

**Sunday Service with the New York Annual Conference
of the United Methodist Church
Thomas J. Bickerton, Resident Bishop
June 14, 2020**

Order of Service

Prelude: “In Times Like These You Need a Savior” Author: Ruth Caye Jones (1944)

In times like these you need a Savior,
In times like these you need an anchor;
Be very sure, be very sure,
Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

This Rock is Jesus, Yes He's the One,
This Rock is Jesus, the only One;
Be very sure, be very sure,
Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

In times like these you need the Bible,
In times like these, O be not idle;
Be very sure, be very sure,
Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

This Rock is Jesus, Yes He's the One,
This Rock is Jesus, the only One;
Be very sure, be very sure,
Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

In times like these I have a Savior,
In times like these I have an anchor;
I'm very sure, I'm very sure
My anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

This Rock is Jesus, Yes He's the One,
This Rock is Jesus, the only One;
Be very sure, be very sure,
Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock!

GREETING: Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, Resident Bishop, New York Annual Conference

As many of you know, the taping of this service took place three weeks ago-- just days before the events surrounding the murder of George Floyd. Since that time so much has taken place that now more than ever we understand the need to address systemic racism in our culture, our country, and even in our church. Many have expressed deep lament.

Others have expressed significant anger and frustration. Still others have hoped that it would just quickly go away.

But it will not go away and it should not go away. We need to come alongside those who have for so long endured the pain of systemic racism and say together “enough is enough” is long overdue. We need to give voice to those who have felt unheard and to listen deeply is urgent. We need to examine systems and structures that for too long have suppressed people’s gifts and abilities. This cannot be just another “flash in the pan” study, task force or book to be read. It has to be more. The door has been opened and it is time to act.

In his town hall meeting last week, President Obama reflected that there is something different with the protests that are being conducted across the world today than the ones carried out in the 60’s. Today there is a diverse group of people of all colors and ages and backgrounds who saying that enough is enough and something has to change.

And there is a clear need for us as religious leaders to incorporate what we know and do best into the conversation. It is not time for us to hold a Bible but to use it and draw upon the words that call us to action, that offer us forgiveness, and that bring us hope in the midst of our confusion and despair. Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde, the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington said it best. She writes, “Scripture is clear that God is not impressed by prayers unaccompanied by sustained efforts to create a more loving world. ‘Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.’” Scripture is clear. She writes, “Justice, which is the societal expression of love, matters most to God. Justice is also what is most important to those who are exercising their right to peacefully protest.”

Scripture informs us and expresses what we all know to be true: It is long past time to fix a law that allows police officers and vigilantes to go unpunished for crimes against people of color. It is long past time to correct the gross disparities in health care that Covid-19 has revealed. It is very long past time to change economic and educational systems that privilege white people.”

I could not agree more with or say it any better than Bishop Budde when she says, “There are times when taking a side and a stand is precisely what’s needed from people of faith. For me, now is such a time. I stand with those engaged in peaceful protest, calling for meaningful change, and especially with young Americans who rightfully wonder if there is hope for their future. This is a crucible moment. By grace and with courage, I believe that we can rise to meet it and we must. The God I serve is on the side of justice. Jesus calls his followers to emulate his example of sacrificial love and to be what he called the Kingdom of God on earth.”

I pledge to come alongside those of you who have, for far too long, felt unheard and marginalized. I pledge to keep the conversation, the words, and the actions in front of us and not let it fade. I pledge to lead with you and for you. And I pledge, as a part of that leadership, to admit mistakes, seek forgiveness, and listen deeply.

One of the most impactful statements I have heard in recent days has come from the rapper-activist, Killer Mike. In a recent interview, Stephen Colbert asked him what white Americans could do right now. Part of it, Killer Mike, said, was to quote, “understand that right now is always.”

There is a real need to confess to the black community that, as white people, we have not always understood that the emotions you are experiencing in relationship to the murder of George Floyd, the right now, is something that you have always felt and daily experienced. It is time for us to join together to name the sin, seek forgiveness and reconciliation, and pledge to work together to end the enormous disparities caused by racism.

We cannot be distracted by those who want to dilute the conversation and divert it to something else. As Bishop Budde says, “The path of lasting change isn’t easy and we won’t always get it right. But if we keep our eyes fixed on what matters most, we can refuse to be distracted by lesser things.”

This is our prayer, and this is my hope.

