

Encourage  
one another  
and build up  
each other....

1 Thessalonians 5:11, NRSV

**TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

**Worship with Holy Communion  
November 19, 2017 – 10:30 AM**

**Christ Lutheran Church  
Woodcliff Lake, NJ**

## WELCOME TO CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

**Through the readings today** we learn of the faith-generated response to God's lavish grace.

**Breaking the sound barrier!** We invite you to try one of our listening devices, which allows you to sit anywhere in the sanctuary. They are available by speaking to an usher or the service coordinator.

**Pink prayer cards:** You may write names for prayer on a pink card found in the pew rack. Please place your card on the table for inclusion in the prayers of the day. If you wish a name to be added to our printed prayer list (for four weeks) please write "Prayer List" on the card. Please be sure this prayer request is approved by the person for whom we are praying.

**Holy Communion:** All who are baptized are invited to the table where Christ is bodily present in the bread and wine. At the directions of our ushers, all who are able kneel at the rail to receive this gift. The individual cups contain wine and grape juice (grape juice is in the center of the tray). A common cup with wine is also available. Children who commune should hold out their hands to the server.

**Nursery facilities:** There is a self-serve Nursery and Infant Room for young children accompanied by their parents. The Infant Room contains a bathroom with a changing table. These rooms are located along the hallway from the side door of the sanctuary.

**Need an offering envelope?** We have envelopes in the pews for you. Please include your contact information or envelope number. **We also accept checks online.** Visit our website ([www.clc4u.com](http://www.clc4u.com)) and click on "Give" to learn how to set up an account with your bank information. Thank you for your gift!

### Contact Information:

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Open on Sundays: 9 am and 10:30 am

## PRELUDE

### CONGREGATION ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER REQUESTS

[Pink prayer cards with your joys or concerns may be placed on the altar rail.]

[For today's worship all *portions in italics will be spoken by our worship leaders.*

Congregational responses are in **bold-faced type.**]

[Please stand as you are able.]

### CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

*In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

**Amen.**

*Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

**Amen.**

*Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another. Gracious God, have mercy on us. We confess that we have turned from you and given ourselves into the power of sin. We are truly sorry and humbly repent. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things we have done and things we have failed to do. Turn us again to you, and uphold us by your Spirit, so that we may live and serve you in newness of life through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.*

**Amen.**

*In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

**Amen.**

### THE PEACE

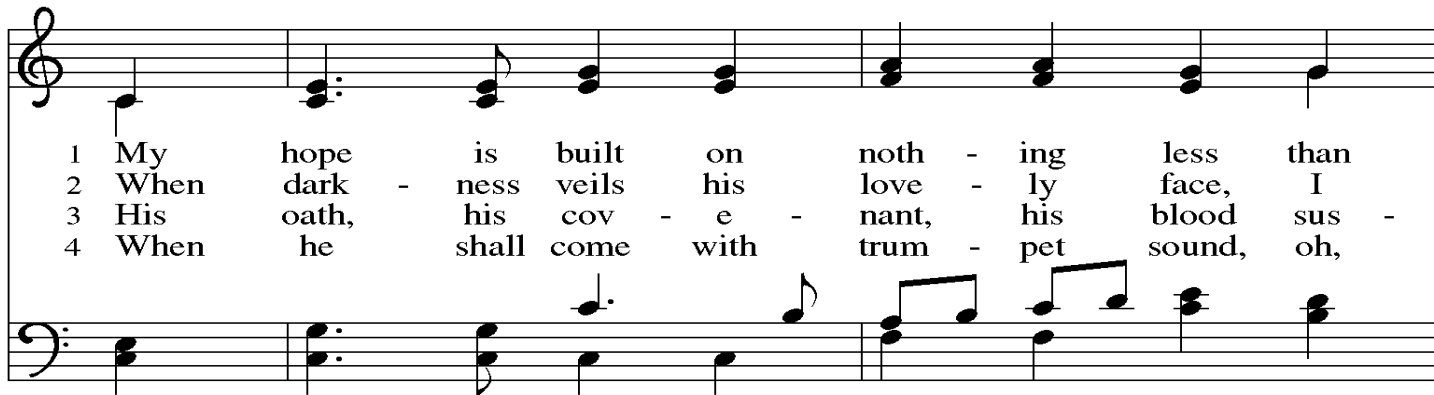
*The peace of Christ be with you always.*

**And also with you.**

[We share the peace via handshake or the peace sign.]

