

THE HOPE IN US

**A CATECHISM FOR
WORLD ANGLICANS**



LIVING CHURCH BOOKS

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A CATECHISM FOR WORLD ANGLICANS

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THE**TEN COMMANDMENTS****LESSON ONE***GOD spake these words, and said:**I am the LORD thy God; Thou shalt have none other gods but me.**Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the*

water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and show mercy unto thousands in them that love me and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his Name in vain.

Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work; thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, thy manservant, and thy maid-servant, thy cattle, and the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it.

LESSON TWO

Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt do no murder.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his.

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THE
APOSTLES' CREED

ONE
APOSTLES' CREED INTRODUCTION

TWO
I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY,
MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

THREE
AND IN JESUS CHRIST HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD

FOUR
WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY GHOST,
BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

FIVE
SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, WAS CRUCIFIED, DEAD,
AND BURIED: HE DESCENDED INTO HELL [TO THE DEAD]

SIX
THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD

SEVEN
HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND SITTETH
ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY

EIGHT
FROM THENCE HE SHALL COME TO JUDGE
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NINE
I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST

TEN

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH;
THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

ELEVEN

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

TWELVE

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY;
AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING. AMEN

○

THE

LORD'S PRAYER

ONE

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name*

TWO

*thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven*

THREE

Give us this day our daily bread.

FOUR

*And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us*

FIVE

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

SIX

*For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.*

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OUR CALLING & GOD'S GIFTS IN CHRIST

OUR GRATITUDE FOR:

ONE

CHRISTIAN VOCATION AND WORK

TWO

SUFFERING, DYING, HOPING

THREE

MARRIAGE, FAMILY, SINGLENESSE, SEXUALITY, EMBODIMENT

FOUR

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FIVE

MONEY, WEALTH, TITHING, CARE FOR CREATION

SIX

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SEVEN

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EIGHT

BOOK OF COMMON PRYER, WORSHIP, CHURCH YEAR

GUIDE:**GENERAL CHARACTER OF THIS CATECHISM**

We offer this work freely and gratefully for the upbuilding of the Anglican churches throughout the world, and for any other Christian brothers and sisters who might find it of help. We have called it an ‘A Catechism for World Anglicans,’ though we hasten to add that we have not worked at the request of any institutional authorities. We are happy that it should be judged by the value leaders and congregations find in it intrinsically. Team members who contributed to this effort were deliberately gathered from diverse parts of the Communion, and for all of them we give thanks to God.

Catechesis (“teaching”) is important at any time in the Church’s life, but the need for stronger moorings seems particularly urgent now across various cultural contexts. One could hear different bishops and teachers worry about Biblical forgetfulness, a more tenuous relation to Anglican roots, and the effects of secular culture. By its very nature, the prime virtue of catechesis is surely not originality. We hand over what we have received, or, to change the Biblical metaphor, we offer milk without the spices one might add to subsequent meat.

For this reason, the reader should note that we have maintained

the traditional shape of catechism, especially the 10 Commandments and the Creed. But any catechism, indeed any Christian activity, does best when it impels us back to hearing the Word of God. So we have emphasized the great narrative of Scripture in our opening section. This approach is supported by the tradition of the continuous reading and hearing of Scripture in the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer and Sunday Eucharistic lectionaries. It is from this Scriptural framework that all the Church's practices are rightly understood.

We have imagined three ways in which this catechism would be of benefit to the Church.

- i. It can be a guide for those who prepare persons for baptism or candidates for confirmation; or, for renewing the faith of current members. It is, thus, very basic and aims at laying out the fundamental teachings and convictions of the Christian faith.
- ii. Because it is aimed at this basic level, it also hopes to provide a common framework for Anglican teaching across a broad range of geographical, cultural, and educational contexts. There are legitimate differences that may arise within these diverse contexts, but they cannot rightly be seen as an alternative to the basic teachings presented here. Rather, they must arise only on their foundation.
- iii. This catechism is Anglican but, we hope, ecumenically friendly (as our tradition has been, at its best). The catechism deliberately appeals to our common Book of Common Prayer heritage, even as it understands that this must be adapted locally in a way that is faithful to our 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Ephesians 4).

Holding together these three aims, however, is a challenge. Any responsible catechism must present the proper substance of the faith in a way that, as Gregory the Great said of the Scriptures themselves, is like ‘a river, broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim.’ A catechism, however, is not Scripture itself. Just as with Anglican catechisms of the past, this particular catechism requires a teacher—priest, catechist, elder leader—to present it, and adapt it to the learners, sometimes by simplifying and sometimes by enlarging on its content. The teacher must also be sensitive to the larger Christian communion of disciples—not just Anglicans—and find a way to balance the particular characteristics of local Anglican life with the broad testimony of the great “cloud of witnesses” that make up the full Body of Christ (Hebrews 12).

Finally, a word on how this catechism was put together. As a whole, it is the work of a number of Anglican (including ACNA) leaders from around the world, lay and ordained, along with one Roman Catholic participant. After several months’ reflection and communication across the globe, a week’s gathering in Cairo, hosted by Archbishop Samy Fawzy Shehata, ordered by prayer and discussion, yielded the outline and plan that was the basis for the final text. Several proposed lessons were drafted as a group along with the introductory statements. Then, with particular lessons assigned to individuals, the group spent the next 18 months doing their work. The editors assembled these drafts, ordered and edited them into a relatively integrated whole, and then the manuscript was further edited by a third party, for the sake of smoothness and standard formatting.

We are well aware, however, that the catechism’s lessons bear the marks of diversity, in relative outlook and style. Themes emphasized, Scriptures chosen, questions asked, even length of discussion: given

that the catechism's content derives from Christians from around the world, and from contexts of Anglican life that vary, this relative diversity is not only unsurprising, but necessary. Those who use this catechism should welcome this, for in learning along with the voices of others from around the Anglican world, they are growing with them as well. At the same time, the Christian outlooks that inform the catechism all fall within a common vision. Whatever diversity there is, users of the catechism should feel confident that they are in fact receiving just such a common vision, one that is at one with the vast majority of Anglican commitment and devotion both historically and geographically. These are commitments and devotions that, for all the variety of graces offered in Christ (Ephesians 4:7), we believe are coherent with the "One body, the one Spirit, the one hope, the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism and the one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:4–6), whom we serve in thanks.

What this catechism *is not*:

— It is not a manifesto for a particular party in the church – high, low, Evangelical, Catholic, liberal, or conservative. Widely recognized truths that have been upheld by these and other groups within the church have been commended; but only because they fit with the witness of the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" that informs our common Christian identity.

— This catechism is not a biblical commentary; it is not a doctrinal textbook; it is not a theological treatise; it is not an ethical code or a devotional handbook. There are aspects of commentary, doctrine, theology, ethics, and devotion in the catechism throughout. But only as these serve a discussion of the basic elements that inform the Christian's daily discipleship: elements of Scriptural truth, the

Gospel of Jesus, and the Christian mysteries of worship, sacrament, and service.

— This catechism is not a single argument, to be read in a sitting or two by an individual. This is instead an outline to be presented by a teacher. Although the individual lessons fit with each other in terms of content and outlook, they are designed to be particular units, whose integration in the larger catechetical process deepens on the direction of the teacher.

A GUIDE TO USE

We now want to provide more specific advice about this catechism's use.

i. In conjunction with the description above, consider the vision shared by the contributors from the beginning to the end of our work. The catechism opens with a statement about the character of Anglicanism and about the nature of the Scriptures that shape the lessons. This “Anglican vision” is not part of the lessons, but the teacher may want to share aspects of this statement on Anglicanism and Scripture with the group at some point, so that they have a roadmap for their study together.

ii. The catechism is laid out in 48 lessons. This total number was deliberate: if two lessons, of one hour each, were presented a week, the catechism could be completed over the course of six months. In some parts of the Anglican Communion, this fits with common practice before baptism or confirmation.

But in fact, the 48 lessons do not require such a six-month approach. They can be adapted, either as sections (e.g., Old Testament or Creed) or individually in many different ways. One might, for instance, use the six lessons of the Lord's Prayer section for a weekly Lenten study, or one or both of the Scripture sections for a longer

adult study over the course of three months. We aim for flexibility. Further, how long to take for each lesson will depend on how one adapts these lessons.

iii. Each lesson has these sections: Teaching, Exploring the Scriptures, Exploring the Book of Common Prayer, Questions, Calling, and Practice or Devotion.

- a. Teaching: this portion presents the content of the lesson – summarizing the scriptural, theological, and practical aspects and implications of the lesson’s topic. This can be read, aloud as a group or personally, but it should also be discussed together, with the leader helping to clarify points or answer specific questions.
- b. Scriptures: This portion of the lesson suggests a number of scriptural texts that relate to the topic. Some may have already been mentioned in the Teaching section, others are new. These are not proof texts for the teaching, but rather places in Scripture where the teaching is unfolded in various ways. Participants are encouraged to look up, read, and discuss some of these biblical texts, though not necessarily all of them. The leader needs to be prepared to guide the group in this, introducing the group to some of the breadth of the Bible.
- c. Book of Common Prayer: here, certain prayers or liturgies of the Prayer Book are suggested as places where the teaching of the lesson is lived out in common worship. It is important that the teacher be ready to guide the group in locating these places in the Prayer Book, if possible. Or, if the local Prayer Book (there are many in use among Anglicans) does not contain these particular suggestions, the leader needs to find an alternative in that Prayer Book. This section of the lesson is crucial for helping learners find their place as Christian disciples

within the Anglican tradition of common life.

- d. Questions: these are possible discussion questions, designed to encourage reflection by the group on some aspect of the topic being covered. Other questions may arise on their own, and thus these particular suggestions can be put aside. But it is important to have a time during the lesson for these kinds of broad questions to be raised and addressed.
 - e. Calling: this portion of the lesson presents a summary of the personal commitments God summons from us, if we take seriously what we have learned from the lesson. Some discussion of this as a group needs to happen.
 - f. Devotion: Finally, some suggestions are made for something to do as a group, or individually during the week: sing a hymn, speak to someone in a certain circumstance, say a particular prayer. When the group next meets, it is worth asking about how this worked for participants – what happened, what they learned, how they felt.
- iv. Finally let us consider the setting within which the catechism is used.
- a. The catechism is designed for group teaching. Although individuals could read and reflect on the lessons on their own, learning together and common discussion will best allow the lesson's content and meaning to take shape for participants.
 - b. Because discussion is important, the catechism will work best in groups that are not too large.
 - c. Lessons can be covered over the course of one hour apiece, or longer. (The lessons are not all of exactly the same length, and teachers will need to adjust to the topic and the group.) Some churches may wish to do two lessons a meeting, perhaps coordinating a Scripture lesson with a lesson from the Creed or

other sections. Or the entire catechism could be worked out lesson by lesson, beginning with the Old Testament section, and then moving through the other sections in order. This is a matter for the local leader and group to discern.

- d. As far as possible participants should have a Bible and a Book of Common Prayer in hand for the gatherings. The leader must have these available and be prepared to find the relevant texts for each lesson.
- e. Prepared leader: The teacher (priest, catechist, or other) must have looked over the lesson ahead of time, and must be ready to present the material (especially the teaching and exploring sections). The leader must have access to some of the suggested practical devotions, like the hymns or have ready alternatives.
- f. Each lesson's questions and practice sections are also important to engage. But they are the most flexible in terms of the leader's suggestions, which might involve alternative questions and practices that better fit the group.

Let us close this introduction by attending to the attitude of heart we have sought in its composition, and in which we hope the church receives the catechism. To this end, let several of our great Anglican forebears come to our aid. First, Thomas Cranmer in the Preface to first Book of Common Prayer insisted that it must be in 'such language [as is] spoken to the people in the Church.' To this end we will endeavor to see that this work is translated into French, Spanish, and Swahili (and we hope others as opportunities present themselves). This is a theological as well as a practical commitment which lies at the heart of what has, in missional discussion, been called 'inculturation.' Second, we who have served over many years in parishes offer this work, not with bishops, nor theologians, nor structures,

primarily in mind, but rather with ordinary Christians and inquirers, in local congregations, in the service of the Word rightly preached and the sacraments observed (Article 13). We trust in the Christian people's gift of discernment over time. Third, and finally, we older members of our team, encouraged by our younger colleagues, as well as by a new generation discovering the Gospel within the Anglican fold across the globe, offer this catechism as an act of hope for how the Holy Spirit will yet make use of our tradition, flawed and redeemed, as we ourselves are.

INTRODUCTION: ANGLICAN IDENTITY AND SCRIPTURE

We believe that the Anglican tradition is a gift that can help us humbly live, witness to, and share the new and transformed life offered to us through salvation in Christ Jesus. This gift accompanies, through God's providence, the gifts of other Christian traditions. But the way we have received it and pass it on is distinct. Our understanding of this Anglican way shapes the following catechism as a whole.

We see our Anglian identity as informed by:

- the **Bible** as the living and authoritative Word of God,
- passed on to us by the **Apostolic Tradition** to which we are gratefully accountable,
- and bearing fruit in **Personal Conversion** to a new and transformed life in Christ Jesus and His likeness.
- This life is lived in **Communion** with other Christians, and in the fellowship of other churches in common prayer, sacraments, orders of ministry, and in common service and witness to the world,
- and we believe this life is faithfully formed by the **Book of Common Prayer** and its biblical character. These prayers articulate the life and teaching that shapes the Christian faith we share.

This identity is rich, and the various aspects listed above have interacted in different ways across time and place. This rich character, furthermore, has given rise to Anglican churches with varying charisms and forms of witness, on all the inhabited continents of the globe. The common faith we share and that joins us with other Christian traditions now and in the past always partakes of these characteristics, and we are grateful to God that they are part of our history and present life as churches.

The commitment to **Scripture** and its life-giving testimony, however, is not only an “aspect” of Anglican identity. Rather, Scripture’s reality and authority form the vital spring of Anglicanism’s very being, as a church born of the ferment of 15th- and 16th-century Christian struggle and discipleship. The Bible remains the touchstone of our life in Christ in a unique way. As such, Scripture forms the ground of our growth and learning, and this catechism seeks to orient new Christians on this basis. At some point every year, Anglicans will say the following collect, originally written by the main composer of the Book of Common Prayer, the great 16th-century Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer:

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our savior Jesus Christ. [Contemporary version: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ.]

The Bible is central to this catechism, because it is central to the Christian faith. Christians have, from the beginning of the Church, considered the Bible to be the authoritative Word of God. Anglicans agree, and we pronounce, after we read the Bible publicly in worship, “This is the Word of the Lord”, to which all respond in gratitude, “Thanks be to God”.

God creates all things “by his Word” (Genesis 1:1–3; Psalm 33:6), which is “living and active” (Hebrews 4:12). We believe this Word to be God’s own Son, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth (John 1:1–4). By the Holy Spirit, Christ the Word speaks to us in words that we can understand (Hebrews 1:1–2). Anglicans describe these understandable words as “God’s word written”, that is, the Bible (or the Scriptures). The Anglican Book of Common Prayer is based on the Bible, and we pray with the Bible because we know that the Word can challenge and transform us.

This Word of God, given in the words of the Bible, comes to us as the Old Testament, spoken to the people of Israel; and as the New Testament, the words spoken by Jesus and by those who knew him and followed him. Together, both the Old and the New Testaments make up the “canon of Scripture”, a phrase that means that all important truths about God, ourselves, and the world are to be “measured” by it. These words have authority because they “endure forever”, in comparison to our frail capacities as creatures (Isaiah 40:8). The experience of Israel and the church over the centuries has shown this. Anglicans believe that the Bible “contains all things necessary to salvation”. That does not mean that the Bible tells us everything that is true. But whatever God desires us to know and believe as true for the sake of our lives, both on earth and in heaven, can be found in the Bible, or shown through the Bible.

The Bible confronts us with God Himself. It teaches us about who God is, why He created us, how to live and die well, how to treat others, and how to honor God in a way changes us to be like Christ Jesus. Because the Bible is God's Word, it does not contradict itself, and we must read it in a way that fits together. This demands wisdom and faith, and Anglicans believe that interpreting the Bible well is something we learn from faithful Christians in the church of the past, as well as of today. We are called constantly to study the Bible, learn its important truths, and pass these down through our teaching and our witness (Deuteronomy 6:7–9; 2 Timothy 3:14–17). This catechism does not aim to take the place of this scriptural calling, but, with its outlines and pointers to Christian life within the Anglican context and its varied forms, to help open the doorway to pursuing it with all faithful Christians of every era.

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THE
OLD TESTAMENT

LESSON ONE:

CREATION AND FALL

FIRST TEACHING: CREATION

Before God created the world, nothing existed. There was only God (Genesis 1:1). God made everything freely and according to His desire and will. God spoke out of the chaos of nothingness, light filled the darkness, and the world came into being. Everything He made was well-ordered and good (Genesis 4:25). God made the sun and the moon and the stars, the seas and the dry land, all growing things and creatures, and he provided for their needs. Last of all, God made human beings. He made them in His image, male and female, to be fruitful, to be the stewards of His creation, to worship Him in joy with all creation (Psalm 96:1), and to dwell with Him (Genesis 2:15). God creates out of love and mercy (Psalm 145:9).