Something that is also critical and must be dealt with alongside the urgency of this moment is the ongoing struggle to deal with and recover from the Coronavirus. All of us, in one way or another, have been impacted by it. The convergence of these two events have begun to write a chapter that will most certainly evolve into a “new normal” that none of us can quite predict. But all of it is opening doors of new possibility for mission, ministry and service.

This pandemic has placed a real burden on the shoulders of our pastors. The daily challenges of shepherding a congregation and placing the burdens of people’s needs and care on their shoulders is not easy. The work that our pastors have had to do in these past three months has added a new level of stress that none of us could predict. So many in leadership are ill-equipped to deal with what they have faced and will be facing.

Because of that I felt it was important to acknowledge that the self-care of a pastor must be a vital consideration and a key focus for those of us who have responsibility for the oversight, safety and well-being of our clergy.

This is the reason why I chose to take this weekend, the four days when we would have been at Annual Conference, and provide a four-day period of respite and renewal for our pastors: a time to pull away to rest, read, pray, and reflect without the pressures of preparing a service or a sermon for this one week and a time to seek the strength necessary for the days that lie ahead.

I am very pleased that my team here at 20 Soundview has provided this worship experience for you.

I am also very pleased to offer the pulpit for this service to our Director of Congregational Development & Revitalization, David Gilmore. This opportunity

represents a very inadequate but appropriate way to acknowledge and express our gratitude to David for his service among us.

As many of you know, David is returning home to Kansas City, Missouri to become the District Superintendent of the Heartland District that includes Kansas City. Our loss is surely the Missouri Conference's gain, as David has provided exceptional vision and leadership in our cabinet, among our local churches, and to various regions where new and creative ministries have been initiated.

I have asked David to be the preacher for this service as a way of providing us with one last opportunity to hear from him of how God's Word and God's Will should inform our ministry here in this Annual Conference.

David will be leaving us in mid-July to begin his new responsibilities. I hope that you will join me in thanking David by showering him with cards, letters, and other words of thanks for his amazing work in our midst. I wish we could have done that in person. What we will do will pale in comparison to what we should do to say "thank you" to a person who has been faithful, energetic, and deeply committed to our people and our churches.

Now, as we prepare to worship, would you just pause for a moment. Silently reflect to God your words of praise and thanksgiving. And join me, as we together, worship the Lord.

CALL TO WORSHIP: NYAC Cabinet, Reading of Psalm 84

Rev. Sungcham Kim (Superintendent, Long Island West District)

¹How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!

Rev. Karen Monk (Superintendent, Catskill Hudson District)

²My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

Rev. Tim Riss (Superintendent, New York-Connecticut District)

³O Lord of hosts, my Ruler and my God,
at your altars even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,

Rev. Bill Shillady (Executive Director and CEO, United Methodist City Society)

⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise!

Rev. Denise Smartt-Sears (Superintendent, Metropolitan District)

⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

Rev. Alpher Sylvester (Superintendent, Connecticut District)

⁶ As they go through the valley of tears,
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain also covers it with pools.

Rev. Robert Walker (Assistant to the Bishop)

⁷ They go from strength to strength;
the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

Ross E. Williams (CFO and Director of Administrative Services)

⁸ O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;
give ear, O God of Jacob!

Rev. Julia Yeon-Hee Yim (Superintendent, Long Island East District)

⁹ Behold our shield, O God;
look upon the face of your anointed.

IN UNISON:

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹ For the Lord God is a sun and shield,
and bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does the Lord withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

¹² O Lord of hosts,
blessed are those who trust in you.

HYMN: Marching to Zion (UMH # 733) Author: Isaac Watts (1707), Author (Refrain): Robert Lowry (1867), Composer: Robert Lowry (1867). Led by Mr. Raymond Trapp, Musical Director.

1. Come, we that love the Lord,
and let our joys be known;
join in a song with sweet accord,
join in a song with sweet accord
and thus surround the throne,
and thus surround the throne.

Refrain:

We're marching to Zion,
beautiful, beautiful Zion;
we're marching upward to Zion,
the beautiful city of God.

2. Let those refuse to sing
who never knew our God;
but children of the heavenly King,
but children of the heavenly King
may speak their joys abroad,
may speak their joys abroad.

(Refrain)

3. The hill of Zion yields
a thousand sacred sweets
before we reach the heavenly fields,
before we reach the heavenly fields,
or walk the golden streets,
or walk the golden streets.
(Refrain)

4. Then let our songs abound,
and every tear be dry;
we're marching through Emmanuel's ground,
we're marching through Emmanuel's ground,
to fairer worlds on high,
to fairer worlds on high.
(Refrain)

SCRIPTURE: Acts of the Apostles, 2:37-42, read by the Rev. Matt Curry, Director of Connectional Ministries, New York Annual Conference

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers,[a] what should we do?” ³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” ⁴⁰And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God."

