

COMFORT, O COMFORT MY PEOPLE

*A RESOURCE FOR SOLACE AND STRENGTH
DURING GENERAL CONFERENCE 2008*



**Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or
dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you
wherever you go.**

BERING MEMORIAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

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APRIL 17, 2008

A PRAYER FOR THE WORLD

Let the rain come and wash away
the ancient grudges, the bitter hatreds
held and nurtured over generations.
Let the rain wash away the memory
of the hurt, the neglect.

Then let the sun come out and
fill the sky with rainbows.

Let the warmth of the sun heal us
wherever we are broken.

Let it burn away the fog so that
we can see each other clearly.

So that we can see beyond labels,
beyond accents, gender or skin color.

Let the warmth and brightness
of the sun melt our selfishness.

So that we can share the joys and
feel the sorrows of our neighbors.

And let the light of the sun
be so strong that we will see all
people as our neighbors.

Let the earth, nourished by rain,
bring forth flowers
to surround us with beauty.

And let the mountains teach our hearts
to reach upward to heaven.

Amen.

— Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

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IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Refrain:

It is well with my soul,
it is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
let this blest assurance control,
that Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
and hath shed his own blood for my soul.

(Refrain)

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

(Refrain)

And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
even so, it is well with my soul.

(Refrain)

— UMH 377, Horatio G. Spafford

WE SHALL OVERCOME

We shall overcome, we shall overcome
We shall overcome some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We shall overcome some day

The Lord will see us through, the Lord will see us
through

The lord will see us through some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
The Lord will see us some day

We're on to victory, we're on to victory
We're on to victory some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We're on to victory some day

We are not afraid, we are not afraid
We are not afraid today
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We are not afraid today

The truth shall make us free, the truth shall make us free
The truth shall make us free some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
The truth shall make us free some day

We shall live in peace, we shall live in peace
We shall live in peace some day
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We shall live in peace some day

— UMH 533

PEOPLE OF GOD, THIS DAY IS OURS!

People of God, this day is ours!

A day to acknowledge our hunger; hunger for love,
hunger for respect, hunger for justice.

People of God, this day is ours!

A day to proclaim that all of God's creation—
Gay, Straight, Bisexual, Transgender—
must be affirmed and made to feel welcome in our
communities.

How deep is your hunger? How long can you wait
in order to be fed the bread which will sustain you?

Our hunger is deep
Yet even as we gather for worship,
we begin to feed one another with the bread of life,
a bread that will not run out even in times of scarcity.
Let us seize the day and make it count.
Let us seize the day and
proclaim the good work that is taking place here and
now.

— Reconciling Ministries Network

Philippians 4:4–7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice!
Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is
near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by
prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your
requests be made known to God. And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts
and your minds in Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 8:31–39

What should be our response? Simply this: “If God
is for us, who can be against us?” Since God did not
spare the Only Begotten, but gave Christ up for the sake
of us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that God
will freely give us everything. Who will bring a charge
against God's chosen ones? Since God is the One who
justifies, who has the power to condemn? Only Christ
Jesus, who died—or rather, was raised—and sits at the
right hand of God, and who now intercedes for us!

What will separate us from the love of Christ?
Trouble? Calamity? Persecution? Hunger? Nakedness?
Danger? Violence? As scripture says, “For your sake,
we're being killed all day long; we're looked upon as
sheep to be slaughtered.” Yet in all this we are more than
conquerors because of God who has loved us. For I am
certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor
demons, neither the present nor the future, neither heights
nor depths—nor anything else in all creation—will be
able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us
in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

WHEN I USE MY POWER

When I dare to be powerful—
to use my strength
in the service of my vision,
Then it becomes less and less important
whether I am afraid.

— Audre Lorde

JOSHUA 1:1–2, 5–6, 9

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

A PRAYER OF ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things pass away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Those who have God
Find they lack nothing;
God alone suffices. Amen

JOHN 13.34–35

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

EPHESIANS 3:20

To God—whose power now at work in us can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.

PRAYERS OF ST. PATRICK

As I arise today,
may the strength of God pilot me,
the power of God uphold me,
the wisdom of God guide me.
May the eye of God look before me,
the ear of God hear me,
the word of God speak for me.
May the hand of God protect me,
the way of God lie before me,
the shield of God defend me,
the host of God save me. Amen

Christ illumine and guide me.
Christ as a shield overshadow me.
Christ with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit,
Christ when I stand,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me. Amen

HYMN OF PROMISE

In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons, a hidden promise:
butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter
there's a spring that waits to be,
Unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence
seeking word and melody;
There's a dawn in every darkness,
bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future;
what it holds, a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

In our end is our beginning;
in our time, infinity;
In our doubt there is believing;
in our life, eternity,
In our death, a resurrection
at the last, a victory,
Unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

— UMH 707, Natalie Sleeth

FROM *STRENGTH TO LOVE*

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction ... The chain reaction of evil—hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars—must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.

