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# THE BASICS: PREACHERS' NOTES

## ASH WEDNESDAY

March 5, 2025

### Our Own and Others' Needs

Justin Kosec

#### REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY TEXTS

First Reading: Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalm: 51:1-17

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

#### NOTE ABOUT THE LECTIONARY

*On Ash Wednesday, the Revised Common Lectionary provides two options for readings from the Hebrew Bible: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 and Isaiah 58:1-12. This commentary focuses on the text from Isaiah. Thus, Isaiah 58:1-12 is recommended for use as today's Hebrew Bible reading.*

At some point during report card season in my elementary education, I heard a classmate say he was excited about his good grades because they meant he would receive a prize from his parents.

A prize? For good grades? This was something my family had never done. Did my parents not know about Good Grade Prizes? I asked when I got home, because I had to know.

"Mom, I got good grades this quarter."

"Great, honey!"

"Can I get a prize?"

"For what?"

"For... the good grades."

"Why would you get a prize for good grades?"

I flubbed my way through some kind of response about so-and-so's Good Grade Prize, knowing full well my mom would tell me that we didn't do things that way in our house. Then she patiently explained that we didn't get a prize for doing what we were supposed to do. We were supposed to go to school and try our hardest. That's what I had done, and the grade was the result.

This was a sensible, if unsatisfying, answer. I knew the grade was the objective. But it wasn't enough. I wanted recognition for what I had done, some external validation.

Prayer is different from a grade, but it's easy to forget. Grades are individual, a recognition of one's own performance. We often treat prayer the same way. This individualist streak is part of Jesus' critique when he criticizes prayer practices in Matthew 6. People want their devotion to be recognized. We want to receive praise for the time and effort we have put into prayer—we want a Good Prayer Prize. Our desire for such validation betrays the individualism behind our prayers. We may find ourselves seeking recognition even when we pray for others.

Certainly, many people turn to prayer to ask God to fulfill their basic or most urgent needs. This doesn't mean that such prayers are selfish, but prayers remain individualistic whenever they focus only on our own needs. In Isaiah 58, the prophet presses readers to recognize something provocative: often, when we pray for ourselves—for our own wants, our own desires, our own recognition, even our own basic necessities—it becomes quite easy to forget that there are plenty of people around us who don't have what they need to survive.

In Isaiah, the prophet identifies something interesting: God will rush to care for all of our needs when we “share bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house” (Isaiah 58:7). The prophet does not minimize our needs. Instead, as the prophet writes, God fully recognizes our needs, and God will satisfy those needs when we broaden our awareness to include our neighbors' needs as well.

This season, you can begin by recognizing basic human needs that you and all other humans possess. We all need to breathe. We all need to drink water. We all need food. We all need human companionship. We all need shelter of some kind. We need plenty of other things besides. Feel free to explore some of those things in your context as you set the stage for a season in which you'll focus on needs. Remind your worshiping community that society's focus on individualism hides the truth revealed in the scripture: anything *you* truly need is something your neighbor needs as well. God is not satisfied until everyone has what they need. Nobody gets a Good Prayer Prize until everyone is fed to satisfaction.

As preachers, you may already know and recognize all this in your own spiritual lives. Today, you may find it useful to press your people to ponder how often they pray for their own desires versus the pressing needs of their neighbors. Remember, however, that in Isaiah, the prophet doesn't critique an individual but rather a whole society. You may also find yourself considering the

concerns of your congregation as a whole. What concerns press closest to their hearts? As a community, how often does their prayer life narrow to focus solely on the needs of your own congregation? How often does the congregation's awareness expand to include the needs of neighbors, and how narrow or broad is their definition of neighbor? Is that concept as broad as Jesus'—broad enough to include people we do not know, people we try to avoid, or even our enemies?

When I worked for the chapel at my divinity school, our staff often needed someone to remind us of this tension. We prayed every day, and our prayers were heartfelt pleas for our community. But once in a while, a staff member would ask, "When was the last time we prayed for the challenges our city faces?" Often, we could not remember. We were so wrapped up in the rhythm of school, the stresses of the academic year, and the pressures of life in an academic community that we had forgotten to pray for people down the road who struggled for their daily bread.

