



THE GOOD NEWS

San Marcos
Lutheran Church

July 2026

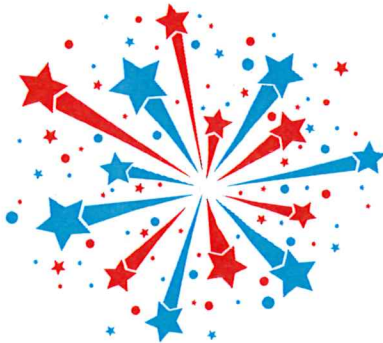
Our Mission: "To know, accept and live the love of God and share it with others"

July Highlights



Saturdays of Sisterhood

Saturday, July 4th
10am in Luther Hall



Come join us!

Saturday, July 4th
approx 7pm-930pm
to watch fireworks

in a family-friendly environment.

Invite your friends & neighbors!

We are currently accepting donations of cases of soft drinks and individual snacks. Volunteers needed to help the day of event. Contact Pr Casey or Aimee in the office to help!

Pr Casey's Outdoor Office Hours

Tuesday, July 21st
5pm-7pm
Draft Republic, San Marcos

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid. — Micah 4:3b-4a

It feels like everywhere we turn, there is a giant red, white, and blue 250—on t-shirts, on paper plates, on signage, on social media, everywhere. I even learned the word semiquincentennial for the occasion! Our nation is celebrating the 250th anniversary of its founding with great fanfare. The Fourth of July is not a feast of the Church, but it is an important opportunity for reflection.

Much has been mythologized about the founders of this nation—including one of my favorite musicals, Lin-Manuel Miranda's 11-Tony-award-winner, *Hamilton*. Their names and faces are on currency, monuments, buildings, universities, and doctrines. They are larger than life in our national consciousness.

Similarly to how we sometimes regard the communion of saints, we can forget the everyday nature of these figures, and presume that all they ever did was make grand pronouncements about Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. But just like us, and just like those who have gone before us in faith, these folks were simultaneously saints and sinners. These were men with world-changing ideas about freedom and equality, but with a shortsightedness as to who was included in the concept of "all."

The story of our nation's history is one of incremental progress, of the opening of doors for more and more of God's beloved children, step by step. Groups who were excluded came together to demand their inclusion—to insist that they, too, had been "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." Piece by piece, we have worked toward being equal to the aspirational values of our nation's founding.

Part of the group project that is American life is continuing this fight. 19th-century poet Emma Lazarus wrote *The New Colossus*, famously found on the Statue of Liberty. You know the one: "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." She is also credited (though so are several other great workers of words) with saying that none of us are free until all of us are free.

This declaration of interdependence is essential to our life as followers of Jesus. In a culture that praises the Individual and rewards selfishness, we have to remind one another that we are all in this together. That as a community, a collective, the Body of Christ in the world, we are capable of so much more when we join our hearts and hands.

This is the countercultural gift that we, as Christians, offer to this country. Jesus invites us to set aside the race to the top, to refuse to step on one another as we climb. Instead, he pronounces blessing on those who make peace and who offer mercy. Suffragist Mary Church Terrell wrote that "lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go." As a rising tide lifts all boats, all the changes made in our communities should bring everyone along, leaving no one behind. Love leads the way.

We will celebrate our nation as well as our neighborhood on the Fourth, hosting our annual Parking Lot Fireworks Watch Party. We'll play some games, hear some music, eat some snacks, and otherwise enjoy each other's company. Bring a friend and a chair!

Peace,
Pastor Casey

San Marcos Lutheran Church

3419 Grand Avenue San Marcos, CA 92078
(760) 727-1509

office@sanmarcoslutheran.org
www.sanmarcoslutheran.org



All are Welcome! As a community of the people of God, the members of San Marcos Lutheran Church welcome all people, regardless of age, economic status, ethnic background, gender, physical or mental ability, race or sexual orientation. We affirm that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female." (Galatians 3:28)

Pastor Casey Kloehn Dunsworth

Office Manager: Aimee Hudlow Musician: Justin Hershey
Bookkeeper: Cristen Mugford Choir Director: Max Chodos
Communications: Adriana Alfaro

Council Members

Dan Norris, President	Ed Mossuto
Kelly Van Jen, Vice Pres.	Devin Hogan
Anne Voth, Secretary	Donna Johnson
Beda Farell, Treasurer	Sharon Phelps
Brother Jack Anderson	Esther Daniels