[Remain standing]

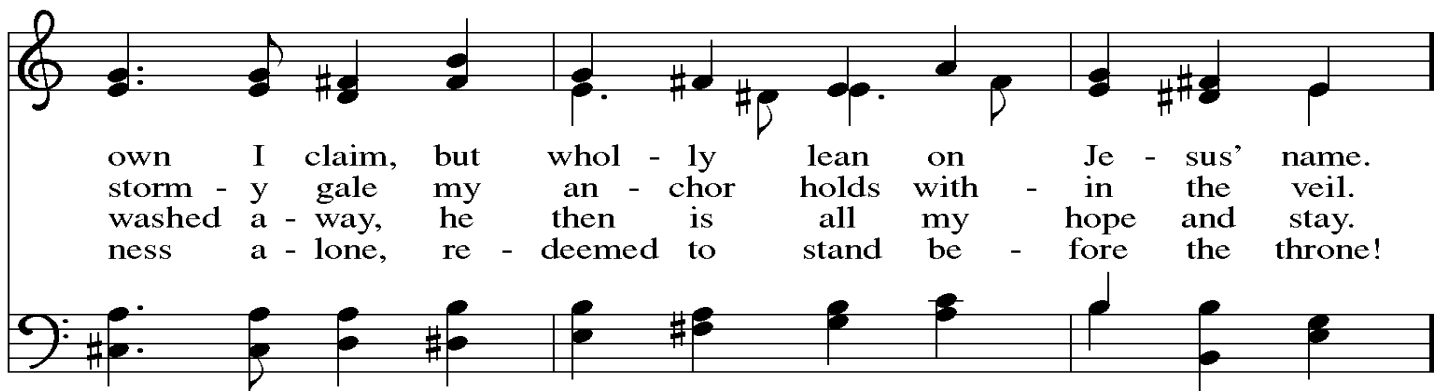
**GATHERING SONG** – “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” [ELW 597, all verses]



1 My hope is built on noth - ing less than  
2 When dark - ness veils his love - ly face, I  
3 His oath, his cov - e - nant, his blood sus -  
4 When he shall come with trum - pet sound, oh,

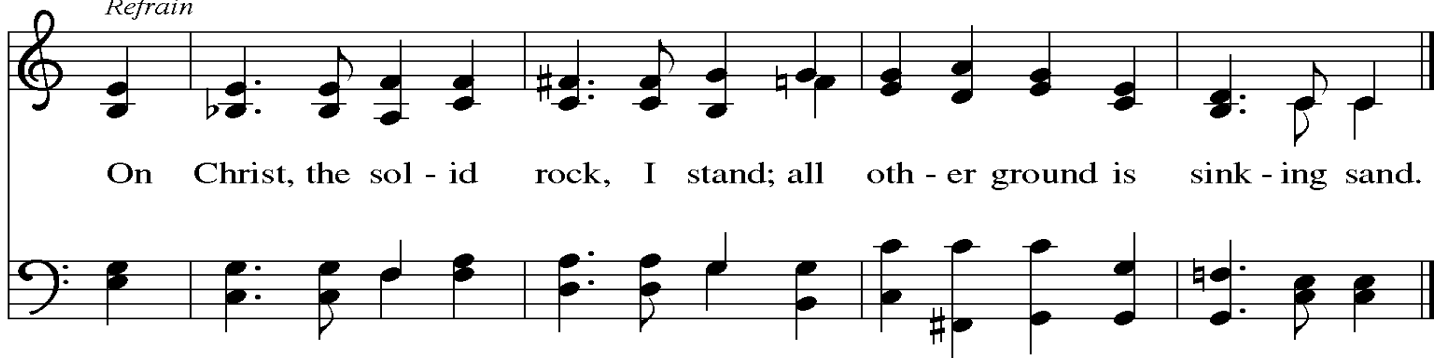


Je - sus' blood and righ - teous - ness; no mer - it of my  
rest on his un - chang - ing grace; in ev - 'ry high and  
tain me in the rag - ing flood; when all sup - ports are  
may I then in him be found, clothed in his righ - teous -



own I claim, but whol - ly lean on Je - sus' name.  
storm - y gale my an - chor holds with - in the veil.  
washed a - way, he then is all my hope and stay.  
ness a - lone, re - deemed to stand be - fore the throne!