That doesn't make personal struggles less real or less potent. But consider your own community. How many in your community are more likely to identify with anxiety over midterms than with putting dinner on the table? If your congregation is more likely to identify with the former, how do you help them expand their awareness? If they already demonstrate a keen attention to their neighbors, do they hope to receive a Good Prayer Prize? How, if at all, does an awareness of the neighbor shape their spiritual practices?

We can find our favorite Lenten practices utterly transformed by an awareness of our neighbors' needs. When we fast from food, for instance, we get hungry or desire what we are not eating. As a consequence, we find ourselves grappling with a number of issues. We feel the pressure of our human need for calories, that bodily necessity that all of us share. Yet fasting also disrupts our eating habits and the rhythm of our days. It highlights the nature of desires that otherwise go unrecognized, like our love for a particular type of food. We might even encounter personal tendencies toward overconsumption or overindulgence.

When applied safely, any of these outcomes make fasting worthwhile. But if we broaden our awareness to include the needs of our neighbors, the practice of fasting transforms. We discover that when we eat less, spend less, and waste less, we have much more to share with others. Then, we begin to wonder: if we decide to fast from eating meat on Fridays, for example, how can we share with others what we would have consumed on our own?

It's not necessary to use your Ash Wednesday preaching to introduce the whole menu of needs to be explored over the course of this season. Instead, you may want to follow the prophet's inclination in Isaiah. The only needs mentioned in today's scripture are the needs of the afflicted—the needs of someone else who's having a worse day than you. This is the best way to set the stage for a season focused on need: to begin by broadening our awareness to consider how our own needs are intrinsically connected to the needs of our neighbors and of our whole society.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Which Lenten practices do people follow in your worshiping community, and how might these practices be transformed by a broader awareness of your neighbors' needs?
- In which part of your spiritual life do you find yourself pursuing a Good Prayer Prize?
- How often do your prayers—both your personal prayers and the prayers of your congregation—include an awareness of your neighbors' needs? If such awareness is a regular feature of your prayer, how can you expand your awareness to pray for neighbors you have ignored or forgotten?
- Who in your local community prays for basic necessities today? How does your congregation help provide for them?

# THE BASICS: CHILDREN'S MESSAGE STARTERS

## ASH WEDNESDAY

March 5, 2025

### This week's need

To think about what other people need

### Discussing this week's need with children

Paradoxically, kids are both wonderful and terrible at this need. On the one hand, kids can be some of the most empathetic people we know, keenly aware of the needs of the world and genuinely upset when not enough is done to meet them. But empathy, the ability to imagine oneself in someone else's position, is not an innate skill; it's one that we learn with age. One article on childhood development illustrates the paradox well, noting, "By the time a child is about 4 years old, he begins to associate his emotions with the feelings of others. While one child says he has a stomachache, some 4-year-olds may come over and comfort him. Others, much to the bewilderment and horror of parents and teachers, will walk over to the child and punch him in the stomach."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, being able to imagine ourselves in someone else's shoes is a life skill that we all need, not just because punching others is not the way to make friends and influence people, but because we're God's people, and God calls us to a special kind of caring for the poor, the unhoused, the imprisoned, and the oppressed. Ash Wednesday is an especially good day to explore that need with the children of your congregation.

### Visual aid

A very large basket, on the scale of a laundry basket

### Scripture focus

This week's reading from Isaiah calls God's people to do the work of justice by meeting the real needs of others: "to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke... to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them." (Isaiah 58:6-7)

### Meeting the need

*\*\*\*This activity requires prep work!\*\*\**

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<sup>1</sup> Kutner, Lawrence. "When (and How) Do Children Develop Empathy?" Psych Central, May 17, 2016.  
<https://psychcentral.com/lib/how-children-develop-empathy#1>.

### ***Option 1***

A few weeks ahead of Ash Wednesday, prepare children and their families to bring in a non-perishable food or clothing donation, or something else that supports a ministry in which your church is already engaged. Be specific in what you request! You can collect these items before Lent begins or simply continue the collection all season if you don't anticipate strong participation from families on Ash Wednesday.