To contact any Council members, email
council@sanmarcoslutheran.org

San Marcos Lutheran Preschool
preschool@sanmarcoslutheran.org
(760)727-0326

Director: Ann Leong
Teachers: Roxy Maldonado, Marlene
Vazquez, & Elle Kim



Remember in Prayer:

Christine Buma, Sue Check, Crystal, Eunice Choi, Celia Genishi, Jolene Hanson, the Holtz family, Pete Johnson, Gary Kloehn, Karin Kloehn, Larry, Deborah McGregor, Maddie, Alvar Roy, Jean Russell, David Russell, Marilynne Smith, Dawn Steele, Stephanie, Marilyn Schwarz, Nick Torres, Kelly Van Jen.

PLEASE CONTACT US!

We want to include you in our prayers, arrange for pastoral visits, and inform the congregation, when appropriate. Please notify the Church Office (760)727-1509 when:

- A loved one or someone you know dies
- You, or someone you know is ill or grieving
- You, or someone you know is in the hospital
- You want to plan a baptism, wedding, or celebration
- You moved or contact info has changed.

For urgent needs, contact Pastor Casey at cell:
442-222-1194

Lutheran Fellowship Lunch

Everyone is invited for good food and fellowship with First Lutheran of Vista. We will meet on Monday, July 13th at 12pm at PEGAH's Kitchen at 955 S Santa Fe, in Vista. It will be order from the menu and they have a great selection. Any Questions contact Bill Hanson,

760-805-4565. Hope to see you there!



Saturdays of Sisterhood

Saturdays of Sisterhood meets on
Saturday, July 4th from 10-11:30 AM.

Saturdays of Sisterhood is a bible study designed by women, for women, about women. It includes fellowship, bible reading, sharing of ideas, prayer, and fun.

We will not meet in August, but will resume on
Sept. 5th

No need to RSVP a spot, all women are welcome!
Questions? Contact Karin Kupka

Financial Update

Social Action



End of May 2026 - 41.7% of Year

Income

Annual Budget	Actual YTD	% of Budget
\$308,160	\$120,302	39.04%

Expenses

Annual Budget	Actual YTD	% of Budget
\$322,368	\$129,598	40.20%

Thank you for your generous gifts which support the mission and ministry of San Marcos Lutheran Church!

Celebration of Life for Grace Holtz
 Saturday, August 1, 2026- 12pm
 at SMLC (Reception following)

Please join Gene and the family in giving thanks to God for Grace's 89 years of life and the way she blessed so many people with her welcoming spirit, warm smile and giving nature.

Council Update

Hello SMLC! Here are the updates for the June Council meeting.

The Council met on June 24th for our regular monthly meeting. The Council accepted and/or approved the submitted minutes and reports. The council had 1 item of business that was discussed. After a review of the financial statements and situation of the congregation, the council discussed and prioritized options that could be investigated to provide larger sustainable income for the congregation. Several potential items were discussed and the Council approved a motion to begin investigation into these items. After investigation, recommendations will be discussed at future Council meetings before presentation to the congregation for approval. Any questions around this issue can be shared with me at council@sanmarcoslutheran.org or in person.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as president for 2026 and for your continued support of SMLC, our Council, Pastor Casey, and the staff.

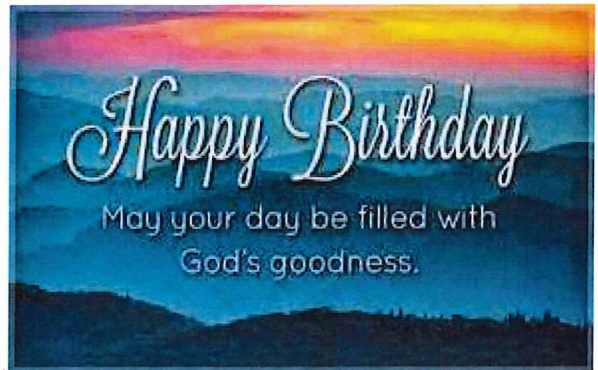
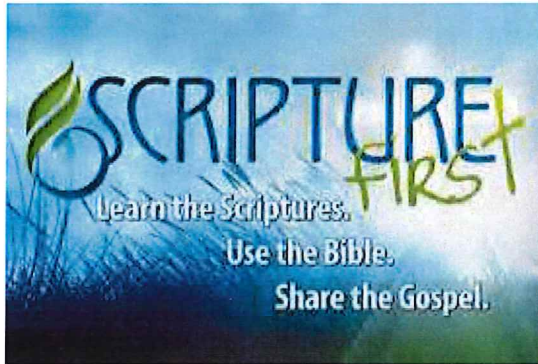
Daniel Norris, President

ALL SAINTS FOOD PANTRY

Thanks to the generous contributions from the members of All Saints Episcopal and San Marcos Lutheran Church, we had enough ketchup and mustard for everyone this month.

