

HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING

In Scripture and Prayer and The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Week of July 24, 2022

Collect for Proper 12

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. BCP 231

Genesis 18:20-32 NRSVue, 2021

In our first reading the patriarch Abraham bargains with the Lord over the fate of Sodom. He learns how ready the Lord is to turn away divine anger for the sake of the few who are good. Abraham dares just a little further each time in testing the Lord's patience. In this period the presence of a few wicked persons was thought to make an entire community liable to judgment. This story, which applies the principle in reverse, represents a significant advance in Israel's understanding of God: mercy directs God's actions.

²⁰ Then the Lord said [to Abraham], “How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! ²¹ I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me, and if not, I will know.”

²² So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. ²³ Then Abraham came near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? ²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” ²⁶ And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” ²⁷ Abraham answered, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to my lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” ²⁹ Again he spoke to him, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” ³⁰ Then he said, “Oh, do not let my lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” ³¹ He said, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to my lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” ³² Then he said, “Oh, do not let my lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.”

Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19) NRSVue, 2021

In this lesson the new disciples at Colossae are urged to remain rooted in Christ, letting nothing detract from his uniqueness and preeminence. The Colossians were apparently tempted to worship the pagan star-gods along with Jesus, and also to accept basic Jewish practices such as circumcision as necessary to salvation. But God has revealed the fullness of divinity in Christ, who has triumphed over all such gods. The record of our sin and debt to law have been nailed to the cross. Ours is a far better spiritual circumcision found through dying to our sinful self and being made alive with Christ.

⁶ As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸ Watch out that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by the removal of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; ¹² when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

[¹⁶ Therefore, do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food or drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths. ¹⁷ These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the body belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, initiatory visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons, grows with a growth that is from God.]

Luke 11:1-13 NRSVue, 2021

In the gospel lesson Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer and the character of God as Father. This shorter version of the Lord's Prayer is the earliest known to us. Its concern is both with present life and with readiness for the coming of the reign of God. Jesus' two little stories encourage his followers continually to ask in prayer and to expect the good gifts of God, especially the Holy Spirit.

¹ [Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his

disciples.”² So he said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, may your name be revered as holy.

May your kingdom come.

³ Give us each day our daily bread.

⁴ And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

⁵ And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, ⁶ for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ ⁷ And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ ⁸ I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

⁹ “So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ¹¹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asked for a fish, would give a snake instead of a fish? ¹² Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion? ¹³ If you, then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Psalm 138 BCP 793

A hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord on high, who has saved God’s servant and cares for the lowly.

- 1 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; *
before the gods I will sing your praise.
- 2 I will bow down toward your holy temple and praise your Name, *
because of your love and faithfulness;
- 3 For you have glorified your Name * and your word above all things.
- 4 When I called, you answered me; *
you increased my strength within me.
- 5 All the kings of the earth will praise you, O Lord, *
when they have heard the words of your mouth.
- 6 They will sing of the ways of the Lord, *
that great is the glory of the Lord.
- 7 Though the Lord be high, he cares for the lowly; *
he perceives the haughty from afar.

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8 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; *
you stretch forth your hand against the fury of my enemies;
your right hand shall save me.

9 The Lord will make good his purpose for me; *
O Lord, your love endures for ever;
do not abandon the works of your hands.

Supplemental Resources

Luke 11:1-13. “What is God Like?” A Lectionary Essay

By Daniel Clendenin, Founder of Journey with Jesus Webzine, retired college professor and author.

Over the 4th of July holiday our family rented a big house for the long weekend. With seven adults, three grandchildren, and three dogs, I joked that we were testing the limits of holy chaos. For the kids, the biggest hit was the swimming pool. For me, it was reading books with our granddaughters while cuddled up under “blankies.”

I especially appreciated a children’s book by Rachel Held Evans and Matthew Turner called *What is God Like?* (2021). I thought it was a fantastic effort to introduce children to that most natural, most complicated, and most important of all questions that people throughout history have asked: what is God like?

The philosopher John Hick once observed that if you collected all the images of God that have been created by humanity, they’d form a book the size of a telephone directory. I remember walking through the Egyptian section of the British Museum a few years ago, where, for example, I met the god Sobek, pictured as a man with the head of a crocodile. Or consider the Hindu fire god Agni, who has two faces smeared with butter, seven tongues, gold teeth, seven arms, and three legs.

Is that what God is like?

Despite our many divisions, one liturgical confession has united all Christians for two thousand years. Every Sunday, virtually every Christian in every country around the world prays the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples in this week’s gospel: “Our Father in heaven.”