— Martin Luther King, Jr. 1963

INVITING THE PRESENCE

Gathered in this sacred space, O Creator Spirit in the multi-colored company of your Church on earth and in heaven, we celebrate your creation and invite your presence into our midst.

We know, Creator Spirit, that eternity cannot hold you, nor can our little words describe the breadth of your faithfulness to us.

Yet in the space of one small heart and in silence,
Come close and repair us.

O God, remind us you are near.

May we open our hearts to you.

— Rev. Dr. Sally Harris

ROMANS 14:22 (*Priests for Equality*)

On the other hand, be confident in your personal belief before God, and don't condemn yourself for doing something you really believe is all right to do.

WE'VE A STORY TO TELL TO THE NATIONS

We've a story to tell to the nations,
that shall turn their hearts to the right,
a story of truth and mercy,
a story of peace and light,
a story of peace and light.

Refrain:

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
and the dawning to noonday bright;
and Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
the kingdom of love and light.

We've a song to be sung to the nations,
that shall lift their hearts to the Lord,
a song that shall conquer evil
and shatter the spear and sword,
and shatter the spear and sword.

(Refrain)

We've a message to give to the nations,
that the Lord who reigneth above
hath sent us his Son to save us,
and show us that God is love,
and show us that God is love.

(Refrain)

We've a Savior to show to the nations,
who the path of sorrow hath trod,
that all of the world's great peoples
might come to the truth of God,
might come to the truth of God.

(Refrain)

— UMH 569, H. Ernest Nichol

CIRCLE OF LOVE

We confess that the circle of love is repeatedly broken
because of our sin of exclusion.

We create separate circles: the inner circle and the outer
circle.

We confess that the circle of love is broken
whenever we cannot see eye to eye,
whenever we cannot link hand to hand,
whenever we cannot live heart to heart and affirm our
differences.

We confess that the circle of love is broken
whenever there is alienation, whenever there is
misunderstanding,
whenever there is insensitivity or a hardening of the
heart.

We confess that the circle of love is broken
the circle of power and the circle of despair,
the circle of privilege and the circle of deprivation.

Through God's grace we are forgiven,
by the mercy of our Creator,
through the love of the Christ,
and in the power of the Spirit.

Let us rejoice and be glad!
Glory to God!

Amen.

— Miriam Terese Winter (Adapted by Marcia
McFee)

GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.

Refrain:

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

(Refrain)

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

(Refrain)

— UMH 140. Thomas O. Chisholm

A PRAYER OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

God, of your goodness give me yourself; for you are
sufficient for me. I cannot properly ask anything less, to
be worthy of you. If I were to ask less, I should always
be in want. In you alone do I have all. Amen

ISAIAH 40:28–31

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
God does not faint or grow weary;
God's understanding is unsearchable.
God gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even the youth will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their
strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

MORNING PRAYER

New every morning is your love, great God of light,
and all day long you are working for good in the world.
Stir up in us desire to serve you,
to live peacefully with our neighbors,
and to devote each day to your Only Begotten,
our Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

— Presbyterian Worshipbook, U.S.A., 20th Cent.

EPHESIANS 4:4–6

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were
called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one
faith, one baptism, one God and Creator of all, who is
above all and through all and in all.

A PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS ASSISI

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace,
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

ESTHER ROUND

Perhaps you have come to the place where you are
for just such a time as this.
Perhaps you have come to the place where you are
for just such a time as this.
Speak out! Don't keep silence!
Be true to God!
Speak out! Don't keep silence!
Be true to God!

— Ann Freeman Price

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

I can do all things through the One who strengthens
me.

Reconciling Redeemer, you are the mender of our souls
and the healer of our broken bodies.

Bind us together in ways that strengthen and sustain,
nurture and nourish, heal and help ourselves and the
church of Christ.

Holy Fire, ignite a new spark in the heart of each one
gathered here.

Light our way. Warm our bodies. Inspire our tongues to
speak a new word, to shout another praise, and to sing an
amazing song that will bring to us life and to you glory!

— Reconciling Ministries Network

LUKE 18:1–8

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to
pray always and not to lose heart: “In a certain city there
was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for
people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming
to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my
opponent.’ For a while the judge refused; but later
thought, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect
for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I
will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by
continually coming.’” And the Lord said, “Listen to
what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant
justice to God’s chosen ones who cry to God day and
night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you,
God will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when
the Promised One comes, will faith be found anywhere
on earth?”