Collect the donations in the large basket. Bring it out and place it in front of the children. Tell them that it's being filled with things for people in your community who don't have what they need to get by. Please note: this will not be a surprise to most of your children, and unbeknownst to you, some may be recipients of such donations.

As you introduce the scripture focus for the day, tell them that God asks us to take special care of those who don't have what they need. Invite the kids to put what they brought that evening into the basket, or to check out what is already there.

### ***Option 2***

Turn the same message into a congregation-wide donation drive. Instead of having the children and their families fill the basket alone, have them help you collect items from the whole congregation.

# THE BASICS: WEEKLY LITURGY

## VICTORIA LARSON

### GATHERING WORDS

#### OPTION 1

*This variation may be used for any or all weeks of Lent.*

As the Holy Spirit gathers us for worship on this \_\_\_\_ Sunday in Lent,  
we come carrying the weight of the world's needs.

I invite you to lay those needs in God's hands.  
Come back to one simple need:  
the need to breathe.

Breathe in, and breathe out,  
remembering that in the beginning,  
God breathed into us the breath of life.

Breathe in, and breathe out,  
remembering that Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit  
onto his friends and followers.

Breathe in, and breathe out,  
remembering that the Holy Spirit intercedes  
for our needs and for every need  
with sighs too deep for words.

We worship in the name of our triune God,  
who gives us life,  
gives us breath,  
and gives us what we need the most:  
God's own self,  
here in this place.

**Amen.**



## PRAYERS OF THE DAY

### FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Tender God, you emptied yourself of power in order to take on flesh in Jesus Christ. Open us to embrace our own vulnerability, so that we may discover how your strength is made perfect in weakness. Amen.

### SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Incandescent Christ, signs of your presence fill the world with brightness, but we are weighed down with sleep. Guide our waking and guard our sleeping, so that we may rest soundly in dreams of the world you envision, and wake to refract your glory in all that we do. Amen.

### PALM AND PASSION SUNDAY

Holy Jesus, you sent your disciples to ask for a colt with no reason other than that you needed it. Increase in us the willingness to go where you send us, even when we don't understand the needs you call us to answer or the value of what we can offer. Amen.

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

***A note for worship planners:** The Prayers of the People are one of the most important worship elements in this series: it's when we pray for what we need. During this season, we strongly encourage you or a member of your worshipping community to prepare your own prayers each week. Below, you'll find a set of questions for each week meant to help you think broadly about needs from local to global through the lens of each week's theme. Each question could generate several prayer petitions; use your best judgment about the prayers your community is called to pray. Strive for balance between intercessions on behalf of your church community and your local, national, and global communities. Remember to pray for creation and for the poor. Although we don't include the prompts below, it's common in many traditions to give thanks for the lives of those who have died before concluding these prayers.*

### ASH WEDNESDAY

In today's readings, the prophet Isaiah calls our attention to the needs of the afflicted. In your prayers, intercede for the "parched places" (Isaiah 58:11) throughout your community and the world. Usually, our prayers include our own community and ministries; today, make an intentional choice to focus your prayers on those outside your community.

- Which parts of the wider church are struggling? Think of local ministry partners, international sibling congregations or judicatories, and the church in places where freedom of worship is not permitted.
- Where is creation crying out for help?
- Which authorities (local, national, and/or abroad) are struggling to inaugurate or preserve peace and justice?

- Who is suffering today in body, mind, or spirit?
- Who in your church's sphere of influence needs food, clothing, shelter, community?

### THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

In today's readings, a vineyard worker advocates on behalf of a barren fig tree to a vineyard owner who wants to cut it down. In your prayers, pray for those who need an advocate or a guide to help them survive and thrive. Pay special attention to the work of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate that Jesus provides for us.

- Which parts of the wider church are facing theological division?
- Where in your neighborhood are trees and vegetation at risk of being cut down? Where is the wellbeing of animals or habitats cut short?
- Where are war and conflict breaking out in the world and in your community?
- Who needs legal representation that they cannot afford?
- Who needs help in order to ease their body, mind, or spirit?
- Which ministries in your congregation are in special need of the Holy Spirit's guidance or intercession on their behalf?