For July, we'd like to continue to focus on summer and picnic items that are unavailable or in short supply at the Food Bank: assorted pasta for salads or pasta salad mix, tuna, tea bags or iced tea mix, baked beans, cheese dip and chips, and a special request for nuts for baking or snacking.

Our clients are always so happy for the many choices they have. Our volunteers offer smiles and a kind word, and our clients always leave with smiles along with their bags of food. Thank you for continuing to support this ministry.



July 5 6th Sunday after Pentecost

First Reading: Zech 9:9-12
Second Reading: Romans 7:15-25a
Gospel: Matt 11:16-19, 25-30

July 12 7th Sunday after Pentecost

First Reading: Isa 55:10-13
Second Reading: Romans 8:1-11
Gospel: Matt 13:1-9, 18-23

July 19 8th Sunday after Pentecost

First Reading: Isa 44:6-8
Second Reading: Romans 8:12-25
Gospel: Matt 13:24-30, 36-43

July 26 9th Sunday after Pentecost

First Reading: 1 Kings 3:5-12
Second Reading: Romans 8:26-39
Gospel: Matt 13:31-33, 44-52

- 7/1 Victoria Shoup
- 7/7 Cindy Angelini
- 7/7 Deborah Finney
- 7/7 Cheryl Johnson
- 7/10 Corrie Lott
- 7/13 Sue Check
- 7/14 Andre Rivas
- 7/16 Aimee Hudlow
- 7/18 Evelyn Derganc
- 7/18 Lynne Jaseph
- 7/19 Miles Nolan
- 7/19 John Walsh
- 7/23 Alvar Roy
- 7/25 Lindsey Proskow
- 7/26 Kevin Angelini
- 7/29 Hannah Liu
- 7/30 Sharon Phelps

**The next Newsletter article deadline
is July 15th**

SAN MARCOS LUTHERAN CHURCH INVITES YOU TO OUR

Community
FOURTH of JULY
Firework
Watch Party

parking lot opens at 7pm
city of san marcos firework show starts at 9pm

3419 GRAND AVENUE
SAN MARCOS, CA 92078

office@sanmarcoslutheran.org
760-727-1509

free parking



for more info:



NO ALCOHOL, FIREWORKS, OR SPARKLERS ALLOWED

SERVICE
PROJECTS

COMMUNITY
CLEAN UP

HELP US DREAM BIG!

CARE
PACKAGES

God's Work. Our Hands.

FOOD
PANTRY
SUPPORT

BRAINSTORM SESSION

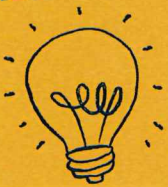


Sunday,
July 19th



Immediately following worship in
Luther Hall

NEW
IDEAS!



Join us for a brief (about 10 minutes) brainstorming session as we begin planning for **God's Work. Our Hands. Sunday on September 13th.**



Do you know of a local nonprofit that could use support? Are you involved with a service organization?



Have ideas for on-site projects in our community or projects we can do right here in Luther Hall?



Whether it's something we've done before, something new, big or small; all ideas are welcome!

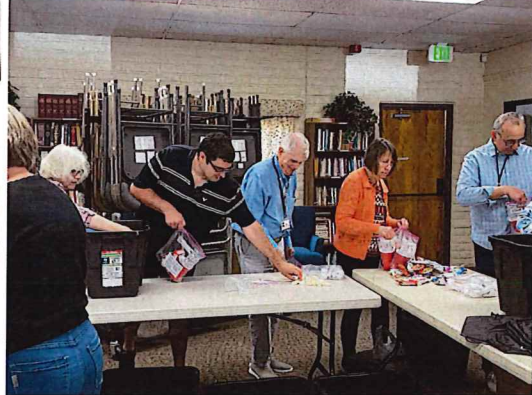
ALL IDEAS WELCOME!

