



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of May 5, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Loving God, who makes all things new, I celebrate your care and generosity. Making the world new again is a vital part of your vision. Make me tender and uncomfortable enough to join your new creation work, we pray. Amen.

Monday, May 6

Scripture: Isaiah 2:2-4, 11:6-9, 65:17-19

In the days to come
the mountain of the LORD's house
will be the highest of the mountains.
It will be lifted above the hills;
peoples will stream to it.
Many nations will go and say,
"Come, let's go up to the LORD's mountain,
to the house of Jacob's God
so that he may teach us his ways
and we may walk in God's paths."
Instruction will come from Zion;
the LORD's word from Jerusalem.
God will judge between the nations,
and settle disputes of mighty nations.
Then they will beat their swords into iron plows
and their spears into pruning tools.
Nation will not take up sword against nation;
they will no longer learn how to make war.

The wolf will live with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat;
the calf and the young lion will feed^[a] together,
and a little child will lead them.
The cow and the bear will graze.
Their young will lie down together,

and a lion will eat straw like an ox.
A nursing child will play over the snake's hole;
toddlers will reach right over the serpent's den.
They won't harm or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain.
The earth will surely be filled with the knowledge of the LORD,
just as the water covers the sea.

Look! I'm creating a new heaven and a new earth:
past events won't be remembered;
they won't come to mind.
Be glad and rejoice forever
in what I'm creating,
because I'm creating Jerusalem as a joy
and her people as a source of gladness.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad about my people.
No one will ever hear the sound of weeping or crying in it again.

Observation

In Isaiah's day, conflict between the dominant Assyrian Empire and the military power of Egypt was a constant threat to Israel. (Like them, we at times feel as though we live with the threat of violence.) Isaiah's God-given vision was not of one power wiping out the others, but of swords made into plowshares. He wrote prophetically about God's dream of a world restored by the Messiah, a world where "they will neither harm nor destroy." He even used startling images to show us the serene nature of this new Eden. Imagine lambs lying down safely with lions, or children playing near cobras!

Application

The Common English Study Bible clarifies the meaning of "swords into plowshares": "For the nations seeking God's ways, weapons will no longer be necessary. These will instead be fashioned into tools for tending the earth and nurturing life." As centuries rolled by, and swords were still swords, God's people realized their ultimate hope was in a world dramatically recreated by God's redeeming power. What inner tendencies do you, and the communities of which you are a part, need to move beyond before weapons are no longer necessary?

Prayer

O Lord, let your peace reign more and more in my heart, in my life. And keep my hope and faith focused on the day when you again reign fully over our world, and violence and sadness give way to complete peace and harmony. Amen.

Did You Know?

It is spring in Minnesota and all around us new life is emerging! Let's get out and enjoy the beauty of Creation, and let's be good stewards! The "Hymn of Promise" says: *"In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree; in cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free! In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be, unrevealed*

until its season, something God alone can see.” When you are outside today, try listening for the birds and looking for the new life and colors of Spring!

Tuesday, May 7

Scripture: Revelation 19:5-9, 21:1-6

Then a voice went out from the throne and said,

“Praise our God, all you his servants,
and you who fear him, both small and great.”

And I heard something that sounded like a huge crowd, like rushing water and powerful thunder. They said,

“Hallelujah! The Lord our God, the Almighty,
exercised his royal power!

Let us rejoice and celebrate, and give him the glory,
for the wedding day of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

She was given fine, pure white linen to wear,
for the fine linen is the saints’ acts of justice.”

Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Favored are those who have been invited to the wedding banquet of the Lamb.” He said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne say, “Look! God’s dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look! I’m making all things new.” He also said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will freely give water from the life-giving spring.

Observation

Many people think the book of Revelation is bleak and scary—but near its end, the vision pictured God’s restored world as a joyous wedding banquet! (In Bible times, wedding banquets were an even bigger deal than today’s receptions.) The vision rolled on to end in Paradise restored. With images from the prophet Isaiah as well as the Genesis creation stories, it showed the world as God meant it to be—no pain, suffering or death. In Revelation 21, “the one seated on the throne” made a resonant promise to our broken, hurting world: “I’m making all things new.”