GUIDE US TO OPENNESS

Sung to *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*

Guide us to openness, Spirit of mercy,
Aid us in seeking God's justice and grace.
Move us to show Christ's compassion through witness,
Love first to offer and hate to erase.

Refrain:

Guide us to openness! Guide us to openness!
Let no one ever be shunned or denied.
Make of the Church a bold place of compassion,
That all who seek You may come and abide.

Spirit of tenderness, impart Your presence,
Fill both our hearts and our hands with Your care.
Let no one suffer or grieve unattended,
Grant us Your kindness and warmth here to share.

(Refrain)

Though there are those who would limit Christ's graces,
Still we refuse to believe in such lies,
For in this time we have made a commitment
Never to limit love's power or size.

(Refrain)

— W. Robert Martin, III

INSIDE THE DOORS!

Creating God, blessed are you and blessed is this time
and place.
Thank you for these people gathered here.
We are here! Inside the Doors! We have not retreated!
We are standing in praise!

THIS IS A DAY OF NEW BEGINNINGS

This is a day of new beginnings,
time to remember and move on,
time to believe what love is bringing,
laying to rest the pain that's gone.

For by the life and death of Jesus,
love's mighty Spirit, now as then,
can make for us a world of difference,
as faith and hope are born again.

Then let us, with the Spirit's daring,
step from the past and leave behind
our disappointment, guilt, and grieving,
seeking new paths, and sure to find.

Christ is alive, and goes before us
to show and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
our God is making all things new.

— Brian Wren

STORIES

These stories have been told to us:
You are not for this.
You cannot have the love you seek.
You cannot come in.

But in You, I-AM,
we are fit, and loved, and welcomed.
Forgive our forgetting.
Remind us we are yours.

— Dumbarton UMC

LAMENTATIONS 3:19–27 (Adapted from *The Message*)

I'll never forget the trouble, the utter lostness,
the taste of ashes, the poison I've swallowed.
I remember it all—oh, how well I remember—
the feeling of hitting the bottom.
But there's one other thing I remember,
and remembering, I keep a grip on hope:

God's loyal love couldn't have run out,
God's merciful love couldn't have dried up.
They're created new every morning.
How great your faithfulness!
I'm sticking with God (I say it over and over).
God's all I've got left.

God proves to be good to the man who passionately
waits,
to the woman who diligently seeks.
It's a good thing to quietly hope,
quietly hope for help from God.
It's a good thing when you're young
to stick it out through the hard times.

When life is heavy and hard to take,
go off by yourself. Enter the silence.
Bow in prayer. Don't ask questions:
Wait for hope to appear.
Don't run from trouble. Take it full-face.
The "worst" is never the worst.

Why? Because God won't ever
walk out and fail to return.

GOD, WHO MADE ME IN YOUR IMAGE

God, who made me in Your image,
teach me to love myself as You love me.
God, who made me in Your image,
allow me to show that image to the world.
God, who made me in Your image,
help me to see Your image in all those I meet.
God, who made me in Your image,
teach me to conserve and protect all Your creation.
God, who made me in Your image,
bless, protect, and keep me and all Your children safe.
The One who breathed life into our lungs
continues to be present with us.
God, who has made us reflective of God's own image,
has forgiven us all and made us new creations.
Therefore, since our sins are forgiven,
let us go forth with love and peace,
honoring and upholding the dignity of all we meet,
knowing we see reflections of God's image all around.
Thanks be to God. Amen
— More Light Presbyterians, 2006

FROM A STATEMENT OF FAITH

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.
We are not alone. Thanks be to God!
— UMH 883, The United Church of Canada

JAMES 1:5

If you lack wisdom, ask for it from God, who gives
generously and ungrudgingly to all, and it will be given
to you.

ISAIAH 54:10–14

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you. O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, I am about to set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the prosperity of your children. In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you.

SUSTAINER GOD

Sustainer God, I am tired of this fight. I am tired of demanding a place at Your table, a voice in the pulpit, a seat in the pew. I wonder if there are any more words to say what has been said by so many, for so long. I wonder if there are any more ways of showing how destructive it is and what it means to be included out. I wonder if it is in me to continue. It matters and so, with your help, I will carry on. Guide my words and actions and may they honor you. I ask for strength in the struggle and your presence with me on this journey. Amen

— Lesley Brogan

SPIRIT OF TRUTH

Spirit of Truth, you often seem elusive to us:
to speak truth
 can result in being shunned
 by parent, siblings, or children:
to be honest
 can jeopardize our pastorate or job.
Why does embracing you run the risk
of discrimination and pain?
Spirit of Truth,
fill my heart, my breath, my soul.
Encompass me
with your ever-changing form.