*Refrain*



On Christ, the sol - id rock, I stand; all oth - er ground is sink - ing sand.

Text: Edward Mote, 1797–1874, alt.

Music: MELITA, John B. Dykes, 1823–1876

[Text and Music Copyright Holder: Public Domain]

## GREETING

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. And also with you.*

## CANTICLE OF PRAISE

**Pastor**

*Refrain*  
Assisting minister



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al - le - lu - ia.

**All**



1 Wor - thy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us



free to be peo-ple of God. Pow - er and rich - es and wis - dom and

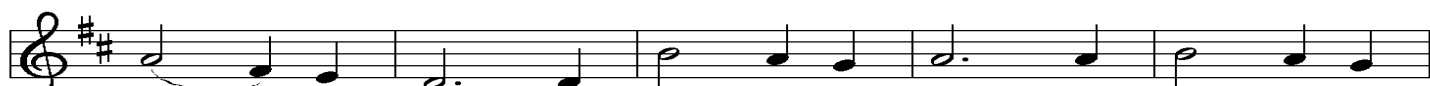


strength, and hon - or and bless-ing and glo - ry are his.

*Refrain*



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God. Al - le - lu - ia.



2 Sing with all the peo - ple of God and join in the



hymn of all cre - a - tion: Bless-ing and hon - or and glo - ry and



might be to God and the Lamb for - ev - er. A - men.

*Final refrain*



This is the feast of vic-to-ry for our God, for the Lamb who was slain



has be - gun his reign. Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.

## **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

*Let us pray. Righteous God, our merciful master, you own the earth and all its peoples, and you give us all that we have. Inspire us to serve you with justice and wisdom, and prepare us for the joy of the day of your coming, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.*

**Amen.**

## **CHILDREN'S SERMON** [The congregation may sit.]

### **THE FIRST READING – Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18**

<sup>7</sup>*Be silent before the Lord GOD!*

*For the day of the LORD is at hand;  
the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests.*

<sup>12</sup>*At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps,  
and I will punish the people  
who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts,  
“The LORD will not do good, nor will he do harm.”*

<sup>13</sup>*Their wealth shall be plundered, and their houses laid waste.  
Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them;  
though they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them.*

<sup>14</sup>*The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast;  
the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there.*

<sup>15</sup>*That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish,  
a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and thick darkness,*

<sup>16</sup>*a day of trumpet blast and battle cry  
against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.*

<sup>17</sup>*I will bring such distress upon people that they shall walk like the blind;  
because they have sinned against the LORD,  
their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.*

<sup>18</sup>*Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them  
on the day of the LORD's wrath;  
in the fire of his passion the whole earth shall be consumed;  
for a full, a terrible end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.*

*The Word of the Lord.*

**Thanks be to God.**

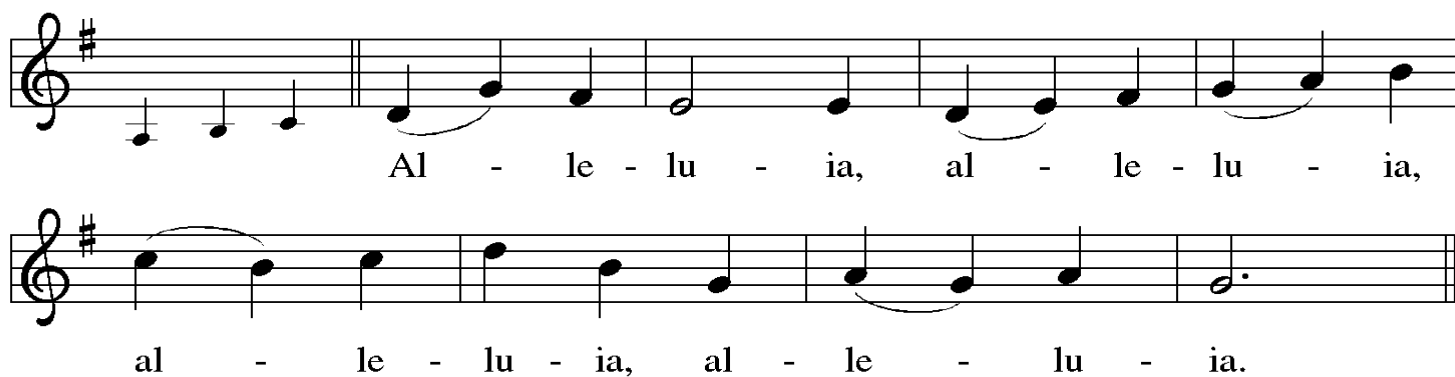
## **THE SECOND READING – I Thessalonians 5:1-11**

