



ST. ELIZABETH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Br. David Steindl-Rast is a Benedictine monk, author, and a cherished friend. He has talked about the attitude of gratefulness as “an orientation to life with an unconditional and expansive embrace.” Rather than being grateful for only moments that are pleasant or what we want, gratefulness can be expanded to include the entirety of our life and that opens us to chances to be grateful within a wider range of experiences.

With practice, gratitude can serve us even when new insights take time to reveal themselves. Rather than simply looking for silver linings, approaching life from a position of deep, practiced gratitude can help calm us, reduce the grip of fear, and open us to greater empathy, compassion and clarity. Instead of ignoring our pain or resolving our anxiety, giving all our life experiences to God in gratitude can restore a sense of balance, stimulate an awareness of connection and breath a reinvigorating trust in our well-being.

We'll be dealing with COVID-19 for some time. Even so, we can choose to find and embrace unexpected opportunities in this adversity. We can generate gratitude, which in turn builds up greater capacity to face whatever is challenging in the months and years ahead. If you would like to learn how to develop an “orientation to life with an unconditional and expansive embrace,” here are some practices to begin or to exercise.

Reflect with gratitude on the sacrifices made by front-line workers and those working overtime to research, make tests and vaccines, and provide important, accurate and timely information. Be thankful if you are able to stay home. Even if you disagree with the overwhelming evidence, wear a mask in public as gesture of gratefulness for all the ways that people are caring for each other around the planet.

Use your 20-second “lather-ups” to slow down enough to find gratitude for running water, the miracle of soap and the wonder of human hands. Allow yourself to appreciate and be in awe of what is available to you. Being fully present in the moment of a simple task turns a mindless activity into a sacred moment filled with grace.

Find time to connect to family, friends or neighbors just to see how they're doing. You'd be surprised at the uplifting power of a call, text or email that lets another person know you are grateful that they exist.

Extend compassion and generosity. People's health and livelihoods are in jeopardy and nervous systems are taxed, so we are not always acting our best. Because we can't know what each other is carrying on our hearts, we can be more patient, kinder and take a deep breath before responding. We can stay grounded in behaviors that preserve our integrity.



Preparation



Now that we are in the late Spring/Summer season after Pentecost called “Ordinary time,” we use green as the liturgical color for altar and priestly vestments. The color symbolizes growth, creation, life, health and hope for many people from many faiths. And so you may want to drape a green cloth over a kitchen table, dining table, or a table in a garden or under a tree if the weather holds.

During this temporary physical separation, you might also dress your worship space with photos or real flowers and greens. Anglican spirituality holds that all the senses can disclose God’s presence – not just texts for speaking or singing. Try burning some incense as an enhancement.

If you have a favorite icon, cross, rosary or image of Jesus, putting holy artifacts in your worship space can help focus your prayer. A candle is always appropriate, as is inviting friends, family or loved ones to join you by phone or through social media. You may want to invite loved ones that we no longer see or saints that you admire.

If we were gathered physically, we might use Hymn #390 for our processional and you can find a sumptuous rendition as part of a celebration of the 60th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth’s coronation at: youtube.com/watch?v=0JvCmvlm-Qg Recorded at Westminster Abbey, you can’t get a lot more Anglican than that! For a different mood, there is a hymn based on the Hebrew Scripture reading, our Hymn #638, called “Come, O thou Traveler unknown.” There is a powerfully moving recording by the choir of St. Matthew, a Jesuit church in Bratislava, Slovakia, here: cyberspaceandtime.com/mylCWLT9qY4.video+related

Continuing on to another part of the world, the Matie Choir at Stellenbosch University (the most celebrated choir in South Africa) has posted a sung recording of the “Our Father” in Swahili (“Baba Yetu”) at: youtube.com/watch?v=PCa8RxaOPW8 I defy you to watch this and not smile with hope for this tired old world!

