

We Say

Yes

Prayer Guide

Lutheran Church of the Atonement
November 2004

How to Use This Prayer Guide Effectively

- Find a time in your day that allows you some quiet moments. The earlier in the day, the better. That way later on, as you sit at a stoplight, walk to lunch, or wait for the kids to get out of school, you can reflect on what you read earlier in the day.
- If at all possible, look up the Scripture passage that is cited and have a family member read it aloud.
- Before you read the passage, ask God to use it and devotional words which follow to increase your understanding of Him.
- Read the passage and the devotional; then do your best actually to pray the prayer which accompanies them. If you have made time for additional prayer or study, great! If not, use some time later in the day to again pray that God would bless your understanding of the thoughts that have been offered.

+ + + + +

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Being Rooted and Grounded in Love November 1

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. + Ephesians 3:16-19
+

This prayer from Ephesians is one of the most powerful ones in the Biblical witness. As does the Lord's Prayer, it asks everything. It specifically asks that God's riches and glory be given to us, so that our being can be empowered and changed.

As we pray this prayer, we ask that God give to us the Spirit of hope, of life, of love and of understanding. Our inner spirit now transformed by the power of God, enables us to comprehend that God always offers and gives more than we have asked. Out of this sense of overflowing fullness we are changed into giving beings. Jesus giving his life; the shared talents of the Holy Spirit; the comforting arms of the Father: all this inspires us to give abundantly.

We give, because we have been shown how wide, how deep, how tall and how long is this precious love. We can't wait to share this feeling of fullness. We are excited about the opportunity to share the story, to share our time, to share our talents and to share our good fortune.

*Dear God, we thank you for the glorious riches you have given us. We glow in appreciation for these gifts. Thank you for giving us the chance to share the deepest, widest, longest, and tallest love ever given.
And all God's people said Amen*

Answer When God Calls Us

November 2

Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and see this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." + Exodus 3:3-4 +

We, too, are called by God in various ways to serve Him.

Here I am! -- created by God, redeemed by God, and kept in faith by God. Look what God has done for me! What can I do to further the work of His kingdom?

We are all a piece of God's puzzle. As puzzle pieces differ in size and shape, we also differ in how we can serve God with our time, talents and treasures. Yet it takes all of us and our service to complete God's puzzle.

Here I am! I say Yes. I will continue to serve God faithfully.

Here I am Lord! Let my gifts and talents be the piece that completes the puzzle that enables us to do the work of your kingdom at Atonement.

God's Love is for Giving

November 3

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, even as I have loved you. + John 13:34 +

Paul, too, emphasizes the importance of love in First Corinthians 13:14: "Now abideth these three, faith, hope and love; but the greatest of these is love." He calls love "the highest gift," and explains further in Galatians 5:14, "All the law is summed up in one word, love." James underlines the truth. He calls "Love you neighbor as yourself" the "Royal Law." Also Peter declares, "Love covers a multitude of sins."

What kind of love are they all talking about? Scripture spells it out in great detail. For example, the whole thirteenth chapter of Corinthians describes love: Love is patient and kind, not selfish, boastful or irritable. Love doesn't insist on its own way; it keeps no score of wrongs. First John tells us there is no fear in love. Also that love must not be a matter of words, but must show itself in deeds. Ephesians 4 urges us to be generous, tender hearted, forgiving one another as God through Christ's atonement forgave you. In a word, we are to be imitators of God and to live in love as God has loved us.

What a tremendous goal! How can we humans aspire to be such beautiful people? Because God furnishes the means! First John tells us that "God is love: and the "Love is from God." When we ask God to fill our hearts with God's love, we can grow in our capacity to care deeply for others and work for their welfare. This means that we will reach out to others with expressions of God's love. We will reflect God's love in our works and gifts.