Luke writes how the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.” Implicit in that request was their admission that there were things that they didn’t understand about prayer. I’m sure they saw Jesus praying, and perhaps they wanted to imitate him. Jesus didn’t commend any technique or regimen. Rather, “when you pray,” he said, trust in the character of God.

Trust what God is like.

Three readings this week give us glimpses of what God is like that encourage us to pray.

Jesus says that God is “in heaven.” He’s infinite, mysterious, and beyond human comprehension. This spatial language about God “up there” warns us of any casual presumption, and of our chronic inclination to create God in our own earthly image “down here.” I love how the Jewish tradition refers to God as ha-Shem, “the Name,” precisely to avoid even pronouncing his name in a sacrilegious manner.

Here’s a little test. If God loves all that you love, and hates all that you hate, you can be sure that you’ve created him in your own image. The frailty of our prayers will always flirt with blasphemy and idolatry, said CS Lewis, and so he commended what he called “A Footnote To All Prayers.”

He whom I bow to only knows to whom I bow
 When I attempt the ineffable Name, murmuring Thou,
 And dream of Pheidian fancies and embrace in heart
 Symbols (I know) which cannot be the thing Thou art.
 Thus always, taken at their word, all prayers blaspheme
 Worshiping with frail images a folk-lore dream,
 And all men in their praying, self-deceived, address
 The coinage of their own unquiet thoughts, unless
 Thou in magnetic mercy to Thyself divert
 Our arrows, aimed unskillfully, beyond desert;
 And all men are idolaters, crying unheard
 To a deaf idol, if Thou take them at their word.
 Take not, O Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in thy great
 Unbroken speech our limping metaphor translate.

The Preacher similarly cautions us: “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.” (Ecclesiastes 5:2). Isaiah wrote that God is “high and lifted up.” No one has ever seen God, says John.

But this transcendence of God doesn’t mean that he’s remote or unknowable, like the impersonal and absentee landlord of eighteenth-century Deism. In his compassion and condescension, says Lewis, God “translates” the “limping metaphors” of our prayers. He’s a God of “magnetic

mercy” who draws us to himself.

There’s no need to stress or strain, to grope in the darkness, for as God’s created offspring he’s near to each one of us, as close as breath itself. In fact, you couldn’t escape his presence even if you tried, says the psalmist. Before God we are nakedly revealed, fully known, and lovingly protected.

Jesus says that God is not only high and lifted up “in heaven,” he’s also near and dear as a loving father to every person. God is infinite, yes, but he’s also intimate. In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he’s the “father of every family, in heaven and on earth.”

And so, the first two words of the Lord’s Prayer, “Our Father.” God is like a tender and protective father, said Jesus.

Paul says the same thing in Romans. We shouldn’t relate to God as a slave who fears a master, but as a child who feels safe with a parent: “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6).

Abba is the Aramaic word that Jesus used that means something like “Papa.” The word is used only three times in the New Testament, and conveys a shocking sense of human intimacy with the divine Infinite. It’s a word that little children first learning to speak used for their father, and that Jesus himself used to pray to God in the Garden of Gethsemane.

This picture of God as a tender father always reminds me of another museum. During the four years that my family lived in Moscow (1991–1995), we would take the overnight train to St. Petersburg. There, we visited the Hermitage Museum, which houses Rembrandt’s *Prodigal Son* (1636).

The painting is enormous (262 X 205 cm), and full of deep, dark reds and browns. In it, the stooping father embraces his kneeling son — with compassion, with tenderness, and without any judgment.

The real prodigal here is God the father — wildly extravagant or “prodigious” in his love. While his son was still “far off,” the father dispensed with all decorum, and instead ran to meet him, embraced him, and kissed him. He then threw a lavish party for him.

Then there’s the prophet Hosea, who pictures God as a spurned lover. He compares God’s love for Israel to the raw emotions of a jilted lover. Despite his pain at the unfaithfulness of his woman, he can’t help himself because he loves her so much. He won’t give up, even on a one-sided relationship.

To communicate the radical nature of his love, God commands Hosea to enact a living parable or symbolic act, something like street theater. He instructs Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer. The point of this shocking act is simple but powerful: “Go, love the harlot Gomer; love her

just as the Lord loves the Israelites even though they turn to other gods.” (3:1).

Israel had prostituted herself in many ways — religiously, politically, and economically, but God still loved her. He longed to woo her, to “speak tenderly to her,” and to “show her my love.” Three times he still promises to “betroth Israel to me forever.” In a beautiful play on words, the Hebrew reads, “I will show my love to the one called ‘Not my loved one’” (2:14–23).