<sup>1</sup>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>When they say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! <sup>4</sup>But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup>for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; <sup>7</sup>for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup>For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

*The Word of the Lord.*

**Thanks be to God.**

## **THE GOSPEL ACCLAMATION** [Please stand as you are able.]



## **THE HOLY GOSPEL according to St. Matthew 25:14-30**

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

*[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>14</sup>“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup>But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. <sup>19</sup>After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ <sup>21</sup>His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>22</sup>And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ <sup>23</sup>His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>24</sup>Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ <sup>26</sup>But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? <sup>27</sup>Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup>For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup>As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”*

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

[The congregation may sit.]

**SERMON – “Talents”**



[Please stand as you are able.]

**HYMN OF THE DAY – “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word”** [ELW 517, all verses]

1 Lord, keep us stead - fast in your word; curb those who  
2 Lord Je - sus Christ, your pow'r make known, for you are  
3 O Com - fort - er of price - less worth, send peace and

by de - ceit or sword would wrest the king - dom from your Son  
Lord of lords a - lone; de - fend your ho - ly church, that we  
u - ni - ty on earth; sup - port us in our fi - nal strife

and bring to naught all he has done.  
may sing your praise e - ter - nal - ly.  
and lead us out of death to life.

Text: Martin Luther, 1483–1546; tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827–1878, alt.  
Music: ERHALT UNS, HERR, J. Klug, *Geistliche Lieder*, 1543

[Text and Music Copyright Holder: Public Domain]

## **THE APOSTLES' CREED** [Please remain standing.]

**I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen**

## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION** [The congregation may sit.]

*Welcoming God's reign of righteousness and mercy, let us pray with people of every time and place.*

[A brief silence.]

*We pray for the church. Enliven its witness in ecumenical ministries, feeding programs, and new ventures. We pray for our Bishops, Elizabeth and Tracie, and all members of church councils everywhere. Open our hearts to friendships that share faith, and open our mouths to share your good news. Lord, in your mercy,*  
**hear our prayer.**

*We pray for the nations of the world, their leaders, and those God has entrusted into their care. Raise up just and wise advocates and judges from small-town courts to international tribunals. We pray for Donald, the president, and for all justices on the Federal Supreme Court and the Supreme Court of New Jersey. Enlighten all leaders to discern what is right and do what is good. Lord, in your mercy,*  
**hear our prayer.**

*We pray for parks and open spaces, for clean air and clear water. Help us protect places where we are reminded of God's work in creation and find renewal. Lord, in your mercy,*  
**hear our prayer.**

*We pray for those who have been and are still today enslaved, trafficked, or oppressed. Make clear the needs of those who are silenced by suffering, that we may listen and bring an end to exploitation. Lord, in your mercy,*  
**hear our prayer.**

*We pray for those who cry out for healing, hope, or help, and for those for whom we have promised to pray. We lift up to you. . .*

*Beverly Albert, Dolores Albert, Bill Caver, Kathy Cipoletti, Tony Conboy,  
Peter Gluesing, Kim Herrera, Gerald Hoenes, Bo Hoag, Ken Huebner, Mae Hulburt,  
Millie and Roger Hildebrand, Shiloh and Katherine Johnson, Gary Meserole,  
Fred Messner, Chris Montana, Holly Mullins, George Namendorf,  
Meghan Otte, Anne Pangalo, Michael Pyne, Lorraine and Jack Sadlon,  
Ellie Soehren, Nancy Sorbo, Nancy Sweet*

*Bring relief to caregivers and surround those who are lonely with your powerful presence. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.***

*We pray for this congregation and the talents and treasures each person brings. Bring new talents to blossom among us, as we encourage and build up one another. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.***

*We pray for retail workers, managers, and all who are preparing for the holiday shopping rush. In times of stress, bring them peace. When they are feel overwhelmed, show them the way. When anger and frustration replace joy and fun, open them to your calming presence. And give all of us, retail workers and customers, the grace to set a good example to all among whom we live, to be just and true in all our dealings, and give us hearts that are generous and courteous towards all. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.***

