

First Baptist Church in Needham

858 Great Plain Avenue, Needham MA 02492

www.fbcneedham.org

Meditations for Sunday, May 17, 2020
(or whenever you are so led to pause, reflect, and pray)

Sixth Sunday of Eastertide

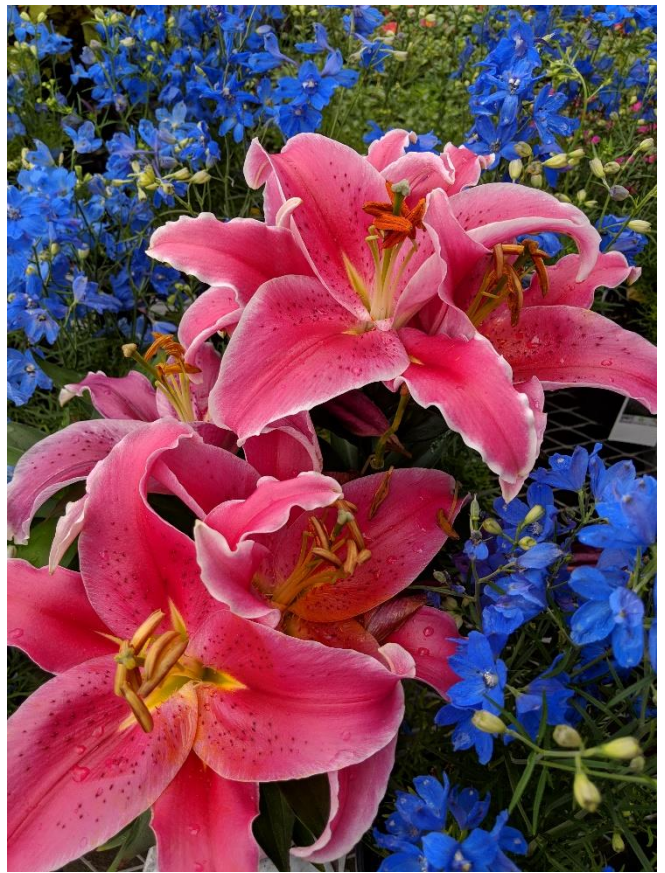
Edition 9

Christ is risen—risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Lighting the Candle of Life

You may wish to light a candle or use the candle photo as a focus.

ALL: We light the Candle of Life — a candle that represents community, spirit, and the fullness of all of life — birth and death and all of the transitions in between and beyond.



My God, Holy & Uncontainable...

The lectionary offers us texts in John and Acts this week asserting both that God is larger than any of our labels, name, imaginings, or traditions **and** that God's Spirit indwells in us. As we continue to live through the time of COVID19, we first pause to consider the images and names of God and Christ that are most familiar and comfortable for us alongside ways of knowing and perceiving our Creator that are less familiar or challenge us to let go of our labels and boxes for our God who is, indeed, Uncontainable and for whom no image, pronoun, or name is fully adequate.

- What are the names, images, and pronouns I find most comfortable for referring to God? To Christ?
- What names, images, and pronouns for God and Christ do I find are growing edges for me to use? Why do they challenge me?
- Am I willing to know God and Christ more fully and deeply by broadening how I speak, think, and imagine God and Christ to be?

Reflective Song

El Shaddai

Michael Card and John Thompson drew directly from Hebrew and Christian scripture to write El Shaddai in 1981. It is best known from Amy Grant's version of it on her 1982 album, *Age to Age*. As you consider how the words and images for God and Christ shape your understanding of the Holy One as well as your behavior and relationships with the world around you, speak or sing these words, or listen to Amy Grant and Sandi Patti singing them online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ME_34jwnErs¹.

[1st Refrain]

*El Shaddai, El Shaddai, El-Elyon na Adonia,
Age to age you're still the same,
by the power of the name.*

*El Shaddai, El Shaddai, Erkamka na Adonai,
We will praise and lift you high, El Shaddai.*

Through your love and through the ram,
you saved the son of Abraham;
Through the power of your hand,
Turned the sea into dry land.
To the outcast on her knees,
you were the God who really sees,
And by your might,
You set your children free. [1st Refrain]

Through the years you've made it clear,
that the time of Christ was near,
though the people couldn't see
what messiah ought to be.
Though your word contained the plan,
we just could not understand
Your most awesome work was done
Through the frailty of your son. [2nd Refrain]

[2nd Refrain]

*El Shaddai, El Shaddai, El-Elyon na Adonai,
Age to age you're still the same,
by the power of the name.*

*El Shaddai, El Shaddai, Erkamka na Adonai,
I will praise you 'till I die, El Shaddai. [Repeat]*

A Reading from Acts 17:22-31 & John 14:15-21 (NRSV)

Read the text aloud. Pause and notice what image or phrase stands out or "shimmers" as you tell the story.