God's creation is founded upon His speaking His word. The Genesis account repeatedly emphasizes how God spoke everything into being, how He said, "Let there be," and whatever He had spoken came into being. At the beginning of his gospel, St. John re-emphasizes this, clarifying how the Word was God, identical to Him and

the maker of all creation (John 1:1–3). This truth is why Christians see Christ Jesus as speaking through the whole of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments together, so that both are authoritative for our lives. We dare not separate the two. It is also why we see creation as reflective of God’s being in His Word. Creation is made both to praise God and to be part of our service to God (Psalm 148). Creation belongs to Christ, and as faithful stewards of creation, Christians are serving their Lord as His disciples.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Genesis 1–2; Psalm 139:13–14; Psalm 148; Jeremiah 32:17; John 1:1–3, Hebrews 11:3.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Song of Creation (*Benedicite, omnia opera Domini*), one of the Canticles for Morning Prayer.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

We are created in God’s image. This means that we are not part of God, but we are special. What makes us special? After creation, God rested on the seventh day. What does His example of rest mean for you?

OUR CALLING:

We are called to offer thankful care for God’s creation, assuring that we use the land in ways that maintain its health and beauty. This is also true for our bodies. We are meant to receive them with thanks and take care to keep them healthy, even as we use them in the service of God and in a way that furthers His purposes for our local and human community.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing the hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” or a hymn based on St. Francis’ *Song of Creation*.

SECOND TEACHING: THE FALL

In the beginning, God gave the first man and woman a beautiful and plentiful garden to live in. He told them that they could freely eat all the fruits of the garden except for the fruit of one tree (Genesis 2:16). He commanded them not to eat its fruit because if they did, they would die. Adam and Eve did not listen to God. When the Devil (in the form of a serpent) told them that the tree was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they succumbed to temptation and ate its fruit (3:6) because they wanted to know good and evil like God and take His place (3:5).

But Adam and Eve were only human beings. And because human beings are limited and cannot use the knowledge of good and evil well, shame and punishment fell upon them and all the generations of their children to come (3:10, 11, 14). As a result, human hearts become caught in their own fears, deceits, and desires. As the prophet Jeremiah writes, human beings are desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9), even as they are also filled with hopes for good.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Genesis 3:1–15, Romans 5, Psalm 51.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Prayer of Humble Access at Communion.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

The Devil suggests to Eve that we humans can become gods (Gen. 3:5). What is wrong with his suggestion? Compare this story with Jesus' temptations in the desert (Luke 4:1–13). What sorts of things does the Devil tempt Him with, and how does He respond? To hide the shame of their nakedness, God clothes Adam and Eve after their disobedience (Genesis 3:21). What does this tell us about God's mercy and about our lives?

OUR CALLING:

In Scripture and in the order of His creation, God shows us what is good and right. We are called to live obediently according to His commands and will, ever mindful of our own limits, incapacities, and sinfulness. The Fall teaches us both humility and our need for repentance and for turning to God for forgiveness and strength—the blessed hope of redemption!

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Say together the Prayer of Humble Access from the Prayer Book Communion service and meditate on its phrases.

LESSON TWO: COVENANT

TEACHING:

A covenant is an agreement between people. There are many kinds of agreements, but a covenant has a special character. We might compare it to a business contract, but business contracts do not have either the personal bond or the moral weight of a covenant. We might better compare it to a marriage, which has promises which hold *until we are parted by death*. We could also compare it to blood brotherhood, found in some cultures, in which saving someone from distress creates a lifelong connection. However, covenant in the biblical sense is far more than either marriage vows or blood brotherhood.

Modern Biblical scholarship has something to contribute to our understanding of covenant. In the ancient Near East, triumphant kings often made pacts between themselves and the states subordinated to them. Covenants in the Bible are similar in that they too involve an unequal relationship. Like the kings of old, God takes the initiative and lays out the terms of the relationship He has with His servants. However, covenants in the Bible are very different from those known from the ancient world of politics and domination. Their difference lies in God's love, for in a biblical covenant God uniquely loves the human party with whom He makes an agreement.

God does not dominate. God loves.

At the center of Scripture is the covenant God has with Israel in the Old Testament, and then the deepening and widening of that relationship in Jesus Christ with the Church, and finally through the Church with the world. The story does not begin with God's covenant with Israel at Sinai, with the giving of the Law. It is preceded by a series of earlier covenants, each accompanied by divine signs (like the rainbow or circumcision): with Noah and with all living creatures after the flood (Genesis 9), with Abraham through the promise that he will be a blessing to the nations (Genesis 12, 15, 17), and with the patriarchs after him. Their survival of trials and dangers, some of their own doing, testify to God's faithfulness in seeing the covenant fulfilled.

God's covenant with the Hebrews (Exodus 20), made in the giving of the Law on Sinai, requires that Israel be solely loyal to God (here the Ten Commandments are the prime example). The people commit themselves not to lapse back into paganism. Although the succeeding chapters of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy record their many lapses and rebellions against God, and God's punishment for them, this does not end the covenantal relationship, for God is patient. The giving of the land to Israel must be seen in the context of covenant, and it comes to include a new dimension in the subsequent promises to David, Zion, and its Temple (Psalm 132:13–14; 1 Kings 9:3).

Through all this, the people of God prove unfaithful, rejecting or straying from their responsibilities and promises before God. Prophets like Jeremiah remind the people that they should not presume on God's covenant promises in a way that sanctions sin (Jeremiah 7:1–4). In the midst of exile, while they may question whether the covenant still holds (Ezekiel 37:1–10), God reassures them that

His love is stronger than Israel's disobedience (see Isaiah 49:14–16). Through this reassurance, the hope of the promise entailed in the covenant grows in the centuries that follow.

The fact that we call the collected canonical writings of the early Church the New Testament—that is, the New Covenant—testifies to the continued importance of this divine promise and its responsibilities accepted by God's people. At the Last Supper, Jesus described both the renewed Passover meal and the saving death it represented as a “new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). Both in sermons and in images, the earliest church frequently depicted the parting of the Red Sea in a way that tied covenant (how Israel became God's people) together with Christ's death, for they saw that Jesus' people were bound up with the promises of God made to the Passover (or Paschal) people of the Hebrews from long ago. Other New Testament writings thought through covenant in relation to grace (Paul), sacrifice (Hebrews), servanthood (John), and martyrdom (Revelation). The holy God's promised relationship of love with those who follow him gratefully provides the foundation of our Christian faith.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Study some of the texts noted above. An important question in the New Testament is whether God's covenant holds in spite of our failings. For this, look at this passage from Romans which concerns our relationship to Jesus in the face of death, life, powers and principalities (Romans 8:38). Discuss this in relation to the assurance that the risen one will be with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). What other passages come to mind, and what do they tell us about the nature of God's covenants with us?

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Covenant lies at the heart of the Christian understanding of baptism—namely, God’s initiative on our behalf in Jesus, and then our response to His call. Read the baptismal rite in the Prayer Book of your church and consider how it develops this covenantal theme.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

If we place covenant at the center of our relationship with God, what can we say about the wider reality of the world and our place in it? In what way is creation also covenantal (see Genesis 9)? In what sense does our being formed in the image of God (Genesis 1) constitute a covenant?

OUR CALLING:

Baptism is the basis for other callings, like confirmation, ordination, marriage, religious orders, or special individual callings. How are these described in the Prayer Book? Your Christian calling, in whatever context it may be, is something that flows from your baptism, with God as your powerful partner.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

While you are studying this catechism, you have committed yourself to a learning program! How might you think of this activity as covenantal in the sense we have been exploring, and how might this shape your commitments to your teacher, your fellow learners, and the church? Talk about this amongst yourselves, and ask one another how God is committing Himself to your learning. What are your committed responses to Him and to one another? Pray about the covenant, or commitment to learning, that you have made.

LESSON THREE: COVENANT

TEACHING:

The Exodus was an important event in the history of the people of Israel. It is also the name of the second book of the Old Testament which describes it. After the Israelites lived in bondage to the Pharaohs, or rulers, of Egypt, for 430 years (Exodus 12:40), God finally set the Israelites free, under the leadership of His servant Moses. But they were not set free in a single day. Gaining their freedom and finding their promised homeland involved a series of difficult experiences and a journey that lasted for many years.

In the story recorded in the Book of Exodus, God sends down ten devastating plagues upon Egypt in an attempt to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites go free. But no matter how destructive the plagues are, Pharaoh stays stubbornly resistant. Finally, God loses patience and sends the angel of death to strike down all the firstborn sons of Egypt. However, He first instructs the Israelites to sacrifice a lamb and sprinkle its blood upon the doorposts of their houses so that the angel of death will see it and *pass over* them. When the angel of death strikes down Pharaoh's son, Pharaoh relents and allows the Israelites to leave. God tells the Israelites and all their descendants to keep the Passover of their release in a yearly remembrance forever (Exodus 12–14).

The Israelites follow Moses out of Egypt, but as they approach the Red Sea between Egypt and Sinai, Pharaoh changes his mind and sends his armies after them. Just in time, God separates the waters of the Red Sea, and the Israelites cross over into Sinai through a narrow passage of dry land. As soon as Pharaoh's armies try to follow them, the waters rush back and drown them all.

After their centuries of slavery, the Israelites have much to learn, especially about their relationship to God. As the Israelites' leader in the process of redemption on their journey to the Promised Land, Moses is the dominant and most famous figure in Exodus. After their miraculous escape from Pharaoh, the Israelites go wandering helplessly in the desert for 40 years. Eventually, they reach Mount Sinai and make their camp in the desert at the foot of the mountain. By this time, they are weary of wandering, and some of them are even looking back regretfully to their food and security as slaves in Egypt. Worse yet, they are giving up on God and beginning to turn to idols. Moses leaves the camp and climbs up Mount Sinai to ask God what to do. It is during this meeting on the mountain that God gives Moses the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the covenantal law that is to bind the Israelites into a people dedicated to Him.

As an event, the Exodus demonstrated God's mighty hand to save His people (Exodus 14:12–16). But God did more than deliver them from slavery in Egypt. Despite the sufferings the Israelites endured in their wanderings and their repeated backsliding, God formed a people for Himself, a people who held His commandments to be holy and true. Moses died before crossing the River Jordan into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34:4).

The Exodus story is important to Christians in another way. Jesus was crucified on the evening before the Passover. To Christians, His death correlates with the original Passover in Egypt, when the Israel-

ites sacrificed lambs and sprinkled their blood upon the doorposts so that the angel of death would pass them by. Jesus is the new Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7–8), bringing redemption not only to Israel, but to all people who are joined to Him.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Exodus 12:1–3, 12:12; 14:15–18; Exodus 19:1–2; Exodus 20:1–17; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Prayer Book collects for Easter reflect the great redemption through Jesus Christ, the Passover Lamb. The Ten Commandments are also featured as optional in the Holy Communion liturgies of many Anglican Prayer Books..

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What do you think are common forms of spiritual bondage that you have witnessed among non-Christians?

Is there something that you recall that kept or still keeps you in bondage?

MY CALLING:

I will seek to live a life of freedom in Spirit.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Memorize John 8:34 and 2 Corinthians 3:17.

LESSON FOUR:

THE PROMISED LAND

TEACHING:

Despite human rebellion in the Garden of Eden and then later, outside the Garden, God was not finished with humanity. God planned to bring His people back into His presence by giving them the Land of Canaan, a place where they could flourish in obedience, worship, and security (Genesis 15:7; 18–21). God called Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3) and made a covenant with him, promising to multiply his descendants (Genesis 17:2; 6), and to give them a fertile land in which to flourish (Genesis 17:8). In this way, Abraham's family could become a blessing to all the nations, sharing a knowledge of God's creative gifts and holiness, and thereby bringing all the human race into a place of true worship and obedient thanksgiving (Genesis 12:3; 18:18).

The Israelites understood that their relationship with God and the inheritance of the land were inherently connected. Many centuries after the Israelites had been released from bondage in Egypt, they suffered another terrible loss in the Exile—when, after several hundred years of living disobediently within the Promised Land, the Israelite kingdom was destroyed, and its people were led captive into Assyria and then to Babylon. The Exile undermined the entire framework of

their relationship with God. But even in Babylon, through repentance and renewed obedience, the Israelites could experience again the covenantal blessings of relationship with Yahweh.

This prepared the way for the widening of God's purposes in the world to embrace the Nations (or Gentiles) in a way Israel had never previously envisioned. Giving repentant thanks, even as strangers in a foreign land, enabled the exiled Israelites to bear witness to all people of God's holy goodness (see the Book of Jonah). As a result, salvation was and is no longer tied to a specific space or limited to one ethnic group, but it is there for all who believe in Jesus Christ (Ezekiel 47:21–23). Jesus himself—the Son of God—becomes the place where human beings flourish (Revelation 21:22–27).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

The Promised Land: Genesis 12:1–3; Genesis 15:7; Genesis 17:1–8; Psalm 105:1–22; Ezekiel 47:21–23. Jesus: John 4:21–24.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Song of Zechariah (*Benedictus Dominus Deus*) at Morning Prayer.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

The loss of the Promised Land must have been crushing. So how can humans get back to the Promised Land and God's presence? Israel may have lost the Promised Land, but they were still God's people in the Exile. How did this prepare the way for the widening of God's purposes in the world to embrace the Gentiles?

MY CALLING:

God's promises for our wellbeing are to be trusted, though our capacity to enjoy them is connected to our willingness to be faithful to

Him. Yet God's promises are also aimed at allowing us to share His truth and mercy with others. As God did with Abraham, what He gives us is to be used as a blessing for others, including those who are far away in time, and who will come in future generations.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing the hymn "For I'm Building a People of Power."

LESSON FIVE: ON KINGS & TEMPLE

FIRST TEACHING: KINGS

The Old Testament concept of monarchy finds its roots in the Israelites' desire for a human king to lead them, much like the surrounding nations (1 Samuel 8:5). Initially, God was rightly considered by the Israelites to be the King of Israel, governing His people both directly and through judges (Judges 8:23). However, the people's demand for a monarch signalled a shift in their desires for governance. God, though reluctant, granted their request and instructed Samuel to anoint Saul as the first king (1 Samuel 10:1).

Despite the human king's authority, the ideal monarchy was always to reflect God's justice, righteousness, and covenantal faithfulness (Psalm 72:1–2). As it turned out, most of Israel's human kings proved unable and unwilling to live according to this ideal, and they ruled in ways that were variously unjust, cruel, and unfaithful (Jeremiah 23:1–2). The strife this engendered after King Solomon's death ended by dividing Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms.

As great and wise as King Solomon was, his father David was greater, though in a very different way. While David was a man of many failures and sins, his depth of faith and willingness to repent made him a model of human integrity that took God's true rule

in human affairs seriously. The Book of Psalms has always been attributed to David. The psalms express his human fears and his sorrow over his failings, but most of all, his heartfelt devotion to God. Because of this, God promised to preserve David's descendants. During this time, the king was designated to rule by being anointed with oil, and he was called the *anointed one*, or *Messiah* (in Hebrew) and *Christ* (in Greek). Ultimately, the Davidic line of kings symbolized the hope for a messianic ruler who would perfectly embody God's reign, pointing towards the future fulfilment in Jesus, called the *Christ* (2 Samuel 7:12–16).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read 1 Samuel 8:4–22; 9:1–2; 10:1; 1 Samuel 16:1–13; 2 Samuel 5:1–5; 7:12–16; 1 Kings 1:28–30; 9:4–5; 2 Kings 23:1–3; Psalm 72.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Collect for the King's Majesty in the 1662 Prayer Book; the Advent collect that begins, "Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness ..."

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

In what ways does the promise of a perfect future king in the line of David, as it is mentioned in 2 Samuel 7:12–16, shape your expectations of Jesus the Christ's role as King in your life and in the world?

MY CALLING:

I am called to see myself as a subject of the King (God) and subordinate my will to His ("Not my will but yours be done," as Jesus teaches in the Lord's Prayer).

DEVOTION:

Sing “Be Thou My Vision” and pay special attention to the final stanza, beginning with “High King of Heaven.”

SECOND TEACHING: TEMPLE

The Old Testament concept of the Temple begins with God’s desire to dwell among His people (Exodus 25:8). The Temple, first established as the tabernacle in the wilderness, served as the sacred space where God’s presence was manifest (Exodus 40:34). Designed according to divine specifications, it was a place of ordered beauty and holiness (Exodus 25–27). The Temple provided a central place for worship, sacrifices, and the observance of God’s laws (Leviticus 1:1–17). Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem became the permanent structure symbolizing God’s dwelling with Israel (1 Kings 6:1–38). It was a place where heaven and earth met, a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7), and a foreshadowing of God’s ultimate plan to dwell with humanity through Christ (John 2:19–21; Revelation 21:22).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Exodus 25:8–9; 40:34–35; 1 Kings 6:1–2; 8:10–11; 8:27–30; 2 Chronicles 7:1–3; Psalm 27:4; Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:4; Ezekiel 40:1–4.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The 1662 Prayer Book does not have prayers directly related to the Temple (although many newer Prayer Books contain prayers that refer to the Temple in the liturgy for the Dedication of a Church.)