TOGETHERNESS—A BLESSING BAG EVENT: SUNDAY, JULY 19th

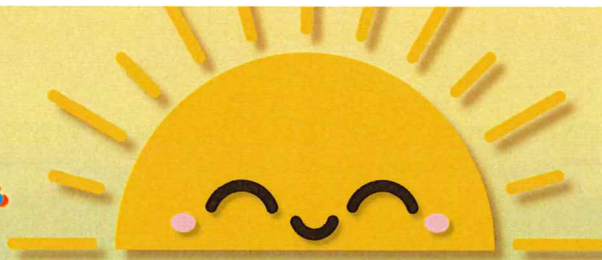
This continuing event has been sustained by the generosity of the people of this congregation. It all began in 2016. Marilyn and Patti Pulver showed us how this worked out at All Saints Episcopal Church. Over the past ten years we have assembled and distributed over 3000 bags.

In addition to nutritional benefits that were given to the recipients, this group activity has been a team-building exercise: we got to know each other better and witness each other's inner spirit.

As we continue to honor Jesus' words to care for "*the least of these*" in our community, I'd like to give special thanks and acknowledgement to Ann and Adam Holmberg for their extra efforts. Please join us for a joyous event! — Br. Jack



KIDS EDITION!



INTERFAITH'S SUMMER OF SERVICE

School's out, but the good vibes are on!
Come hang with Interfaith Community Services and turn a few hours into a huge community impact. Log 3 or more shifts and you will earn an official Interfaith Summer Service Hours Certificate.
Perfect for the brag board and those future college apps!

PANTRY PARTY CREW!

Crank the tunes, sort the goods, and keep our shelves stocked like pros

When: Mon, Wed, Fri, 1-2 PM or 2-3 PM
Where: Interfaith HQ, Escondido
550 W. Washington Ave
Escondido, Ca 92025

We supply the speaker and you supply the playlist!



SNACK PACK SUPERHEROES!

Assemble grab-and-go snack bags that fuel our neighbors on busy days.

When: Mon, Wed, Fri, 1-2 PM or 2-3 PM
Where: Interfaith's Development Building
2215 Auto Parkway
Escondido, Ca 92029

Challenge your friends to see who can pack the neatest snack pack (quality counts!).



LUNCH BUNCH LEGENDS

Kid + parent team up to serve lunch for clients in our Recuperative Care Program.
Age 10 years and up

When: Mon-Fri, 11:15 AM-1 PM
Where: 555 N Centre City Pkwy, Escondido, CA 92025

What you'll do: Plate meals, hand them out, chat with guests, and help tidy up= instant hero status.



KINDNESS CARD CREATORS

Grab markers, get artsy, and sprinkle smiles everywhere.
Craft uplifting notes and doodles for every snack bag and hygiene kit.

When: Mon, Wed, Fri, 1-2 PM or 2-3 PM
Where: Interfaith's Development Building
2215 Auto Parkway
Escondido, Ca 92029

Your artwork might be the exact boost someone needs today!



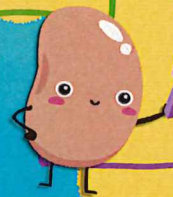
interfaith
Community Services

Scoop-Squad Rockstars

Scoop, portion, and bag rice, beans and pet food for local families.

When: Mon, Wed, Fri, 1-2 PM or 2-3 PM
Where: Interfaith HQ, Escondido
550 W. Washington Ave
Escondido, Ca 92025

Bonus: Level up to Scoop Champion status-bragging rights included!



Ready to jump in?

www.signupgenius.com/go/interfaithsummerkids2026

Signup here!