*We pray for all who celebrate Thanksgiving this week. Strengthen our own sense of thankfulness. Help us remember all of your good gifts. Keep all who travel safe, and bring reconciliation, love, and joy to dinner tables where there is distrust. Hold tight those who will mourn this week. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.***

*Lord, our dwelling place in all generations, we remember with thanksgiving all who have died in you. Teach us to count our days as gifts from you. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.***

*Receive these prayers and the hopes and concerns of our hearts, O God, as we entrust into your loving care all for whom we pray, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.***

## CHANCEL CHOIR MUSICAL OFFERING – “10,000 Reasons” with Nancy Ulanday, flute

### TEMPLE TALK – Carla Hoenigmann

### THE OFFERING IS TAKEN

### THE ELEMENTS ARE RECEIVED AND THE OFFERTORY IS SUNG

[Please stand as you are able.]

### OFFERTORY SONG – “Shall We Gather at the River” [ELW 423, verse 1]



- 1 Shall we gath - er at the riv - er, where bright an - gel feet have trod,
- 2 On the mar - gin of the riv - er, wash - ing up its sil - ver spray,
- 3 Ere we reach the shin-ing riv - er, lay we ev - 'ry bur - den down;
- 4 Soon we'll reach the shin-ing riv - er, soon our pil-grim-age will cease;



with its crys - tal tide for - ev - er flow-ing by the throne of God?  
we will walk and wor - ship ev - er, all the hap - py gold - en day.  
grace our spir - its will de - liv - er, and pro-vide a robe and crown.  
soon our hap - py hearts will quiv - er with the mel - o - dy of peace.

#### *Refrain*



Yes, we'll gath - er at the riv - er, the beau-ti-ful, the beau-ti-ful riv - er;



gath - er with the saints at the riv - er that flows by the throne of God.

Text: Robert Lowry, 1826–1899

Music: HANSON PLACE, Robert Lowry

[Text and Music Copyright Holder: Public Doman]

## **OFFERING PRAYER**

*Let us pray.*

*Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts: ourselves, our time, and our possessions. Use us, and what we have gathered, in feeding the world with your love, through the one who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.*

**Amen.**

## **DIALOGUE**

The musical notation is written on four staves, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes are placed on the lines of the staff, with lyrics written below them. Slurs are used to group notes for longer words or phrases. The first staff has a double bar line after the first measure. The second staff also has a double bar line after the first measure. The third and fourth staves end with double bar lines.

The Lord be with you. And al - so with you.

Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

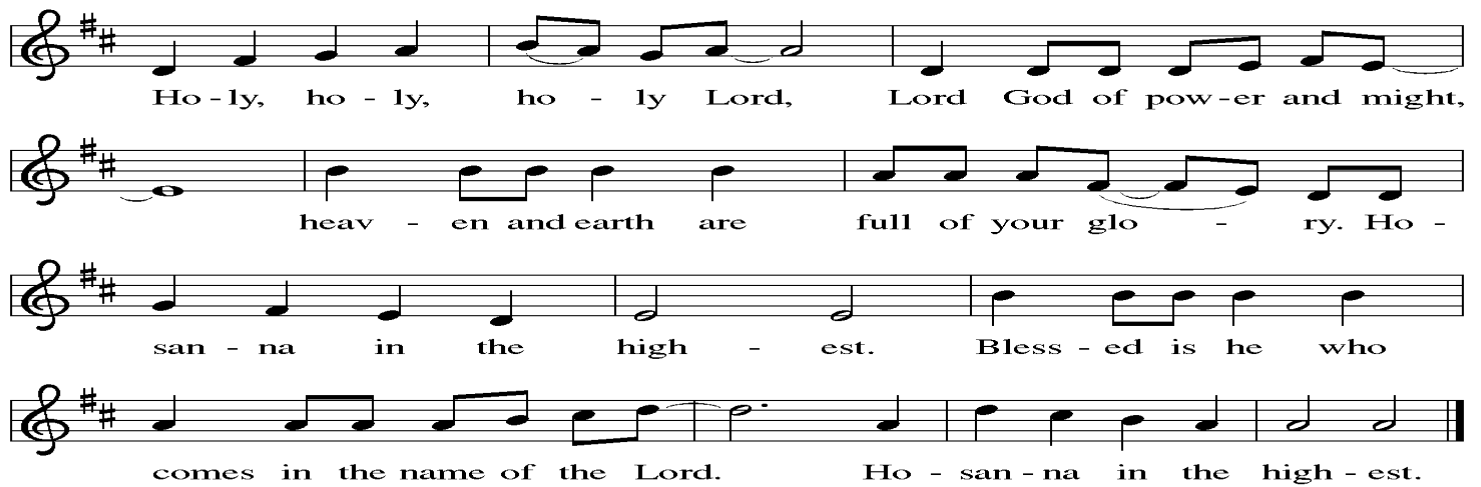
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