Lord, help us always to seek this highest gift; a truly loving, caring heart. Let us always love others as you have loved us. In our loving Savior's name. Amen

We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. + Second Corinthians 8:1-2 +

Last year as I spoke to a parent on my daughter's volleyball team, I heard her story of being a single parent who had to quit her job because she had lost state assistance with childcare. She couldn't continue the job because she didn't have anyone to care for her kids before or after school. She immediately searched for a job that would allow her to care for her three children. She would drop off the kids at school in the morning, and then sit in the parking lot down the street until businesses opened, because she couldn't afford the gas to go back home.

She was able to get a job at McDonald's, and during her first week of employment, she had a blowout on the way to school, only to find out that her tires were all in very dangerous condition. By now, they were foreclosing on her house and she would be evicted. I found a Good Samaritan to purchase new tires for her. She cried and said that she couldn't accept help. I explained that God had sent her to me, and that the Good Samaritan and I were God's answer. She accepted our help and through the next couple of months we tried to help her get back on her feet. She was able to find a house to rent and with some help came up with the deposit and first month's rent.

I then learned her biggest concern was that her children weren't going to have Christmas. I asked her to make a list, and Atonement would adopt her as one of our families. When I got the children's wish list I saw that her son's list included a toothbrush and underwear. The girls asked for hair ribbons. I realized how different our lives were, even though our daughters played on the same team. Her family looked no different, and her kids seemed happier than most. A few days before Christmas, her family showed up at my home bearing gifts for my family. They weren't expensive, but they were the most meaningful gifts we've ever received. We knew that instead of buying a toothbrush, underwear or gas for their car, they wanted to give. Their desire to give was greater than their wants and needs. How different the world would be if everyone transformed their desire to gain into a heart-felt desire to give. It could only serve to make the world a kinder place to live.

Oh God, thank you for the examples of generosity that you have sent into our lives. Forgive us, Lord, for being more concerned with how much we can earn, have and keep, instead of how much we can give. Open our hearts, O God, to the joy of generosity.

Let Christ Battle Your Fears

November 5

Thus says the Lord to you: "Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's . . . This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still and see the victory of the Lord . . ."

+ *Second Chronicles 20:15, 17* +

Over and over in Scripture we hear "Don't be afraid, I am with you," especially at times when anyone would be astounded, or frightened, at what they are seeing. These verses take the calming words a step further – the Lord says that He is in control, and that He will win the victory. No need to be afraid.

All He asks of us is to take time to listen, to wait for Him to lead, and let Him be the victor. That's very difficult when we have a project with a deadline, lots of planning and many tasks to co-ordinate, in order to have a successful outcome. It is reassuring to hear the Lord say, "This battle is not yours to win, but mine".

Do we have the faith to do that – to stand still and wait for the Lord to see this through to victory? Pray for that faith, for guidance, for what we need to make this His success.

*Lord, teach us to stand still, to listen for your guidance, and wait for your leading. Help us to accomplish great things for you. Send us your Holy Spirit, to strengthen our faith and draw us closer to you.
Amen*

Now to Him who, by the power at work within us, is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen. + Ephesians 3:20 +

This clearly is the closing verse of a prayer for the Church at Ephesus is St. Paul's recognition of and praise to God for what can be achieved through the Holy Spirit, principally, the edification, or building up, of the faith of believers in the Church.

The edification of workers in Christ's Church involves physical support for our witness, and goal setting is part of that effort. This is a purely human endeavor, since goals are not an issue for God. We are his representatives in the physical world, and this is how we attempt to achieve what we believe is His will. As we set our goals we are confronted with our limitations, and so we tend to specify only those results that we believe can be accomplished on the road to these goals.

Now Paul advises that by the power and ardor of our belief we can accomplish far more than we can foresee. From this we may infer that a goal for edification or improvement ought to test our pre-supposed limits. We should not be afraid to push ourselves in order to achieve what we set out to do in God's name.

Almighty God, create the attitude in me that what is righteously decided is achievable in your name and through the name of your son, Jesus, who made possible the forgiveness of our shortcomings. Amen

For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.
+ John 3:16 +

This chapter in John opens when Nicodemus comes to Christ in secret (by night, the text tells us). Jesus explains that he must be born again of water and of the spirit. Being born again isn't simply "sudden conversion" as interpreted by fundamentalist denominations. I believe our Lord means we must view our spiritual lives as a continual renewal of our Baptismal vows (the water). There is no one point where we are "born again" or "saved." We must ask God's help each day so that our lives reflect the magnitude of His sacrifice so eloquently described in verse sixteen.