PRELUDE: “Spirit of the Living God”

SERMON: “Go, Go, Go! by Rev David A. Gilmore, Director of Congregational Development and Revitalization, New York Annual Conference

Acts 2: 37 – 42

“Go, Go, Go!”

I greet you in the name of Jesus and want to offer my heartfelt thanks to our Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, for this opportunity, this invitation to proclaim the Word of God.

I love you and I pray that this message touches someone’s soul. Will you pray with me and pray for me at this time?

God of Grace and God of Mercy, I pause right now thanking you for another opportunity to proclaim your Word. Use me Lord in thy service and fill me with something that will offer hope to your people. This is my prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen.

I’d like to spend just a few moments today on the subject of going...

Before the rising sun, we fly
So many roads to choose
We'll start out walking and learn to run
(And yes, we've just begun)
Sharing horizons that are new to us
Watching the signs along the way
Talking it over, just the [few] of us
Working together day to day
Together

And when the evening comes, we smile
So much of life ahead
We'll find a place where there's room to grow
(And yes, we've just begun)
Sharing horizons that are new to us
Watching... We've only just begun.

These verses, verses two through four from the Carpenter's 1970s hit, set the stage for this message. According to our Book of Discipline, "the heart of Christian ministry is Christ's ministry of outreaching love. Christian ministry is the expression of the mind and mission of Christ by a community of Christians that demonstrates a common life of gratitude and devotion, witness and service, celebration, and discipleship.

All Christians are called through their baptism to this ministry of servanthood..." (§126 2016 BOD) Additionally, "the church as the community of the new covenant has participated in Christ's ministry of grace across the years and around the world. It stretches out to human needs wherever love and service may convey God's love and ours. The outreach of such ministries know no limits." (§128 2016 BOD)

But is that last statement actually true?

"Go, Go, Go!" After reading how the United Methodist Book of Discipline depicts "the heart of ministry" and "the ministry of the community or "church," I ask a rhetorical question, "is working *in* the church the same as working *for* the church?" Well, is it? Again, that is rhetorical.

Not too long ago the Pew Research Center released a study showing a growing number of Americans, primarily younger Americans, turning away from God and/or religion. According to the study, between 2007 and 2014, "Americans who described themselves as atheist, or agnostic, or of no particular faith grew from 16 percent to nearly 23 percent. At the same time, Christians dropped from about 78 percent to just under 71 percent of the population." And, sadly, as of 2017 the numbers of 'nones and dones' (or don'ts and won'ts) continues to climb, while those who self-identify as 'Christian' are still shrinking.

If we take the time to read the first chapter of Acts, we hear Jesus command his Disciples "not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the father" (Acts 1:4). The promise being the arrival and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The outcome of which is, 'you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1:8)

Read the first chapter of Acts... You see, Jesus knew something about His (that's us) Disciples that we (I mean they) may not have ever, ever publicly admitted. And that is that we cannot *do* the "work" if we have *not* been equipped and empowered *for* the work. I mean, his Disciples knew what to speak, but they had *not* been prepared to

actually speak—yet! Jesus’ disciples knew the story. But *His* story had not become *their* story—yet!

So today, we come to the “go” of Pentecost. And as I was prayerfully studying the Pentecost story, the image of a “knee jerk reflex” examination kept coming to my mind. For those unfamiliar with the “knee jerk reflex,” this is a procedure in which a doctor will sharply strikes the patellar tendon just below the kneecap. And as the response (or lack thereof) of movement in the leg indicates the possibility of damage to the central nervous system or maybe even thyroid disease.

Now because I am not well-versed in medicine or the healing arts, I understand this “knee jerk reflex” as the response of the patient to a stimulant administered by the doctor. The patient may *feel* just fine, but the response to the “knee jerk reflex” may tell another story entirely. The patient may walk around believing that she or he is healthy, whole. However, it is their response to the hammer, to being struck that reveals the true nature of their condition.

We have a Pentecost Word from God today and it is for all of us! And that Word is that some of us “Christians” cannot carry Christ, because we have not been adequately prepared for the task at hand! We need to be “struck!” Some of us “Christians” cannot carry Christ, because we have not been equipped to do what Christ did, where Christ did it, and among those that Christ did it! Oh yes, we need to be “struck”!