## **PREFACE**

It is indeed right, our du - ty and our joy,  
that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you,  
al - mighty and merciful God, through our Sav - ior Je - sus Christ;  
who on this day overcame death and the grave,  
and by his glorious resur - rec - tion  
opened to us the way of ev - er - last - ing life.  
And so, with all the choirs of an - gels,  
with the church on earth and the hosts of heav - en,  
we praise your name and join their un - end - ing hymn:

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of ten staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The lyrics are written below the notes. The music is written in a simple, clear style, with notes and rests clearly visible. The lyrics are in a serif font, and the overall layout is clean and professional.

**HOLY, HOLY, HOLY**



### **THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

*Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord, heaven and earth are full of your glory. In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son, who reached out to heal the sick and suffering, who preached good news to the poor, and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.*

*In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.*

*Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and ascension, we await his coming in glory.*

*Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord, and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord; to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever.*

**Amen.**

### **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**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.**

*Come, not because you are perfect but because, through Christ Jesus, you are invited.*



## HOLY COMMUNION

[All are invited to the Table where Christ is bodily present in the bread and drink.

At the direction of our ushers, everyone who is able kneels at the rail.

Bread will be distributed first (gluten free wafers are available),  
followed by wine and grape juice in individual cups. A chalice with wine is also available.

Children and all who have not received First Communion will receive a blessing.

The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you. **Amen.**]

[The congregation may sit. The following songs are sung by the congregation during Holy Communion distribution.]

### **COMMUNION SONG – “On Eagle’s Wings”** [ELW 787, all verses]

Leader or All



1 You who dwell in the shel-ter of the Lord, who a-bide in this shad-ow for life,



say to the Lord: “My ref - uge, my rock in whom I trust!”

Refrain  
All



And he will raise you up on ea-gle’s wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,

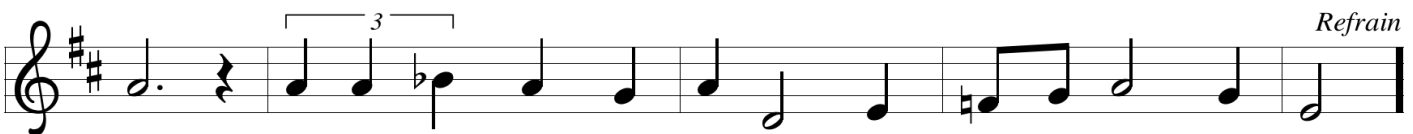


make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of his hand.

Leader or All



2 The snare of the fowl-er will nev-er cap-ture you, and fam-ine will bring you no



fear; un - der God’s wings your ref-uge, with faith-ful-ness your shield.

Refrain

Leader or All *3*

3 You need not fear the ter-ror of the night, nor the ar-row that flies by

*Refrain*

day; though thou-sands fall a - bout you, near you it shall not come.

Leader or All *3*

4 For to the an-gels God's giv - en a com-mand to

guard you in all of your ways; up - on their hands they will

bear you up, lest you dash your foot a - gainst a stone.

*Final refrain*  
All

And he will raise you up on ea- gle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,

make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of his hand.

And hold you, hold you in the palm of his hand.

Text: Michael Joncas, b. 1957

Music: ON EAGLE'S WINGS, Michael Joncas

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**COMMUNION SONG – “Just As I Am, without One Plea”** [ELW 592, all verses]

The musical score is written for a four-part choir (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of music. The first system contains the first four verses of the hymn. The second system contains the continuation of the verses. The third system contains the final verse. The lyrics are printed below the vocal staves, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across two lines of music. The bass line is a simple accompaniment consisting of chords and single notes.