God spares nothing. He gives His only Son. He also gives us food and clothing, family and friends, every good thing in this world. In the twenty-seventh verse, John the Baptist reminds those who doubt Jesus' ministry that no one receives anything except "it be given him from heaven." All we are and all we possess, we really don't "own" at all. God does. It's that simple. And that complicated. As I sit in our beautiful place of worship every week, moved by the beauty of our ancient liturgy, enlightened by Word and strengthened by Sacrament, I must continually remind myself that these gifts are greater than anything material. They are given by my Lord who gave Himself for me and for every human being on earth.

What can we do in return? Not come "by night." Too much of the world still lies in darkness. We cannot withhold our time and talents. If we are truly reborn of the spirit, we give freely of what our Lord has given us--everything. Let every member of Atonement, say, "Yes, Lord, we will work, we will share, we will hold nothing back in spreading your light across the earth."

Grant us, O, Lord, the wisdom to understand that all good things come from you. We are but stewards placed on earth to share the Good News of your Son's sacrifice for us. Give us grace to share what you have given us with those around us: the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost. You held back nothing from us. Help us to hold back nothing from them. Give Atonement the courage to respond to your ultimate sacrifice with these words: We say Yes!

Remember God's Vision; Remember God's Promise November 8

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."... And Abram said, "O Lord God what will you give me, for I continue childless....," God brought him (Abram) outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then God said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And Abram believed the Lord.

+ Genesis 15:1, 3, 5, 6 +

On this journey of faith there will be times when excitement and enthusiasm are long forgotten. There will be times when faith seems overwhelmed by questions and doubt. How does God respond? What does He ask? "Go outside Abram, count the stars, remember the vision, remember the promise."

When we started our family, we had always hoped for a boy. We were blessed with three beautiful girls. We prayed for a boy, but it wasn't to be at that time. We thought maybe someday we'd adopt a boy to complete our family. As with many other families, we were caught up in the day-to-day activities. We felt overwhelmed by everything needed for the family, not knowing if we could afford to send them all to college. Our excitement and enthusiasm turned into doubt and questions. How could we possibly afford to adopt a child when we weren't sure we could provide everything for our three girls? We've become more involved at church because of our girls. It seems the more you give the more you are blessed. God has shown us that we have a lot to give to another child. We have a family, friends, commitment, and love. We can share this with a child who needs and wants these things. We are moving forward in the adoption process with the love and support of our family and friends. We will be adding a boy to our family.

God's promise and vision are still present in our lives. We will continue to make our commitment to the church, because we are fulfilling God's promise and vision for ministry and mission. Our children have brought us to this point in our lives and we are very blessed.

Dear God, Thank you for blessing us with our family. Our children have brought us to church and have taught us about God's promise and vision. Help me to remain excited and enthusiastic about God's vision. Help me to share God's promise and vision with others. In Christ's name I pray, Amen

Wait on the Lord

November 9

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His Word I hope.
+ Psalm 130:5 +

I am reminded of my father's last two years of his life, which he spent without the presence of his dear wife, my mom. Dad missed my mother terribly. She was his best friend, his companion, his lover his "better half." Now that she was gone, Dad waited. He waited, his soul waited, and he put his trust in the Lord that He would help him through each day, knowing that when it was his time to go he would once again join his beloved wife.

Dad fought valiantly against health challenges and the emotional turmoil of those two years without his beloved. He was brave, and would have left this earth much earlier had he not put his faith in God to guide him and give him strength. Finally, on his seventy-eighth birthday, God took him to be with his wife. He was buried on Valentine's Day next to my mother. Two lovers, together again forever.

My Dad lived in the hope that the Lord had a plan. I think he did.