“Go!” We “Christians” are called to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...” That’s what my Bible says in Matthew 28:19-20. However, too many of us do not go, because we have not really experienced that heart-warming, soul-stirring, life-changing power from on high! And the truth is that if we are not changed, we cannot change and folks around us will continue to “shade” Christ because they see many of us “Christians” as “shady!” We need to be “struck!”

Today’s passage of Scripture, while not traditionally preached on Pentecost, is in actuality, still a vital part of the Pentecost story. Now, leading up to today’s Pericope of Scripture, we have the followers of Jesus waiting expectantly for the “promise.” The “promise” arriving, the “promise” transforming, or changing, or striking Jesus’ followers. And the “promise” equipping and empowering a “struck” Peter to tell the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

You see, Jesus knew the story Saints! Peter knew the story of Jesus, but when the Holy Spirit “strikes” Peter, Jesus’ story become Peter’s story! What do I mean “Jesus’ story becomes Peter’s story?” I know someone listening today is wondering this very thing.

Peter knew Jesus. Peter knew the Jesus story. Peter walked with Jesus and talked with Jesus for three years. He knew the story! Peter witnessed the miracles’ of Jesus healing the sick, and feeding the hungry, and raising the dead. He knew the story! Peter

was with Jesus on the mountain and witnessed a “transfigured” or changed Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. He knows the story!

Peter, the one who denied Jesus three times, abandoned Jesus during his time on the cross, and then ran with John to the empty tomb. He knows the story! Oh yes, Peter knows the story. And Peter who has heard Jesus ask him “do you love me” three times and then tells Peter to “feed my lambs and tend my sheep and feed my sheep” (John 21:15-17) Church, Peter knows the story!

But it was on the day of Pentecost, when the Jesus’ story became Peter’s story! It was on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit falls afresh on Peter that he understands that following Jesus means not just “talking” Jesus, but more importantly, “walking” Jesus! Oh yes, it was on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled Peter, that he knew telling the Jesus story meant also telling the Peter story! Peter was “struck!”

Peter had fallen three times and Jesus picked him up three times! Peter has deserted Jesus in his hour of need and Jesus had shown up when Peter needed him most! Peter has fled the flock and now Jesus is teaching him how to be a shepherd to that flock! Oh yes Church, the Jesus story became the Peter story! But even better yet, the Peter with Jesus Story.

And when Jesus’ story becomes our story, then our story will become a story that touches or cuts the hearts of those who hear the story! I am talking about “believers” becoming “believable.” I am talking about the Holy Spirit equipping and empowering and filling us with a boldness that turns heads and turns hearts! I am talking about being responsive to the Holy Spirit’s power, so others may respond in faith.

Let me make this as plain or basic as possible. I believe that many, both Christians and non-Christians, view our world through a lens of skepticism, pessimism and yes, corruption. I believe many, both Christians and non-Christians, have witnessed so many assaults on humanity, so many instances of injustice—someone say the name Ahmaud Arbery.

So many occurrences of “nobodys” being reminded of their “no body-ness.” Somebody, call out the name Skhylur Davis... That we have become in many instances numb to the power of the power of the Holy Spirit.

And for many of us “numbed aints” (I said “numbed aints”) it begins with the perceived impotence of the church. And since I’m on my soapbox, let us go one step further. If the church did not have such a gory rather than gloried history, then maybe those seeking purpose or relevance would not view the church so irreverently.

Make no mistake, the Christian church will “go.” But all too often, it is the hypocrisy found in many of our bureaucracies that has alienated not one, not two, but now three generations of people. Yes, Church, the hypocrisy of the church is the primary reason we have such an alarming number of “unaffiliated” or “nones”!

The “Christian” church professes a Christ-like love and often has been the instrument of hate! The “Christian” church professes a Christ-like love, but often has been the seat of condemnation! The “Christian” church professes a Christ-like love and has been the “hammer” keeping out society’s marginalized and ostracized! You know, we ‘good’ church folks have become a beast to the least, too fast for the last, and a boss to the lost!

We need to be “struck!”

Too many “aints” have been wounded by the “Saints!” Too many “aints” have been pushed down and pushed around by the “Saints!” Too many “aints” have been broken up and broken down by those same “Saints!” Yes “Saints,” for many “aints” there is *no* difference between how *they* are being viewed by the church—or the world! Because *both* the world and the church have used, misused, and abused too many individuals, too many communities, too many families and as a result, too many churches are now museums or mausoleums instead of wellsprings of hope and love!