From Acts of the Apostles

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

"The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps

¹ "El Shaddai" – "God Almighty; "El-Elyon na Adonai" – "God Most High, I beseech you, my Lord;" Erkamka na Adonai" – "I love you, my Lord". Data from: LyricFind. For non-commercial use only. Music video by Amy Grant, Sandi Patti performing El Shaddai. (C) 2015 Christian Music United Inc. Glorify Music.

grope for him and find him--though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'

"Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

From the Gospel of John, Jesus Speaks

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees nor knows the Spirit. You know the Spirit, because the Spirit abides with you and will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

ALL: The word of our Lord. Thanks be to God.



Eastertide Alleluia Hymn 736 Celtic Alleluia arr. Fintan O'Carroll & Christopher Walker
This Alleluia response to the scripture reading will follow us through the season of Eastertide. Alleluia means "God be praised!" You may choose to recite it as a prayer of thanksgiving, sing it to your own tune, or sing along with this online version: https://youtu.be/kSS_TanMwWE ².

[Refrain] Alleluia, alleluia. Alleluia, alleluia.

The word of the Lord lasts forever. What is the word that is living?
It is brought to us through God's son, Jesus Christ. *[Refrain]*

My God, Advocating Spirit ...

In John's Gospel, Jesus assures the disciples, and us, that we are never abandoned or alone. We are accompanied *always* by the Holy Spirit. Whatever our losses, our fears and anxieties, our failures, our sins, or our pain, the Holy Spirit moves alongside and within us winding strands of healing, transformation, hope, and peace with God's fullest love. In this time of COVID19, the Spirit continues to wend her way through our lives and the complex workings of the world far deeper and broader than our understanding. As Spirit stands with each of us, She calls us to fully embody her presence to one another: advocating for vulnerable souls; standing against corruption, greed, and injustice; and breeching systems of racism, violence, and (me-and-mine, us-versus-them) self-centeredness.

- *How do I claim the Holy Spirit's presence in my life? In my loneliness, anxieties, or loss?*
- *With accounts of violence and anger toward workers (and cases of shooting deaths of some workers) tasked with enforcing basic COVID19 guidelines for the public's safety and well-being, how may I respond to Spirit's call to be her presence in my spheres of relationship, community, and influence?*
- *COVID19 projections will have a long-term impact on my community. How may I open myself to care for and seek to be Spirit's advocating and healing presence to vulnerable persons around me: seniors and immunity-compromised persons, people of color, immigrants and internationals, the working poor, homeless souls, prisoners....? Who will I ensure knows they are never abandoned or alone?*

Reflection Hymn

More Love to Thee

MORE LOVE TO THEE

New England author, poet, and hymnist, Elizabeth Payson Prentiss (1818-1878), penned this hymn of devotion in 1856 during a time of intense grief after two of her children died following illness. She kept it as a private prayer for thirteen years until her husband encouraged its publication in 1869. Since then, it has become a prayer for many followers of Christ.³ Under the shadow of COVID19, speak or sing the words as a prayer of commitment, or sing along with vocal bass Derrol Sawyer, online at: <https://youtu.be/lig4Lq11VaI> ⁴.

More love to Thee, O Christ,
more love to Thee!
Hear Thou the prayer I make on bended knee;
this is my earnest plea:
more love, O Christ, to Thee,
more love to Thee, more love to Thee!

Once earthly joy I craved,
sought peace and rest;
now Thee alone I seek, give what is best;

this all my prayer shall be:
more love, O Christ, to Thee,
more love to Thee, more love to Thee!

Then shall my latest breath
whisper Thy praise;
this be the parting cry my heart shall raise;
this still its prayer shall be:
more love, O Christ, to Thee,
more love to Thee, more love to Thee!

³ <http://womenofchristianity.com/more-love-to-thee-by-elizabeth-prentiss-hymn-story>

⁴ BibleStream: Meditation of the Day (2016). Learn more about Derrol Sawyer's Moses' Song Ministries at www.mosessong.org.