Application

Every day natural disasters, illnesses, some large or small part of the economy going south, or the world scene getting more chaotic can make it feel as though the news is trying to snuff out hope. In whom do you place your confidence that “the worst thing is never the last thing”? Do you trust that Jesus meant it when he promised to prepare a place for us so that we can be with him forever (John 14:1-3)? Can you live in hope that, in the end, God will win?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I yearn for the day when you will make all things new. Keep renewing me inside, empowering me to live with trust and hope in a world painfully short of both. Amen.

Did You Know?

In Minnesota, we talk about 10,000+ lakes, but climate change is primarily a water crisis. We feel its impact through worsening floods, rising sea levels, shrinking ice fields, wildfires and droughts. We can all make changes in how we use water so we can conserve and use water wisely. One small thing we can do today: Just by turning off the tap while you brush your teeth in the morning and before bedtime, you can save up to 8 gallons of water a day. That adds up to more than 200 gallons a month—per person. **Learn more at:** <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/water-and-climate-change>

Wednesday, May 8

Scripture: John 3:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. He came to Jesus at night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it’s not possible to see God’s kingdom.” Nicodemus asked, “How is it possible for an adult to be born? It’s impossible to enter the mother’s womb for a second time and be born, isn’t it?” Jesus answered, “I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don’t be surprised that I said to you, ‘You must be born anew.’ God’s Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. It’s the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

So then, from this point on we won’t recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn’t how we know him now. So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!

Observation

Jesus told his nighttime visitor Nicodemus that entering his Kingdom was like being born for a second time, like an act of creating new life. The apostle Paul echoed that, writing to

the Christfollowers in the city of Corinth that God called them to live as a “new creation.” Those links to the creation story evoked a connection between God’s power as Creator of all that is and God’s grace recreating our inner identities, and the attitudes out of which we live.

Application

Scholar N.T. Wright called 2 Corinthians 5:17 “one of [Paul’s] great summaries of what Christianity is all about. In the Greek language he was using, he said it even more briefly: ‘If anyone in Messiah, new creation!’ The ‘new creation’ in question refers both to the person concerned and to the world which they enter, the world which has now been reconciled to the creator.” In what ways do you see God’s creative power at work in your life, and that of other Christians you know?

Prayer

Dear God, you’ve made me a new creation. Help me to remember that, to submit myself to you today so that as I live among others, they too will be able to see you at work in me. Amen.

Did You Know?

A rain garden helps filter out pollutants carried by storm waters before this runoff reaches our waterways. A rain garden is a pollinator habitat and provides a food source for hummingbirds, butterflies and honeybees. Messiah has two rain gardens (one near the Bloom playground, the other near our parking lot.) A third is being planned. If you are thinking about making some changes in your yard, a great article with ideas and how-tos can be found at https://restore.tchabitat.org/blog/diy-rain-garden?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjw2uiwBhCXARIsACMvIU2BZ-5nkot969ypo5TszUWo2swzGyRa6g6GdErco19Ao_PvHhZ9qZUaAimAEALw_wcB

Thursday, May 9

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-13

When God began to create^[a] the heavens and the earth— the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters— God said, “Let there be light.” And so light appeared. God saw how good the light was. God separated the light from the darkness. God named the light Day and the darkness Night.

There was evening and there was morning: the first day.

God said, “Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters to separate the waters from each other.” God made the dome and separated the waters under the dome from the waters above the dome. And it happened in that way. God named the dome Sky.

There was evening and there was morning: the second day.

God said, “Let the waters under the sky come together into one place so that the dry land can appear.” And that’s what happened. God named the dry land Earth, and he named the gathered waters Seas. God saw how good it was. God said, “Let the earth grow plant life: plants yielding seeds and fruit trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it, each according to its

kind throughout the earth.” And that’s what happened. The earth produced plant life: plants yielding seeds, each according to its kind, and trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it, each according to its kind. God saw how good it was. There was evening and there was morning: the third day.

Observation

This is the start of the first of two creation stories found in Genesis. The writer(s) wrote poetically, and Hebrew priests may well have used the story in worship. Many of Israel’s neighbors in the ancient Near-Eastern world had their own creation stories, but the Jewish account was the only one that saw creation as fundamentally good. Later, that goodness was lost through bad human choices, but the world came spotless from God’s hand, good from its origin.