We need to be “struck!”

And when we are “struck,” when we are truly responsive to the grace-filled outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a different kind of response will arise in those who hear our story. The scriptures tell us that when Peter told his story, the hearers were “cut to the heart asking what should we do?” To which Peter replies: “Repent, be baptized, be forgiven, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!”

Get this now, the responses of “repenting” and “being baptized” and “accepting forgiveness” and even the “reception of the Holy Spirit” are *not* something that the people (any people) including us “good” people, can do on our own. No Church, we are able to respond because the Holy Spirit provides the grace-filled room and stimulus for us to respond. It was *after, after* they heard the story that they asked the question. And it was in the question, that Peter was able to offer this divinely-inspired guidance!

Maybe this went past somebody, so let me say it again. We “repent” because the Holy Spirit allows us the room and gives us the stimulus to “turn back to the Lord!” And our “baptism in the name of Jesus and forgiveness of sins” is possible, because the Holy Spirit allows us the space and gives us the stimulus to “become one with Christ!” We respond in faith to that presence that moves us to what we could never ever, ever, ever do and moves us to feel what we could never, ever, ever feel and moves us to go where we could never ever, ever “go” on our own! I’m talking about being “struck” right now Saints!

And maybe it is just me... But it seems like there must have been something about the movement of the Holy Spirit on that day, and in that place, and on those people because the text tells us that as a result of this outpouring 3,000... That’s three with three zeros, welcomed Peter’s message and were baptized. They were “struck”! That day 3,000 heard the story, that day 3,000 believed the story, that day 3,000 were moved by the story, and 3,000 became one with the story! Oh yes, they were “struck”!

Don't tell me the church is dead! As long as the Holy Spirit lives, then we live! As long as the Holy Spirit moves, then we move! As long as the Holy Spirit transforms, then we transform! As long as the Holy Spirit goes, we go!

Someone here today needs to know there is *real* power in the Holy Spirit! I said "there is power, real power in the Holy Spirit!" When the Spirit strikes us, we are equipped to work *in* the church and *for* the church! When the Spirit strikes us, we are empowered to tell our story in the presence of the "Saints" and the presence of the "aints!" When the Spirit strikes us, we are filled with a holy boldness that allows us to speak truth to power inside the church and even in the world!

I am talking about being "struck" and then "going" or "striking out." When the Spirit strikes us, then we become believable, believers! When the Spirit strikes us, then we become changed, change agents! When the Spirit strikes us, then we will speak what "thus sayeth the Lord" unafraid and unashamed! When the Spirit strikes us, then we look forward to learning the word, and partaking in the Lord's supper, and will feel unfulfilled if we cannot get to a church house and be around some Saints of God! When the Spirit strikes us, then we will hug the unhuggable, and love the unlovable right there in the neighborhood, where the missional outpost called the church house is located!

But it gets even better! We are told the "promise is for you, and for your children and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." That means that the Holy Spirit will strike us, and strike our homes, and strike our neighborhoods! That means the Holy Spirit will strike in Brooklyn and in Hartford. In Pleasantville and in Southington. In Harlem and in Westport. In Staten island and in Long Island. In Greenwich and Bowling Green and Orange and even White Plains. In the state of Connecticut and New York. In the United States of America—and across the globe!

And with the "strike" comes a change! Mothers, when the strike comes, your child will rise up and call you blessed! Fathers, when the strike comes, your child will honor you that their days may be long! Children, when your parents are struck, they will become she-roes and heroes!

Someone here today can feel something happening right now! You can't put words to it, but you know... You just know the Spirit is calling you to "go" and do something, right now! You can make Jesus' story a part of your story! Right now, you can hold on to someone who has already fought the battle on your behalf! Right now, you can become one with a Christ who loved you enough to die for your sins, and then loved you even more in defeating death so that you might have life and have it for eternity!

If you're there, I invite you to go! Hallelujah! Listen to and 'go' with that "voice" calling you by name! Listen to and go with that "voice" that's calling you out of your depression! And calling you out of your emptiness! And calling you out of your hopelessness! Listen to the Holy Spirit and go with Jesus!

And to all I say, Amen. And Shalom.

ANTHEM: Credo, from the Virtual Choir Project, coordinated and directed by Rev. Dr. Cynthia A. Wilson, Executive Director for Worship Resources and Director of Liturgical Resources at Discipleship Ministries, a General Agency of the United Methodist Church.