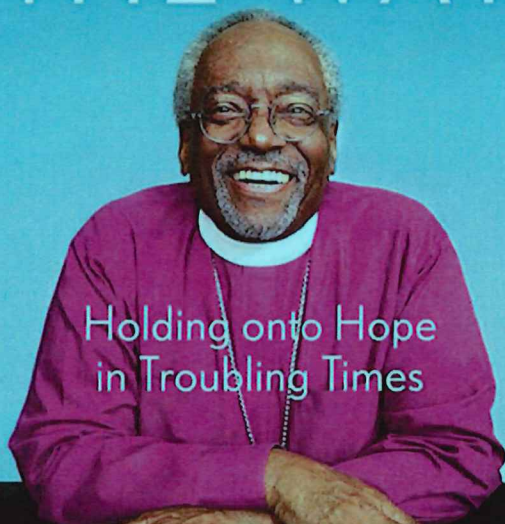
Pick your shifts! You can mix and match as you like!
Let's make this the most memorable, feel good summer ever! See you in the pantry, snack station or lunch line!
If you have any questions or would like to share your fun playlist: email Maria at mespinoza@interfaithservices.org

PASTOR CASEY'S

BOOK CLUB



LOVE IS THE WAY



Holding onto Hope
in Troubling Times

BISHOP MICHAEL CURRY

PRESIDING BISHOP OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

with SARA GRACE



**SUNDAY,
JULY 12**



**DURING
COMMUNITY TIME**
after worship



LUTHER HALL



Copies available through the San Diego County Library.

If you choose to purchase the book, consider supporting a local bookstore, Bookshop.org, or Libro.fm.

2026

JULY

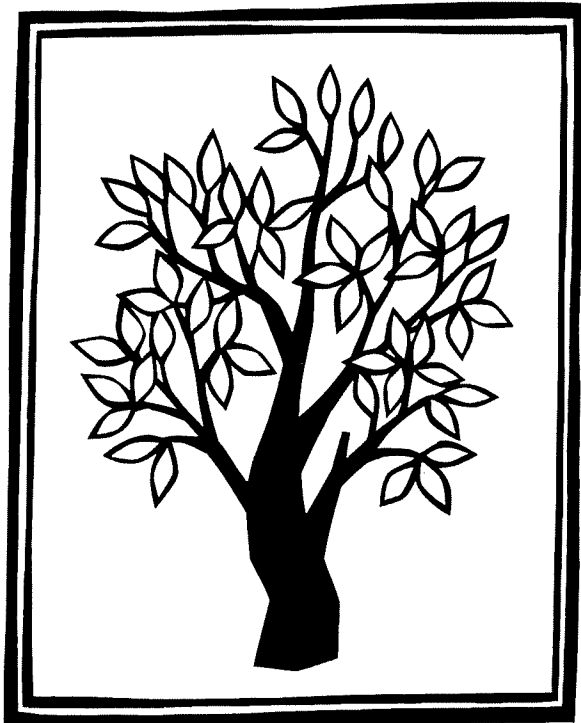
SUNDAY

CALENDAR YEAR

CALENDAR MONTH

FIRST DAY OF WEEK

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28	29	30	01 12pm-AA- LH	02	03 12pm-AA- LH	04 10am- Sat of Sister- LH 7pm- Fireworks Watch Party
05 10am- Worship Service 11:15- Community time	06 12pm-AA- LH	07 7-9pm- Music Men- LH	08 12pm-AA- LH 130pm- SAC mtg- Conf 6-8pm- AA Leadership Mtg-LH	09	10 12pm-AA- LH	11 6-9pm AA- LH
12 10am- Worship Service 11:15- Community time	13 12pm-AA- LH	14 7-9pm- Music Men- LH	15 12pm-AA- LH	16	17 12pm-AA- LH	18 11am- Lattin Memorial- SA 6-9pm AA- LH
19 10am- Worship Service 11:15- Community time	20 12pm-AA- LH	21 5-7pm- Pr Casey's Office Hours- DR 7-9pm- Music Men- LH	22 12pm-AA- LH	23	24 12pm-AA- LH	25 6-9pm AA- LH
26 10am- Worship Service 11:15- Community time	27 12pm-AA- LH	28 7-9pm- Music Men- LH	29 12pm-AA- LH	30	31 12pm-AA- LH	01
02	03	04	05	06	07	08



A SUMMER DEVOTION: July

As we move through the summer months and find ourselves in Ordinary Time on the Church calendar, the Sundays may begin to run together. Perhaps you'll be traveling, or have loved ones visiting you, and will not participate in worship as often as you usually do. These weekly devotions, reflecting on selected scripture from the Revised Common Lectionary, are intended to enrich your weeks—whether you attend worship or not.

Each week includes five components: a passage of scripture, a reflection by Pastor Casey, questions for reflection, actions you might take, and a prayer.

For those who do attend worship in person, consider sticking around for Community Time to chat about your answers to the questions or the actions you took that week.