## BLESSING

### FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Now may God,  
 who brings the wilderness into blossom,  
 who basks in the fragrance of extravagant love,  
 who blesses those in mourning with a promise of joy,  
 bless you and sustain you.  
 Today God has answered your need,  
 and now the Spirit sends you out  
 to answer the world's need. Amen.

### PALM AND PASSION SUNDAY

Now may God,  
 who makes a way in the wilderness,  
 who walks the path to the cross,  
 who passes into our very hearts,  
 bless you and sustain you.  
 Today God has answered your need,  
 and now the Spirit sends you out  
 to answer the world's need. Amen.

# THE BASICS: HYMN SUGGESTIONS

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT: THE NEED FOR CHANGE

### **In the Bulb There Is a Flower (Hymn of Promise)**

Text: Natalie Sleeth

Music: PROMISE, Natalie Sleeth

### **Can You Feel the Seasons Turning**

Text: Mary Louise Bringle

Music: LLANSANNAN, Welsh melody

### **As the Winter Days Grow Longer**

Text: Mary Louise Bringle

Music: SUO GÂN, Welsh melody

### **God of Change and Glory**

Text: Alvin Allison Carmines

Music: KATHERINE, Alvin Allison Carmines

### **Change My Heart, O God**

Text: Eddie Espinosa

Music: CHANGE MY HEART, Eddie Espinosa

# DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

## ASH WEDNESDAY

March 5, 2025

### Recognizing others' needs

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (Isaiah 58:6-7)*

Do you fast during Lent or otherwise follow a spiritual discipline, like giving something up?

Many who habitually undertake this practice begin Lent with a plan. One of my friends fasts from all kinds of music except one artist, who he listens to all Lent. Another gives up work meetings, an idea that thrills me but also sounds terrifying. When I was a child, my family fasted from eating red meat on Fridays.

These days, I forget to give up something until Lent begins. Then I waffle on some kind of spiritual discipline until it's halfway through the season.

If you will choose to follow a spiritual discipline this Lent and don't already have a plan, start thinking about it now and make a choice by this weekend. Consider selecting something this year that connects to something you need.

Note that there are many types of fasts. You likely already know about fasting by refraining from certain types of food, as many Christians do during Lent. Some traditions refrain from eating meat during Lent, or just during certain days of the week. Some Christians fast during the daytime or give up breakfast. Imagine forgoing your morning cup of coffee. (Eek!)

You could try this type of fast for Lent, but remember that you do need to eat, and eating should be nourishing and good for your body. If you want to fast from food, consider a "fast" in a way that highlights this dimension of our relationship to food and drink. Fast by eating more vegetables, by drinking more water, or by giving your body more of what it needs to be healthy. You could also "fast" from devices or from media, like Netflix. Give yourself an earlier bedtime.

As you do, consider what changes these experiences introduce into your day. What do you notice about yourself in the process? What does fasting teach you about what you need—or what you do not?

### REFLECTION

Choose a spiritual discipline you'll follow through the season of Lent. Write it in the space at the end of this devotional guide. Give yourself a couple days to consider your choice, if you need to, but if you'll follow a discipline, select something by Sunday.

## PRAYER

*God, you make each day anew so we have a fresh opportunity to draw closer to you. Make this Lent a spiritual season in which each day's sunrise and sunset, each day's hunger and satisfaction, and each day's activity and exhaustion turn our minds to you. Amen.*

## TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2025

### *The dignifying power of beauty*

*Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. (Luke 12:27)*

In the winter of 1912, workers in textile mills in Lawrence, MA—most of them immigrant women and children—went on strike after their hours and pay were cut. These workers already struggled to make ends meet for their families, and they labored with dangerous machinery in unsafe conditions. The strike lasted for several months. Pickets became victims of violence at the hands of militias and police. The strikers cared for one another with soup kitchens, mutual aid, and translators who could help them communicate across the approximately nineteen languages they spoke. The strike ended after women and children testified in court about their working conditions, the injuries they had sustained in the factories, and the financial crises their families faced. The workers successfully negotiated with the mill owners for better pay, hours, and conditions.