And then you might finish with this uplifting version of Hymn #146 from “Lift Every Voice and Sing” that many Episcopal churches use as a supplemental hymnal. A recording from a little closer to home done by young men at the Fountainview Academy, a Seventh Day Adventist secondary school near Lillooet, British Columbia. Our theologies vary a great deal, but when you listen to this: youtube.com/watch?v=djc3MUpRY6U those differences melt away for a minute and we can be content to be different without the need to demonize each other.

We are still working meticulously for the day when we can gather together in person at St. Elizabeth. Our buildings may be closed, but the church is open and actively seeking God’s creating inspiration. And so we pray together in the plural – “we,” “us” and “our” – even when we are worshipping by ourselves or temporarily apart from each other physically, because no matter what separates us – politically, geographically or economically – we are also always bound together in Christ.

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
2 August 2020

Centering

Make the sign of the cross as the leader says: Blessed be God; (+) Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever.

The leader prays:

O God,
with whom we wrestle until the break of day:
make us long to see your face
beyond the limits of our strength,
that in our wounds we may remember you,
and in your blessing, we may find ourselves;
through Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

The Word of God for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

A reading from Genesis: That same night [Jacob] arose, and taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After taking them across the stream, he sent across all his possessions. Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But he answered, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." Said the other, "What is your name?" He replied, "Jacob." Said he, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed." Jacob asked, "Pray tell me your name." But he said, "You must not ask my name!" And he took leave of him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, "I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping on his hip.



Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God

(The response: Prayed together or by alternating verses) Psalm 17: 1-7, 16

Listen, Yah, I speak with sincerity.
Attend to my singing;
pay heed to my prayer,
because I am not trying to fool You.
If I am to be judged,
let the judgment come from You;
Your eyes see and recognize honesty.

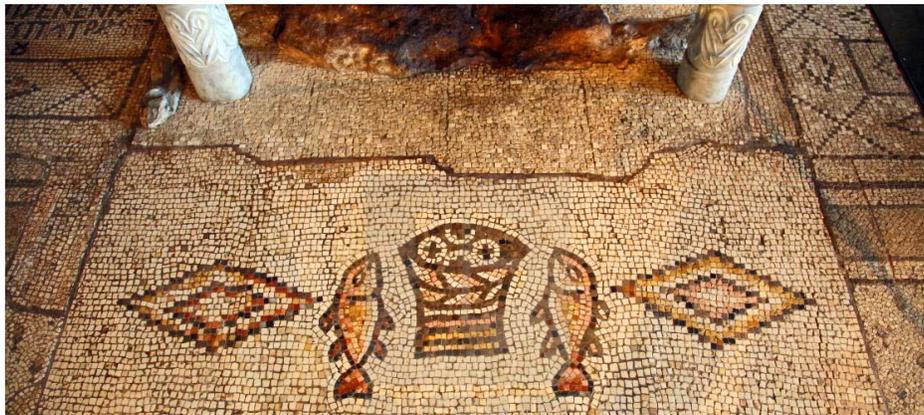
You have tested my heart;
You have taken hold of my conscience at night.
You took me apart and found no wrong;
You looked at the record of my speech
and found that it was true.
You've seen my actions,
Paid attention to what my lips said;
I saw that I kept myself
From the path of the outrageous ones.

You have supported my steps in Your path;
You kept me from stumbling,
So I call on You, that You might answer me, O God.
Incline Your ear to what I say;
with right arm put a barrier between me
and those who reared themselves up against me.
Staying honest, I will see Your Face;
being wide awake, I will drink in Your features.

A reading from Romans: I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God



The Gospel is the primary reading of the day and should always be read. Read the passage aloud without rushing. Allow the images to enter your awareness and find a home within.

A reading from Matthew: ...Jesus withdrew...in a boat to a deserted place by himself; and the crowds, hearing of this, followed him on foot from the cities. And on disembarking he saw a large crowd, and he was moved inwardly with compassion for them and healed the ill among them. But when evening arrived his disciples approached him, saying, "This is a desert place and the hour is already past; so send the crowd away so that they may go off into the villages and buy foodstuffs for themselves." But Jesus said to them, "They have not need to go away; you give them something to eat." But they say to him, "We have nothing here but five loaves of bread and two fishes." And he said, "Bring them here to me." And, having bidden the crowds to recline upon the grass, he took the five loaves and two fishes, looked up to heaven, pronounced a blessing, and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples to the crowds. And all ate and ate their fill; and they took up what was left over of the fragments, filling twelve baskets. And those eating were about five thousand men, not counting women and children.