JULY 5, 2026 – SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Zechariah 9:9-12

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

and the war horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,

and he shall command peace to the nations;

his dominion shall be from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;

today I declare that I will restore to you double.

REFLECTION

This text from the sixth-century prophet Zechariah might paint a familiar picture to you, of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday. This prophecy is one of the reasons why many of the people Jesus encountered expected the Messiah to be a mighty warrior king, not a healer preaching compassion and nonviolence.

But the king of this prophecy is also promised to "command peace to the nations" which sounds a little more like the Prince of Peace we expect. We are in the season of Ordinary Time in the middle of summer, not Lent or Holy Week, but this text draws us there.

The reason Jesus paraded into Jerusalem on a donkey was to directly juxtapose and even satirize the ostentatious military parades of the Romans. This simple entry, humbly riding a dusty donkey rather than a gleaming war horse, points to Jesus as an alternative to the oppressive leadership of the empire. He is building a kingdom of humility, gentleness, peace, and hope.

But back to the original audience of Zechariah, the Israelites in exile. I was so intrigued, as I read this, by the phrase "prisoners of hope" used to describe them. At first glance, that doesn't seem to make sense. How could one be a prisoner of hope? Isn't hope a good thing?

All these people had was the hope that their God would rescue them and bring them home. And for many long years, this hope was not fulfilled. They spent their days wondering if this would be the day of their liberation, or if they would languish further. This in-between state of unknowing could have begun to feel like a prison. But God promises to set the prisoners free and restore them double! So their hope has come to fruition after all!

The Babylonian Empire eventually fell. The Roman Empire eventually fell. All empires eventually fall, but God's reign—marked by love, freedom, and peace—is eternal.

QUESTIONS

Have you ever felt like a prisoner of hope? Maybe you find yourself hoping against hope now, waiting a long time for God to bring about restoration in your life or in the life of someone you love. How are you sustained in this time of waiting?

ACTION

When we feel hopeless, it is helpful to do something to help someone in need. This reminds us of our connectedness to one another, and that our struggles are eased when we refuse to be isolated by them. What community connection can you build today?

Gather something to donate to the food bank grocery cart at church this Sunday; send a note of encouragement to someone in immigration detention; contribute to the pastor's discretionary fund,

which helps members of our congregation in financial need; bring some flowers or food from your garden to a neighbor, just because. I'm sure you can think of a hopeful action!

PRAYER

God of hope, we rejoice in the freedom only you offer. Restore us to good spirits and bring us your peace. Amen.



JULY 12, 2026—SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Isaiah 55:10-13

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle,
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

REFLECTION

When I was a pastoral intern, during my third year of seminary, I served at a congregation in suburban Denver. I gathered every week with the other pastors in our conference (the neighboring suburbs), to study the scripture for the following Sunday and to engage in some sort of discussion or spiritual practice. The leadership of each rotated throughout the group, until one week it was my turn.

I decided to "go out in joy" by asking my colleagues to reflect on the last week and share something that they did that brought them joy.

After I asked this question, it was silent for...quite a while.

The twenty or so of them looked at each other and realized that they could not readily think of an answer—and boy, did that lead to a different discussion!

We wondered about why it was that we were so able to go about our busy lives without ensuring that we were enjoying ourselves occasionally! We spent time talking about the people who bring us great joy: our church community, our families, our friends, our favorite artists and musicians.

We shared the activities that bring us joy, that we move in and out of prioritizing: photography, music, dancing, gardening, writing. We were reminded about how close we are to those people and things, and that it can be as simple as choosing them over one last work email, one more scroll of our social media feeds, or one more chore that does not actually have to be accomplished right this second.

It is true that not every day or week or month will be full of joy—life is more complex than that.

We are likely, though, to make time for anger, fear, frustration, and other emotions that upset us. It can be hard to imagine a life where the mountains and the hills are bursting into song, or the trees are clapping their hands.

God promises to restore us to a world like that. So let's tap into a little bit of that in the here and now. Whenever we can, let's choose joy. Let's build peace.

QUESTIONS

Think back over the last week. What gave you the greatest joy? Where did you experience peace? Which of those feelings is easier for you to access? Which do you have to work harder to cultivate?