One of the opening sentences for Morning Prayer is the striking verse from Habakkuk 2:20. In addition, the Psalms, which are the heart of Morning and Evening Prayer, repeatedly refer to the Temple (Psalm 5:7; 26:8, etc.).

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What significance does the concept of the Temple as a dwelling place for God's presence amongst His people (Exodus 25:8–9, 1 Kings 8:10–11) hold for your understanding of the sacredness of your church and that of your body as a *temple of the Holy Spirit* (1 Corinthians 6:19)?

MY CALLING:

Whereas Temple worship was geographically bound in Jerusalem, Jesus announced to the Samaritan woman (John 4:21–24) that true worship was now in *spirit and truth* and could take place anywhere. Resolve to worship God everywhere and at all times. Such universal prayer is given in blessings, graces, petitions, and thanks.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing the song “Jesus All Glorious, Create in Us a Temple”.

LESSON SIX: THE PROPHETS

TEACHING:

God has spoken and speaks still! This is central to the Bible's message, from the very first verses where He brings what He speaks of into being (Genesis 1:2ff.), to the conclusion where He says, "I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). God is Himself the Word (John 1:1), and, unlike all His creatures, endures forever (Isaiah 40:8). At the climax of Scripture's great account, God the Word becomes fully human in Jesus (John 1:14). From the prophets, whose callings stretch across the centuries of the Old Testament to John the Baptist at the beginning of the New, in their lives and messages conveyed in the Scriptures, we learn more about the Word, so that we may prepare for His coming. It is not so much that the Prophets are a supplement to the Law of Moses (the greatest prophet), nor a replacement of the Law. Rather, they are sent to Israel to testify to the truth and holiness, the mercy and righteousness, of the God who has given the Law to Israel.

"The lion roars. Who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8). God has all the initiative, for He calls, and the prophets must respond and say what they are given to say. In themselves, they do not feel capable of speaking. The prophet needs protection from God's utter holiness

and then needs his mouth to be purified by God's fire. Whether prophets are heard is not their concern. The word they are given by God is spoken in their actions as well as in their speech. Sometimes, prophets will bodily enact a parable—for example, the shattered vase represents the Temple, a slave's yoke represents exile (see Jeremiah 19 and 27). The life of a prophet is often risky and dangerous. When they speak, they can seem to the faithless leaders to be *troublers of Israel* (1 Kings 18:17). For their faithfulness in giving God's messages, they are often driven into exile, threatened by murder plots, or worse (Elijah, Jeremiah).

Even though the people in their faithlessness were at their ease, the prophets still brought words of judgment upon their disobedience. They denounced the crushing of the poor and the worship of idols which betrayed the worship of God. Amos and Hosea, both prophesying to the Northern Kingdom, exemplified this. In its own time, their critique was, in our terms today, holistic: social injustice and the worship of false gods were equally rebellious.

While both the Northern and Southern kingdoms were frightened and weak, the message of the prophets was the very opposite. According to their message, the God of Israel directed history in all times and places. To be sure, He might bring woe as well as weal upon His people. His time frame might seem to humans to tarry. But He alone planted and uprooted empires. Although the prophets of the Old Testament spoke amidst calamitous world events, they declared that, appearances notwithstanding, God was in control, for the benefit of all the nations and for the redemption of His people.

Each prophet was distinct in his historical context, style, and personality. But all of them shared a conviction that the old traditions of Sinai, David, and Zion had been betrayed. As a result of this betrayal, the Northern Kingdom ceased to exist, and the Temple in Jerusalem,

long held to be protected by God, was ransacked. Through the prophets, God let the people know that He was doing a new thing, but it did not mean that He had abandoned His promises of old. In fact, the new fulfilled the old in an unexpected way: “Behold,” writes Isaiah, “I am doing a new thing ... I will make a way in the wilderness and springs in the desert” (Isaiah 43:19). This new act of salvation could be understood in terms of the Exodus of old.

In the prophets we hear predictions of the coming of the Anointed One, God’s chosen. He will not come as a warrior king with armies, but as the Prince of Peace, born of a maiden. He will ride humbly on a donkey, a servant wounded for the sins of many, and he will appear suddenly in the Temple to cleanse it. He will come as a Son of Man who brings the nations to the Ancient of Days. In this way, the Prophets of the Old Testament were intimately linked to the Messiah—not another human king, but the Son of God himself, Jesus of Nazareth (1 Peter 1:7–12).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

On the prophets’ ministry, see Amos 3:8, Isaiah 6:5ff., Jeremiah 19.

On the Messiah, see Isaiah 9:6, 7:14, Micah 5:2, Isaiah 52:6, Malachi 3:1, Daniel 7:13–14.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

In the lectionary of many of the new Prayer Books, the Old Testament reading frequently offers a passage from the prophets which anticipates the Gospel lesson and *prepares the way of the Lord*.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

How is it that the words of the prophets could address their time, that of the Messiah, ours, and the time of the end as well?

OUR CALLING:

The prophet Joel foresees a time when all shall prophesy. Think of the Church's life as speaking one great and final prophetic word: "Jesus is Lord" (I Corinthians 12:3). I am called to contribute to the speaking of this great word.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Prayerfully read and consider, perhaps in a group, the words of the BCP Canticle of Zechariah (the *Benedictus*), taken from Luke 1:68–79, and often used in Morning Prayer. If you can, listen to "Comfort Ye, My People" in Handel's *Messiah*. In each case, meditate on how the prophets, uttering God's directing word, have pointed us on a way to Christ.

LESSON SEVEN:

JOB

TEACHING:

The eighteenth book of the Old Testament is about a man named Job. We know nothing about him, though Greek Christians believe he was an Edomite, descended from Jacob's brother Esau. (*Job* means *Hated*, and the place he lived, *Uz*, means *counsel*.) But we do know that Job was not an Israelite, and his story, which is at the center of Bible, is remarkable for this. Job is someone who stands for everyone (not only Israelites) and the word *adam*, or *man* (as in *any and every man*) occurs frequently in the book. Thus, just as Jesus is the Second Adam (or human being, 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47), so Job points to Jesus and His gathering up of all human life in Himself, in His suffering and in His divine redemption.

The story of Job is that of a very righteous person, who, through the permission of God, suffers terrible things, including the loss of his children, of his wealth, and of his health. The book is mostly about Job's reflections on this terrible experience, which seems to him (and us) so unfair. In his misery, he wishes he had never been born. He is *counseled* by four so-called friends, who wonder if Job is being punished by God for his sins. Since Job is more righteous than anyone (God himself says so to Satan, the *Accuser*, at the beginning

of the book), this seems unlikely. Job resists his friends' views and turns to God for an explanation, crying out to his Maker to tell him the reason he suffers.

God finally answers Job out of a whirlwind (38–41). He declares His sovereignty over all things and the incomprehensible nature of His astonishing being. The book is filled with reflections on the wonder of God, of creation, and of the mysteries of existence. Job, faced with this awesome vision and the direct words of God, praises God in grateful humility (42:1–6). The book ends with God's new blessing on Job's life. Job's suffering righteousness and humbled thanks remind us of Jesus, who fulfills both Job's goodness and his longing (Job 19:23–27). He indicates how our lives make sense only when we enter into the life of God first.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Genesis 3; Psalms 39; 42; 43; 102; 104; 139; 148; Isaiah 40; Romans 11:33–36; James 5:10–11; 1 Peter 2:21–25; 4:19.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Read the Visitation of the Sick in the 1662 Prayer Book. The prayers contain a full range of attitudes from the Book of Job, including those of his friends and of Job's thoughts, and they express clear claims about God's power, justice, and mystery.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Job embodies a universal human question of great depth: Why do I suffer and why do the good suffer? If Job represents *every person* in a way that anticipates Jesus, how do you think Jesus would answer Job? As a Christian who follows Jesus, how would you answer your

suffering friend or family member? What is the church's vocation in the face of suffering?

OUR CALLING:

Job's *patience* in suffering did not involve an easy acceptance of his pain, but rather his determination to engage God in prayer and even questioning, never giving up or letting go of God. In Job's difficult but steadfast insistence on maintaining his relationship with God, God reveals himself to Job and opens a way of renewed wonder and praise. This is the attitude we take in following Jesus and His Cross.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Horatio Spafford wrote the beloved hymn "It Is Well with My Soul," when, like Job, he learned about the death of much of his family. Ponder and sing with others the hymn's verses, which like Job (1:21) bless God even in the face of sorrow. Remember several of your sorrows and sing one verse after each difficult memory.

LESSON EIGHT: WISDOM LITERATURE

TEACHING:

In the Old Testament, wisdom means many things. They range from practical insight about how to live in a godly way day-to-day, to someone named *Lady Wisdom as the first of God's works ... constantly at His side* (Proverbs 8:22, 30). In all its uses, wisdom as God's gift leads human beings to life rather than death. But it does so as a mirror of our souls which shows us both the goodness of our created nature as well as our limits and corruption. The Old Testament includes a specific set of books we call *Wisdom literature*. These books include the Song of Songs (which speaks of love, human and divine); the Psalms (Israel's hymnal of joy, petition, and praise), Ecclesiastes (the meaning of life's shortness), Proverbs (moral and practical advice), and Job (a meditation on human creation and suffering, with its own lesson).

The theme of wisdom continues in the New Testament. Jesus refers to His own ministry as wisdom (*wisdom is proved right by her deeds*—from Matthew 11:19), and he is described by Paul as embodying God's wisdom in the scandalous witness of the cross (I Corinthians 1:24). Elsewhere, wisdom is important in the Epistle of James (1:5 and throughout) as the enactment of a life of grace.

The Old Testament Book of Proverbs, which is not treated separately here, provides a foundational store of deep, useful, and sometimes biting insights into how human beings should rightly live with God and with their neighbors in the midst of a host of practical situations. Although all of Scripture reflects the richness of Proverbs, the following Wisdom books deserve special notice because they develop aspects of this wealth of insight in ways that especially illuminate the Christian Gospel.

THE SONG OF SONGS

TEACHING:

The Song of Songs is attributed to King Solomon and is sometimes even called the Song of Solomon. Chapters 1–8 depict marriage. Marriage is to be celebrated, enjoyed, and revered. Though human sexuality is one of God’s most marvelous and blessed gifts, we live in a fallen world filled with marital conflict, divorce, sexual immorality, sexual exploitation, and abuse. Though a divine gift, our experience of sexuality shows us the painful effects of sin and each person’s desperate need for a Savior. This Song foreshadows the Church and her relationship of love with her King, our Lord Jesus Christ (see 2:4 as an example of this: We are bought by our Lord Jesus Christ; or 2:16, on being covered by His love). This book has been one of the most frequently read parts of the Bible because of its focus on divine love—for Israel, for the Church, and for the individual soul.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Psalm 45; Proverbs 5:15–21; 1 Corinthians 7:3; John 2:1–11; Ephesians 5:21–33.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Our world is confused about marriage. What makes this Song special to us? Sex is a blessed gift from God for humanity to enjoy between man and woman in marital relationship. Consider the repeated admonition not to *stir up or awaken love until it so desires* (8:4). What does this mean for your life?

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Marriage service in many Prayer Books suggests reading the Song of Songs 2:10–13 and 8:6–7. Why are these verses appropriate for a wedding? How is God's love like the married love between a man and a woman?

OUR CALLING:

Through Christ, God's design for humanity in all its fullness is restored and renewed. This Song presents a picture of God-honoring sexual delight between a man and woman that is an expression of the blessed life that we have in Christ and His glorious redemption. How do we experience this?

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Can you think of a married couple whose relationship demonstrates God's love for us? If you are able to do so, tell them how grateful you are for their witness.

THE PSALMS

TEACHING:

The Psalms are a collection of songs to God, mostly by David, as well as some written by others involved in the worship of the Temple. The Psalms cover a broad set of topics: obedience to God, trust, suffering,

creation, God's character, divine judgment, God's mercy, family life, enemies and friends, sickness and health, the promises of the Messiah, and much more. They express the deepest hopes and fears of human life, both those of an individual and of humanity as a whole, and they are filled with some of the most beautiful and inspiring language in Scripture. In the New Testament, Psalms is the most quoted Old Testament book, and over the centuries, it has been the most read and repeated book of the Bible. It has been used for prayers, hymns, and public and private worship.

A famous ancient Christian writer, St. Athanasius of Egypt, described the Psalms as containing the whole heart of man. Though expressing the human heart *before* God, the Psalms ultimately express the truth of God. The fact that Jesus uttered a verse from a psalm at the end of His life (on the Cross, Psalm 22:1) means that we must read them first as the voice of the Son of God and heed their words just as we would the Gospels. The longest psalm, 119, focuses on this. One of the great teachings of the Psalms is that God's Word is pure (Psalm 12:6) and powerful, reviving the soul (Psalms 19:7; 107; 119:97–100; see also 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12), because the same Word has created the world (Psalm 33:6–9). The Psalms, as the voice of God spoken into the world and by God's servants back to Him, is thus central to the entire Bible (Psalm 33:6–9; John 1:1–5).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Luke 24:44: Jesus opens the Psalms, which are about Himself, to the disciples. Here are just a few: Psalms 16:8–11 (Resurrection); 22:1 (the Cross); 41:9 (betrayal by friends); 45 (the kingly bridegroom and His bride, the Church); 110 (Jesus, the Messiah and Lord).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Reciting the Psalms is central to the Daily Office (Morning and Evening Prayer), a particular gift of the Anglican tradition to the wider Church. The Psalms are also used in most Communion services. What is the effect of frequent shared reading of the entire Psalter?

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

As noted above, the Psalms cover a range of topics, from the Law to our fears, discouragements, joys, and hopes. Where do you find each of these in your own spiritual life? The Psalms are all *songs*: how do singing and music engage our prayer in a special way?

OUR CALLING:

I will bring all of my life and that of the church and world before God in prayer and song. I will listen to His voice even as I pray and sing. I will listen to God's voice in reply.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing the hymn "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" (a paraphrase of Psalm 147).

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

TEACHING:

Ecclesiastes (sometimes known by the Hebrew title *Qoheleth*) means the *Preacher*. The writer of this book seems to be King Solomon in his old age. Looking back upon his life, he offers wisdom about the nature of human existence on earth, and his insights fit with many Old and New Testament teachings. He writes that, given our mortality, moderation and humility are great gifts. Furthermore, he says, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under

the heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Living for ourselves and trying to gain more on earth will only lead to frustration and disappointment (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23). We cannot change the fact that all people face uncertainty, and death is common to all, as St. Paul reminds us (1 Corinthians 15:22).

However, we can cling to God and the idea of eternity to make that uncertainty and our fear of death a little easier (Ecclesiastes 8:7-8). It is important to know that God is in control and has a plan for your life (Ecclesiastes 3:11). In creation, we see that God created the world and called it good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Despite this, Solomon understands that the world is filled with meaninglessness, vanity, violence, and frustration (Ecclesiastes 1:2). This vision fits with Paul’s understanding that, although human beings were created good, they fell into sin, and all creation was subject to the curse of God through them (Romans 8:18-22).

Ecclesiastes does not fully trace God’s response to sin. Nonetheless, the book emphasizes that the only thing that brings real meaning to life is establishing and growing our relationship with God (Ecclesiastes 12:1), revering God, and obeying the Lord’s commandments (12:13).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Genesis 1; Romans 8:18-22; 1 Corinthians 15:22; James 4:14; Genesis 3; Galatians 3:13.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The collect and liturgy for Ash Wednesday in modern Anglican Prayer Books express, in part, the spirit of Ecclesiastes, especially in their discussion of our mortality and the limits sin places on us.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Solomon tells us that when we look at everything done under the sun, it all seems to be meaningless. Does this mean it is useless to work? As Christians, how should we deal with such feelings, which we are bound to have as mortal human beings?

Remember your creator in the days of your youth. What does this mean to you?

OUR CALLING:

To quote Ecclesiastes 12:13: “Fear God and keep His commandments.” This is “the conclusion of the whole matter.”

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing the hymn “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind” or “Fight the Good Fight”. When you feel that your life is empty, what words of encouragement have helped you? Offer such words to another person who is struggling.

LESSON NINE:

EXILE

TEACHING:

Exile refers originally to events in the history of Israel and Judah (defeat and deportation by Assyria and Babylon); then to the trauma and crisis of faith brought especially by these events; then as a situation calling for new strategies from God's people amidst pagan neighbors; then as a description of separation from God by His people in the story of later Judaism and in the New Testament; and finally as a metaphor in the subsequent history of the Church in the context of culture. Hence, *Exile* is a rich reality that grows in its meaning from Israel's experience into our own. We will consider each aspect in order.