Ease the bitterness
of my constant struggle.
Strengthen me against those
who would use you to hurt me.
Let me never doubt
 my own integrity,
 my own freedom to disclose,
 the authenticity of my faith.
Guide my vision
to your ultimate manifestation. Amen.

— Mark Bowman

UBI CARITAS

Ubi caritas et amor,
Ubi caritas Deus ibi est.

(Where charity and love are, God is there.)

— Taize chant

AN AFFIRMATION

I believe God's love will find a way to heal our wounded world,
and I believe somehow that hatred and poverty will end.
For I believe in the persistent love of God.

I believe that God is loving and healing through our tears
and I believe God can make us whole again.
For I believe in the great healing love of God.

I believe that God has made me who I am.
And I believe that God rejoices when we are able to live
honest lives.
For I believe in the creative love of God.

I believe it's not too late for us to learn to live to love.
and I believe God's love can teach us to forgive and start
anew.
For I believe in the forgiving love of God.

— Tim McGinley

JESUS AT THE WELL

Jesus at the well,
whose knowledge of our lives surprises us,
we pray for comfort and healing.
We bring you our dehydrated emotions and brittle
bodies.
We put ourselves on the edge and wait to be lowered
into your living waters.

— Unknown

hours of life and take us out on some desolate highway
and beat us and leave us there, and we will still love you.
Run all around the country and send your literature, and
say that we aren't worthy of integration, that we are too
immoral, that we are too low, that we are too degraded,
yet we will still love you. Bomb our homes and go by
our churches early in the morning and bomb them if you
please, and we will still love you. But we will wear you
down by our capacity to suffer. And in winning the
victory, we will not only win our freedom, we will so
appeal to your heart and your conscience, that we will
win you in the process. And our victory will be a double
victory. We will win our freedom, and we will win the
individuals who have been the perpetrators of the evil
system that existed so long.' This is the thing that we
must say; this is the thing that we must do. If we do this,
we will be able to bring into being, by the grace of God,
this new world.

— Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16–19

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a
human point of view; even though we once knew Christ
from a human point of view, we know him no longer in
that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new
creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything
has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us
to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of
reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the
world to himself, not counting their trespasses against
them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

HELP US ACCEPT EACH OTHER

Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;
Teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace.
Be present, God, among us, and bring us to believe
We are ourselves accepted and meant to love and live.

Teach us, O God, your lessons, as in our daily life
We struggle to be human and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people, for all, not just for some,
To love them as we find them, or as they may become.

Let your acceptance change us, so that we may be moved
In living situations to do the truth in love;
To practice your acceptance, until we know by heart
The table of forgiveness and laughter's healing art.

God, for today's encounters with all who are in need,
Who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and bread,
Bring us new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on;
Renew us with your Spirit; God! Free us, make us one!

— UMH 560, Fred Kaan

FROM *SOME THINGS WE MUST DO*

My friends, we must keep on believing that unearned suffering is redemptive. We must say to our white brothers all over the South who would try to keep us down: 'We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. We will not hate you, and yet we cannot in all good conscience obey your evil laws. Do to us what you will. Threaten our children, and we will still love you. Come into our homes at the midnight

JOHN 15 :1, 4, 7–9, 12, 16–19, 20A–21, 26–27 (Adapted)

I am the true vine, and my Abba is the vinegrower ...
Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Abba is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As my Abba has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that Abba God will give you whatever you ask God in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know Abba God who sent me. When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from Abba God, the Spirit of Truth who comes from Abba God, she will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

HERE I AM, LORD

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.

Refrain:

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.

I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

(Refrain)

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.

(Refrain)

I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my words to them.
Whom shall I send?

(Refrain)

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will send the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.

(Refrain)

MEDITATION

God, you have created me
to do you some definite service:
You have committed some work to me
which you have not committed to another.
I have my mission—
I may never know it in this life,
but I shall be told in the next.
Somehow I am necessary for your purposes.
I have a part in the great work;
I am a link in a chain,
a bond of connection between persons.
God has not created me for nothing.
I shall do good, I shall do God's work;
I shall be an angel of peace,
A preacher of truth in my own place.
Fulfill your high purposes in me,
I am here to serve you, to be yours. Amen

— John Henry Cardinal Newman (Adapted)

HEBREWS 12:1–3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Jesus who endured such personal hostility from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

LOVING SPIRIT

Let us rejoice ourselves today, sweet God. Allow us the comfort of knowing that we are exactly the way you have created us to be, and are becoming exactly what you want. Be with us as we continue to surrender ourselves to your love and live in a world that harbors so much fear. God we invite you to be an active presence in each one of us as our commitment grows stronger towards a healthy, whole, confident way of loving you.