Dear God, forgive me the times that I have lost my faith and my way. Help me to find the strength and courage to wait patiently, regardless of the challenges that comfort me. Help me to find ways, in the midst of my busy life, to wait on you with faith hope and anticipation.

Trusting in God

November 10

Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the Kingdom of God. + Mark 10:24 +

As we read and reflect on the story of the young rich man who couldn't part with his wealth, which is the context of the words in verse 24, we may be inclined to breathe a sigh of relief. *"Whew. At least Jesus wasn't indicting me. I'm of modest means, certainly not wealthy, just barely making it with a little left over. Yeh, those rich folks really do have their priorities mixed up at times."*

But before we move away from these words of Jesus, we need to look a bit deeper. In contrast to most of the world's population, we in middle class America are indeed wealthy. We enjoy and take for granted the highest standard of living in the world, and our obsessions for convenience and consumption probably dwarf those of all others. So maybe, just maybe, Jesus is talking to us and asking us where we have placed our trust.

Learning to trust God with all of our being, including our wealth, is a lesson that we never master. It is a journey, a work in process, a faith adventure that God calls us to pursue. So perhaps we can strive to achieve measures of "success" through baby steps, letting go of a little bit here, and a little bit more there. Could we/I possibly:

- Increase my monthly gift to Atonement for ministry and missions by \$50, assess its impact on my budget, and realize I can do this regularly?
- Give a special gift from our savings (abundance) as a thank offering for all of God's blessings in our lives – past, present, and still to come?
- Give above and beyond my ongoing gifts to support our Capital Campaign? Can I make it a "stretch" commitment beyond my comfort zone, and then see how God can help me grow in my letting go of wealth?

Lord, forgive my lack of trust and faith in you and your goodness. Help me to be open to your guidance and direction as I consider my gifts to the work of your kingdom through the ministries of the Lutheran Church of the Atonement. Challenge me to trust you more completely as I put all of my life into your hands, including my wealth and possessions. Bless my sacrificial gifts, and use them to help and serve others. In Jesus' name, Amen

God's Wonders Among Us

November 11

Then Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." + Joshua 3:5 +

We should surely keep ourselves holy, for God does indeed do wonders among us, and we should honor God's magnificence. Consider how a small group of dedicated Christians started this congregation and saw to its growth with their gifts. Consider how wondrous it is that there were many who desired education from a Christian perspective; and a school was started and grew. Consider that the members became so numerous that the sanctuary could no longer hold all the members; and a larger sanctuary was built. Consider the depths of trust and sacrifice that led to a growth and diversity from the initial seed of wonder planted in the hearts of God's people. Consider that those people are you and I. We are who should sanctify ourselves, for tomorrow we must be ready for the wonders the Lord will do among us.

Lord, consecrate me to be ready for the wonders you will do among us. Let me be an instrument of Your love that I may give of myself willingly to honor the wonders you do among us. Amen

Reflect God's Glory

November 12

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved.

+ *First Corinthians 10:31-33* +

"To the glory of God" – a statement of five short words that covers how we should live our lives. There are so many material things that we seek in this life to give us pleasure and to make us comfortable. We work, we save, so that we can spend our resources to have nice things. And, we all enjoy worshipping in a place of beauty and comfort. To have these things there must be a time of sacrifice.

As we reflect on Jesus, or on certain times in our lives, sacrifice is a word that comes to mind. Nothing of value comes easily, so sacrifice makes achieving our desires dearer to the heart. Changing priorities is a necessary part of meeting the challenges that arise. Our focus needs to be turned to reflect the glory of God. Through prayer and stewardship we can accomplish God's plan and not simply our own wants and desires.

Dear God, I confess that I do not always reflect You and Your love. I confess that much of my time is spent in seeking my own advantage. Give me the courage, O God, to seek Your will for my heart, my life and even my finances. In all that I do and say, help me to reflect Your love and Your glory. I pray through Christ, my Lord. Amen

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. + Isaiah 40:31 +

What strikes me about this verse is the hope and promise of good things to come for us all. The LORD will give us much! I suppose we can't expect something for nothing.