Prayers of the People

Enter into this time in song. If you don't know the tune, let the words be the doorway to your prayer.

Sung Prayer

Hear My Prayer, O Lord

BENZENHAFER
arr. Holly C. Benzenhafer

Hear my prayer, O Lord. Hear my prayer, O Lord.
I am asking, hear my prayer, O Lord.

Prayerful Meditation⁵

God of what was and what will be,
Of what might have been and might
still be.
God of past and future,
Of memories and beginnings.
God of the finite and the infinite,
Of moments and possibilities.
What is my life?
And what of my death?
What of my choices?
And what of my future?
What of this distance?
And what of the endless sky?
What of the darkness?
And what of the light?

God of the seen and unseen,
Of the known and unknowable.
Teach me patience and understanding
As the mysteries of my life unfold.
Teach me to live gently, love generously,
And to walk with strength and confidence.
Teach me to give and to receive,
Sharing Your blessing in joy and sorrow.
Teach me to see others through Your eyes,
As children of God.
And teach me to see myself and my life as You
do,
With love.

We Hold in Prayer...

*Many of this week's prayers are requests from members of our congregation in the past week. **If you have general or specific prayer requests—joys as well as concerns—to share please contact Holly or Daryn to pass them along.***

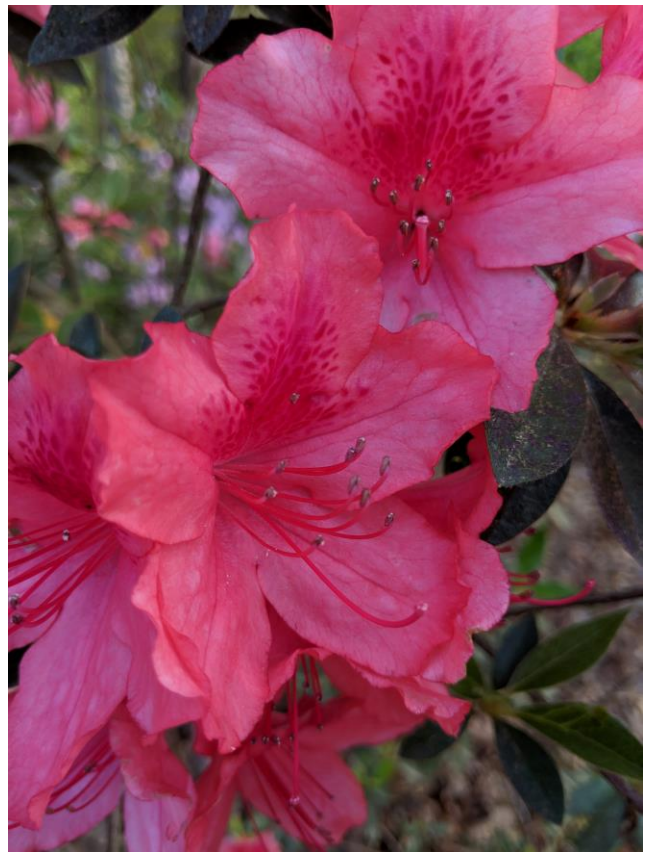
As a community of faith gathered in Spirit when we cannot be in person, we offer our hearts and voices in prayer where we are, as we are, entrusting the Spirit's moving among us and responding far beyond our individual reach and influence...

With Pastor Holly, we offer thanks for the high school, college, and graduate school graduating classes of 2020, especially **Jacob Krannitz, Graham Eklund**, and the newly minted **Dr. Kathryn House**. We join in celebrating the culmination of their years of study, training, and dedication to preparing for the next stages of their lives. Though the way this ending is not how they imagined it would be, it is no less a mark of achievement and hope for the future...***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....***

⁵ Alden Solovy, "The Path of Righteousness," in *Jewish Prayers of Hope and Healing* (USA: Kavanot Press, 2013), 10.