Lord, with your love, receive our prayer.

Enflame our entire community, dear God, and be the force that drives us to honesty, clarity, commitment, and truth. Clear our ears so that together, we may hear your call to unite. Be with us as we strive to create a world that is safe for closet doors to open everywhere, and for the spirited and the lovely to emerge.

Lord, with your love, receive our prayer.

— GABLE

FROM *DIALOGUES WITH SILENCE*

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. ... 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 I will 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.

— Thomas Merton

Finest bread I will provide,
'Til their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

(Refrain)

—UMH 593, Dan Schutte

PHILIPPIANS 4:4–9

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

FROM *STRENGTH TO LOVE*

The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.

— Martin Luther King, Jr. 1963

GOD, YOU HAVE BEEN OUR SHELTER

God, you have been our shelter from one generation to another

 overarching sky
 shading tree
 deepest waters
 pulsing veins.

You have spread your vine widely
 bringing us a bounteous fruitfulness
 of care and nurture, fulfillment and peace.

Grow in us
 that we may root ourselves in your visions
 of justice and mercy.

Open our arms that we might lift another's burdens,
 speak through our mouths that we might comfort the
 afflicted,
 urge our feet that we might march in solidarity with
 the wounded.

Teach us to be the household of God,
 a people spreading out the everlasting branches of
 love. Amen

— Bobbi Patterson

A PRAYER

In Christ we experience our wholeness,
we are a new creation.

As you have received God's grace,
go now and dare to reach out to others,
to help others reconcile and make new.

 And the presence of God, who is our Creator,
 Redeemer, and Sustainer, will go with you.

— Kelly Turney

JEREMIAH 32:1–2, 6–7, 9–10, 14–15 (Adapted)

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard.

Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.'

And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

ABIDE WITH ME

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

I need thy presence every passing hour.
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

— UMH 700, Henry F. Lyte

A PRAYER OF ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
Amen

BREATHE ON ME, BREATH OF GOD

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will,
to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
till all this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity.

— UMH 420, Edwin Hatch

MY HOPE IS BUILT

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' life and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain:

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand;
all other ground is sinking sand.

When Darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,
my anchor holds within the veil.

(Refrain)

His oath, his covenant, his life
supports me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay.

(Refrain)

—UMH 368, Edward Mote

GALATIANS 6:9–10

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for
we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So
then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for
the good of all, and especially for those of the family of
faith.

FROM *LIFE OF THE BELOVED*

How do we get in touch with our chosenness when we are surrounded by rejections? I have already said that this involves a real spiritual struggle. Are there any guidelines in this struggle? Let me try to formulate a few.

First of all, you have to keep unmasking the world about you for what it is: manipulative, controlling, power-hungry and, in the long run, destructive. The world tells you many lies about who you are, and you simply have to be realistic enough to remind yourself of this. Every time you feel hurt, offended or rejected, you have to dare to say to yourself: “These feelings, strong as they may be, are not telling me the truth about myself. The truth, even though I cannot feel it right now, is that I am the chosen child of God, precious in God’s eyes, called the Beloved from all eternity and held safe in an everlasting embrace.”

Secondly, you have to keep looking for people and places where your truth is spoken and where you are reminded of your deepest identity as the chosen one. Yes, we must dare to opt consciously for our chosenness and not allow our emotions, feelings or passions to seduce us into self-rejection. The synagogues, the churches, the many communities of faith, the different support groups helping us with our addictions, families, friends, teachers and students: all of these can become reminders of our truth. The limited, sometimes broken, love of those who share our humanity can often point us to the truth of who we are: precious in God’s eyes. This truth is not simply an inner truth that emerges from our

center. It is also a truth that is revealed to us by the One who has chosen us. This is why we have to keep listening to the many men and women in history who, through their lives and their words, call us back to it.

Thirdly, you have to celebrate your chosenness constantly. This means saying “thank you” to God for having chosen you, and “thank you” to all who remind you of your chosenness. Gratitude is the most fruitful way of deepening your consciousness that you are not an “accident,” but a divine choice. It is important to realize how often we have had chances to be grateful and have not used them. When someone is kind to us, when an event turns out well, when a problem is solved, a relationship restored, a wound healed, these are very concrete reasons to offer thanks: be it with words, with flowers, with a letter, a card, a phone call for just a gesture of affection.

— Henri J. M. Nouwen

ISAIAH 43:1–4A

But now thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, who formed you, O Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you”