1 Just as I am, with - out one plea, but that thy blood was  
2 Just as I am, though tossed a - bout with man - y a con - flict,  
3 Just as I am, thou wilt re - ceive, wilt wel - come, par - don,  
4 Just as I am; thy love un - known has bro - ken ev - 'ry

shed for me, and that thou bidd'st me come to thee,  
man - y a doubt, fight - ings and fears with - in, with - out,  
cleanse, re - lieve; be - cause thy prom - ise I be - lieve,  
bar - rier down; now to be thine, yea, thine a - lone,

O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Text: Charlotte Elliott, 1789–1871

Music: WOODWORTH, William B. Bradbury, 1816–1868

[Text and Music Copyright Holder: Public Domain]

[Please stand.]

*The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace. Amen.*

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

*Let us pray. We give you thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us through the healing power of this gift of life. In your mercy, strengthen us through this gift, in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**BLESSING**

*Almighty God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. Amen.*

## **SENDING SONG – “Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer”** [ELW 618, all verses]

1 Guide me ev - er, the great Re - deem - er, pil - grim through this  
2 O - pen now the crys - tal foun - tain where the heal - ing  
3 When I tread the verge of Jor - dan, bid my anx - ious

bar - ren land. I am weak, but you are might - y; hold me  
wa - ters flow; let the fire and cloud - y pil - lar lead me  
fears sub - side; death of death and hell's de - struc - tion, land me

with your pow'r - ful hand. Bread of heav - en, bread of heav - en,  
all my jour - ney through. Strong de - liv - 'rer, strong de - liv - 'rer,  
safe on Ca - naan's side. Songs and prais - es, songs and prais - es

feed me now and ev - er - more, ev - er - more, feed me now and ev - er - more.  
shield me with your might - y arm, might - y arm, shield me with your might - y arm.  
I will raise for - ev - er - more, ev - er - more, I will raise for - ev - er - more.

Text: William Williams, 1717–1791; tr. William Williams and Peter Williams, 1722–1796, alt.  
Music: CWM RHONDDA, John Hughes, 1873–1932

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### **DISMISSAL**

*Go in peace. Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

### **POSTLUDE**

*This reading from Zephaniah is terrifying.*

*It begins with a command from God demanding silence. This phrase lets us put this text in context. This command is used when something is taking place in the Temple. In ancient Israel, the Temple was where heaven and earth meet. It's where God truly is. By demanding our silence, the prophet Zephaniah tells us that these words are spoken in the place where God is present and where God is being worshipped. These words take place as people gather to pray and celebrate God. The people are participating in rituals, telling stories, and experiencing God. As we will discover, the people expect to be blessed when they worship God. Instead, they are challenged and undone.*

*We don't worship in the Temple but we do worship in our church. Within these eight walls, we pray, sing, and experience Jesus' presence in a holy community. We gather here on Sunday morning because this is where Jesus promises to be. In the stories we share and in the rituals we participate in, we experience a vision of what God's community of welcome, love, and hope actually looks like. We are living and expressing what God's reality truly is. Our rituals are both ancient and new. They are designed to help us experience the presence of God. We are invited guests, brought here to find comfort and joy at God's table.*

*But imagine Jesus speaking these words to you. What do you hear? What do you feel? The metaphors in the passage are centered around vines, vineyards, and wine. God, in the verses around this passage, is the tender of a vineyard, making fine wines and drinks. This drink is designed to be life-giving to all who consume it. In this metaphor, God's people are not drinking the wine God created. Rather, the people are the wine itself. God stored us, tending us carefully, and waiting for us to mature. Yet the wine grew complacent in dealing with God and each other. The wine sought out its own comfort at the expense of others. The wine went bad.*

*And so, in the presence of the God, the wine is destroyed. The people trusted their strength as a nation and a culture so that is the first thing God takes. They did not see God living in their community, so God takes their sight. They did not live lives believing that God will do both good and harm. They didn't believe that God keeps God's promises. The people just lived, assuming they were good people, and that's all they need.*

*When we are in God's house, we expect God to bring comfort and joy. But this text doesn't do that. This is not a text meant for other people. It's a text spoken to the people God claims as God's own. It's a text meant for us. Prophets bring us words that are harsh. Their words challenge us and terrify us. They can turn us defensive but they are here to change us into the people God wants us to be. Zephaniah wants to know, when it comes to daily life, do we live as if the vision of welcome, love, and hope that God proclaims is what we strive to be or do we pretend that our point of view, expectations, and perspective is the only thing God actually wants?*