Hosea’s God is very different from Homer’s gods. He’s like a patient and forgiving spouse, who keeps loving us no matter what we’ve done or how badly we’ve failed in our relationship.

Finally, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 for this week, so infamous for its fire and brimstone, portrays God as an extraordinarily lenient judge. Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Gomorrah, but there’s a catch. He asks God, “will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” Abraham wasn’t concerned for the wicked, he just wanted God to spare the righteous.

God responded: “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” (Genesis 18:26). Abraham kept haggling with God, wondering how low the crazy moral calculus might go. In the end, God promised to spare the entire city if there was but a tiny handful of righteous people. Whereas Abraham wanted to protect the righteous, God wanted to save the wicked.

Because God is like a tender father, a crazy lover, and a lenient judge, Jesus invites us to pray. Keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking, he tells us. If a person will answer the door at midnight when a visitor knocks, how much more will God respond to our prayers?

And when a child asks for food, like a fish or an egg, no parent would ever give him a poisonous snake or scorpion. How much more will God give good gifts to his children, says Jesus.

In the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, there’s a story about Macarius the Great (born c. 300), a former camel driver. One day someone asked him how to pray. “There is no need at all to make long discourses,” he advised. “It is enough to stretch out one’s hands and say, ‘Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy.’ And if the conflict grows fiercer say, ‘Lord, help!’ He knows very well what we need and he shows us his mercy.”

The psalms for this week thus encourage us to trust ourselves to the loving providence of a good God: “The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me... The Lord will indeed give what is good” (Psalm 138:8; 85:12).

Journey with Jesus: Weekly Prayer

[Edwina Gateley](#) (Founding Board Member of [Mary's Pence](#))

[*Silent God*](#)

This is my prayer—
That, though I may not see,
I be aware
Of the Silent God
Who stands by me.
That, though I may not feel,
I be aware
Of the Mighty Love
Which doggedly follows me.
That, though I may not respond,
I be aware
That God—my Silent, Mighty God,
Waits each day.
Quietly, hopefully, persistently.
Waits each day and through each night
For me.
For me—alone.

From Edwina Gateley, [*There Was No Path So I Trod One*](#) (1996, 2013);
this book of poetry can be found on Amazon or on [Abe Books](#). [About
Abe Books](#).

Spiritual Day Hike

In the landscape where Spirit & World intersect



Week of July 24, 2022

This Week's Holy Women and Men (Witnesses to inspire us)

Commemorations in the Episcopal Church are listed in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), in Lesser Feasts and Fasts (LFF), and in a Great Cloud of Witnesses (GCoW).

Here are the Holy Women and Men remembered this week:

Jul 24.....[Thomas à Kempis](#), Priest and Mystic, 1471 *LFF*

Jul 25.....Saint James the Apostle *BCP*

Jul 26.....[Joachim and Anne](#), Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary *GCoW*

Jul 26.....Charles Raymond Barnes, Priest and Martyr, 1918 *GCoW*

Jul 27.....[William Reed Huntington](#), Priest, 1909 *LFF*

Jul 28.....[Johann Sebastian Bach](#), 1750, [George Frederick Handel](#), 1759,
and [Henry Purcell](#), 1695 *GCoW*

Jul 29.....[Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany](#) *GCoW*

Jul 29.....[First Ordination of Women to the Priesthood in The Episcopal Church](#), 1974 *The link is to the Wikipedia Timeline of women's religious ordination*

Jul 30.....[William Wiberforce](#), 1833, and [Anthony Ashley-Cooper Lord Shaftesbury](#), 1885, Prophetic Witnesses *GCoW*

July 24: Thomas à Kempis

Thomas à Kempis is one of the best known and most beloved medieval Christian spiritual writers. Millions of Christians have found his work *The Imitation of Christ* to be a treasured and constant source of edification, and it has been translated into an astonishingly wide range of languages.

Thomas Hammerken was born at Kempen in the Duchy of Cleves about 1380. He was educated at Deventer by the Brethren of the Common Life, and joined their order in 1399 at their house of Mount St. Agnes in Zwolle (in the Low Countries).

The Order of the Brethren of the Common Life was founded by Gerard Groote (1340–1384) at Deventer. It included both clergy and lay members who cultivated a biblical piety of a practical rather than speculative nature, with stress upon the inner life and the practice of virtues. They supported themselves by copying manuscripts and teaching. One of their most famous pupils was the humanist Erasmus. Many have seen in them harbingers of the Reformation; but the Brethren had little interest in the problems of the institutional church. Their spirituality, known as the “New Devotion” (*Devotio moderna*), has influenced both Catholic and Protestant traditions of prayer and meditation.