No, there is one tiny thing God asks of us. To wait. That's all. It isn't much when you think about it, just a trifle really. Right? The LORD will renew our strength! Be patient. Right. We will not be weary! Wait. Right. He will not let us faint! Just wait. Right.

Wait, wait, wait. It sounds like so much to ask in our world today. With everything we pack into our days, hours, and minutes, we have to keep going. Picture the Energizer Bunny commercials. We have worship services, oil changes, work, music lessons, doctor visits, school and volunteer responsibilities, meals--at home and away, sports practices, church commitments, scouts, tune-ups, dance classes, dentists, and more. We can't find time to wait! We don't want to be late! If the dog throws up as we are walking out the door on our way to work, we may yell or mutter under our breath, as we have to make time to take care of it. If the car won't start when we get outside, the day is "ruined", because we don't have the time for that problem. If we miss the green light at the intersection and have to sit and wait for the next one, we are upset, we don't have time to wait (some don't wait and go through on red).

When thinking back, though, it seems like God is asking us over and over again to wait. One day, I was running late, so I missed the green light at the intersection by my house. I was, of course, a little upset. Imagine my surprise when I saw the car that had been in front of me get side-swiped by a truck running a red light on the other side of the street. That could have been me. God was trying to tell me to wait. I am reminded of all the stories like this from the attack on the Twin Towers on September 11. Someone was late to work and not in the building yet, because... an alarm didn't go off... someone missed a bus... someone answered a ringing phone as they were starting to leave the house... someone had a child who dawdled getting ready for school. God wanted them to wait. Now they know why. He wants us to wait, too. What good news has He planned for us? Maybe it isn't so much to ask of us after all. We know what happens when we don't wait. I wonder what marvelous things could happen, if we did wait for God! Let's try.

Dear God, Forgive me for always being in such a hurry. Teach me to slow down. Teach me to wait. Teach me to listen. In my waiting and listening, God, bring renewal to my heart, my life, my family, and my church. Amen

Be still, and know that I am God! + Psalm 46:10 +

I just woke up and I'm thinking about all the things on my agenda today. Let's see, there are two meetings at work, the big project has to be finished before I leave for the day, and then I need to rush to Church in time for choir practice. It's a good thing the Board meeting is just down the hall from practice, as I'll be a few minutes late.

I turn on the television and catch the news while I'm having breakfast. In my car, I turn on the radio for the latest traffic report, and then I switch over to my favorite music station. I'm at the office now. I can't focus on what's being said in the meeting because my thoughts are on the next meeting where I'll be presenting. Back in the car and the radio is on again.

And so the day goes. There's a constant stream of noise going through my mind – either from something I'm hearing or from my thoughts about what has to be done now, in the next hour or later today.

Be still, and know that I am God!

Be still? Does it mean that I should remain motionless, or does it mean I should let the thoughts of the day fall away, and open my mind and my heart to what God has to say to me? How can I be still? There's so much to be done, I don't have time to settle down long enough to be still. I have obligations. People are counting on me! How can I not be still? If my mind is always focusing on what needs to be done, on driving here and there, on what event I need to get prepared for, if I don't stop and listen, then how will I ever hear what God wants to say to me?

Be still, and know that I am God!

I know – I can start by recognizing that the concerns of this world will not disappear, but can be set aside for a while. The television and the radio don't have to provide background noise all the time, so I'll turn them off for a while. That's a big improvement.

It's quiet, I feel at peace, I'm ready to listen.

