

Devotions for the Sixth Week of Easter – May 11-15, 2026

Monday of the Sixth Week of Easter – Prayer for the Week

O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

God is the giver of all that is good. That can sometimes be very difficult to see. Corrie Ten Boom recounts looking in wonder and perplexity at her sister who, in her daily prayers, thanked God for the one thing they had in the concentration camp: fleas. How could she thank God for these vermin? It was only later, after her sister died, that she realized that the fleas were important for keeping the other gift that God had given them, a single copy of the Bible. The guards were so afraid of getting infested themselves that they did not search her flea-infested barracks. Their Bible was safe, protected by a pest.

How would God have us think and act in these days? Too often we have allowed the world into those thoughts and the ways of the world have come to be found in the ways of our church. Some time ago I was talking to a call committee which was searching for a new pastor. They asked me what questions I would have, if I were being offered a call to this parish. Since I knew some of their history, I said to them that I would want them to tell me the last time they solved a problem like a Christian. When did they deal with an angry person, resolve a dispute, or meet a challenge in a way that demonstrated Christian faith, love, hope, or some other virtue.

I don't think they had ever thought of their life together as a congregation that way. Jesus indeed has some things for us to think, things like forgiveness, grace, mercy, and peace. And then he has some things which he does intend for us to do, like forgive, comfort, seek peace, and reconcile. God, the giver of all good things stands ready to help you. First think of God's things. Then do them. He will help.

Tuesday of the Sixth Week of Easter - Acts 17:16-31

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean." ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the

foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for

“‘In him we live and move and have our being’;

as even some of your own poets have said,

“‘For we are indeed his offspring.’

²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” ³³ So Paul went out from their midst. ³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

When I was a college student, I had a chance to visit New Orleans with one of my friends whose father served a parish there. One day, my friend's father, who knew I intended to enter the seminary, offered to take me along to what he labeled his “backstretch ministry.” My initial thoughts were filled with images of people contorted into various yoga poses. But he disabused me of that and went on to explain that he conducted a ministry to the people who worked at the local horse-racing track: the stable hands, handlers, ticket-sellers, etc. While the fans sat near the finish line, the workers toiled in buildings which were situated along the backstretch of the course. Because Sunday was a prime racing day, these folks did not have a chance to go to church, so he offered a service midweek for them on site, with the blessing of the race-track owners. It might seem like an odd place to hold services, but I credit my friend's father with seeing through the very rough exterior to the common humanity of these people.

I must say, seeing what he saw took some effort. The service was held in a large and repurposed room. As we arrived several “members” were busy setting up. One fellow walked up to us and said my friend’s father, “Where do you want the G—d---. hymnals.” He was not angry. Apparently, any object in hand was routinely consigned to the fires of hell. The pastor calmly told him to put them on the table near the entrance. Being from a group of pious Midwest Lutherans, this was new to me.

In the reading for today Paul finds himself among the idols of Athens, which were many. Being a pious and rabbinically trained Jewish theologian, Luke tells us that he was provoked within him. Jewish people had fought and died to keep their monotheism. It was one of the bedrock principles of Paul’s life. But he does not preach against the idols so much as he invites them see the world with new eyes. He does not compromise what he believes, but Paul finds a way to proclaim Jesus who calls people out of darkness and into light.

Paul’s approach did not have a 100% success rate. Some mocked him. But the Holy Spirit blew that day too. Some believed. What united Paul and my friend’s father was a firm conviction that Jesus had died to redeem all people. How should we meet them today?

Wednesday of the Sixth Week of Easter - Psalm 66

- ¹ Shout for joy to God, all the earth;
- ² sing the glory of his name;
give to him glorious praise!
- ³ Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!
So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.
- ⁴ All the earth worships you
and sings praises to you;
they sing praises to your name.” Selah
- ⁵ Come and see what God has done:
he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.
- ⁶ He turned the sea into dry land;
they passed through the river on foot.
There did we rejoice in him,
- ⁷ who rules by his might forever,
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—
let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah
- ⁸ Bless our God, O peoples;
let the sound of his praise be heard,
- ⁹ who has kept our soul among the living
and has not let our feet slip.
- ¹⁰ For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.
- ¹¹ You brought us into the net;

you laid a crushing burden on our backs;
¹² you let men ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a place of abundance.
¹³ I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will perform my vows to you,
¹⁴ that which my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
¹⁵ I will offer to you burnt offerings of fattened animals,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah
¹⁶ Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for my soul.
¹⁷ I cried to him with my mouth,
and high praise was on my tongue.
¹⁸ If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
¹⁹ But truly God has listened;
he has attended to the voice of my prayer.
²⁰ Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me!

I am finding the psalter to be a wonderful tonic for my sorrow, fear, and malaise. We live in an age of information and speed, and I love the psalms because they force me to slow down a little. If you are gifted with some extra time on your hands, consider this bit of ancient poetry. It is not meant to be read quickly, but deeply and slowly. The psalmist invites you and the rest of the creation to join him in praising God. He remembers the Exodus and the stories of the judges when God “let men to ride over our heads.” God has tried them in a forge. But God has brought them back to abundance.