Application

Some Christians tend to view the physical creation as negative, from which only death frees us. This view of creation grew from Greek philosophies like Plato’s, imported into the church through false teachers known as Gnostics. Jesus rose from the dead, not as a disembodied spirit, but with a transformed body (Luke 24:38-43, John 20:26-27). How do you understand the Bible’s promise of eternity as “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1), in which Jesus says, “I’m making all things new” (Revelation 21:5)?

Prayer

Dear God, before anything else existed, Genesis said, you were there. You set it all in motion. Thank you for still creating, for being the God of new beginnings and fresh starts in my life. Amen.

Did You Know?

Farmers Markets will be opening soon, and there are many in the Twin Cities area. The benefits of shopping at one near you? You have the opportunity to buy fresh fruits and veggies picked at their peak, not shipped in from hundreds or thousands of miles away. Buying local helps the environment! Farmers Markets provide the opportunity to talk with the growers, get the kids involved, learn about the food, try new things. **Click here** to learn about two Farmers Markets near us are [Maple Grove](#) and [Plymouth](#):
<https://www.maplegrovefarmersmarket.com/we-are-moving>
<https://www.plymouthmn.gov/departments/parks-recreation-/events/farmers-market>

Friday, May 10

Scripture: John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. He removes any of my branches that don’t produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can’t produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can’t produce fruit unless you remain in me. I am the

vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything. If you don't remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.

Observation

Israelites often saw themselves as part of a vineyard God tended (Psalm 80:8-18, Isaiah 5:1-7). A golden sculpture of a vine over the porch of the Jerusalem Temple reinforced the image. Jesus used that image but applied it differently. When his followers stayed united to him like branches to a vine, Jesus said, their lives would bear the kind of fruit God sought. As Christ-followers, we do not commit to an impersonal set of ideas, but to the person of Jesus.

Application

"Producing fruit" was, of course, an image of what a vineyard-keeper expects the carefully tended vines to do. What kinds of "fruit" does God want your life to bear? How can you go about your daily business seeking to bear fruit for God, without becoming obsessed with externals or turning your spiritual commitment into a dry, detailed set of rules you must follow to earn salvation?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, keep me connected to you today. Let me be a branch through which your divine love can flow freely to bless the lives of other people around me. Amen.

Did You Know?

Do you grow vegetables? Do you have room to grow one more row of veggies to donate?

Home-grown produce is an incredible joy to those who utilize the food shelves. All sorts of vegetables, herbs, and fruits are welcome in any size donation - bring a handful or a bushel! As your garden's bounty arrives later this summer, please drop off your donation directly at Interfaith Outreach, ICA Food Shelf or Bloom Totes for Hope (in our building.)

Saturday, May 11

Scripture: Luke 17:20-21

Pharisees asked Jesus when God's kingdom was coming. He replied, "God's kingdom isn't coming with signs that are easily noticed. Nor will people say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' Don't you see? God's kingdom is already among you."

Observation

Asked when (in the future) the Kingdom would come, Jesus told the Pharisees (powerful religious leaders in his day) that his Kingdom existed in a different dimension. They could

experience it, but it was not subject to direct observation. He tried to move his hearers away from a focus on God's kingdom as a piece of land or a human organization. Instead, he called them to join a kingdom defined by its citizens' worship of, and trust in, God every day.

Application

In verse 21, Luke used the Greek words *entos humon*, which could mean that God's Kingdom is "among you" or "within you." The question Jesus was answering made it clear (as the Common English Bible translators recognized) that "among you" was his primary meaning in this text. What are some ways in which you see God's Kingdom "among us" today? To what extent do both possible meanings ring true to your experience of the Kingdom of God?

Prayer

A great hymn says, "Immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light inaccessible hid from our eyes... thy great name we praise." Lord, surround me with your love and light as I sing you my praises and ask my questions. Amen.

Did You Know?

Messiah Church has a collection bin for used eyeglasses in our atrium. Our bin is part of a group of 16 local eyeglasses (and hearing aid) collection points being serviced by the Wayzata Lions Club. The Lions have been committed to improving the quality of life for the visually impaired in need since 1925. In the month of March 2024, 25 pairs of eyeglasses were donated by the Messiah congregation for reuse. When added to those collected at the other 15 sites, the total for March was over 530 pair! Together we make a difference!