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God

Sermon:

"Jacob was left alone."

Jacob, you see, had some work to do. There are some aspects of his character that he needed to reconsider. Jacob was at the edge of an opening for learning; a chance to take a searching and fearless moral inventory. For many of us, that critical reflection on our sense of who we are and who we were most deeply meant to be requires freeing ourselves from distractions that tempt us away from the necessary hard wrestling.

In short, it's the kind of work best done in isolation.

Now, clearly, we did not choose or plan for the isolation that we are now experiencing. COVID-19 has forced us into isolations from friends and family, and from cherished forms of worship that may leave behind long-term effects on mental health, our sense of security and the ways we "church" together. The resurgence of the civil rights movement is bringing an old fracture to our attention again. Our economy is in deep trouble and our political divisions are taking up a great deal of our attention.

And yet, even with all that swirling around us, if we choose to, we can move into this isolation determined to come out of it as stronger communities with greater compassion for each other. We can engage this isolation by deciding to be alone and to start wrestling like Jacob, which makes the situation more like chosen solitude and less like involuntary confinement.

Jacob has arranged his solitude. He is preparing to reunite with his brother Esau for the first time since he stole his brother's birthright. Isaac and Rebekah, you see, gave Jacob his name that means "grabber," or "supplanter" because at birth, he tried to pull his twin Esau back into the womb so that he would be the first-born; the one who inherited. When that didn't work, Jacob scammed a hungry and impatient Esau by trading a bowl of stew for his older brother's birthright and their father's blessing, effectively cheating Isaac as well as Esau. When Esau figured out that he had been robbed, he was furious and decided to murder Jacob.

As an adult, Jacob continued living true to his birthname. After marrying Leah and Rachel, he conned his Uncle Laban out of his best sheep. That led Jacob's cousins to start plotting against him. Laban himself was bit of a grifter, having tricked Jacob into marrying Leah before he allowed Jacob and Rachel to marry. Jacob and Uncle Laban had to make a truce with each other that called on God to see that they never cheated on each other ever again. That agreement didn't extend to everyone.

Eventually, Jacob realized that he had to return home. Over the years, he had manipulated people to accumulate wealth and family. After leaving home, he had a dream in which he saw a great staircase connecting heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending. That dream planted an impression within him that inspired him to begin living more honestly, though in this passage, he had only begun to take responsibility for his past behavior. He has not yet sought forgiveness from his brother, Esau, who has heard of Jacob's impending return.

And so, the time has come.

Jacob sends his considerable flocks of both livestock and children, his two wives and their servants, and all that he had across the Jabbok, a small tributary between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. These are all to be given gift to Esau in hopes of forgiveness.

And then, Jacob has to settle down with his conscience and the past that has caught up with him. He could choose to wallow in his guilt or to rationalize away his behavior or simply refuse to examine his part in the rift between himself and his twin.

Or he could use his time more constructively.

Jacob was left alone.

And then suddenly, something quite unexpected happened. A being of some sort wrestles with Jacob. The figure may be a man or an angel, or maybe a manifestation of God or some other form of spiritual energy; scripture is a bit vague. Jacob and the mysterious figure struggle through the night at a stream, a wadi, that flows only when fed by rainwater rather than a living river like the Jordan. They wrestle until near daybreak when the entity gives Jacob a new name: Israel, which means "one who struggles with God."

The struggle, the temporary water, the new name – all this evokes an image of Jacob being reborn.

Now, the ancient world often understood a name to be an indicator of a person's character. So if Jacob was nothing more than a "grabber," someone who deceived others so he could take what was theirs, this new birth could have simply resulted in a rehabilitated "Jacob." If that's who he most deeply was, there would be no need to immortalize the fact that he had prevailed; that he had won, even if he left the encounter with a wrenched hip socket.