In 772 B.C., the Northern Kingdom of Israel was overrun by the Assyrians, and its ten tribes were taken into exile. They were assimilated into the culture of their pagan captors, though some of them did eventually survive as the Samaritans, with a divergent form of the Hebrew faith (John 4). Even so, the northern tribes were not forgotten (Isaiah 92–97). Later, the remaining Southern Kingdom of Israel, in Judah, was defeated by Babylon. For the Israelites, *Exile* refers especially to the capture of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the captivity and deportation of a part of its populace

to Babylon in 586 B.C. They were not allowed to return to Judah until 538, when King Cyrus of Persia defeated the Babylonians. At that point, however, some Jews chose to remain behind in Babylon.

Despite their unfaithfulness, the people of Judah supposed that because of God's promise, the Temple could never fall. Their assurance served as an excuse for falling away from God and made them brazen, even in the face of prophetic warnings (Jeremiah 7:1–8). So, when Jerusalem did fall, and its people suffered torture and exile, they were disoriented. Was Yahweh forgetful of them, or was He no longer able to save (Ezekiel 37:1–14)? Were their sins beyond forgiveness (Isaiah 40:2)? What would it mean to be faithful away from the Temple (Psalm 137)? Only as they heard words of hope from their prophets and imagined a new act of salvation comparable to those at creation or the Exodus (Isaiah 42:8–17) were they able to survive until their restoration to Judah (Jeremiah 32:7–9). In their exile, they came to see more clearly that their God ruled all the nations. In this context, exile meant a state of mind and of spiritual discernment.

Nevertheless, exile did require that with the help of God's Word, they had to reconceive their lives. While a disaster, the Exile was also God's means of bringing good news to the Gentiles among whom the exiled Israelites now lived. They needed to pray for the welfare of their neighbors who were also their captors, and they needed to carry on with their lives (Jeremiah 29:4–7). Around their newly expanded geographic world, faithful Jews began to gather in synagogues, and the Law of Moses, including the laws of diet, began to preserve their distinctiveness.

This new kind of life continued under the rule of the Persians. While they remained faithful to God and the Law of Moses, the Israelites now needed a new kind of wisdom that could carry them

forward (see the books of Esther and Daniel), though they also knew that there would be periodic times of persecution, and they needed to be ready for the greater sacrifice of martyrdom. Even in the latter times, they were reassured that God had their times in His hands, and He would preserve them until the day of victory and justice (Daniel 1).

In the time immediately before and after Jesus, this idea that Jewish life was still informed by exile remained. Jews wondered when deliverance would come (Acts 1:6). The early Christians could describe themselves as the *dispersion* (or *those scattered by exile*), for they were shaped by this Israelite Jewish experience (I Peter 1:1). Under duress, the first churches could think of the Roman empire as Babylon (Revelation 17:5). Paul connects the time of waiting for the kingdom as a kind of exile (Philippians 3:20).

The idea of dispersion in later Christian history is easiest to see in minority churches scattered throughout the world. In a more theological vein, Luther described the errors of the Christian church in the 16th century as a Babylonian captivity. Finally, more recent Christian authors have imagined being Christian in a relentlessly secular culture as itself a kind of exile, one of mind and heart.

The following books of the Old Testament are associated with the Exile or with the period after the Exile. During the Exile: Ezekiel, Daniel, Lamentations, parts of Jeremiah. After the Exile: Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

In addition to the many texts referred to in the lesson, read Hebrews 11 (noting especially verse 13), which expresses how believers, Jewish and Christian alike, and in both Old and New Testaments, understood their lives (and thus, our lives) in terms of exile.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Read the baptismal liturgy and reflect on it in light of the exilic dimension of the Church's life. See also the collect for the 4th Sunday after Trinity ("O God, the protectour of all that trust in thee ..."; many modern Prayer Books use this on a different Sunday), and its language of pilgrimage, which echoes aspects of Hebrews 11:13.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

How might you think of your situation as exilic? What practices enable the Church to maintain its identity in the face of challenges from external forces, both political and cultural, that seem to overwhelm Christian belief and practice?

OUR CALLING:

In Philippians 3:20, Paul speaks of our *commonwealth* or political home as being *in heaven*. That is, we owe our first allegiance not to the leaders of nations, but to God, and we enact that allegiance through following the steps of Christ Jesus and his saints (see Philippians 3:16–17; 8–10).

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing "O come, O Come, Emmanuel" as an exilic hymn.

LESSON TEN: MESSIAH & KINGDOM

TEACHING:

In the Old Testament, Messiah (from Hebrew *mashiah*) means the *anointed* one of God. The word can refer to priests who were anointed. But it mostly designates kings who ruled the people of Israel according to God's will. The role of the Messiah was to bring justice and peace and maintain the faithfulness of the people. Both priests and kings were anointed with oil at the time of consecration. Their domains were different but complementary: the priest in the Temple and the king in the political arena, namely the kingdom. The king—the anointed one of God—was expected to be a shepherd of the people and would act on behalf of God. Despite their human failings, King David and his son, King Solomon, were probably the most revered and most faithful of all Israel's rulers. Both were anointed as kings (1 Samuel 16:13, 1 Chronicles 29:22).

When their kings did not live up to what both God and the people expected of them, people lost hope. Initially, God wanted Israel to have no human king, but to serve Him alone. Unhappy with their inability to order their lives well, the people demanded a human king, like all the other nations had. Though He warns the people that their human kings will fail them, God in His providence uses the human

kings of Israel to prepare the way for His divine Son (1 Samuel 8). Bad kings made Israel suffer at the hands of enemies near and far (Ezekiel 19; 21). Israel became a servant to tyrannical monarchs, or captive to foreign powers. Humiliation and suffering at home and in captivity made the Israelites believe that God would send a new and better Messiah or anointed king to deliver them from suffering and restore them to the promises God had given them at their liberation from Egypt.

God promised restoration that was often linked to a new and righteous Messiah (Psalm 132:10–19; Daniel 7:13–14), and that involved a new heart and a new creation (Jeremiah 31:31–34, Isaiah 65:17–19). This expectation continued until the time of the New Testament (Acts 1:4–8), when, in Palestine, the Jews were still ruled by foreign overlords—this time, the Romans. The people hoped for a political Messiah who would save them from Roman domination. Jesus, whose birth and life were seen as fulfilling earlier prophecies about a future king (Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14; Zechariah 9:9–10; and even Isaiah 53), was received by his followers as God’s promised Messiah and called the *Christ*, which means *the anointed one* in Greek (Matthew 16:16).

Though he was sent by God, the mission of Jesus was not political in the way many had expected (Luke 24:21). Jesus announced God’s kingdom (Mark 1:14), but one shaped by repentance and Good News (Gospel). He came to inaugurate a new covenant between God and humanity through His sacrificial death on the Cross, and by conquering death through His resurrection. The Messiah Jesus, the Lamb that was slain, is in fact one with the great King of the Universe (Revelation 4–5).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read about the anointing of the king as Messiah (1 Samuel 16:13, 1 Chronicles 29:22).

Read about the Israelite's rejection of God as ruler and King (1 Samuel 8:6–9, Isaiah 1:2–3).

Read God's response to rebellion (Jeremiah 29:4–9).

Read about hope and restoration (Isaiah 2:1–3, 65:17–18, 66:22; Jeremiah 30:1–3, 31:31–34; 33:6–9).

Read about Jesus as the Messiah or Christ (Matthew 16:13–28).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

In two important places, the Prayer Book emphasizes both the promises for a divine Messiah and their fulfilment in Jesus. First, in the Scripture readings for Advent and Christmas, and second, in the Prayer of Consecration in the Holy Communion service, especially those in more modern versions of the Prayer Book that recount the history of Israel and God's saving work in His Son.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What do you consider to be the key difference between an earthly ruler and God as King? How does the kingly rule of Jesus illustrate this?

What does the Kingdom of God mean to you, and do you think you belong to it? If so, how?

MY CALLING:

I will live in hope like a child of the King, a citizen of the Kingdom of God, a subject to the Lamb who reigns from a Cross.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Read Luke 22:24–27 and imagine how your service (in any way) can be like the royal kingship of Jesus. Sing a hymn about Jesus as our Messiah (King) whose reign comes through His self-giving: “At the Name of Jesus, Every Knee Shall Bow” or “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.”

○

THE
NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON ONE:**THE PRE-EXISTENCE AND NATIVITY OF CHRIST****TEACHING:**

We have been tracing the Old Testament story of creation, fall, and redemption, as well as Israel's hope of restoration which is set upon the coming Messiah and His kingdom. The New Testament picks up where the Old Testament concludes, and it introduces Jesus, a descendant of David, as the promised Messiah. Matthew 1:1 begins: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." The New Testament is clear about two features of Jesus' appearance in human history. First, as the Son of David, Jesus was conceived of the Virgin Mary and born fully human. Second, Jesus, as the Son of God, existed before His human birth (John 1:1, 14). These two realities, His nativity and His pre-existence, express Christ's two natures as both human and divine. From time to time throughout the Old Testament, God suddenly appears directly within Israel's experience. He speaks to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58; Revelation 1:17–18); He comes in both the cloud of glory on Mount Sinai (Exodus 33:12–23; Matthew 11:28–30; 17:1–5), and in the glory of the Temple that Isaiah saw (Isaiah 6:1–5; John 12:41). As St. John the Evangelist puts it,

this glory is “as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14). Thus, the Son was always present for Israel, even if He was not recognized as such.

But the fullness of this glory was finally revealed in the Word made flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God and Son of Man, who dwelt (literally, *tabernacled*) among us (John 1:14–18).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Christ is the eternal image of God (Colossians 1:15–20; Hebrews 1:3); Adam was the created image of God (Genesis 1:26–27).

The tabernacle and Temple were the visible manifestation of God’s glory in the Old Testament (Exodus 40:33–38; Leviticus 9:22–24; 2 Chronicles 7:1–3). These anticipated, or prefigured, Christ, who tabernacled among us in the flesh and revealed to us God’s glory (John 1:14–18).

The ark of the covenant was the house of God’s glory in the Old Testament, prefiguring Mary, whose body contained the uncontainable glory of God in the incarnate Christ.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Preface for the Incarnation in the Holy Eucharist liturgy of many modern Prayer Books reads as follows: “Because you gave Jesus Christ, your only Son, to be born for us; who, by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, was made perfect Man of the flesh of the Virgin Mary his mother.” The Preface for the Epiphany reads: “Because in the mystery of the Word made flesh, you have caused a new light to shine in our hearts, to give the knowledge of your glory in the face of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What difference does it make that Jesus is not just a man who became God, but the eternal God who became man for you? What difference does it make that Jesus was not just God appearing like a man, but was actually God dwelling among us as a full-blooded human being?

MY CALLING:

Because the Son of God took on flesh, I can know I am not alone in the universe. I no longer have to wonder hopelessly who God is, or what He is like, for I only have to look to Jesus of Nazareth to see the fullness of God. I will continually read and ponder the Gospels and pray to God in the name of Jesus.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

The seasons of Advent and Christmas are an opportunity every year for believers to live more deeply within the reality that Jesus took on flesh for us and for our salvation. Memorize the words to the hymn “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” which express this saving mystery: “True God of True God, Light from Light eternal / Humbly, He entered the virgin’s womb / Son of the Father, begotten, not created.”

LESSON TWO:**THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION
OF JESUS CHRIST****TEACHING:**

As the New Testament Gospels continue the story of Jesus of Nazareth, we see the journey of Israel relived in Jesus' baptism and temptation. Just as Israel, God's firstborn (Exodus 4:22–23), passed through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:26–31), so Jesus, God's only begotten Son (John 3:16; Matthew 2:14–15), passed through the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13), bearing for His people their flight and purification. Just as Israel wandered for 40 years through the desert, so Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights (Matthew 4:2). But where Israel fell into temptation and rebelled against God (Numbers 20:2–13), Jesus proved victorious and overcame Satan (Matthew 4:1–11), affirming the eternal nourishment of God's word, God's sole kingship, and trusting and not testing God. Through His baptism and temptation, Jesus takes upon Himself the vocation of Israel and fulfills it in righteousness before God and faithful worship of the Father (Matthew 3:15). Through the waters of our baptism, we become united with Christ, so that what is true of Christ is true of us. His sonship is credited to us. His righteousness is counted for our own: He takes our place and carries us along with Him. His

victory over Satan and temptation becomes our victory over Satan and temptation.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

In Numbers 20:2–13, the Israelites have nearly arrived at the borders of the Promised Land, but while they are still wandering in the dry and weary land, they grow disheartened. In their discouragement, they forsake the LORD and doubt his faithfulness. They even wish the LORD had not brought them out of Egypt through the waters of the Red Sea. Nevertheless, the LORD gives them water from the rock.

In Psalm 95:7–11, the Psalmist recalls the faithless generation and calls each successive generation to repent and soften their hearts to the word of the LORD.

In Matthew 2:13–4:11, read the history of Israel from Egypt to desert wandering restaged in the journey of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 10:13: Paul places our temptations in the context of Israel's and of Christ's presence in baptism and nourishment.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The baptismal liturgy in many modern Prayer Books includes a Thanksgiving over the Water that draws together the threads of creation and redemption in the baptism of Christ, and in our union with Him in our baptism. For example, “We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit

as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.” See also the Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (1662).

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Apart from Christ, can you be good enough to be accepted before God the Father? Do you live with guilt or shame? How does the story of Jesus’ baptism and temptation address each of these concerns?

MY CALLING:

Baptized into Christ, I can now hear the voice from heaven speaking over me the words that were spoken over Christ: “This is my beloved son (or daughter), with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). United with Christ, I can overcome Satan in the wilderness of temptation. I no longer need to be ruled by guilt or shame, but I can live into my acceptance before the Father. I now have the power to overcome sin and temptation and live in grateful obedience to my Lord.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

If you are putting your faith in Christ but have not yet been baptized, speak to your local priest and set aside a time to undergo this vital Christian rite. If you have already been baptized, make it a regular practice to recall all that God has done in us through baptism and the baptismal vows you have made with God. The liturgy for the renewal of baptism vows found in many new prayer books is one way to do this. Try rereading them now, and ask yourself whether they reflect your life today. One practical way to do this is to pray the Daily Office, which reaffirms every day the baptismal creed, which is the Apostles’ Creed. As you remember your baptism, pray that Christ, with whom you are united, to give you power to overcome sin and temptation.

LESSON THREE: CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES

TEACHING:

The Gospels and Acts of the Apostles show that Jesus had many *disciples*. A disciple is a student or learner who, in the ways of Jesus' time, followed a teacher to listen and watch and learn (Luke 6:17, Luke 10:1, and Acts 1:15; St. Paul had followers, too, as Acts 9:25–26 shows). However, after much prayer (Luke 6:12), Jesus appointed twelve of them and gave them a special ministry (Matthew 10:1–4, Mark 3:13–19, Luke 6:13, Luke 9:1–2). These individuals were “called by grace”, as are we (2 Timothy 1:9; John 6:44).

Jesus' chosen disciples were people from very different backgrounds. For example, Matthew, also called Levi, was a tax collector (Matthew 9:9, Luke 2:14, Luke 5:27), while Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were fishermen (Matthew 4:18–19, Luke 5: 3–4), and Simon the Zealot was a member of a Jewish political group that wanted to overthrow the Roman rule of Israel. The disciples are also known as the Twelve. The full list is: Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John (sons of Zebedee), Philip, Bartholomew (or Nathanael), Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Canaanee or the Zealot, Judas son of

James, and Judas Iscariot (Matthew 10:2–4, Mark 3:16–19). (Judas Iscariot ended up betraying Jesus, killed himself, and was replaced by Matthias after Jesus’ resurrection.)

Jesus’ purpose for appointing the Twelve was so that they could travel with Him and watch and learn from Him. Then they, too, could proclaim the good news and heal the sick (Mark 3:13–15, Matthew 10:5–8). They were to be Jesus’ special witnesses because they had lived, learned, and suffered with Him, receiving His forgiveness and encouragement for their frequent faithlessness, and beholding His resurrected life (John 15:27; Acts 1:21–22; 1 Corinthians 15:5). After Jesus’ resurrection, He gave the Twelve the special gift of the Holy Spirit to empower them as He sent them out into the world (John 20:21–22).

The word *Apostle*, which means sent out, is rarely used in the Gospels, but it is common in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:37, 2:42, 4:36–37, 5:1, 5:12, 5:18, 5:40, 8:1, 11:1, 15:6, 15:22, 19), as well as in several of St. Paul’s epistles (Romans 11:13, 2 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11). Although the Bible does not tell us what happened to each of the Twelve, Christian tradition remembers them all as having traveled widely to share the Gospel. According to the early Christian stories, most of them were martyred, often in places far from home, like Peter in Rome, and Thomas in India, where they had gone to spread the Gospel.

