

Home Service for August 16, 2026

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

God's grace and presence lie hidden in moments of abandonment and loss. The time we feel most alone is the time we are most closely held.

Call to Worship:

When hatred and division separate us, God's love binds us together.
When quarrels estrange us, Christ's grace brings reconciliation.
When we feel excluded and left out, The Spirit's peace eases our pain.
Come! Let us worship the One who makes us one.

Opening Prayer:

Eternal God, heal the wounds that block our unity as your beloved children.
Ease the hurts and betrays the block us from embracing the balm of your forgiveness. Cast out the fears that prevent us from seeking your peace and reconciliation. Even when our hearts are pierced with anguish, send us friends who will bring us solace, through your loving Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Merciful God, free us from the desire for retribution towards those who have wronged us. And fill us mercy and compassion for those who trigger deep-seated prejudices against those who offend us. Open our hearts, O God, to those who seem different and strange. For we long to know the joy of living in peace, and the hope of living in harmony, with those we would rather live without. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

*The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.
Rejoice in the knowledge of God's saving love.*

Read Psalm 133

How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!
² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,

down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the Lord bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Prayers of the People:

Lord, what a blessing it is to come together in this community of faith. We travel here from all walks of life, from different ages and stages, and are welcomed in your love and your presence! Today we bring before you the names of loved ones who are struggling with loss, with illness, with depression, with addiction, with alienation from those that they love. Be with each of them. Lay your hand of healing gently over their lives and pour out your balm of peace on them. Help us to reach out to be of service to each other in Jesus' name. Lord, we also bring to you situations of celebration: birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, family gatherings, special occasions which lift us up and remind us of the goodness that there is in life. Breathe your spirit into these wonderful events that all who gather may rejoice and celebrate the blessings you have given each of us. Keep our hearts and minds open for your reconciling word for us; for we ask this in Jesus' name. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

³ Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! ⁵ And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was

to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ⁶ For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. ⁷ But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. ^[a]

⁸ “So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. ⁹ Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. ¹⁰ You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’

¹² “You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. ¹³ Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.”

¹⁴ Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. ¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don’t you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel:

²⁹ for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable. ³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now ^[a] receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. ³² For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 15:10-28

Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. ¹¹ What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”

¹² Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

¹³ He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. ¹⁴ Leave them; they are blind guides.^[a] If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

¹⁵ Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”

¹⁶ “Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. ¹⁷ “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? ¹⁸ But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

²¹ Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²² A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

²³ Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

²⁴ He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵ The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶ He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

²⁷ “Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Message

Paul’s words today, in his letter to the Roman Christians, convinces me that Churchill’s words, “Never give up, never give up, never give up!” could also be used to describe the Lord’s movement in our lives and in the world in which we live.

Our Epistle Lesson starts with the question: “Did God reject his people? Paul’s reply: “By no means! God has not rejected his people!” He based his claim on himself and what God had done in his life. Think for a moment, Paul was an educated Jew. He had a rather distinguished pedigree and identified himself as a Pharisee. As a conservative, traditional, observer of the law, Paul opposed the new sect called, “The Way,” whose followers of Jesus were later called Christians. They were the first Christians. He did not just voice his opposition, but rather actively persecuted the early disciples of Jesus Christ. He imprisoned some and stood by while others were executed. In his writings, Paul stated that he considered

himself the “chief of sinners.” Living in opposition to the God whom he sought to serve, Paul was amazed that God would single him out, appear to him on the road to Damascus, forgive him, give him the ability to believe, and respond to God’s grace with faith.

Paul was not the only imperfect person that the Lord has used. Jacob, one of the fathers of the Jewish people was a liar and trickster. Moses was a murderer with a speech impediment, for he stuttered. King David was a rapist and murderer. The disciple Peter betrayed Jesus not once but three times. The list of imperfect people is endless, both in the Scriptures and in the history of the church. Other than Jesus, all of us are imperfect people, but God still loves us, He calls us to be His children and may we serve Him every day of our lives. God is a tenacious God. According to Paul, the Lord will not stop moving in the lives of the Jews drawing them into a faithful relationship with him, and God will not stop moving in our lives inviting us in to a closer walk with him, and transforming us in to his image. The good news of God’s love and grace is that our goodness does not cause the Lord to love us anymore and neither does our sinfulness persuade God to love us any less.

God tenaciously loves us and moves in our lives. The Lord does this because of who he is, and in spite of who we are. We have nothing to be proud of in our relationship with God. In fact, in Romans 11:20 Paul warns his readers not to be proud, but to stand in awe of what God has done and is doing. This is an echo of Micah 6:8 where it states that the Lord “requires” that his people love kindness, seek justice, and walk humbly before their God.

Paul anticipated that Roman Christians, to whom he was writing, would respond to his letter with the questions, “How?” “How will God do this?” “How will God bring the people of Israel back into a relationship with him?” Like any good, truthful theologian Paul answered their question honestly by saying, “I have not a clue. I do not know.” But in reality Paul wrote, “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.” In other words, “Only God knows.”

God is a little too big for us to understand Him, but I will admit there is days that God is huge and I can only stand in awe. God works mysteriously in our lives sometimes in ways that only God can see. We know that God has used a blinding flash of light and a voice from heaven. God has used a burning bush, a storm at sea. Sometimes God uses more mundane avenues to draw us to him like a listening ear, a warm smile, a heartfelt hug, or simply the gift of presence. Sometimes He speaks to our hearts or places a thought into our head. There are times that we do not recognize His presence until after the fact. But joy we feel when we are able to experience “a God Moment!”

There will be times when we can rest in the assurance that at the very core of our being we know that God is embracing us with his love and grace. At other times we may not sense God's movement in our lives or in our world. There may even be occasions when we will convince ourselves that God is far away rather than near, but in those times remember He is only a prayer away. Whatever our situation, may we can remember Paul's words, "By no means! God has not rejected his people." And he has not forsaken us, because our God is a tenacious God of love. For God loved us first!

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who is and was concerned about all of the lost sheep regardless of whether or not they are Jews or Gentiles. Today's Gospel Lesson is but only one incident of how Jesus reached out to those who were not Jews. Jesus came to this world to save all people, both Jews and Gentiles, and if you ever question that just take a moment to remember and say or read John 3:16-17 which states: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." Take the time to feel God's love surrounding you and then thank Him for His gift of grace. Amen.

Benediction:

Family of God, how good and pleasant it is when we live, when we praise, when we weep, and when we find peace in unity together. May God bless you with the wisdom and grace to recognize and cooperate with the Spirit who binds us together in love, that we may grow in unity of praise now and forever. Amen.