

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Called together to follow Jesus, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

Cultivate humility in your church. In gatherings of every size, teach us to boast only in the cross. Shape your church to be people of kindness, generosity, and justice. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

The foundations of the earth bear witness to your faithfulness; the mountains and hills echo with your holiness. When we mistreat your creation, show us the error of our ways. Inspire us with reverent awe to honor all you have made. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You make foolish the wisdom of the world. Raise up honorable leaders who seek justice, love mercy, and pursue peace. Frustrate plans that are corrupt, wicked, and self-seeking. Prosper the work of peacemakers (*local and international reconciliation efforts may be named*). Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Preparing for Next Week

Monday Psalm 37:1-17. **Tuesday** James 5:1-6. **Wednesday** Ruth 3:1-13; 4:13-22. **Thursday** (Presentation of Our Lord) Luke 2:22-40. **Friday** (commemoration of Ansgar, Bishop of Hamburg, missionary to Denmark and Sweden, died 865) James 3:13-18. **Saturday** Isaiah 29:13-16. **Fifth Sunday after Epiphany** (commemoration of the Martyrs of Japan, died 1597) Isaiah 58:1-9a [9b-12]; Psalm 112:1-9 [10]; 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 [13-16]; Matthew 5:13-20.

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Bless all whom the world rejects. Accompany those who are regarded as foolish, weak, low, and despised; reveal your power and presence at work where it is least expected. Give your life, strength, and wisdom to all in need (*especially*). Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

As with your people Israel, remind this congregation of your saving acts. Remind us how your faithfulness brought us through difficulties and sustained us despite our weaknesses. Establish the cross as the center of our life together. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Praise to you for your blessed saints in every time and place (*especially*). Trusting you accompanied them in poverty, persecution, and in every trial, we trust you abide with your people always. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

We bring to you our needs and hopes, O God, trusting your wisdom and power revealed in Christ crucified. **Amen.**



Celebrate

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 29, 2023

Who are the blessed ones of God? For Micah, they are those who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. For Paul, they are the ones who find wisdom in the weakness of the cross. For Jesus, they are the poor, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who mourn, and those who hunger for righteousness. In baptism we find our blessed identity and calling in this countercultural way of living and serving.

Prayer of the Day

Holy God, you confound the world's wisdom in giving your kingdom to the lowly and the pure in heart. Give us such a hunger and thirst for justice, and perseverance in striving for peace, that in our words and deeds the world may see the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

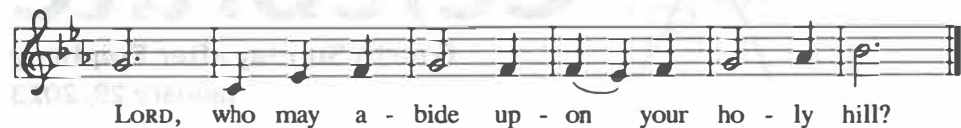
First Reading

Micah 6:1-8

With the mountains and the foundations of the earth as the jury, God brings a lawsuit against Israel. God has "wearied" Israel with a long history of saving acts. God does not want or expect lavish sacrifices to attempt to earn divine favor. Rather God empowers the people to do justice, to love loyalty to God, and to walk shrewdly in God's service.

Hear what the LORD says:
Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.
2Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the LORD has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.
3"O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you?
Answer me!
4For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.
5O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,

and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the LORD."
6"With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
7Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
8He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?



LORD, who may dwell in your ¹ tabernacle?
 Who may abide upon your ¹ holy hill?
²Those who lead a blameless life and do ¹ what is right,
 who speak the truth ¹ from their heart; **R**
³they do not slander with the tongue, they do no evil ¹ to their friends;
 they do not cast discredit up- ¹ on a neighbor.
⁴In their sight the wicked are rejected,
 but they honor those who ¹ fear the LORD.
 They have sworn upon their health
 and do not take ¹ back their word.
⁵They do not give their money in hope of gain,
 nor do they take bribes a- ¹ gainst the innocent.
 Those who do these things shall never be ¹ overthrown. **R**

According to the world's standards of power and might, the message of the cross seems stupid and offensive. Yet this word reveals the paradoxical way God has chosen to work power and salvation through weakness, rejection, and suffering. Hence the message of the cross becomes true wisdom and power for believers.

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
 and the discernment of the
 discerning I will thwart."

²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and

the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

²⁶Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Gospel

Matthew 5:1-12

Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount by naming those who are blessed in the reign of God.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."