PASTORAL PRAYER: Rev. Doris K. Dalton, Director of Leadership Development and Intercultural Competency, New York Annual Conference

Please join me for a moment of silence for Ahmaud Arbery, for Breonna Taylor, for Tony McDade, for George Floyd and countless others whose lives were unexpectedly and unjustly taken away.

O God of us all, we call you by your name: The Great Physician, The Healer of our Hearts and the Balm for our Souls. We thank you for another opportunity to greet the sunrise and breathe your gift of life into our lungs. We thank you for holding us in the center of your powerful and unchanging love. We thank you for hope, for mercy and most of all, for your grace in these times.

O God, we ask you to hear our prayers:

For the sick and the infected: God, we ask for healing in their bodies and to sustain their spirits.

For our vulnerable populations: God, we ask you for protection for our elderly, for those with weakened immune systems and those who are especially vulnerable to this virus.

For the young and for the strong: God, give them compassion to help their neighbors who may be suffering. Give them eyes to see how they can be a helping hand and a witness of your love and hope.

For the unemployed and the uninsured: God, inspire the church to support them with our resources. Give them comfort in this time of uncertainty and fear of what the future could hold for them.

For those with mental health challenges who feel isolated, anxious, and helpless: God, provide them every necessary support.

For the homeless, unable to practice the protocols of social distancing: Protect them from disease, and provide them with safety and shelter.

For the hungry and food insecure: God, connect them to food pantries, feeding campaigns and food banks.

For families with children at home: God, help mothers and fathers, parents, guardians and grandparents to partner together creatively for the care and flourishing of

their children. For single mothers and fathers, grow their networks of support. Give them networks of support, so they can find rest and renewal.

For our pastors and the leaders of our church: God, give them the rest they deserve. They have not been trained or prepared to lead your church in this time. Help us to be generous with our leaders, and supporting of their efforts to lead through a time of uncertainty and fear.

God, we praise you for hope eternal and for hope right now. We praise you for your grace, mercy and compassion. We praise you for new beginnings and second chances. We praise you for the great cloud of witnesses and the encouragers and supporters in our lives right now. Most of all, we praise you for your powerful love that holds us, covers us, renews us and empowers us.

We thank you for your help in the sanctuary of our hearts, and for receiving the prayers of our hearts and the deep sighs of our souls. And we will give you all the thanks and praise for all of these things and more! In the name of God, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray, Amen and Amen.

HYMN: “We’ll Understand It Better By and By” (UMH #525) **Author and Composer:** Charles Albert Tindley (1906). **Arranger:** F.A. Clark.
Led by Mr. Raymond Trapp, Musical Director.

1. We are tossed and driven
on the restless sea of time;
somber skies and howling tempests
oft succeed a bright sunshine;
in that land of perfect day,
when the mists are rolled away,
we will understand it better by and by.
Refrain:
By and by, when the morning comes,
when the saints of God are gathered home,
we'll tell the story how we've overcome,
for we'll understand it better by and by.
2. We are often destitute
of the things that life demands,
want of food and want of shelter,
thirsty hills and barren lands;
we are trusting in the Lord,
and according to God's word,
we will understand it better by and by.
(Refrain)
3. Trials dark on every hand,
and we cannot understand

all the ways of God would lead us
to that blessed promised land;
but he guides us with his eye,
and we'll follow till we die,
for we'll understand it better by and by.
(Refrain)

4. Temptations, hidden snares
often take us unawares,
and our hearts are made to bleed
for a thoughtless word or deed;
and we wonder why the test
when we try to do our best,
but we'll understand it better by and by.
(Refrain)

BENEDICTION: Bishop Bickerton Thomas J. Bickerton,

As we depart from this service, acknowledging that much work has been done and much work needs to be done, let us go remembering and reaffirming the vows made at our baptism:

- Let us go renouncing the spiritual forces of wickedness, rejecting the evil powers of this world and repenting of our sin.
- Let us go accepting the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.
- And let us go, confessing Jesus Christ as our Savior, putting our whole trust in his grace, and promising to serve him as Lord, in union with the church Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races.

May it be so! Amen.

POSTLUDE: "Spirit of the Living God" (UMH # 393) Author: Daniel Iverson (1926),
Music: Daniel Iverson (1926).

Spirit of The Living God,
Fall Afresh on Me.

Spirit of The Living God,
Fall Afresh on Me.

Melt Me, Mold Me,
Fill Me, Use Me,

Spirit of The Living God,
Fall Afresh on Me.

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