But the mysterious figure did give him a new name: "Israel," meaning "one who struggles with God."

The implication is that, while the name Jacob, meaning "the one who acts crookedly," was partially true about him, certainly from his birth to his middle age, there was a deeper truth with which he actually struggled until this moment. "Israel," or "one who struggles with God," emerged into the light of the new day, no longer a stranger to the person that God intended for him to be, even as he limped away to his family.

From this day on, Israel can know himself as God has known him from the beginning. This is what liberates him from his reputation and his previous self-image so that he can go to his brother with humility. In the days to come, he will reconcile with his brother, fulfilling God's yearning for him. Even so, scripture will go on referring to him by both names: Jacob and Israel. He has become not a perfect man, but rather a liberated man at peace with himself and his God.

He is no longer left alone.

And neither are we.

While this pandemic continues to rage and as righteous impatience over racism spills into the streets, and our political differences are being mightily strained, there is a great deal to tend to. And while we must express our love for our fellow human being by staying away from each other, we are never truly isolated.

We have before us an opening for learning. We can engage this time of increased solitude to set worldly distractions aside for a period of fearless self-inventory and introspection. We would do well to wrestle with our anxieties, to struggle with our own participation in racism or prejudice, or in some other way to plumb our own depths for the yearning that God has planted there for us. In the depths of our souls, too, there is a great deal to tend to.

The questions are less about *who* or *what* we are wrestling with and are much more about who *we* are in our struggles. Whatever we wrestle with in these moments, we are ultimately wrestling with our understanding of God.

The story of Jacob, of Israel and of all the descendants of Abraham, come to that, is a story about what it is to be a conduit, a carrier, of God's blessings for the world. The story of Israel doesn't romanticize suffering or downplay the difficult work of discernment. The resulting wounds are not limiting wounds. Rather, they are openings through which God's grace can pour into us and through us for God's reconciling purposes.

We *will* suffer in the weeks and months ahead. And even if we work to the edges of our capability, God's blessing will not always arise quickly. Just know this...trust this...God is present. Even as we grow tired and the night seems unending, God wrestles *with* us, not against us, to see that blessing prevails. *Our* struggles become God's and God's become ours, so that our mutual struggles may become channels of grace for others as a part of who we most deeply are: we are children of God.

Stillness and silence

The Nicene Creed

Leader: Let us reaffirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God,

the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:

by the power of the Holy Spirit

he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he (or “she” or no pronoun) is worshiped and glorified.

He (she/who) has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need

These intercessions may be used, adding others in each household:

Leader: Through baptism we have been made alive in Christ Jesus. With the breath of the Holy Spirit speaking through our renewed lives, we pray for the whole state of Christ's church and the world, saying: "LORD, have mercy."

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for the new Province of Alexandria, created from the former Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa in the Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East.

In the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer, we pray for the St. James Family Center, Cathlamet; Annie Wright School, Tacoma.

For the church, that we might be faithful, willing to serve, constant in grace, and receptive to newness, let us pray to the LORD.

All: LORD, have mercy.

Leader: We pray for our neighbors at Navos, for Neighborhood House, for Hospitality House, for Operation Nightwatch, and for the safety of those in military service, for the safety and stamina of healthcare workers, for first responders, and for their families. We pray for those on our long-term list. Let us pray for our own needs and those of others, offered silently or aloud.

Leader: For this congregation, that we might be eager to welcome, diligent in prayer, and generous in deed, let us pray to the LORD.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For our nation, town and neighborhood, that we might be advocates for the excluded, diligent in prayer, defenders of liberty and models of justice.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For those who lament the iniquity of racism, those who protest the brutality of hateful speech and deadly action; for those working for racial justice and harmony, and for the courage to examine our own prejudices, inviting the Holy Spirit to free us from them.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For those experiencing homelessness, unemployment or under-employment, and those without healthcare or food stability.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For those who grieve, for those isolated in care facilities, those in prison, those suffering from addiction and those who are despondent.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For those in dangerous occupations, for those who care for the sick, those who work the land, those who work in transportation, warehouse or delivery services and those who teach.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For our families and all those placed in our care, for those with whom we disagree, and for those who are examples of grace in our lives.

