communion with God. As a way of thanking God for faithfulness in this series, consider inviting several persons to offer brief statements about their experience. Some of these might be individuals or families reflecting on a particular prayer practice; others might be congregational leaders who reflect more corporately on what has happened during the series. Conclude with prayers of thanksgiving for God's steadfast love in the congregation.

Responding

It would be appropriate to celebrate communion today. As the bread is broken and the cup is shared, emphasize the giving of thanks in response to God's great love, which continually strengthens and renews us.

Another response might be a water blessing in which the congregation is sprinkled with drops of water flung from branches dipped in a basin of water. As the song "Rain Down" is sung, several people carry basins of water throughout the congregation, sprinkling worshippers with drops of water, signifying God's refreshing grace.

Sending

May the God whose love endures forever
satisfy our thirst
and fill us with good things.

May God's love overflow into every barren place
and bring new life.