Starting at vs 13, the psalmist reveals a little of himself. He will fulfill the vows he spoke when he was in trouble. He will make good on that promise to bring an offering. It sounds as though it has not been a straight line to blessing and vow fulfillment for the psalmist. There have been a few detours along the way. Were they detours caused by more affliction or caused by prosperity I wonder? What kept him from fulfilling those vows in the past? What keeps you from keeping the repentant vows you have made?

“Come and hear,” calls the psalmist to us. Hear what God has done to rescue his soul and how God has answered his prayers. After you read and ponder this psalm, reflect on how God has rescued you. Have you been in a day of trouble and found relief? Have you grieved and found comfort? Have you suffered and been given strength? Be ready to tell that story.

Ascension Day – Acts 1:1-11

¹ In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴ And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

It was one of those rare sunny days we sometimes get in the month of January. We take them as we can get them around here. Usually grey, wet, and cold is our normal in that time of the year. I was heading home but decided to detour, there is a little coffee shop in the U of O library next to church. I used to teach in that building and I was feeling a little melancholy. I thought I would sit and be haunted by memories and ghosts over a latte.

I drank my coffee and remembered students and colleagues. I was a little sad, I have to admit. I don't know why I went out the front door. It was not the right way, not the way toward my home. But as I did, I saw him sitting there out of the corner of my eye. An old friend, basking in the sun on a chair. His thick white beard blinding white in the sun. “Is that you?” I called. It was him.

We sat and spoke for a while, remembered good times, made plans to change this neighborhood together, shared some griefs and joys. I was so glad I had made all those strange turns that morning and run into him. My ghosts were banished and my melancholy was gone.

Luke tells us that in his first book he had told us what “Jesus began to do and teach.” I do not think it was an accident that I suddenly had an urge for a coffee or that my steps went out that door. I think Jesus knew we both needed each other that bright January day, when a little darkness was troubling us both. I am glad Jesus has not stopped doing what he does and that he still teaches me.

Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter - I Peter 3:13-22

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

“It’s not fair!” No, persecution and suffering are almost never truly fair. Even justice, meted out by fallible courts and legal processes is often not truly fair. I think every parent has heard a child speak those words at one time or another. It is one of the most difficult lessons of life for us to learn. The world is very unfair. Peter wrote to a persecuted group of first-century Christians in what is modern-day Turkey. Picked on by the dominant culture, perhaps hounded by legal authorities, it was not fair. But listen to what Peter says to them and us who struggle under the strictures of a pandemic shutdown.

- Have no fear of what others do, nor be troubled. They cannot truly hurt you if you are doing good.
- Do good out of the hopeful expectation which comes from Christ and be ready to explain that hope with gentleness and respect. You will stand out and people will notice.
- You will be misunderstood but make sure that those who misunderstand have mistaken good deeds.
- There is good/meaning in suffering for doing good. Christ also suffered.

Peter enjoined them and us to lead lives which were rooted in the reality of our baptism. God in Christ has broken into this world to claim you. Now you are the embodiment of that kingdom in this benighted world. He reigns through your good deeds. This pandemic has undoubtedly given you new opportunities to do good. They may be hard. They may be misunderstood. It might take courage and strength to do them. Do them anyway. You are a citizen of that kingdom.

Friday of the Sixth Week of Easter - John 14:15-21

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

Jesus knows us well. He is one of us, after all, since taking up to himself our human nature. He knows our fears and our weaknesses. Since those heady days of post-resurrection glory, Jesus has not made it a regular practice to show up as he did for Saul on the road to Damascus or the Emmaus disciples who had stopped for an evening meal. As Peter told us, even though we do not see him, we love him (I Peter 1:8). But we would very much like to see him. Like the disciples on the mount of Olives yesterday (Acts 1:9-11), our eyes turn upward, waiting for his promised reappearance for all.

Jesus speaks to what might feel like a hole in our experience today. We want to see Jesus. When two Greeks came up to the disciple Philip one day, he brought them to Andrew, and they went to Jesus (John 12:20-21). I wish it worked that way today. It would be good to lay eyes on him.

But Jesus exhorts me today not to think of this facet of my faith as a problem. Indeed, He tells me that he has come to me and he lives in me. It is a presence better than sight. The disciples saw Jesus but the Gospels are unanimous in telling us that the disciples almost never understood what he was saying or truly grasped who he is. They saw him but were mostly blind. Jesus has come to me differently, it is true, but he has come to me better than it was for Peter, James, and John. He has come in Spirit.

I know a man who was an orphan, but he was adopted by a couple who loved him. He said that he used to feel like a second-rate member of the family until his father one day took him aside and said, “Son, there is a funny thing about adoption. It never happens by accident. It always takes a great deal of work. It is expensive. You are here because I chose you and wanted you to be here.” He said this changed the way he saw himself from that day forward. He belonged. Jesus has not left us as orphans. He has chosen us and come to occupy our lives.