We celebrate with Andrew the birth of **Wren's** daughter, **Carmen Eloise Esterline**, born Saturday, May 9, 2020, 7 lbs 5 oz, 20 inches in Muskogee, OK. Mother and daughter are home and well. In the joy of this new, bright life among us...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Liz, Pastor Holly, and Pastor Daryn, we hold persons living with non-COVID19 illness and injury requiring hospitalization or treatment. We continue to hold Liz's Aunt **Virginia** now released from hospital but still struggling with swallowing. We pray for Holly's Aunt **Deb Benzenhafer**, in Wartburg, TN, having chemotherapy for stomach cancer, and her Uncle **Tom Benzenhafer**, who is recovering from knee replacement surgery. We hold in God's healing Holly's Mississippi friends **Gloria Martin** recovering from surgery and **Harry Vickery** as he recovers his speech after suffering a hematoma and Daryn's Aunt **Lana** who is now recovering at home. In the midst of suffering and unknowing, life changes and beloved presence, we gather these souls before you, Holy Spirit, and now speak the names of persons likewise confronting serious medical conditions ...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*



Standing before an Unknowable God and filled with the Advocating Spirit, we bear witness and do not look away from the continued targeting, violence, and death-dealing dehumanization toward persons of color in our communities and across our country fueled by insidious strains of racism and white privilege that continue to fester. We bear witness to the family and friends of Ahmaud Arbery who grieve his lynching in Georgia. Shake us from our discomfort and complacency, Holy Spirit, that such hatred within your children be expelled as the poison it is. Cherishing Ahmaud's life violently cut short and the lives of other souls of color egregiously slain whose names we speak aloud...*Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

We hold to God the systems of inequity, systemic impoverishment, and inadequate healthcare in our country that have left persons of color at greater risk of COVID19 and numerous other chronic medical conditions over the decades. We bear witness and pray for well-being of the COVID19 positive Haitian immigrants being forced to return to Haiti before they have recovered. We pray for persons held in close quarters in ICE detention centers and prisons. For their safety, health, and return to the fullness of life...and for souls living with daily inequities and marginalization that limits their well-being, security, and flourishing whose names we speak aloud...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Anthony, we offer gratitude for incremental steps in health care that point toward hopeful progress with COVID19 and for the continued diligence of medical personnel and researchers throughout the world...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Marty and Andrew, we hold individuals and families standing in food lines and encountering daily strains of hunger pangs, inability to pay bills, home insecurity, and unemployment. Hear their cries, O God, and open the hearts and resources of those with plenty to share generously and selflessly for the benefit of neighbor and stranger, alike. We pray for networks, non-profits, volunteers, government agencies, and businesses that seek to offer aid, especially, Needham Community Council, First Baptist Church Jamaica Plain, and the Greater Boston Food Network...and for souls in need of assistance and souls engaged in this work whose names we speak aloud...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Clif and Liz we celebrate the ever-so-gradual turn to warmer weather, clearing of broken tree branches, spreading mulch, planting gardens and also the pleasure of animal companions, especially **Pete** as he learns how to behave around other dogs and **Rascal** who turns 11 this week...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Dorothy and Stan, we acknowledge the difficult ethical, moral, and health decisions our branches of government face and also the ramifications of the choices we daily make in discerning how to be safe, when to risk going out, and how to see loved ones. We cherish our own FBC Needham community and pray for each member's continued health and well-being, especially since so many of us are in vulnerable populations. We speak now the names of members of FBC Needham and hold them to God's gracious peace...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Anthony, Clif, and Stan, we are thankful for the ability to worship through a variety of new and creative means—online, with our Worship Resource, with scripture and devotional reading, and through our own prayers and spiritual practices...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Louise, we extend our prayers to Christ's full embrace of the world in all its beauty, diversity, joy, and suffering. We entrust our Earth to God's care and speak our prayers for all life and being...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With Clif and Pastor Holly, we give gratitude for the wealth of resources being made available to educate and entertain us, especially online yoga, online specialized training, and all forms of arts: television, theatre, music, fine art, and dance... *Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Marty, Dorothy, and Andrew we give thanks for the loving care and delight of children and loved ones, of families by birth and those souls we choose to claim and who claim us...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

With Nancy, we are mindful that this time remains a season of added work and stress for many persons who contend with make-shift work spaces, loss of boundaries between work and home, and the strain of needing to perform to previous expectations during a pandemic. For their restorative rest, ability to focus, grace with frailty, and humor...and for souls whose names we speak aloud... *Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

With John and Stan, we anticipate new life in all its forms, especially John's two daughters-in-law (due in July and September) and Stan's daughter (due in August)...*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow....*

We hold Pastor Holly's extended family to Spirit's consolation in the death of her cousin, **Diana Freels Nease** after living six years with ovarian cancer. For the lives lost to COVID19 and its impactful trauma, all persons who have entered God's nearer presence since last we entered prayer together, souls who grieve this day... and for souls whose names we speak aloud...*Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer....*

For the prayers of our hearts that you, Holy One, know even when words cannot hold them...
Hear my prayer, O Lord....