Gracious God, forgive me for my failure to take time to listen and be still. Forgive me for filling my life with everything but You. Teach me, speak to me, help me to listen and give me the faith to obey. In Christ's name, Amen

God's Great Generosity

November 15

You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. + Second Corinthians 9:11-12 +

How many times a day do we say "thank you" to someone? In the morning, sitting in a long line of traffic and then someone lets you in front of them, you wave and say, "Thank you." Walking into a building someone holds the door and you say, "Thank you." Someone says how good you look in those new clothes and you say, "Thank you." We are quick to recognize someone when they do something nice for us but what about what God does for us? Do we take the time to thank God for all the things he does for us everyday? The Lord has generously given us so many things in our lives and often we do not take a moment each day to say, "Thank you." How do we say, "Thank you" to God? Through prayer. Just a quick "Thanks for that wonderful evening at the theater with my wife" or "Thank you for keeping my child safe on that field trip." God has given all of us so many wonderful gifts that it would be impossible to thank him for them all. But that does not mean we should not take a moment and show our gratitude with a prayer. We also show God how truly thankful we are for all of these wonderful things in our lives through our generous giving of the many gifts he has first given us.

As the verse at the top of the page says, God has given us much so that we can give away much. And those gifts will help those in need and in turn bring thanksgiving and praise to God.

Thank you Lord, for all the things you have so generously given to me. Forgive me for not always taking the time to thank you for how truly fortunate I have been. Lord you show me everyday how to be generous, help me now to give from the heart with that kind of generosity. In Christ's name, Amen

All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth to those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great. + Psalm 25:10-11 +

The LORD never minimizes sin, yet He never closes the door of his household, even on those who have greatly transgressed and displeased Him. If our iniquity is great, His mercies are greater. In Christ crucified God made a covenant by which none shall be cast out and none rejected who come with contrite and penitent hearts. That is the good news proclaimed through the years. Our troubled mind can be at ease, because God blots out sins to remember them no more.

To enjoy this blessed peace, we keep His covenant and believe His testimonies, which say that Jesus is the way to life eternal. God has made the terms of peace through the cross of Jesus. There on Calvary, the LORD has spoken. Christ has redeemed us. He says so: "It is finished."

Beneath that cross we have found a full salvation, which removes all guilt. Nothing now can separate from the love of God.

Believers are the most blessed people. They ought to be the most grateful. We have found the perfect peace that puts our minds at ease. Let us render service to Him who asks us to go into His vineyard to tell the story of His love and grace.

In the midst of this busy day we come, LORD God, nesting safely in your everlasting arms of love. We live unafraid and unworried, your promises abide with us and in us. Be with all Your children. Protect them from harm. Teach us to believe that nothing in this present world, not even persecution and war, can separate us from Your love in Christ Jesus, our LORD. Amen

Our Blanket of Faith

November 17

And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

+ Mark 2:4-5 +

What faith these friends had! They used the means at hand to reach their goal. We can show our faith such as the friends of the paralytic showed theirs. We can pick up a corner of the blanket and do our share. If we have a genuine sense of compassion and love for our church, then we will be able to give of ourselves with the means at our hands and the ministry will continue as it has for these fifty plus years. Furthermore, The Lutheran Church of the Atonement will continue to grow to serve God far into the future.

Show your faith, show your love, show your compassion. Pick up your corner of the blanket and we can show Jesus Christ's healing presence to more of the world.

Gracious God continue to show us the means that we have, so that we may be a blessing to enrich your ministry in our congregation.

For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints -- and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and by the will of God to us.

+ *Second Corinthians 8:3-5* +

St. Paul tells of the Macedonian Christians, who despite poverty, gave themselves to God and then to others. They **sought the privilege** of sharing in ministry to the saints. One Saturday each May, the postal letter carriers participate in a National Food Drive picking up donations as they deliver mail. The food is measured in pounds multiplying into tons of food given to area food banks. The same observation is made each time: those who appear the least able are often the ones who place full bags or boxes of food next to their mailbox for carrier pick-up while some of the most affluent contribute little or none. The question is: why? Do those giving beyond their means better understand the need and the value of the gift being given?

There are many worthwhile causes for which we are asked to give. How do we determine where to give? The Macedonian Christians have taught us: **first they gave themselves to the Lord.**

Show me, Lord, the poverty of my soul. Forgive me for trying to live my life outside Your will. Help me atone for the mistakes I've made, and lead me to the richness of the life You've planned for me. Help me daily to seek a better understanding of Your Word. Guide me continually closer to You, and open my heart to what You want me to do. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen

Sing God's Joyful Song!