In this sense, the Twelve are examples for every Christian, for we are each called to be a learner or disciple of Jesus, we are sent out to be apostles as we proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to others, and we are each drawn as a follower of the Cross (Matthew 16:24), to suffer with and for Jesus (Philippians 3:10–11). We must remember the words of Jesus that “A disciple is not above his master [teacher]”

(Matthew 10:24). And we must remember, too, that the *calling of the disciples* is our calling to be missionaries of the cross of Christ.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Mark 3:13–15, Matthew 10:1–14, Luke 6:12–18, and Luke 9:23–26.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Prayer Book celebrates 25 saints from the New Testament with a collect and special lessons, including each of the Twelve Apostles. Anglicans have always recognized their special role as witnesses to Christ. In addition, both older and more recent prayer books focus on the calling of the disciples in their liturgies for Baptism and Confirmation. These services stress our own calling as disciples of Jesus and led by the Spirit. Finally, the Good Friday service in most modern Prayer Books in particular speaks of our vocation to follow Jesus' Cross.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus today, given our different circumstances compared to those of the Twelve? How do we regularly learn from Jesus, proclaim Him, and follow His cross?

It is likely that each of the Twelve Apostles was martyred. Is there a cost to being a disciple today? What might it be? If so, are you willing to pay its price?

MY CALLING:

I will take up my cross and follow Jesus, sharing the Good News of His life and salvation with others, no matter how challenging this is. I, too, through my rebirth in Jesus, am a witness to His resurrection.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

This week, pray for the Holy Spirit's help and take at least one opportunity to speak of Jesus to another person. Share with your group what happened.

LESSON FOUR: MIRACLES & PARABLES

TEACHING:

Jesus' mission is described in the Gospels as "proclaiming the good news of God ... the kingdom of God has come near: repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:14–15). When Jesus began his ministry around the age of 30 (Luke 3:23), He did so primarily through His speaking: He taught with words, but He also healed with words, declaring the restoration of health, casting out demons, and pronouncing both judgment and forgiveness of sins. Jesus is *the Word* incarnate who creates new things through His *speaking them into being*, just as God did in Genesis 1. His teaching and miracles, then, are part of that same powerful divine speaking, which not only gives us information, but transforms us, too, so that we might enter into the coming of God's kingdom.

The Gospels contain many teachings of Jesus, in different forms and contexts. Perhaps the best-known of these are the words He shared with gathered disciples and crowds known as "the Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5–7). These represent some of His most challenging teaching, on forgiving enemies, generosity, being pure of heart, humility, and prayer. The Sermon on the Mount begins with

what we call “the Beatitudes” (Matthew 5:3–12), a word that refers to Jesus’ “blessing” of a range of attitudes and persons the world normally despises: the poor (both “in spirit” and literally, as we see in Luke 6:20), the meek, the hungry, the mourning, the peacemakers, the persecuted. God, Jesus promises, grants all these His kingdom. The life we live with God takes a form that the world rejects.

TEACHING WITH PARABLES:

Jesus’ preferred way of teaching was with parables; “with many parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it” (Mark 4:33). The word *parable* comes from a Greek word meaning something *thrown or placed alongside* something else. In Jesus’ parables, something visible and well known is used to point to things that are hidden and invisible to the eye. For instance, a man sowing seeds in a field shows us how we respond to the sowing of the word of the kingdom (Matthew 13:18–23). By teaching with parables, Jesus fulfilled a prophecy in the Psalms (Matthew 13:34–35, Psalm 78:1–4), in which the Psalmist prayed:

Hear my teaching, O my people;
 incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
 I will open my mouth in a parable:
 I will declare the mysteries of ancient times.

Stories or lessons told in parables were common to most cultures and religions of the Ancient Near East, including those of Judaism, and Jesus’ listeners were accustomed to them. The corresponding Hebrew term was *mashal*, meaning *similitude* and, in some contexts, *authority*. The language of *mashal* could take the form of an adage or an old saying, like *the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge* (Ezekiel 18:2). Jesus uses a similar style when He

says, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). We are better able to understand Jesus’ parables when we read them in the larger context of the Old Testament and the culture of the Jewish people. Because the parables were not always easy to understand, it seems that Jesus was using them as a powerful means to change or convert our minds and hearts, sometimes simply to expose our hearts in their hardness. As we seek to understand them, we are transformed; if we refuse to try, we are left in our ignorance (Matthew 13:11-17).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

There are a few key places where Jesus’ parables are recounted as a group (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 13).

Jesus’ parables proclaim that God’s kingdom is near at hand (Matthew 13:31–33, Mark 4:26–32).

Parables are sometimes at the heart of an open conflict (Matthew 21:33–46, Isaiah 5:1–2,7; see also Acts 13:46, Acts 4:11, 1 Peter 2:7).

Parables call us to love the stranger as our neighbor (Luke 10:25–37; Leviticus 19:18, 34).

Luke’s gospel has many parables of God’s mercy. Three of them can be found in Luke 15.

A parable sometimes needs Jesus to explain it before it can be understood by those who are willing to hear (Matthew 13:36–43).

MIRACLES CONFIRM JESUS’ TEACHINGS:

The Gospels report that crowds gathered around Jesus because of the miracles He performed in healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, forgiving sins, and multiplying food. They also report that “the crowds were astonished by Jesus’ teaching, for he taught as one having authority and not as the scribes” (Matthew 1:28–29).

His teaching was not just with fine words. It was accompanied by acts of compassion and care.

The Apostles later presented Jesus in this light (Acts 2:22, 10:38), describing Him as doing *mighty works, wonders, and signs* (the word John uses in his Gospel) to show how *God was with Him*—that is, in their midst and come to save. Peter describes this as Jesus *doing good*. Hence, the miracles are a part of God’s mercy and love that, in Jesus, have begun to overcome the world (John 16:33). Each miracle made His listeners ask where He got such authority. Some of the people who opposed Him claimed His power came from *the prince of demons* (Matthew 12:24). Jesus responded to them by saying, “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Matthew 12:28).

However, to those who believe, Jesus’ miracles are signs that God’s kingdom comes through Him. Jesus is *the word of God* (John 1:14–18), the *good shepherd* (Luke 15:4–6; John 10; Psalm 22; Ezekiel 34:11), the long-awaited spouse who comes in the night (Matthew 25:1–13), and the master (Matthew 25:14–30; see v. 37). Each *mighty work*, like Jesus’ teaching, shows us this working of God and brings it about in reality. Hence, the stories of Jesus’ miracles should be studied and prayed about, so that we may learn and see more fully the very truth of God.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Disciples ask who this man is that has such authority that even the wind and sea obey Him (Mark 4:35–41).

A woman with a chronic hemorrhage believes she will be healed if she only touches the hem of His clothes (Mark 5:25–34).

His healing includes forgiveness of sins (Matthew 9:2–8).

John’s Gospel refers to Jesus’ miracles as *signs*, in that they point

beyond the immediate miracle to something even greater. (See seven signs: John 2:1–12, 4:43–54, 5:1–16, 6:1–15, 6:16–21, 9:1–41, 11:1–46.)

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (1662) has a Collect that is linked to the Gospel story of Jesus' stilling the storm (Matthew 8:23–27; the collect begins, "O God, who knowest us to be in the midst of so many and great dangers..."), one in which the powerful act of Jesus in the story is used as a parable for our life. Note how miracle, prayer, and teaching are all brought together in this Sunday Communion service.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

The backdrop of many parables and miracles is the growing tension between Jesus and religious authorities—the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees. They question His authority to teach and heal, and they are deeply resistant to His call for conversion of heart. Jesus' parables and miracles are offered to announce the good news of God's kingdom and the joy of His mercy, but they also provoke deep opposition and conflict. How might this be related to Jesus' teaching that His parables both enlighten and blind at the same time?

OUR CALLING:

I am called to listen to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' parables and miracles in a way that helps me *repent and believe the good news*. Let me be open to conversion of heart in the face of what Jesus' word both says and does.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Read Luke 10:38–42, the story about Martha and Mary. What makes Mary's listening to Jesus' teaching the *better part*? How can you learn to listen more carefully and openly, so that you may be transformed in your faith and service?

LESSON FIVE: ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM

TEACHING:

All four Gospels describe Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51) as a time for Him to prepare His disciples for His Passion and Resurrection. Matthew, Mark, and Luke begin with their accounts of Jesus foretelling His death and resurrection after Peter's confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ (see Matthew 16:21–27). The events that follow—the Transfiguration, the struggle of His disciples to understand and accept what is happening, and the growing conflict with the authorities—move in the direction of His Passion and death. Jesus follows His Father's will amidst political opposition and popular incomprehension. Yet even as He does this, He continues to teach, heal, and witness to His Father's will. Jesus' whole ministry is characterized by teaching and miracles that cover various topics and situations and touch various people. Nevertheless, it is all directed by His single-minded approach to the Cross.

John, whose Gospel is structured around the Jewish feasts where Jesus is present, offers a different account of Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem. Earlier, Jesus had left Jerusalem because the authorities wanted to arrest Him (10:39–40). Now, He begins His return journey when

He learns of the sickness of His friend Lazarus, who lives in Bethany, a town close to Jerusalem. When He arrives at the home of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary, He learns that Lazarus has already died. The miraculous raising of Lazarus anticipates Jesus' own death and resurrection.

There is a common thread to all these accounts of Jesus' last days as He moves to complete His mission. Amid His ministry of teaching and witness, several things become apparent:

Confessions of faith:

Peter's: "You are the Messiah, the son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Martha's: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the one coming into the world" (John 11:27).

The glory of God manifested:

In the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–9; Mark 9:2–9; Luke 9:28–36), God's glory is visibly manifest. Jesus is transfigured, His face shines, and His clothes are dazzling white. Moses and Elijah *appear in glory* with Jesus. They are overshadowed by a cloud, and the disciples hear a voice saying, "This is my beloved son; listen to him."

John offers no account of the Transfiguration but makes several references to God's glory: Lazarus' illness and death are *for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified though it* (11:4); after Lazarus is raised from death, Jesus says to His disciples: "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

The disciples fail to understand and accept Jesus' death and resurrection:

Peter's rebuke when Jesus speaks of his suffering and death (Matthew 17:22); all the disciples who *do not understand what He is saying and are afraid to ask* (Mark 9:32); the disciples argue about which of them is the greatest (Mark 9:33–37); James and John ask for a place of honor when Jesus comes into His glory (Mark 10:35–40).

John gives a powerful story of contrast between a disciple who understands and one who does not. Mary anoints the feet of Jesus and wipes them with her hair, and Jesus says about the expensive perfume she uses to wipe His feet: “She bought it so she might keep it for the day of my burial” (12:7). But Judas Iscariot complains about the money spent on the perfume, which he says ought to have been given to the poor. John tells us that Judas intended to steal this money “because he was a thief” (12:6).

Growing conflict with the authorities:

This theme is especially emphasized in Luke 11:37–54, 12:1–12, 13:10–17, 13:31–35, 15:1–2, 19:41–47.

In John, see 11:45–54, 12:9–11.

Throughout these accounts, we see Jesus deliberately moving to fulfil His mission of suffering and death for sin, confident in His Father's resurrecting power, even while His disciples fear such suffering and death. At the same time, Jesus shows them that the way of the Cross is the way of life. This is why so many events in His life-giving ministry take place on this journey.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read John 11—12:1–11 and the account of journey to Jerusalem in Mark 8:27—10:52. Reflect on the way that Jesus' approach to His death is filled with His work of giving life to others and challenging what is evil in the world. We follow Him in this.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Collect and readings for the Sunday before Easter (1662) summarize the relationship between Jesus' Passion and our own calling. Look as well at the opening Scripture verses (anthems) for the Burial of the Dead. The Gospel readings of Lent are frequently associated with this journey of Jesus, as we are called to journey with Him to His Cross.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

In John 11, consider how the power of Jesus' word has its source in His obedience to His Father's will. Consider also how Jesus' love for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus is an expression of God's love for all humanity in moments of affliction and joy. It shows that the experience of death is also the occasion for the visible demonstration of God's glorious redemption.

OUR CALLING:

As Christians we are called to respond to Jesus' claim: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25–26). We are thus called to live as Jesus tells us: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25).

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Take time to meditate on these words of Jesus—"Do you believe this?"—while you consider experiences of both joy and difficulty in your own life. How would you respond to Jesus' question? What questions or doubts do you have? If you believed, how would you follow? "True God of True God, Light from Light eternal / Humbly, He entered the virgin's womb / Son of the Father, begotten, not created."

LESSON SIX: PASSION OF JESUS

TEACHING:

The crucifixion of Jesus as the means of salvation was both a surprise and an offense. Such a death was shameful in the Roman world and polluting for a Jew (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). Yet it had precedents in Scripture. Peter explained that “this is how God fulfilled what was foretold in the prophets” (Acts 3:18). Prime examples would be the *suffering servant* of Isaiah (53) who died *for us* (Romans 5:8), and the sacrifice of Isaac the son of Abraham on what would become the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, near where Jesus died (Genesis 22).

Likewise, we can hear the echoes of Scripture in the Passion story. Jesus counts His death for the forgiveness of His killers (Luke 23:34). He quotes Psalm 22, a royal psalm, to describe His separation from His Father, who then restores Him. His prayer on the Mount of Olives anticipates the victory over God’s opponents at the end of time (Zechariah 14:4). When the Roman soldier pierces Jesus’ side with a spear, blood and water pour out of the wound, reminding us of baptism and Communion. Finally, we may note that in the story about Jesus’ Transfiguration on the way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:31), Elijah and Moses speak with Him about His *departure*, His *exodus*.

This looks backward to Moses and the redemption of the children of Israel, who were led through the Red Sea's deadly waters, as well as to baptism in the early Church. The image helps to tie together crucifixion and resurrection as one encompassing event. The Early Christians understood it this way, and they therefore celebrated Jesus' Passion and Resurrection as a single *three-day event* (in Latin, the *Triduum*).

The death of Jesus was a tragedy brought about by evil and cowardice, and it occurred under a tyrannical imperial power, which was represented by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea at that time. Christians understand that all human beings, including themselves, are caught up in the responsibility for such evil (Peter denies his Lord and friend). More profoundly, Jesus' death was the premier example of human faithfulness and divine love. Finally, it was the culmination of God's will from eternity to enter His world so that He might save his people (Ephesians 1:9–11).

At the heart of this mystery was God trading places with us—His death for us, our new life from His. Paul puts the matter of His dying for us in a startling way: “God made Him who had no sin to be sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The New Testament describes this event in a rich variety of ways: as a military victory over Satan (John 12:31), as an acquittal in court, as the *redeeming* of one in bondage, as an atoning religious sacrifice. As John writes, it is *accomplished* (19:30), but its eternal consequences continue to our benefit.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

It is common in Christian churches to read the entire Passion account from one of the Gospels during Holy Week, especially on Good Friday. Different details are mentioned or emphasized in each

of the four Gospels. As a way of beginning to note these distinctive features, compare Mark's account of Jesus and His accusers with John's (Mark 14:53—15:38 and John 18:13—19:37).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The 1662 Prayer Book does not have a special service for Good Friday, but it does have three special collects for the day. Read them and compare their meaning to more recent editions of the Prayer Book that have Good Friday services, some of which turn more explicitly toward the coming Resurrection. Yet both earlier and modern Prayer Books focus on God's mercy for sinners, given in Jesus' suffering and death, and extending to the whole world. Both plead for the conversion of sinners and unbelievers. Both offer adoring thanks for God's compassion toward us. In the Prayer Book, the Passion of Jesus is at the center of God's overwhelming goodness. Thus, it manifests the same divine power as the power given in the Resurrection.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

In John 11:50, the High Priest Caiaphas says that it is better for one person to die for the whole people than for the whole people to die. He is speaking about political expediency. He means that the Roman overlords will see Jesus' teachings and many followers as threats to their power, and a Jewish insurrection that they must crush. But Caiaphas' statement also points to how *one* person, in this case the Son of God, can bring life to many others through His death. Have you seen human examples of such life-giving sacrifice? Now transfer the power of such human occurrences to the God of the universe. What is the result?

OUR CALLING:

Jesus asks us to follow Him, to take up our cross, to lose our life *for His sake* so as to gain it (Matthew 16:24–25). In doing so, we do not so much make sacrifice for others as we adore our Lord's mercy and offer Him thanks for the inestimable gift of His loving sacrifice for us.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing together “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” What does this teach us about the cross and our spiritual lives?

Read the Collect for Good Friday. What does it tell us about being a disciple of the Crucified?