All: LORD have mercy.

A period of silence follows and then, leader: Gracious God, you are the bread of heaven, giving life to the world. You fill our emptiness with your goodness. You come to our weakness with your strength. Come, refresh, renew, restore us through Christ Jesus, our brother, who You and the Holy Spirit, lives in glory, One God, everlasting. *Amen.*

Leader: Let us confess our sins to God.

Silence may be kept and then all together:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father:

We have sinned against you,

through our own fault,

in thought, and word, and deed,

and in what we have left undone.

For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,

forgive us all our offenses; and grant that we may serve you

in newness of life,

to the glory of your Name. *Amen.*

Leader: May the Almighty God grant us forgiveness of all our sins, and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*



Pater Noster/Our Father/The Lord's Prayer

Please feel free to use the translation and language that most feeds your heart.

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, the power and the glory,

for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of spiritual communion

Most Holy Christ, we trust that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

We love you above all things, and we long for you in our souls. Since we cannot at this

moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into our hearts. We embrace you

as though you were already there and we unite ourselves entirely to you. Never permit us to

be separated from you. *Amen.*

Concluding Prayer

Lord, our God, in the confusion and loneliness of this world, you do not cease to gather with your word a holy people from every land, city and nation, so that in charity they may offer worship pleasing to you. Keep the flock you have gathered, preserve it in your love, now and forever. *Amen.*

Blessing

Make the sign of the cross as you say: The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that God has given us. May the blessing of God (+), Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us and those for whom we pray, this day and for ever. *Amen.*

Giving Thanks at Table

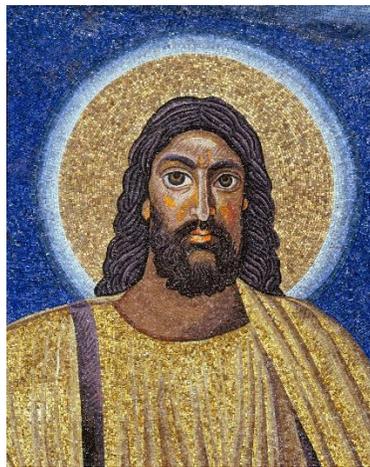
Leader: Every eye looks to You, O Lord.

All: You are the One who gives them their food in due time.

You are the One who opens Your hand
and fills every living thing with Your favor.

Bless us, + O Lord, and these Your gifts which we are about to receive
from Your goodness, through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.



“In the quietness of life,
When the flowers have shut their eye,
And a stainless breadth of sky
Bends above the hill of strife,
Then, my God, my chiefest Good,
Breathe upon my loneliness:
Let the shining silence be
Filled with Thee, my God, with Thee.”

~ **Rev. Percy Ainsworth**

Offerings

Just a reminder: There are many ways to continue to invest in our shared ministry at St. Elizabeth during this time apart. You can still send your pledge or gift to P.O. Box 66579, Burien, Wash., 98166 or you can find us on Givlify.com. You can also find us at <https://resources.ecww.org/> Your gift will help to provide upkeep and maintenance of the building and grounds; allow church staff to maintain our ministry; ensure that normal operations can resume when the time comes. If you want to make a gift to the Rector's Discretionary Fund, which we use for those who have emergency needs, please indicate that on your check.

Sources and references:

Opening essay image: photo of Br. David Steindl-Rast.

“Preparation” image: detail of choral book from Benedictine monastery of Lorch, 16th c.

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Gospel image: 3rd or 4th c. C.E. mosaic at the base of the altar in the Church of the Multiplication at Tabgha on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Israel.

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“Pater Noster” image: photo of Pater Noster in Swahili at Carmelite monastery, Domaine de l'Eleona, Jerusalem.

Prayer of Spiritual Communion: adapted from a prayer by St. Alphonsus Liguori

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Concluding image: 6th c. mosaic of Jesus in church of Santi Cosma e Damiano, Rome.

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