November 19

*Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things...
Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth . . . +Psalm 98:1, 4 +*

What powerful words! Song is filled with our memories, with our feelings, with our sadness, with our joy, with our fear, with our hope, with our love. And this is as it should be. Our God has given us the gift of music and all the parts of ourselves that find expression in music so that we might use this gift of expression to understand God's other gifts – **Everything!** All that we have is a gift to us from God – an unending procession of new and exciting possibilities. Our God, who gave us song, gave us community, gave us this rich and bounteous world, gave us education, gave us music, gave us art, gave us science, gave us new work to do, gave us old work to continue, gave us perseverance, gave us intellect, gave us pleasure, gave us hope, gave us future, gave us past. And God isn't finished; God continues to give in new and astounding ways!

Will we listen to the sound of all God's joyful gift? Can we sacrifice our fear so that we can give from our joy? We can!

Lord, I shout for joy for the wonders you have given me! Let me always sing your praises. Let me sing to You a new song each day - with my voice, with my heart, with a deep and sacrificial joy for the many gifts you have given me to enrich my life.

Fragrant Offerings

November 20

Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. + Ephesians 5:1-2 +

Children are great imitators. I watch our two-year-old grandson playing with his toys. If it's a truck or some other motorized vehicle, I hear him trying to imitate the sound that he thinks that vehicle's motor ought make. I can remember doing the same when I was a child. If I was playing with my tractor I made a different sound than if I was hauling a heavy load of sand with my dump truck.

Likewise, our children also imitate our actions and expressions. If we are polite to each other and encourage them to do likewise, chances are, they will be polite individuals. Conversely, if our children hear us use foul language and curse words, and experience our unkind actions toward others, we will hear and see them exhibiting the same kind of behavior.

Now, how can we be imitators of God? Can we suddenly be like God - holy, all powerful, omnipresent, able to listen to and grant countless requests or know which requests ought to be denied? Of course not. But, in Christ and with the Holy Spirit's help we can demonstrate some of God's traits. The apostle says that we are to live in love as Christ loved us and permitted Himself to be sacrificed for our sins so that we can be declared righteous in our Heavenly Father's eyes. We can show mercy and offer forgiveness, because our Heavenly Father has first forgiven us.

The apostle says that Christ's sacrifice was a fragrant offering and sacrifice to the Father. Here again, with the Holy Spirit's help and out of gratitude for what God in Christ has done for us, may we be imitators of Christ by bringing willing, cheerful, and truly sacrificial offerings in this capital campaign. May they also be fragrant offerings to a gracious and merciful God.

Gracious God, Heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit into our hearts so that we will be enabled to lead lives that imitate Your great love for us. Drive all selfishness out of our hearts so that we address our neighbor's needs as well as our own. Move us to make truly sacrificial offerings which will rise to You as incense. Amen

They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

+ *Luke 24: 32* +

This verse is in the Chapter of Luke where Christ's resurrection is declared by two angels. Christ himself appears to two disciples who were going to Emmaus. Later he appears to the apostles to show them his hands and his feet to prove that it indeed is he. He then gives them a charge, promised them the Holy Spirit, and then ascended into heaven.

While we walk the journey of life, has Christ appeared in our lives? Did we recognize him? And has he given us that very cornerstone of our faith? Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. He has risen indeed. Alleluia, Alleluia!!!

As we have now reached Commitment Sunday on this capital campaign at the Lutheran Church of the Atonement, let our hearts burn within us to commit our time, talents and treasures. Pray that the Holy Spirit will move our hearts to count our many blessings and liberate us to give generously what Christ has first given to us. Let us be grateful and joyful givers as we continue to praise and bless God at Atonement.

Thank you Lord for this gift we call a capital campaign. Thank you Lord for talking to us along the road on this journey to commitment Sunday. Thank you for the burning in our hearts that we recognize as You and Your Love. Help us remember that You are always walking on the path of life beside us. Thank You! Amen