LESSON SEVEN: RESURRECTION

TEACHING:

Resurrection means rising again and generally refers to coming back to life after death. The Christian concept of resurrection, however, is unique. It is different from the idea of reincarnation, the belief that the dead return to life in a body different from the one in which they died. Jewish and Christian belief in the resurrection insists that the dead are *raised* by God in their own created body, even though that body is now transformed. Resurrection also happens with finality. Unlike in resuscitation, resurrection means the one who is raised by God will not die again. The culmination of all the Gospels is the account of the crucified Jesus rising on the third day after His death and then reappearing to His frightened and discouraged disciples, restoring their faith, giving them peace and the strengthening of the Spirit, and sending them out to witness to His life and teachings. While each Gospel recounts various details of this resurrection, Matthew 28 stands as a clear summary.

The Bible teaches resurrection with certainty. It is clear that the many resuscitations mentioned in Scripture are meant to act as signs pointing to the final and unique resurrection given in Jesus. In the Old Testament, Elijah brought back to life the son of the widow of

Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17–24), and Elisha raised to life the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:18–37). A dead man came back to life when his body came into contact with Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:21). These signs are then deepened into a larger understanding of a life that is not only restored in this world but also renewed in the world to come. Job, for instance, believed that even after death, he would *see God* (Job 19:25–27). In many places, the Psalms strongly affirm that God will never abandon the soul of His loved ones to death and decay (16:8–11, 49:13–15, 71:20). Isaiah likens the return of the exiles to resurrection (26:19–20). Daniel teaches that the dead *shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt* (12:2–3). Israel is the object of God's resurrecting power, after the destruction of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 37:1–14).

The New Testament records not fewer than seven instances when the dead are raised. Most astonishingly, this includes Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 27:50–53; Luke 7:11–18; 8:40–56; John 11:1–44; Acts 9:36–42; 20:7–12). But in Jesus, the resurrection of one man touches the whole of creation. The Father raises the incarnate Son from death in an act of *new creation*. The resurrection of Jesus is the centerpiece of the proclamation of the gospel and foundational to Christian belief (Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–7; Luke 24:1–49; John 20:1–29). Jesus rose from the dead *never to die again* (Romans 6:9). This affirms Jesus' absolute power over death, something possible with God alone. It is a testimony to Jesus' sinlessness and divine nature. It also validates the Old Testament prophecies and affirms the hope of personal resurrection. In this regard, the resurrection confirms Jesus' identity as the Son of God and the Savior of the world, by whose sacrificial death sinners receive the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life. Jesus not only has power over death, but He is also the *resurrection and the life so that whosoever believes in*

him shall not perish but have everlasting life. God, who raised Jesus from the dead, will also raise believers through Jesus, the *firstborn from the dead* (Colossians 1:18), who now reigns eternally with the Father (Revelation 11:15).

The dead shall be resurrected in the body and experience a transformation that will endow a body of imperishable nature. Christian traditions emphasize this truth. Article 4 of the Thirty-Nine Articles says: “Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body.” As Paul puts it, we sow a corruptible body in the tomb, but Christ raises up an incorruptible body, a *spiritual body* (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). At the second coming of Christ, both the righteous and the wicked shall be resurrected to face the final judgment (John 5:28-29). For those who enter Christ’s glorious rest, death shall have no power.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 25:8; Daniel 12:2-3; Matthew 28:2-7; Mark 16:5-7; Luke 24:38-40; John 11:25-26; Romans 6:5, 11; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:26-27; 54-57; 2 Corinthians 4:14, 5:10; Philippians 2:8-11, 3:10, 20-21; Colossians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14; 1 Peter 1:3; Revelation 1:5-6.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The collect for Easter Day in many modern Prayer Books emphasizes Christ’s resurrection as a victory over death and sin and encourages us to “die daily to sin ... that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection.” See also the liturgy of the Easter Vigil in more modern Prayer Books, celebrating the “night when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell, and rose victorious from the grave.” The entire service of the Burial of the Dead is founded on the reality of

the resurrection, centered in Jesus' rising from the tomb. The entire Christian Year begins, in Advent, with this hope of "rising to the life eternal" in Christ: see the Collect for Advent 1 in the 1662 Prayer Book, whose conclusion asks that we "may rise to the life immortal."

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Christ died and rose again that we might overcome death and live with Him eternally. How may we receive this gift in our life today (that is, before we die)? Here is another way to look at this: Christ's victory over death is a *new creation* (2 Corinthians 5:17), and joined to Christ, we now walk *in newness of life* (Romans 6:4). How does your *new life* look to you and others?

MY CALLING:

"Thanks be to God who gives us the victory in Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). The resurrection calls me to a life of *gratitude* and motivates me to follow Christ who invites me to His eternal reign. I am called to a life of *joy* and *hope* as I celebrate and worship the risen Christ.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

As you encounter someone this week who is either lonely or dying, consider how you can communicate the gratitude and joy in Christ's new life, and thus share the assurance that death will never have the final say, but only God's creating grace will endure.

LESSON EIGHT:**PENTECOST AND THE CHURCH IN ACTS****TEACHING:**

Pentecost (which means *50th day* in Greek) was a Jewish holiday celebrated 50 days after Passover (the feast that celebrated the Exodus of Israel from bondage in Egypt). Known by the Israelites as *Shavuot*, it celebrated the first fruits of the harvest (Exodus 23:16), as well as the giving of the Law to Moses on Sinai. In the time of Jesus, Jews from near and far still gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1, 5). On Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, however, something new happened. God fulfilled His Old Testament promise (Joel 2:28–32) and poured down the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' disciples and followers. Peter preached on that day, mentioning Joel's prophecy, and he made it clear that Jesus, who died and rose from the dead, was the one who poured out the Spirit (Acts 2:23). Peter called the crowd to repentance, faith, and baptism, and many who heard him took up his invitation.

In that sense the first Pentecost after Jesus' death and resurrection gave birth to the Church, composed of those baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19) and liberated from the slavery of sin. Those who confessed their sin and repented (Acts 2:38) and believed (Acts 13:38–39, Romans 10:9–10) received the

Holy Spirit of liberty and became members of the Church. From that day onward, the Apostles performed wonderful acts in the power of the Holy Spirit and drew many people to Jesus Christ. They formed the first Christian community, whose members lived in a way that became a model for all Christians (Acts 2:41–47) then and now.

From this witness comes the name of the book—Acts of the Apostles—in which the work of the Holy Spirit is repeatedly recounted. Despite fierce opposition and persecution by religious leaders, tremendous Church growth took place, starting from Jerusalem and extending to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). A primarily Jewish church at the start (Acts 1–9), the disciples of Jesus came to include the nations and became predominantly a Gentile church (Acts 10:28). The gift of the Holy Spirit to the Christians and the Church, celebrated at Pentecost, points to a *new creation* (Genesis 1:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17), and to the miraculous and sacrificial witness of Christ’s mission (Hebrews 9:14; 1 John 5:6–8) to the world.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read John 3:5–8, 14:15–17, 16:13–15; Acts 1:8; 2; 4; 5:41–42, 6:7–8, 8:1–4, 9:1–6, 10:1–4, 13:1–3, 16:1–5, 18:1, 18:8–10, 19:1, 23:11; Galatians 4:1–7; 1 Corinthians 12–13.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The services of baptism, confirmation, and ordination each have special prayers for the Holy Spirit to be at work in the new Christian or minister, something that points to the way the Church is indwelt and led by the Spirit. Some of these prayers are based on New Testament teachings about Christ’s witness and the baptized person’s gifts and calling. Others are based on Old Testament teachings, like Isaiah 11:1–2. The Prayer of Consecration in many modern Prayer Books

calls upon the Holy Spirit to “send your Holy Spirit upon these gifts [of bread and wine] that they may be the Sacrament of the Body of Christ and his Blood of the new Covenant.”

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What are the signs that the Holy Spirit dwells in you and in the Church? Compare the different descriptions of spiritual gifts given in Romans 5:1–5, Romans 12:6–20, and 1 Corinthians 12–13. Are there gifts every Christian is called to embrace, and some that are given only to this or that person? Is this distinction important?

MY CALLING:

The Holy Spirit calls and enables every Christian to witness to the love of God in Christ. I will endeavor to be Christ’s witness in my local church and community in the power of the Holy Spirit wherever I am, in whatever situation.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Memorize Acts 1:8.

LESSON NINE: THE EPISTLES

TEACHING:

The word *epistle* means *letter*. The New Testament epistles are letters sent to the early Christian communities by the Apostles Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude. In these letters, the young churches that gathered in the faith of Jesus after His death and Resurrection received guidance, encouragement, and doctrinal clarity. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, each of these epistles addressed the diverse and dynamic needs of the growing and often persecuted Church, in a way that still applies to our churches today. For us now, they provide essential teaching on faith, morality, and church organization, affirming the authority of apostolic witness and tradition, and anchoring believers in the truth of the gospel.

The epistles tackle challenges like external persecution, internal divisions, and the threat of false teachings. They offer practical instructions for living the faith in everyday life, emphasizing the virtues of love, humility, generosity, and patience, as well as moral and sexual purity. Central to these writings is the profound significance of Christ's death and resurrection, which is the foundation of the Christian faith and the hope of salvation, and is the basis for all our practical behaviour in relationship to one another.

St. Paul is the author of most of the epistles. Some of his epistles are written to churches in Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica, and Rome, and others are personal letters to individuals, like Philemon, Timothy, and Titus. In these letters, Paul frequently uses his experience as a follower of Christ as an example. But we have letters as well from the Apostles Peter, John, James, and Jude, and there is one epistle, to the Hebrews, whose author is never named.

Each epistle writer has an individual tone and interests or concerns. But all these apostles encouraged believers to persevere in the face of trials, to hold fast to the truth despite suffering, and to grow in holiness and love. They exhorted the members of the Church to maintain unity, to support one another, and to advance in the knowledge and grace of Jesus Christ. The Church, we are told, *is* the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). Through these inspired letters, the early Church was fortified in its mission, continually reminded of the transformative power of the gospel, and directed toward a life that glorified God and witnessed to the world. The epistles remain among the central texts of Scripture for learning about Christ and the Christian life.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read 2 Timothy 3:16 on the authority of all Scripture, including the epistles.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10–13 and Galatians 1:6–9 on examples of local problems the epistles address. Are there similar issues in your church?

Read Colossians 3:12–17 on ethical conduct for Christians.

Read Romans 6:4–5 and 1 Peter 1:3 for Christ's death and resurrection as our doctrinal foundation.

Read Romans 10:14–15 and Philippians 1:27 for exhortations to witness.

James 2:1–9 for Christian attitudes toward the poor.

Hebrews 11:1—12:3 is a call to follow Jesus with the inspiration of great witnesses of the faith in ancient Israel and today.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

See the collects for the Feasts of St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John. What themes and passages from Scripture do these collects depend upon? What might they tell us about the importance of the epistles written by these Apostles?

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Reflect on how the epistles present Christ as *the same yesterday, today, and forever* (Hebrews 13:8). Yet, they grew out of specific situations in the early Church, in which Paul or Peter, James, John, or Jude were often speaking to pressures or problems their listeners were experiencing. What specific teachings from the epistles that you have read resonate most deeply with your circumstances as a church?

OUR CALLING:

I will seek to imitate the Apostles. As crucial as a compass is to a sailor out in the ocean, so are the teachings in the Epistles to a Christian seeking to follow Christ in this world. St. Paul writes, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing “The Church’s One Foundation” and ask what passages in the Epistles it reminds you of. (Hint: Look at Ephesians 2:17–22. Can you think of other passages?)

LESSON TEN: REVELATION AND LAST THINGS

TEACHING:

Revelation, the final book of the Bible, is an apocalyptic, prophetic letter. The word *apocalypse* does not imply a *world-ending disaster* in the sense that we use it today. It comes from a Greek word that means *unveiling*. In the Book of Revelation, what is being unveiled and revealed is a vision of God's final victory over evil and the establishment of the new creation, in which *with unveiled faces* we will behold God's glory and see Christ face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12 and 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Christians look forward to Jesus returning as He promised and to the establishment of a new heaven and earth. We will dwell in the bright and complete presence of God and will praise Him forever with all the saints (Revelation 19:1–8). The Bible tells us that the coming of the last things will involve persecution and hardship for those who follow Jesus (Matthew 24:3–14). However, we will be given the strength to endure through the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11).

Jesus says that no one knows the day or the hour these things will happen (Matthew 24:36). The Book of Revelation is thus not a set of datable predictions, but both a warning and encouragement, even a kind of prayer, pointing us to expectation and hope and to the re-

deeming power of God that is at work even today. Even though evil will be allowed by God to assert itself for a time (Revelation 20:7–10), we can trust in God’s ultimate victory. Amid chaos and trials, the fixed point is God upon His throne and Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slain and who died for our sins and rose again, standing in the centre of the throne (Revelation 5:6). Victory over all that opposes God is given in the Lamb that was slain (Revelation 5:6, 12, 13:8), offering us both hope and a shape of life, as we are disciples of this Lamb.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the letter to the church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:14–22).

Read about the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21).

Read Isaiah’s vision (Isaiah 6:1–4).

Read Jesus’ instructions to those being persecuted for the gospel (Matthew 24:3–14).

Read the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1–13; 2 Peter 3:3–9).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The *Sanctus* voices the glorious rule of God in heaven and earth, something that Revelation vividly announces, even as the concluding *Benedictus* turns our expectation to the one *who comes*. The entire season of Advent turns us to the expectation of Christ’s coming victory over evil and our necessary struggle; see especially the collect for the Third Sunday in Advent.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

The Church is called the Bride of Christ in several passages in the New Testament. What do Revelation 19:7–8 and 21:22–27 tell us

about what our relationship with God will be like? Are we already living this out today (Song of Songs; John 3:29; Ephesians 5:21–33)? Jesus says that no one knows the day or the hour that the end will come (Matthew 24:36), but He also says to be ready at every moment. How can we prepare for Christ’s coming again?

MY CALLING:

Revelation tells us what is happening in the world we live in from God’s perspective. This is an *in-between time*, the time between Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension and the time of His return. Second Peter 3:9 says that God is not slow in keeping His promise, but He is patient. God does not want anyone to perish, but for everyone to come to repentance. I am called to turn to Christ *today*, in repentance and faith!.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Join in the prayer of the Spirit and the Bride: *Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus* (Revelation 22:20). There are several hymns you might learn and sing on this theme, many of them associated with the Advent season, like “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” and “The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns.” There are also more contemporary hymns, like “Soon and Very Soon” and “We are Going to See the King.”

○

THE
TEN
COMMANDMENTS

LESSON ONE

COMMANDMENTS 1-4, THE ONE GOD

EXODUS 20:1-17 & DEUTERONOMY 5:6-21

1. I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods but me.
2. You shall not make for yourself any idol.
3. You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

TEACHING:

After He had delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and they had been homeless wanderers in the desert for many years, God called Moses to meet Him on Mount Sinai. In that meeting with Moses, God gave the Israelites His Law in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-21). Note the order that is carried on in the Gospel: God saves in mercy and then provides Israel a way of life with Himself.

The Ten Commandments summarize how we are to live in our relationship to God and to other people. Both Jews and Christians have seen these commandments as expressing the universal will of God for all peoples. They are not a dry set of rules, or mere sugges-

tions for how to live well. The Commandments teach us about good and evil and about the right dispositions of the heart, and they are held to be divinely authoritative by both Jesus and Paul (Matthew 19:17–19; Romans 13:8–10; Ephesians 6:1–3).

The first Commandment is to have no other gods. The God of Israel, revealed to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the one and only true God of the whole earth. God alone is to be worshiped. He is the highest good and the source of all good things. He should be first in our lives.

The second Commandment prohibits idolatry. We must not worship that which is not God. Idols can be depictions of other gods. But they can also be any earthly thing we are tempted to put in the place of God—things like money (Colossians 3:5), comfort, sex, power, and reputation.

The third Commandment forbids the misuse of God's name. God's name is holy, and we should not dishonour His name by using it carelessly through our speech and actions, or by applying it in ways that justify our own human selfish desires and passions.

The fourth Commandment tells us to keep the Sabbath holy. Humans are not made only for toil. We are commanded to imitate God, who rested on the seventh day after His work of creating the world. Keeping the Sabbath holy means to set it apart for God's purposes. It is an act of obedience and trust in God's provision. God's true rest is His promise of the life to come. Yet by keeping the Sabbath holy, we participate in a foretaste of that rest here on earth as a reminder and an anticipation of that coming fullness. Hebrews 4 teaches us that this divine rest is entered into through Jesus, and thus our sabbath-keeping is bound up with our joining ourselves to Him, in His death and resurrection, through our worship and discipleship.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21); the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:1–9); worthless idols (Jeremiah 10:6–16); God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24), God’s rest (Hebrews 4:1–11).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The opening of the Holy Communion service in the 1662 Prayer Book, which is a kind of confession, centers on the Ten Commandments. Here, we ask God to *write these laws in our hearts* and to *incline our hearts to keep this Law*. The relation between the Decalogue and the Eucharist—that is, the self-giving of God in Jesus—is very strong.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

In what—or in whom—should we put our trust? Do we put our trust anywhere, or do our hearts hold back from trust? What signs in our lives indicate where our trust is really located? And if it is in God alone, how should we orient our lives, our effort, and our love? How do our lives reflect what we really prioritize and worship? Why did God give His people—and us—the Law (see Deuteronomy 6:20–25)?