ACTION

Choose joy or peace—or both! Decide on one action you can take that will reshape your week to be a little more joyful or a little more peaceful. If you need help thinking of what to do, think about a friend or neighbor who is especially joyful or peaceful, and ask them for a suggestion!

PRAYER

God of peace, we rejoice in your presence. Carry us through all the hills and valleys of our lives, until we find rest in you. Amen.



JULY 19, 2026—EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Psalm 86:12-17

I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.

For great is your steadfast love toward me;
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant;
save the child of your maidservant.

Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

REFLECTION

The Book of Psalms, also called the Psalter, is the first book of the Ketuvim, the third section of the Hebrew Bible in the Christian Old Testament. Many of the psalms were meant to be sung while playing a stringed instrument like a harp. Psalms are either communal—using “we” pronouns—or individual—using “I” pronouns. Scholars debate the number of “types” of psalms, ranging from as few as three to more than ten.

The richness of the psalms offers us so many ways to speak to God about what is going on in our lives; we may not have the exact experiences that the psalm writers (called psalmists) are describing, but we can relate to the emotions they display.

The psalms are hopeful, desperate, grateful, angry, afraid, and everything in between. They are proof that you can say anything you think or feel to God, because someone has already written something similar in a psalm!

You do not have to hold back your emotions from your prayers. In fact, if you are struggling to express yourself to God, the psalms can be a great place to find the words you're looking for.

QUESTIONS

Is there an existing psalm that is your favorite? What about it speaks to you? If you were going to write a psalm, what would you say?

ACTION

It's your turn! There are many types of psalms, but let's try writing either a psalm of thanksgiving or a psalm of lament, as one of those probably speaks to you at the moment.

Each genre of psalm shares a similar structure, and you can use this same structure to write yours. You do not have to use "biblical" language to write your psalm, especially if that feels too formal for how you prefer to communicate with God. But if there are turns of phrase you read in the psalms that you would like to borrow, go right ahead.

Spend some time reading the examples and contemplating what you might write. You do not have to share your psalm with me or with anyone (though you can!) so feel free to let loose and be honest.

Psalms of Lament

Examples: 3, 6, 13, 31, 54, 79, 106, 137

Structure

- Address to God
- Description of Complaint(s)
- Confession of Trust in God
- Petition for Help
- Reiteration of Trust / Vow to testify to God's power

Psalms of Thanksgiving

Examples: 92, 107, 116, 118, 124, 138

Structure

- Praise of God
- Narrative
- Distress
- Cry for help
- God's response
- Prayer for Deliverance from future Distress

When you're done, try praying your psalm aloud to God.

PRAYER

Good and gracious God, thank you for listening. Encourage us to keep coming to you with our laments and our thanks. Amen.



JULY 26, 2026—NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Romans 8:35-39

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is one of my favorite passages in all of scripture.

I will take any and every opportunity to cite it, to preach about it, to remind myself of it, to shout it at the top of my lungs!

A lot of people, over the millennia, have wondered if something about them—a fact of their existence, a choice they made, an action they took, or something they failed to do—has made them unlovable by God. The answer has always been, is now, and will always be: no! Nothing, and I mean *nothing* can ever separate us from the love of God poured out in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is more than one hymn written using these words—does one come to your mind? My favorite is either Marty Haugen's "Neither Death Nor Life" (ELW 622) or the Taizé song "Nothing Can Trouble" which is based on St. Teresa of Avila's writings on this scripture.

In both, it is clear that God loves us unconditionally, and that we need nothing more than this love from God. I find that immensely reassuring, as we live in a culture that tries desperately to tell us otherwise.

The world says we are not good enough and never will be, but that we should try all kinds of things (and spend a lot of money on them!) to see if we can improve ourselves enough to be worthy. What a trap!

Our first and most important identity is as beloved children of God. We don't earn that, and we can't lose it.

QUESTIONS

Have you doubted the truth of these words? What was it that you thought separated you from the love of God? Have you had the opportunity to remind someone else, in their doubt, of this truth?

ACTION

Write out these words, or your own more personal paraphrase, and keep them somewhere where you can return to them. Maybe that's in a journal, maybe on a post-it note on your bathroom mirror, maybe stuck to your refrigerator—your choice! Remind yourself as Paul does and as I do that nothing separates you from God's love. Nothing!

PRAYER

God of love, thank you for holding us close—no matter what. Continue to pour out your love, so that we might share it with others. Amen.

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