

GATHERING SONG *As We Gather at Your Table (ELW 522)*

1 As we gather at your table,
as we listen to your word,
help us know, O God, your presence;
let our hearts and minds be stirred.
Nourish us with sacred story
till we claim it as our own;
teach us through this holy banquet
how to make Love's vict'ry known.

2 Turn our worship into witness
in the sacrament of life;
send us forth to love and serve you,
bringing peace where there is strife.
Give us, Christ, your great compassion
to forgive as you forgave;
may we still behold your image
in the world you died to save.

3 Gracious Spirit, help us summon
other guests to share that feast
where triumphant Love will welcome
those who had been last and least.
There no more will envy blind us
nor will pride our peace destroy,
as we join with saints and angels
to repeat the sounding joy.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray.

Almighty God, your only Son was taken into the heavens and in your presence intercedes for us. Receive us and our prayers for all the world, and in the end bring everything into your glory, through Jesus Christ, our Sovereign and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING: Acts 1:1-11

Before he is lifted into heaven, Jesus promises that the missionary work of the disciples will spread out from Jerusalem to all the world. His words provide an outline of the book of Acts.

A reading from Acts.

[Luke writes:] ¹In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ²until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. ⁴While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

SECOND READING: Ephesians 1:15-23

The risen and exalted Christ reigns over the entire universe. The author of Ephesians prays that we are given the wisdom to know the power of the risen Christ and the empowering hope that the knowledge of this inheritance provides.

A reading from Ephesians.

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and

power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

GOSPEL: Luke 24:44-53

⁴⁴[Jesus said to the eleven and those with them,] “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

⁵⁰Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵²And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

MESSAGE – Pastor Kristen Koch

It has been a difficult two weeks in our country, as we have experienced and reacted to the mass shootings in Buffalo, New York and now Uvalde, Texas. It is heartbreaking, infuriating, terrifying, and devastating, to name only a few of the emotions that I’ve gone through since May 14. And I don’t know about you, but it has been hard for me to maintain hope in the midst of it all.

That’s why it was so fortunate that I had already signed up to attend a special lecture on hope this past week. Because I needed a reminder. Maybe you could use a reminder as well? I’ll tell you about what I heard.

Rev. Kristin Johnston Largen, President of Wartburg Theological Seminary invited us to consider how hope is our lens as Christians, which shapes how we live in the present and how we look to the future. Christian Hope, President Largen said, is grounded in God’s vision for creation and humanity found in Hebrew Scriptures, is made visible through Christ’s words and actions: especially his death and resurrection, and is lived out in our response to that vision of God’s kin-dom.

I was so grateful for that class. So thankful to have someone guide me, again, through the promises of God. And I was struck by how much easier it was for me to find hope because I was in the midst of community. Hope was a group effort that day.

I think Jesus totally gets that. I think that’s why he called the disciples together to travel and learn as a group. And I think that’s why he came to their Easter evening gathering to prepare them for what’s next; that he will be leaving them. He came where they’ve gathered and taught them; he “opened their minds to understand the scripture”.

And after that he sent them. He called them all to be witnesses to all they had seen and heard and learned from Jesus - together. And that’s the same way that the Spirit formed the church, as we will see next Sunday. The church was called as a community of all kinds of different people. And the Spirit inspired them to give witness to God’s powerful deeds.

The disciples were witnesses. And we as the church are witnesses. And as the book of Acts makes very clear, being a witness to God’s activity is NOT a spectator sport. It involves words and actions. It is “the kind of witness that enters the pain of the hurting world.” – Eric Barretto It is the kind of witness that lifts up hope; practices hope; proclaims hope.

We, the church, are called to give witness to God’s reign “where death and violence and grief are no more. A kin-dom where weapons of war give way to the generosity of God’s grace” E. Barreto That is God’s intention for

creation and humanity – a world of life and hope. And we are to give witness to that hope in the midst of death; in the midst of grief; in the midst of violence. Unfortunately we have given such witness so many times over the last several years that the newest hymnal has an entire section of prayers specifically for responding to gun violence.