MY CALLING:

I am called to put God first in my life, to love and trust Him, to depend on His provision, and to obey and follow Him. Idolatry—putting our trust in something that is not God—is a persistent temptation for our fallen nature. God gave the Law for our good. Although none of us can keep it perfectly, no matter how hard we try, God gives Himself to us in Christ Jesus to save us from the destructive consequences of our human failings and sin.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Read and pray the General Thanksgiving of the Prayer Book, which begins with “Almighty God, Father of all Mercies.” Tithing means sharing with the church ten percent of your wealth, taken from the top of your income before all else is used. It is an essential way to honour God before all other things, for it keeps you from making an idol of your wealth. Even if you are not wealthy, you can gradually but steadily work toward tithing. Moreover, you should honour God not only with your money but with your heart. There are many ways to offer your service to the church, but they should always come from your heart. Keep the commandments and stay faithful in worship and rest each week (Hebrews 10:24–25, 13:15).

LESSON TWO

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

TEACHING:

The first *table* or tablet of the Ten Commandments, which God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, teaches us what it means to *love the Lord your God with all your heart*. The second tablet focuses on *loving your neighbor as yourself* (Matthew 22:37). Jesus commends this part of the Decalogue openly, saying that keeping it will lead to life (Matthew 19:17–19). There are direct correspondences between the two sections. Both are about love, and the second, love for neighbor, grows out of the first, love for God. For instance, the earlier commandment against blasphemy directs us to tell the truth about God, while the later commandment against lying requires us to tell the truth to and about others (see also Matthew 5:33–37). Likewise, the first commandment’s recognition that our life is a gift of the one and only God should also make us honor and be thankful for our parents (1 Timothy 5:8, Ephesians 6:1–4).

When Jesus comments on the second table of the law, He emphasizes the way our hearts must be shaped if we are to fulfill the commandments. Not only should we avoid adultery, but we must also shun lust—that is, thoughts about adultery (Matthew 5:27–30). Not only should we avoid murder, but we must neither hate nor take

revenge (Matthew 5:21–22, 38–48). Moreover, the second half of the Decalogue places the commandments, *thou shalt not steal* and *thou shalt not commit adultery*, with the commandment against *coveting*, or jealously desiring, things that we have no right to. These commandments often go against our human inclinations and keeping them requires our hearts to change. Our ability to follow the commandments rightly, therefore, rests on the inner strength of character that Christ requires of us, and for which Christ empowers us through the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is only by faithfully abiding in Christ that we can live as He lived. The commandments are above all else a description of Jesus' character, one that He would share with us.

Because the commandments are about life in Christ, they remain relevant and authoritative today. They express the very character of God and of His love. The Church from its beginning applied them to situations in her mission to the Gentiles. Not only were the Jews to avoid fornication, adultery, idolatry, and bloodshed, so too were Gentile Christians (Acts 15:28–29). Not only were the Jews to repudiate infanticide and abortion (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31, 18:10), so too did the early Church (see the very early Christian catechism called the *Didache* 2:1–2). In our time, our adherence to these Biblical standards continues to make us look out of step with our culture—for example, in our rejection of polygamy (Matthew 18:4–5) or euthanasia (1 Samuel 31; 2 Samuel 1). Nonetheless, we continue to confess with Peter that Jesus is the way of life (John 6:68), and that we must obey him rather than men (Acts 5:29). The Decalogue, rightly understood, binds us to the very life of God in Christ.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Exodus 20:12–17; Deuteronomy 5:16–21; Leviticus 19:3, 11–18; Proverbs 6:16–19; Mark 12:28–34; Matthew 5:17–48; Matthew 19:16–22; 1 Timothy 5:8; Ephesians 6:1–4.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

At the beginning of the service of Holy Communion in 1662 Prayer Book, we will either recite the Ten Commandments or listen to their summary, as Jesus gives it: *thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself* (Matthew 22:36–40). There is a close relationship between our love for God and our neighbor lived in obedience to God's law, and the love that God shares with us in the death and resurrection of Jesus in the Eucharist. God's love in Christ leads us into our love for God. Our love for God, lived in daily life with others, opens the breadth of God's love given in Jesus.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

In Matthew 5:17–20, Jesus says that He has not come to abolish the law; yet later in that chapter He seems to set His teaching against the teachings of Moses (verses 21–22, 27–28, 31–32, 33–34, 38–39, 43–44). What does He mean when He talks about the laws of Moses? In what way are Jesus' teachings in continuity with the teaching of Moses?

In His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), and in His parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus makes it clear that our enemies are also our neighbors. Who are your enemies, and how can you treat them like neighbors, if you follow the Decalogue?

Paul says that the Law somehow brings a *curse* (Galatians 3:10). How so? Is he speaking of the Decalogue? He also says that the Law

is *holy* and *good* (Romans 7:12). Is he contradicting himself? Again, is he speaking of the Decalogue here as well?

MY CALLING:

I am called to *keep the commandments of God* and *the testimony of Christ* (Revelations 12:17). Obedience can be motivated by fear. But perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). Our obedience to God is empowered by Christ through His Spirit, which touches us in our faith and love for Him. The Law is fulfilled in us as we are *conformed* to Him (Romans 8:29). May I be obedient, strengthened by the Spirit of Jesus!

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Read Psalm 119 and pay attention to how often the psalmist expresses love for God's law, as well as his reasons for loving it.

○

THE
APOSTLES'
CREED

LESSON ONE

INTRODUCTION

TEACHING:

The first Christians sought to teach their faith to new followers of Jesus, as well as to their friends and families. They were careful not to make things up on their own but to share only what Jesus Himself had taught and done. Consequently, they relied on those who had been with Jesus, who had been eyewitnesses to all that He said and did (Acts 10:39–41), and who later passed their memories down to others. This was precious information, and it was important to summarize it in a way that could be a measure for later teaching. It needed to provide a standard of faith for all new Christians to confess, and it needed to be the basis for the Church's unity in teaching over time and across different countries. Saint Paul speaks of *handing down* such teaching (1 Corinthians 15:1), which came to be called *tradition*, a word that literally meant a *handing over of the truth*. Words held profound significance in earlier times, perhaps more than they do today, and the meaning of tradition as a *handing over* came to mirror Jesus' own handing over of Himself for our redemption (Mark 9:31). There are several places in the New Testament where summaries of these ancient traditions are given. They include Romans 1:1–6, 1 John 1:1–4, 4:2, and 1 Timothy 3:16.

Throughout the early centuries of the Church, Christians began to compose other summaries to meet the needs of their growing communities of faith. The moment of baptism became a particularly central time to confess this common faith, and this is where the Apostles' Creed was first used. *Creed* means something that we *believe* (not only with our intellects, but that we *trust* in our hearts in the biblical sense of "faith"). According to ancient belief, it was called the Apostles' Creed because its teachings were supposedly compiled from the teachings of each of the twelve Apostles. It reveals God as Trinity: the Father as our creator; in his incarnation, death, and resurrection, ascension, and heavenly rule, Jesus Christ as the Son of God; and the Holy Spirit as the governor of the Church leading us to eternal life. The Apostles' Creed is not intended to contain all the faith. Only Scripture does that. But by stating the key truths of faith, the Creed points Christians back to the Scriptures where the truths are explained in wonderful fulness (2 Timothy 3:14–17). These fundamental truths uphold our understanding of the reality of God and His creation, of our redemption in Christ Jesus, and of the holy ordering of our lives as followers of Jesus by the Spirit. Confessing these truths, we are steadied in our faith, directed to deepen it according to Scripture, and taught the shape of divine grace that joins us together in the Church. There are other creeds (the Nicene Creed being the most important), but the Apostles' Creed still provides the most fundamental shape of our faith.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

The references above from Romans, 1 John, and 1 Timothy are very important and should be read carefully. In addition, Deuteronomy 6:1–9, Revelation 2–3, Romans 6:16, and 2 Timothy 1:13 enrich our understanding of the Creed.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Apostles' Creed is foundational to the Prayer Book's sense of Christian life and worship. The Baptismal Covenant centers on the Apostles' Creed, and the Creed is a normative part of daily Morning and Evening Prayer, regularly calling us back to the God in whom we place our trust.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

How does the Apostles' Creed provide direction for Christian teaching and reading the Bible? Can you think of teaching or preaching you have heard that does not fit the Creed? In what way did it not fit? How are the Gospel and the Creed related? Does one inform the other?

MY CALLING:

We seek to live in and with the faith of the Apostles, confessing the *one faith* that we share with them (Ephesians 4:5; 2:20).

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Because the Apostles' Creed summarizes the basis for our Christian confession, it is worth memorizing. Spend a week learning it by heart. See if you can teach your children to say it by heart as well. If you invite your children to learn it along with you, they are more likely to learn it too.

LESSON TWO

I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

TEACHING:

Behind all things is the life and creative work of God. Christians speak of God *creating out of nothing* (Genesis 1), by which they affirm at least two things. First, everything—*of heaven and earth* encompasses everything—owes its existence only to God, and not to anything else (whether to another power or to ourselves). All *power* is God's. Second, when we say this, we are affirming that everything, including everything about ourselves, is an utter *gift* from God, or what Christians call *grace*. We did not make it, and we did nothing either to deserve it or to have any claim upon it. With this in mind, to say that *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth* is an act of *thanksgiving* and worship, acknowledging both the gift-giver and the gift. Furthermore, to say that we *believe in God, the Father ...* is to acknowledge that behind God's grace is His *love*. God's love is that of a perfect Father, unlike the necessarily imperfect love of all earthly fathers. We are His children. As such, our relationship to God is not only one of dependence, but one of trust. God cares for all He creates with unutterable love, and we can therefore turn to Him in total confidence. The rest of the Creed, which speaks of the Son and the Holy Spirit, flows from this primal reality of God's power, love, grace, and care.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

God as Creator: Genesis 1 and 2; Psalm 24:1; Romans 1:25.

God Almighty: 1 Chronicles 29:12; Isaiah 6:3; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 1:8, 4:8.

God the Father: Matthew 7:11; John 1:12; Romans 8:15–17; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 1:4–5; 1 John 3:1.

God of Grace, Love, and Care: Psalm 146; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8, 16.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Morning Prayer in the various Anglican Prayer Books begins with one of two Psalms, either the *Venite* (Psalm 95) or the *Jubilate* (Psalm 100). Each stresses the reality of God as our creator and calls forth our thanks, grateful obedience, and worship. All of our prayer, then, proceeds from this reality.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What does it mean for you to know God as a loving Father? How and why is that important?

Are there any privileges that Christians have as children of God? If so, what are they?

What does the Bible say about being a good human father? If, as Isaiah says (Isaiah 66:13; Psalm 131:2), God is also like a *mother*. What does this tell us about our own lives as parents?

MY CALLING:

I will call upon the name of God in my life and in my prayer.

I will trust in God's power even when I am experiencing times of weakness.

I shall live like a child of God, called out of darkness into the kingdom of light.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Learn Psalm 100 by heart. Alternatively, sing a hymn paraphrase of it (“All People That on Earth Do Dwell”).

LESSON THREE

AND IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD

TEACHING:

The Bible teaches that there is only one God who comes to us in the three persons of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost). In the mystery of the Trinity, the three are one but also distinct. In the Incarnation, God took on flesh as a human being and dwelt on earth in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son. The Bible refers to Jesus by various names. He is called the Christ (the Greek word for the Hebrew *Messiah* or *anointed son*), Immanuel (the Hebrew word meaning *God with us*), Son of Man, Son of God, Saviour, or Lord, as well as His given name, Jesus. The Apostles' Creed affirms the belief in the second person of the Trinity as *Jesus Christ, God's only Son and our Lord*. It reveals Jesus' true identity and His role in our salvation.

Jesus is the Christ, God's only Son and our Lord. What does this mean?

When the angel Gabriel comes to the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation, he instructs her to give the child who will be born of this meeting the name Jesus. Jesus is the Greek variant of the Hebrew word *Yeshua*, which means *saviour*. This means that from Jesus' very conception, God came to us in Him who became man to become our saviour. In the New Testament, Jesus is further identified as the

Christ (Matthew 16:16) as well as God's only begotten Son (John 3:16). The word *Christ* is from the Greek *Christos*, a translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Its meaning as *the anointed one* indicates our Lord's holiness and consecration for a special purpose. In this case, His special purpose is the salvation of the world.

When the New Testament writings call Jesus Lord (Greek *kurios*), they are affirming Jesus' divinity as one with God, the Lord who wields ultimate authority over all that exists (see, for example, Matthew 7:21, 28:18 and Romans 10:9), including human rulers (Revelation 19:16). This brings a further question. If Jesus is divine, why does the Creed refer to Him as the *only begotten son* and not simply as *God*? The answer lies in the nature of the Trinity. The relationship among the three persons of the Trinity is so intimate that they are inseparable from one another. But they are also distinct. The word *Son* indicates both the distinction and the oneness, for the Father and the Son are of the same substance. Jesus is the only Son because He is not created by God, but is one with God. Long ago, Christians began to use the term Trinity to denote the tri-unity of God, the three in one and one in three. The Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—is who God is from eternity. Therefore, we can be confident that God whom we know in Christ is utterly trustworthy. When the Bible says that Jesus is the *firstborn over all creation* (Colossians 1:15), it does not mean that He is a created being like us. Rather, He is pre-eminently superior to all creation. As the Son who was before creation and *by him and for him all things were created* (Colossians 1:16–17), He has equal status with God.

When we confess Jesus as *Christ, God's only Son, and our Lord*, we are publicly declaring that Jesus is God Almighty and the only saviour able to deliver us from sin, evil, and death, for as God the

Son, He offers us eternal life. It means we accord Jesus the ultimate authority over our lives, and by faith, submit to His rulership as the only object of personal faith.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Psalm 110:1; Isaiah 9:6, 61:1–2; Jeremiah 23:5–6; Daniel 7:13–14; Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5, 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42–43; John 1:1–4, 14, 10:30; Acts 2:34–36, 13:44, 48–9, 20:20, 21; Romans 10:12–13; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 1:19–22; Philippians 2:9–11; Colossians 1:15–20, 2:9; Hebrews 1:13.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Throughout the Prayer Book Jesus is referred to as Christ and Lord and worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Most collects and special prayers typically end with the phrase *through thy dear Son Jesus Christ our Lord*. In the liturgy of the Easter Vigil in modern Prayer Books, Jesus is referred to as *Christ the Morning Star*. It is a phrase that signifies His role in the renewal of all things as the Saviour who dispels darkness, overcomes death, and brings light and life to the whole of God's creation. His Lordship and Sonship are affirmed in all three traditional creeds (Apostles', Nicene, and in some traditions the Athanasian) included in the Prayer Book.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What does it mean for you to confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour?

Why is it important to emphasize the absolute unity but also the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity? What does this mean for worship? For witness? For our hope in the face of death?

MY CALLING:

I acknowledge Jesus as the ruler over all creation. In humble submission to His authority, I make a personal commitment to model my life after the example of Jesus Christ.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

When you share the gospel of Christ with those who doubt the divinity of Jesus, point out that forgiveness requires a “God-man” (as St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 12th century, tells us). It is very hard for us to forgive others, and accept it for ourselves, fully. Without God’s help in the person of Jesus Christ, we cannot do it in our own strength, no matter how much we want to.

Establish a habit of study to deepen your knowledge and understanding of the word of God. Be especially mindful of St. Peter’s injunction: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15).

LESSON FOUR

WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY GHOST, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

TEACHING:

The angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary to tell her that God had chosen her to bear His Son and that she was to give Him the name Jesus, which means *God saves*. Mary said yes to God's plan of salvation. She replied, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). Jesus was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon the Virgin Mary. He was God's Son, which meant He had no earthly father.

In first-century Judaism, betrothal meant that a man and woman were legally bound as husband and wife, but their marriage was only consummated after they made their final vows at the marriage feast. Mary was already betrothed to Joseph when the angel Gabriel made his visitation. Nevertheless, Joseph obeyed God's instruction and took Mary as his wife and raised Jesus as his son (Matthew 1:18–21). Through Mary, the eternal Son of God, who was *begotten of His Father before all worlds* (Nicene Creed), assumed or took on our human nature. This is why early Christians called Mary the *God-bearer*. Through the nature of His conception and birth, Jesus was fully God and fully Man. As fully Man, he was born into a human family and grew up as a human being. At the same time, His miraculous birth

mirrored God's power to create life "from nothing" beyond His own loving purpose.