In *The Imitation of Christ*, he writes: “A humble knowledge of oneself is a surer road to God than a deep searching of the sciences. Yet learning itself is not to be

Day Hike -2

blamed, nor is the simple knowledge of anything whatsoever to be despised, for true learning is good in itself and ordained by God; but a good conscience and a holy life are always to be preferred. But because many are more eager to acquire much learning than to live well, they often go astray, and bear little or no fruit. If only such people were as diligent in the uprooting of vices and the panting of virtues as they are in the debating of problems, there would not be so many evils and scandals among the people, nor such laxity in communities. At the Day of Judgement, we shall not be asked what we have read, but what we have done; not how eloquently we have spoken, but how holily we have lived. Tell me, where are now all those Masters and Doctors whom you knew so well in their lifetime in the full flower of their learning? Other men now sit in their seats, and they are hardly ever called to mind. In their lifetime they seemed of great account, but now no one speaks of them.”

Thomas died on July 25th, 1471.

Collect for the Commemoration

Holy Father, you have nourished and strengthened your Church by the inspired writings of your servant Thomas à Kempis: Grant that we may learn from him to know what is necessary to be known, to love what is to be loved, to praise what highly pleases you, and always to seek to know and follow your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018

July 25 Saint James The Apostle

James, the brother of John, is often known as James the Greater, to distinguish him from the other Apostle of the same name, commemorated in the calendar with Philip, and also from James “the brother of our Lord.” He was the son of a Galilean fisherman, Zebedee, and with his brother John left his home and his trade in obedience to the call of Christ. With Peter and John, he seems to have belonged to an especially privileged group, whom Jesus chose to be witnesses to the Transfiguration, to the raising of Jairus’ daughter, and to his agony in the garden.

Apparently, James shared John’s hot-headed disposition, and Jesus nicknamed the brothers, “Boanerges” (Sons of Thunder). James’ expressed willingness to share the cup of Christ was realized in his being the first of the Apostles to die for him. As the Acts of the Apostles records, “About that time Herod the King laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the Church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts 12:1–2).

According to an old tradition, the body of James was taken to Compostela, Spain, which has been a shrine for pilgrims for centuries.

Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2018

July 26 Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The gospels tell us little about the home of our Lord's mother. She is thought to have been of Davidic descent and to have been brought up in a devout Jewish family that cherished the hope of Israel for the coming kingdom of God, in remembrance of the promise to Abraham and the forefathers.

In the second century, a devout Christian sought to supply a fuller account of Mary's birth and family, to satisfy the interest and curiosity of believers. An apocryphal gospel, known as the *Protevangelium of James* or *The Nativity of Mary*, appeared. It included legendary stories of Mary's parents Joachim and Anne. These stories were built out of Old Testament narratives of the births of Isaac and of Samuel (whose mother's name, Hannah, is the original form of Anne), and from traditions of the birth of John the Baptist. In these stories, Joachim and Anne—the childless, elderly couple who grieved that they would have no posterity—were rewarded with the birth of a girl, whom they dedicated in infancy to the service of God under the tutelage of the temple priests.

In 550, the Emperor Justinian I erected in Constantinople the first church to Saint Anne. The Eastern Churches observe her festival on July 25. Not until the twelfth century did her feast become known in the West. Pope Urban VI fixed her day, in 1378, to follow the feast of Saint James. Joachim has had several dates assigned to his memory; but the new Roman Calendar of 1969 joins his festival to that of Anne on this day.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018

July 28 Bach, Handel, and Purcell

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Germany, in 1685, into a family of musicians. As a youngster, he studied violin and organ and served as a choirboy at the parish church. By early adulthood, Bach had already achieved an enviable reputation as a composer and performer.

His assignments as a church musician began in 1707 and, a year later, he became the organist and chamber musician for the court of the Duke of Weimar. In 1723, Bach was appointed cantor of the St. Thomas School in Leipzig and parish musician at both St. Thomas and St. Nicholas churches, where he remained until his death in 1750. A man of deep Lutheran faith, Bach's music was an expression of his religious convictions.

George Frederick Handel was also born in 1685, in Halle, Germany. After studying law, he became organist at the Reformed Cathedral in Halle in

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1702, and, in 1703, he went to Hamburg to study and compose opera. His interest in opera led him to Italy and then on to England, where he became a citizen in 1726.

Once in England, Handel supported himself with court appointments and private patronage. His energies were devoted to producing Italian operas and English oratorios, large choral works based upon religious themes. Handel's most popular work, *Messiah*, was first performed in Dublin in 1741, and is notable for its powerful musical interpretation of texts from the Holy Scriptures.