We are called to give witness to hope. But how? Our prayers are just the beginning. There are many ways to witness to hope. Some of us are drawn to advocacy work – advocating for policies that promote justice, life, and mercy. Others may be better suited to one on one conversations with people that encourage compassion and understanding. And still others have the gift for reaching out within the community to offer support and care. We each have our ways to witness. And when we give witness together, with all our gifts, we can make quite an impact.

But let's not forget that the church doesn't do this alone either. Jesus promises the "power from on high"- the power of the Holy Spirit, to inspire us in our witness. "Jesus' ascension is far from Jesus leaving us, rather it is Jesus empowering us with the Spirit so that we may do God's work with our own hands. Because of the Spirit we can find Jesus' presence and power in one another." (elca facebook) And so we are empowered by the Spirit to give witness to hope in the world.

And so we pray: God of true might and redemptive mercy, receive our prayers, and grant us to become your instruments of peace, and your witnesses to hope through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY *A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing!* (ELW 393) vv 1,2,5

1 A hymn of glory let us sing! New hymns throughout the world shall ring: Alleluia! Alleluia! Christ, by a road before untrod, ascends unto the throne of God. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!	2 The holy apostolic band upon the Mount of Olives stand, Alleluia! Alleluia! and with his faithful foll'wers see their Lord ascend in majesty. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!	5 O risen Christ, ascended Lord, all praise to you let earth accord: Alleluia! Alleluia! You are, while endless ages run, with Father and with Spirit one. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
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PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Set free from captivity to sin and death, we pray to the God of resurrection for the church, people in need, and all of creation.

Holy One, ruler of heaven and earth, wash us in your Holy Spirit and make us witnesses to your resurrected life in this community. Among those witnesses we lift of these congregations of the Central States Synod:

Our Savior in Salem, MO,
Faith in Oberlin, KS,
Living Lord in Lake St. Louis, MO, and
St. John in Bird City, KS.

Let the fellowship of this congregation be a sign to others of the presence of Christ. God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Through thundering, mighty waters reveal your creative power at work in creation. Cleanse the air, land, and waters with the movement of your Spirit and the participation of your people. God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

In faithful and diverse worship, turn all people toward you and your loving will for humankind. Bridge differences among traditions and across faiths. Unite us in mission for the sake of a world in need. God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

In the suffering and death of Jesus, draw near to those who suffer and for whom death approaches. Hold them in the palm of your loving hand and give them rest. God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Inspire us through the music, dance, and other arts ministries of this congregation. With clapping, shouting, singing, playing, and moving, let our bodies bear witness to the joy you alone can give. God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Rouse us to remember the faithful witness of the saints who have gone before us. By their lives and the life and death of Jesus, enlighten our hearts, give us hope, and lead us in wisdom. God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Almighty God, you are our strength and our shield. We give you thanks for the men and women of our armed forces, past and present, and especially for those who have died while serving. May their sacrifices serve the cause of peace, and may our nation be ever grateful for their service. With your wisdom and strength guide our military's leaders, and give to all people a desire for justice and peace. God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of resurrection, we remember before you those who have died by gun violence, especially those who died in Buffalo and Uvalde. We commend them to your eternal love. Grant healing and wholeness to the survivors who are wounded or traumatized, and restore all whose spirits are maimed by such violence. May we serve as your arms of care to those in distress. God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

In your mercy, O God, respond to these prayers, and renew us by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

BLESSING

God, the Author of life,
Christ, the living Cornerstone,
and the life-giving Spirit of adoption,
✠ bless you now and forever.
Amen.

SENDING SONG *Lord, You Give the Great Commission* (ELW 579) vv 1,2,5

1 Lord, you give the great commission:

"Heal the sick and preach the word."

Lest the church neglect its mission,
and the gospel go unheard,
help us witness to your purpose
with renewed integrity:

Refrain

With the Spirit's gifts empow'r us
for the work of ministry.

2 Lord, you call us to your service:

"In my name baptize and teach."

That the world may trust your promise,
life abundant meant for each,
give us all new fervor, draw us
closer in community: Refrain

5 Lord, you bless with words assuring:

"I am with you to the end."

Faith and hope and love restoring,
may we serve as you intend
and, amid the cares that claim us,
hold in mind eternity: Refrain

DISMISSAL

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Go in peace. Tell what God has done.

Thanks be to God.