Shortly before the strike, a poem called “Bread and Roses” had been published, inspired by the words of labor activist Helen Todd. It asserted that working people needed more than just food: they needed “roses,” too. Only the rich had the luxury of spare time, rest, and dignity; rather than luxuries, labor activists declared, these things were basic human needs, and the working poor had a right to them as well. The 1912 textile workers’ strike became known as the Bread and Roses strike. Famous songs have since set the words of “Bread and Roses” to music: “Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses.”<sup>2</sup>

In God’s creation, beauty does not belong to the wealthy. It is given to all God’s people. Even the wealth of Solomon cannot buy beauty as exquisite as that worn by lilies. Though the rich may try to restrict beauty, God intends it for all. Beauty is much like the “roses” demanded by the Lawrence

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<sup>2</sup> Oppenheim, James. “Bread and Roses.” Jewish Women’s Archive, 1911. <https://jwa.org/media/bread-and-roses-poem>. Public domain.

textile workers in 1912: they did not just want food; they wanted dignity, too. Beauty dignifies, and God intends beauty and dignity for all.

## REFLECTION

Listen to an arrangement of “[Bread and Roses](#),” sung here by vocal ensemble Windborne. Which workers in your community are in need of adequate pay and spare time enough for metaphorical roses? What changes would make roses accessible to all?

## PRAYER

*God, you send us our daily bread, and your bread is more than food: you satisfy the needs of our hearts and spirits, too. Give food and dignity to all who hunger today. Support everyone who works. Help our communities provide fair pay, safe conditions, bread, and roses for all. Amen.*

## HOLY SATURDAY

April 19, 2025

### Spending time at the grave

*Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (John 19:41-42)*

Holy Saturday asks us to put ourselves in the place of the disciples who buried Jesus: to wait with them in the in-betweenness that filled the time from Jesus’ death on Good Friday to his resurrection on Easter Sunday. It asks us to confront the reality of death. Even in the present day, on the far side of Jesus’ resurrection, death still marks our lives, though its ultimate power has been broken. Holy Saturday asks us to feel the depths of the space between hope and despair, between lament and rejoicing, between doubt and faith. This day challenges us to approach the tomb and remain there awhile, not running from death but keeping company with the dead, and letting our tears fall as they will.

Paradoxically, sitting by the side of the grave helps to free us from death’s power. Running from death and denying its power are both deeply human impulses, but they are also ways of living in fear of death. Confronting the reality of the grave, allowing it to break our hearts, breaks the grip of fear and denial, too.

Spending time at the grave prepares us to embrace the goodness of new life, which is coming... and coming soon.

## REFLECTION

Who or what has died in your life, spiritually or literally, over this past year? What emotions or thoughts arise as you sit with the reality of those deaths? Write some of them in the margins.

#### **PRAYER**

*Jesus, I haven't left you.*

[Breathe in.]

*Please stay with me.*

[Breathe out.]

[Repeat for several breaths.]

# MIDWEEK WORSHIP

## PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

Each week, this service provides text and setup guides for three prayer stations for worshipers to use during a ten- to twenty-minute period at the center of worship as they respond to God's word. Worshipers may move freely between the stations, engaging each station for whatever time they need or not at all. Silent prayer and hymn singing are always options during this time. For worshipping communities in which a line tends to form for individual healing prayer, more time and several prayer leaders may be required. A bell or singing bowl may give worshipers a two-minute warning before concluding the prayer stations.

## CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Confident in God's mercy, we confess our sins together.

*Pause for self-reflection.*

God,  
**We call out for your forgiveness.**  
**This world needs healing**  
**because it is filled with people who harm others**  
**just as they have been harmed.**  
**We are part of this world.**  
**We need healing.**  
**We have hurt others.**  
**We have hurt ourselves.**  
**But you bind our injuries**  
**and soothe our bruises.**  
**You forgive us,**  
**and we no longer have to harm.**  
**You heal us,**  
**and we grow hearty again.**  
**Thank you for your forgiveness. Amen.**

People of God,  
you are loved beyond measure.  
Your sins are forgiven  
by God who knit you together,  
by Christ who satisfied your hunger,  
by the Holy Spirit who gave you breath.