A man of great charity and generosity, Handel died in London in 1759 and was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Henry Purcell was born in London in 1659 and became one of the greatest English composers, flourishing in the period that followed the Restoration of the monarchy after the Puritan Commonwealth period.

Purcell spent much of his short life in the service of the Chapels Royal as a singer, composer, and organist. With considerable gifts as a composer, he wrote extensively in a variety of genres for the Church and for popular entertainment. He died in 1695 and is buried adjacent to the organ near the north aisle of Westminster Abbey.

Collect for the Commemoration

Almighty God, beautiful in majesty and majestic in holiness, you gave to your musicians Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frederick Handel, and Henry Purcell grace to show forth your glory in their music: may we be also moved to sound out your praises as a foretaste of your eternal glory; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018

July 29 Mary, Martha and Lazarus of Bethany

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany are described in the Gospels According to Luke and John as close and much-loved friends of Jesus. Luke records the well-known story of their hospitality, which made Martha a symbol of the active life and Mary of the contemplative, though some commentators would take the words of Jesus to be a defense of that which Mary does best, and a commendation of Martha for what she does best—neither vocation giving grounds for despising the other.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead which, in John's gospel, is a powerful anticipation of resurrection and sign of eternal life for those who claim by faith the resurrection of Jesus. The story of the raising of Lazarus also sheds additional light on Martha. Jesus delays his visit to their home

and arrives only after Lazarus is dead. Martha comes out to meet Jesus on the road, and while somewhat terse at first, she is still confident of his power to heal and restore. The exchange between them evokes Martha's deep faith and acknowledgment of Jesus as the Messiah.

John also records the supper at Bethany at which Mary anointed Jesus' feet with fragrant ointment and wiped them with her hair. This tender gesture of love evoked criticism from the disciples. Jesus interpreted the gift as a preparation for his death and burial.

The devotion and friendship of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus have been an example of fidelity and service to the Lord. Their hospitality and kindness, and Jesus' enjoyment of their company, show us the beauty of human friendship and love at its best. And the raising of Lazarus by Jesus is a sign of hope and promise for all who are in Christ.

Collect for the Commemoration

Generous God, whose Son Jesus Christ enjoyed the friendship and hospitality of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany: Open our hearts to love you, our ears to hear you, and our hands to welcome and serve you in others, through Jesus Christ, our risen Lord; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses, 2018

July 29 First Ordination of Women to the Priesthood in the Episcopal Church

On July 29, 1974, the feast of Martha and Mary of Bethany, eleven women deacons were ordained to the priesthood at the Church of the Advocate, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. "We are certain that the Church needs women in priesthood to be true to the gospel understanding of human unity in Christ," explained the eleven ordinands in a public statement.

One year earlier, the General Convention of The Episcopal Church had defeated a resolution to amend the canons on ordination to state that they "shall be equally applicable to men and women." A similar resolution in 1970 had also been narrowly defeated. After the 1973 convention, a group began exploring the possibility of ordaining women without General Convention action.

Day Hike –6

After months of planning, Merrill Bittner, Alla Bozarth-Campbell, Allison Cheek, Emily Hewitt, Carter Heyward, Suzanne Hiatt, Marie Moorefield, Jeannette Piccard, Betty Bone Schiess, Katrina Welles Swanson, and Nancy Hatch Wittig were ordained by three retired or resigned bishops—Daniel Corrigan, Robert DeWitt, and Edward Welles—in the presence of one active bishop, Antonio Ramos of Costa Rica, and a congregation of about 2000.

Following the ordination, a special session of the House of Bishops, convened on August 14, 1974, determined that the ordinations were not only canonically irregular but also invalid. At their regularly scheduled meeting in October 1974, the bishops affirmed the principle of ordaining women but condemned the bishops who had acted without the church's authorization.

A year later, on September 7, 1975, E. Lee McGee, Alison Palmer, Elizabeth Rosenberg, and Diane Tickell were ordained to the priesthood by retired Bishop George Barrett at the Church of St. Stephen and the Incarnation in Washington, DC. Two weeks later, the House of Bishops decried this action as well.

On September 16, 1976, the General Convention voted to amend the canons to stipulate that both women and men are eligible for ordination. The House of Bishops determined that each woman ordained before 1977 could function as a priest after a “completion of the ritual acts” performed in Philadelphia or Washington.

Collect for the Commemoration

O God, you poured your Spirit from on high to bless and summon these women, who heard the strength of your call: Equip, guide, and inspire us with wisdom, boldness, and faith to trust you in all circumstances, hear you preach new life to your Church, and stretch out our hands to serve you, as you created us and redeemed us in the name of Jesus Christ, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God everlasting. Amen.