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.

My God, Transformative Action...

Today's texts describe God not only as the Uncontainable Creator of all life and matter, but as a Holy Presence that cannot be held within our sacred buildings, our scripture, our traditions, our doctrines, or our practices. God transcends every boundary we put up that might separate us from one another—every prejudice, bias, injustice, and discrimination—and requires us not only to seek the beauty and inherent value within each person as a child of God's own heart, but to repent that we have not done so *and change*.

In John's Gospel, Jesus assures us of the Holy Spirit's unending presence within each of us. The account of Paul in Acts takes that assurance a step further and requires us as ones infused with the Spirit *to repent* and be transformed by that Spirit into God's embodied action in the world—the hands and feet, heart and voice of Christ gathering in all persons previously denied welcome, community, acceptance, well-being, justice, mercy, and love.

- *For what action or inaction do I need to repent? What boundaries have I accepted or placed that barred others from full inclusion or benefits of loving community? From whom should I seek forgiveness?*
- *We are commanded to transformation and to be transforming. How may I live into such challenge and change in my life this very week?*

Hymn 593

Lord, Speak to Me

CANONBURY

English Anglican, Frances R. Havergal (1836-1879) wrote this hymn's text in 1872 as "A Worker's Prayer" to encourage her congregation's prayer life. A prolific author and poet, she published works from age 7 until her death at age 42.⁶ Trusting in God whose Spirit weaves us together to bear each other's pain and work to transform our lives, communities, and world to greater compassion, lovingkindness, and life, we, too, pray for the better versions of us waiting to be birthed through the Spirit's labors. Read the text aloud, or sing with the Second Presbyterian Church congregation in Indianapolis, IN, online at: <https://youtu.be/mjsTjPn1GOI>⁷.

Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
in living echoes of your tone;
as you have sought, so let me seek
your erring children lost and lone.

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
the precious things you do impart;
and wing my words, that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart.

O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
the wandering and the wavering feet;

O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
the hungering ones with manna sweet.

O fill me with your fullness, Lord,
until my very heart o'erflow
in kindling thought and glowing word
your love to tell, your praise to show.

O use me, Lord, use even me,
just as you will, and when and where;
until your blessed face I see,
your rest, your joy, your glory share.

Offering

For online giving, go to <https://www.fbcneedham.org> or continue to support the ongoing ministry of the church by sending a check to the church office via mail to: First Baptist Church in Needham, 858 Great Plain Avenue, Needham MA 02492. Please indicate it is your offering or pledge on the check.

Doxology

OLD HUNDREDTH

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God, all creatures here below.
Praise God above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Benediction

(Speak these words of benediction knowing that you are part of a loving community of faith. If you lit a candle at the beginning, you may wish to blow it out now.)

One: Our blessing to one another is that we are here for one another, that we are with one another, that we celebrate and remember one another along the journey.

ALL: We extinguish the Candle of Life, but the Light continues to shine within us. As we pass the peace we carry the Light of the Candle of Life from this hour into this world and beyond, offering peace, hope and light wherever the journey leads.

⁶ <https://songscoops.blogspot.com/2017/03/lord-speak-to-me-frances-havergal.html>

⁷ From a July 16, 2012 service. <http://www.SecondChurch.org>

Passing of the Peace

(Picture in your mind's eye the faces of beloved souls with whom you would share the peace of Christ in person if you could, and offer each one your blessing of peace.)

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

One: Let us greet one another in peace as we prepare for the journey ahead.



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Announcements

While the Church Office and Building are currently closed, our ministry continues! Pastoral and office staff are working from home. Office voicemail and email are being checked regularly. If you have a pastoral concern, contact Pastor Daryn or Pastor Holly by email, phone, or text.

Do You Need Washable Masks? Be Kind Needham Masks for Seniors is a local organization making washable fabric masks available to local senior residents *for free*. Your health and safety in the weeks and months ahead is paramount, and having reusable, washable masks aids sanitation, is environmentally friendly, and is cost-effective. If you or a senior you know need masks, please contact Pastor Daryn or Pastor Holly.

Needham Community Council continues to provide necessary resources and food to individuals in need of their services. If you or someone you know are in need of reaching out to them or if you want to learn how you can best volunteer to help at this time, go to their website at: <http://needhamcommunitycouncil.org>. *Please note: They ARE NOT accepting drop-off donations at this time due to safety protocols. Financial donations are greatly appreciated and needed.*

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