**Amen.**

## PRAYER STATIONS: WEEK FOLLOWING MARCH 9

### Materials needed

Chairs, at least two tables, medium cross, large map of the world, stones or glass pebble gems, index cards, writing utensils

*Optional materials:* candles, anointing oil

### Readings

Psalm 91, Luke 4:1-13

### Prayer Stations

*The prayer stations may be introduced with these or similar words:*

This week, we reflect on the need to embrace our vulnerability. Accepting that we are vulnerable is necessary to seek healing. By our own power, we can't accomplish the healing that our loved ones, our neighbors, or we ourselves need. We come to God in our vulnerability, seeking healing. At the first prayer station, we will offer individual prayer with a leader for those who need any kind of healing, physical or otherwise. At the second prayer station, you will be invited to pray for healing around the world. At the third prayer station, you will be invited to pray for individuals or groups of people who may have trouble praying for their own healing.

### Prayer Station 1: Individual Prayer

#### SETUP

One pair of chairs per prayer leader, optional anointing oil, optional candle

#### STATION INTRODUCTION

At this station, we pray for healing for ourselves. The leader(s) will listen to you as you name your need for healing. Then, they will pray for healing with you.

#### LEADERS MAY PRAY FOR HEALING IN THESE OR SIMILAR WORDS:

God of grace, send your spirit of healing upon [name]. They seek the healing that only you can give. They seek healing for [needs.] Meet them in their need. Make your presence known. Give them grace to discern the ways you have healed already. Accompany them through all the days and nights to come. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

#### OPTIONAL

Leader(s) may also offer anointing and/or laying on of hands with the consent of the person seeking prayer.

## ***Prayer Station 2: Healing the World***

### **SETUP**

Table with world map, stones or glass pebble gems, optional candle, optional seating

### **STATION INTRODUCTION**

At this station, we pray for healing around the world. Consider what you have heard in the news recently: conflicts and wars, natural disasters, famines, acts of violence, public health crises, and more. Place a stone on the map to mark the approximate location of your prayer concern. Pray silently for God's healing there as you place the stone.

## ***Prayer Station 3: Help Us, God***

### **SETUP**

Table with index cards, writing utensils, cross, optional candle, optional seating

### **STATION INTRODUCTION**

At this station, we pray for people we know who might have trouble praying for themselves or seeking assistance when they need it. On one or more index cards, write the first name of a person or group of people you know are in need of help and prayer. Consider the people in your family, neighborhood, and wider community. These prayer requests will become part of the Prayers of the People later in the service. Place your index cards around the cross.

## ***Prayers of the People***

*Prior to the Prayers of the People, gather the completed index cards from the third station.*

God our healer, you have created us to be as we are: human beings with bodies that experience injury and age, hearts that break, minds that muddle, and souls that long for you. We are vulnerable to tragedy and illness, natural disaster, the rejection of others, our own faults, and so much more.

Yet in this vulnerability there is a gift: you have created us to need the help of others. We need you. Teach us to embrace our vulnerability, that we will also embrace the help that finds us.

Today we pray for ourselves, naming silently those things that require healing...

*Pause for silent prayer.*

We pray for all of our neighbors in need of healing, those close to home and those far away...

*Pause for silent prayer.*

We also pray for people who might have trouble seeking the help or healing they need...

*Read the prayer concerns submitted on index cards at the third prayer station.*

God, we receive your healing and help through the hands of others. As we are healed, let us know the joy of being your beloved children.

**Amen.**

## WORDS OF SENDING

People of God, we have gathered,  
and God's love is all around.

This place is only the starting point;  
this time is only the beginning.

**God sends us  
with hearts of flesh, not stone.  
God sends us  
whether we are courageous or afraid.  
God sends us  
to love our neighbors and our world.**

God's love is all around,  
no matter where you stay or go.  
God sends you,  
here and now.