Jesus experienced all that it meant to be human. He knew what it was like to be tempted, though He did not sin, and He knew what it meant to experience human joy and suffering, strength and weakness. John's gospel sums this up when it says that *the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us* (John 1:14). As the Nicene Creed declares, the Word became flesh *for us and for our salvation*. Christ took on our human nature so that through Him our sins could be forgiven, and we could become *partakers of the divine nature* (2 Peter 1:4). In His incarnation, death, and resurrection, Jesus restored our relationship with God our Father, the one we had at the beginning in Eden, before our sin damaged it.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18–23; Luke 1:26–38; John 1:1–5, 14; 1 John 1:1–4, 4:1–6; Colossians 2:9.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Read the Nicene Creed (and/or the Athanasian Creed, and the Articles of Religion on the Incarnation—Articles 2–4), the collect for the Annunciation, and the collect for the Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin (known as the Purification of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple in many modern Prayer Books).

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

The Church has always taught that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully Man. What does this mean for how we read and understand Jesus' words and actions in the gospels? What does the Incarnation say about God's love and compassion for us?

MY CALLING:

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary bore Christ in the flesh. As Christians we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and through His power we are given the gift of Christ's presence within us (Galatians 2:20), transforming our lives and hearts and making us into sons and daughters of God (John 1:12–13).

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Pray the Collect for the Feast of the Annunciation. Sing “O Come, O Come, Immanuel.”

LESSON FIVE

[HE] SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE,
WAS CRUCIFIED, DEAD, AND BURIED. HE
DESCENDED INTO HELL [TO THE DEAD]

TEACHING:

Jesus the Son of God not only entered human history by being born of the Virgin during the imperial rule of Rome, but as an adult, he also suffered under a particular political leader who represented that same Roman empire, the most powerful in the ancient world (Luke 3:1–4). The Creed declares this emphatically in the brief words *he was crucified*. In Jesus' day, crucifixion was the ultimate symbol of Roman dominance over civil or community threats. But Jesus' death transformed this symbol into the emblem of the full salvation He purchased by His self-sacrifice (Mark 8:34—9:1, 10:32–45). When we confess that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, we declare that the kingdoms of this world, though they ignore and even oppose God's anointed King and Kingdom, will never thwart God's plan to reign over all the earth as He does in heaven (Psalm 2:1–12, Acts 4:23–31).

On Golgotha, Jesus died a genuinely human death. This happened in the waning hours of Good Friday, on the eve of the Passover Sabbath (John 19:31, 42), a day of sacrifice and the holiest day in the Jewish canon. Jesus was taken down from the cross by His disciples and buried in a tomb in the Garden of Gethsemane by Joseph of

Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:38–42), two wealthy Pharisees who were his secret followers.

While His body rested there on Holy Saturday, His spirit *descended into hell*—that is, to the realm of the dead, also known as Sheol or Hades, where the righteous waited for salvation (Luke 16:22; 1 Peter 4:6; Hebrews 11:39–40), and the unrighteous, including perhaps angels, waited for judgment (Luke 16:23; 1 Peter 3:19–20; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). There is no place Jesus will not go in His love and power! In the realm of the dead, Jesus proclaimed His victory over Death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). He also rested with those who had been waiting for Him at Abraham's side—in the *Paradise* He promised to the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43). By His Resurrection and Ascension, He would soon lead these saints from the past in a glorious procession (Ephesians 4:8–10) into the presence of God to become the great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:22–24) awaiting their final, bodily resurrection.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Through the self-emptying death of the Saviour for the salvation of sinners, Mark 10:35–45 shows how the suffering and cross of Christ empty the Gentile kingdoms of their power. Christ calls His followers to the same kind of self-sacrifice. (Here, see Philipians 2:5–11.)

John 18:28–19:16 and Acts 4:23–31 show the paradox of the way the kingdoms of this world in all their power could not overcome the kingdom of God, which was established by the life-saving death of Jesus on a Roman cross.

First Peter 3:18–4:6 is a difficult passage to interpret, especially since we have nearly 2,000 years of various teachings about hell to cloud its meaning. Essentially, it tells the story of Jesus' descent to the

realm of the dead on Holy Saturday (3:18), where He preaches judgment against fallen angels (3:19–20). As perplexing as these verses are, they also help us understand how the Old Testament saints who lived before the Incarnation could be saved (4:6).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The collect for Fridays at Morning Prayer in many modern Prayer Books rehearses the suffering of Christ for daily discipleship: *Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain.*

The Collect for Holy Saturday in many new Prayer Books reminds us that Jesus' burial began the great Sabbath for humanity: *O God, Creator of heaven and earth ... the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath.*

The collect for Saturdays at Morning Prayer in many modern Prayer Books takes the victory of Jesus' Sabbath and applies it to our daily lives: *Almighty God, who after the creation of the world didst rest from all thy works and sanctify a day of rest for all thy creatures: Grant that we, putting away all earthly anxieties, may be duly prepared for the service of thy sanctuary, and that our rest here upon earth may be a preparation for the eternal rest promised to thy people in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Do you live in a country where political power opposes the kingdom of God or the cross of Christ? How might Jesus' confession to Pontius Pilate in John 18:36–37 and 19:11 bring you comfort? (See also Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 6:12–16.)

Does the fear of death cripple you? How might Jesus' victory over death on the Sabbath of Holy Saturday bring you comfort as you face

death? See Romans 8:31–39.

MY CALLING:

When I confess that I believe in Jesus Christ, who suffered under Pontius Pilate and who was crucified, I submit all human allegiances to the Lordship of Christ as King. I live as a disciple, taking up my cross and following Jesus, whatever the cost. When I confess that Jesus was *dead and buried*, and that he *descended*, I am declaring the good news that Jesus tasted my mortality to bring me to immortality. No longer fearing death, I live by the truth that *the way of the cross is the way of life* (BCP 1979: 430).

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Write on a piece of paper, *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*, in as many languages as you know (as in John 19:19). Fasten it to a wall where you see it every day and declare your allegiance to King Jesus every time you see it.

Find a picture or icon (from the Eastern Church) depicting Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and descent to the dead. Notice the victorious cross Jesus carries, and the power He expresses as He reaches down to pull the righteous dead into His life-giving embrace. Thank Him for His victory over death.

LESSON SIX

ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD

TEACHING:

To understand the Resurrection, we must say something about what went before and after it. Even in a fallen state, the human person has a hope to prevail over death. We see this in folk stories as well as in the teaching of other religions. When we turn to the Old Testament, in Psalm 28, we hear how the psalmist affirms his deliverance from Sheol, the realm of the dead. In Ezekiel 37, Israel in exile feels like the dry bones of death that fill an entire valley, and the prophet hopes that they will be enlivened by the spirit of God. The prophets hope for a banquet free of the *veil of death* (Isaiah 25), they imagine how God's servant might return after giving his life for others (Isaiah 53), and they long for a day when the dead are raised to a fair and final judgment (Daniel 12). In Jesus' time, God's people associate the Resurrection with the victory over their oppressors, a victory that will finally usher in the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:6). All these expressions of hope presage the Resurrection of Jesus. In light of them, Jesus' being raised from death was a long-awaited fulfilment of hope. But it was also a surprise, since it occurred to one who had died a shameful death, and whose death was *ahead of time*, anticipating the end of all things.

Certain specific features of the Resurrection are worth highlighting. Jesus really dies, and even after being raised, the wounds of His crucifixion are visible in His hands and side (Luke 24:39). He is no ghost—He has a body, albeit different. He asks His disciples for food and eats a piece of grilled fish in their presence (Luke 24:41-43). He says to His confused and frightened followers, *Peace, Shalom*. They need reassurance both about who He is, and that He forgives their betrayal. He comes to them repeatedly at different times, encouraging them, sharing meals, laying out their futures. Their eyes are opened to Him again as He breaks bread with them at table. After He has forgiven the disciples' sins, He commissions them to speak His word that releases the sins of others (John 20). When He sends them out into the world to teach the nations, it is another sign that the end times prophesied in Isaiah 2 are upon them. Each of these details says something essential and enduring about the Church.

The New Testament borrows several themes from the Old to illumine the Resurrection. Resurrection is a *new creation* by God, so that the light shining from the face of the risen Christ is like the first light at God's creation of the world (2 Corinthians 4:6). We have to learn to see everything now in this light (2 Corinthians 5:16). It is a victory over death and hell, so that we have a new relationship with death. Although death remains the *last enemy* (1 Corinthians 15), we do not ultimately fear it, since Jesus holds the keys to death's kingdom in His hands (Revelation 1:18). The Resurrection is also thought of as the in-breaking of the Kingdom of Heaven into the world, especially as the meals the resurrected Jesus shares with His disciples resemble those anticipated in heaven (Luke 13:29). Finally, we know that the relationship of Son to Father has *held*. It is unbreakable, and so, ultimately dependable. The Father raises His Son back to life.

To be sure, we can easily misunderstand the Resurrection as well. Some believers in the early Church supposed that death was already no more (2 Timothy 2:18). They did not understand that we live in the time between Jesus' Resurrection and His return. In our time, some people suppose that the Resurrection is not a reality, but only a metaphor for human hope. If we assume too much or too little about it, we fail to make our destiny dependent entirely on the bodily Resurrection of Jesus. But since the Resurrection is an act of *God and not of men*, an element of mystery remains. For the time being, as mortal creatures, we can only see *in a glass darkly* (1 Corinthians 13:12).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

All four Gospels give an account of the Resurrection, each with different details. Read them through, one after the other. Compare the way each illuminates some special aspect of God's work in raising Jesus from the dead. Examine the different ways Jesus encourages His disciples after He appears alive to them again.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Read the Burial Office in the Prayer Book. What Biblical passages and themes do you find highlighted in it?

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Some of us have counted on having a bit of the divine in our souls, but we also count on the Resurrection of Jesus. What's the difference?

If the dead be not raised, we are of all people most to be pitied. What do you learn about faith from this verse in 1 Corinthians?

The accounts of Jesus' Resurrection describe the aftermath, but never the actual moment. Why do you think that is the case?

OUR CALLING:

The reality, gift, and power of the Resurrection of Jesus, which He shares with us in our baptisms, grants us the grace to share deep hope with others in the face of death and in our fear of it. We can acknowledge death's reality and sorrow, but even more, we can offer others our faithful witness to the crucified Jesus' new life that overcomes all hopelessness.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing "The Strife Is O'er." What does it speak to in your experience of loss?

LESSON SEVEN

HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN,
AND SITTETH ON THE RIGHT HAND
OF GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY

TEACHING:

For 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to many witnesses. On the 40th day, in the sight of His disciples, He was taken up bodily into heaven. We call this day His Ascension, which means *His ascending or rising on high*. In His ascension into heaven, Christ brought our human nature into the glory of the Godhead.

Scripture tells us that Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:20; Hebrews 8:1). His place *at the right hand of the Father Almighty* signifies His ruling authority, power, and glory. Christ is now our high priest and king in heaven. He intercedes for us and brings us into relationship with the Father (Hebrews 7:24–25). During the Last Supper, the night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples that He was going to His Father's house to prepare a place for them (John 14:2–3). In His Ascension, He is preparing a place for all who follow Him as Lord. In Christ and by God's grace we also will be raised up and seated in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6). As we wait for that blessed time, we are not alone, no matter how harshly life may deal with us. Though Jesus is physically absent from us, He sends the Holy Spirit to be our advocate and guide (John 14:16–18). And by His Spirit He is present with us in our worship

and prayer, in our reading of His word, and He is present with us in the sacraments.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:7–11; Daniel 7:13–14; John 14:1–20; Hebrews 9:23–28.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Read the collects for the Feast of the Ascension and for the Sunday after Ascension Day, as well as the Proper Preface for the Ascension. Consider the opening of the Eucharistic prayer: “Lift up your hearts. We lift them to the Lord.”. Our prayers “ascend” to the ascended Christ, who exercises His righteousness for the world (Psalm 85:11).

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Read Hebrews 7:24–25. What does it mean that Christ is interceding for us before the Father? What do Jesus’ bodily Ascension and His promise to prepare a place for us tell us about Christian hope?

MY CALLING:

I am called to worship Jesus Christ, who completed the work of salvation and is now seated in glory, ruling over the Church and all of creation. I am also called to share the good news of *the kingdom that has no end* (Daniel 7:14 and the Nicene Creed) and to invite people to believe in Christ, the great high priest and king.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing the hymn “Rejoice the Lord Is King!” (Charles Wesley).

LESSON EIGHT

FROM THENCE HE SHALL COME TO JUDGE THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

TEACHING:

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, where He was seated at the right hand of God the Father. This part of the Creed declares that Christ will come again *to judge the living and the dead*. The *living* (*quick* in the language of the 1662 Creed) refers to those who will be alive at the time of His return (1 Thessalonians 4:17), while the *dead* are those who have already departed from this life, but who will be raised up on the day of judgment to stand before Christ (John 5:28–29; 1 Thessalonians 4:15–16; Hebrews 9:27). On that day, both the dead and the living will be judged.

A judge is someone who has the authority to convict or acquit. But the dead cannot amend their lives. Only the living can do that. In other words, it is up to human beings while they are alive to live by faith and amendment of life. They must keep before them the day when they must stand before Jesus Christ and either be acquitted into eternal life or convicted into eternal death. Therefore, it is important for every Christian to make the choice to live faithfully while the opportunity exists. For those who, called by grace, willingly choose to remain in Christ Jesus (Luke 9:62; 2 Corinthians 6:1–2), the Bible teaches and gives assurance that there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). Indeed, those who offer their lives to God in Christ

are *hid* in His being and carried with Him through both tribulation and judgment into the full embrace of God (Colossians 3:3).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read about the resurrection of the dead and judgment (John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 15:20–26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Hebrews 9:27); eternal life through God's Son (John 3:16–18); no condemnation for those in Christ (Romans 8:1–2).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

While the Prayer Book's Litany (sometimes referred to as the General Supplication or the Great Litany) is not about the final Judgment, it provides a full view of human life that includes elements that will come into play at the Last Day. It also places these elements in the context of God's saving work in Jesus Christ, and in the mercy that is part of God's holy character. What might we learn, then, about these matters as we meditate on the Great Litany?

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

How often do you hear the teaching about the Second Coming of Christ? How does the teaching about the Second Coming of Jesus affect your Christian life?

MY CALLING:

I will strive to live my daily life in hope, like a citizen of the world to come who is aware that in the end, *life in Christ* is both my help now and my final destiny.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Recite the Apostles' Creed, and memorize Exodus 14:14; Romans 8:1; and 1 Corinthians 15:20.

LESSON NINE

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST

TEACHING:

The Holy Spirit (or *Holy Ghost* in the old language of the 1662 Creed), together with the Father and the Son, forms the inseparable union of love and life that is the Holy Trinity, the one true God of Christian faith. Through the Son and the Spirit, the gift of this everlasting divine love is conveyed to the world.

Mission of the Son and the Spirit

From the beginning of Creation to the fullness of time, the Son and the Holy Spirit share a joint mission. God's Word and Breath are at the origin of the being and life of every creature (Genesis 1:2, 2:7; John 1:1–2; Isaiah 40:7–8; Psalm 33:6). The Holy Spirit anointed Israel's judges, monarchs, and prophets (Numbers 27:18; 2 Samuel 23:2; Ezekiel 2:2). With the Incarnation, when God's Word takes flesh, the Holy Spirit continues to be intimately involved in the life of the Son.

The Spirit is present in the events of Jesus' childhood: the Annunciation of His birth and His conception (Luke 1:35), John the Baptist leaping for joy in his mother's womb (Luke 1:41), Zechariah and Simeon's prophecies (Luke 1:6, 2:27–35).

During Jesus' ministry, the same Spirit descends upon Him at His baptism (Luke 3:21–22), leads Him into the desert to be tempted by the Devil (Luke 4:1–2), and then brings Him back to Galilee filled with the Spirit's power (Luke 4:14).

Jesus teaches that no can enter God's kingdom *without being born of the Spirit* (John 3:5–8), and He announces the revelation of the Spirit after *He is glorified* (John 7:37–39).

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the Spirit is given in stages. The risen Jesus breathes on His frightened disciples and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). After His Ascension, the Spirit is given at Pentecost with the birth of the Church (Acts 2:1–4).

The Holy Spirit in the life of the Church

With Jesus' glorification, the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit becomes the mission of the Church. The Spirit guides and animates the Church in its life as the body of Christ and its mission to announce the Good News to all the world.

The Spirit makes the apostles' preaching effective, transforming hearts and leading to repentance and baptism in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:37–41).

Stephen is *filled with the Holy Spirit* (Acts 7:55) as he gives his life, forgives his accusers, and becomes the church's first martyr. Barnabas and Saul are *set apart* (Acts 13:2–4) for a mission to the pagan world.

The Spirit guides the apostles in the most important decision the Church has to make at this time (Acts 15). The elders of the Church are entrusted by the Spirit to nurture the flock that constitutes the growing Church (Acts 20:28).

Leading us to eternal life

God is love (1 John 4:8). All are wounded by sin and *fall short of the Glory of God* (Romans 3:23). The love of God (1 Corinthians 13) is the principle of a new life in Christ, who came into this world for its redemption. Jesus teaches that a new birth in the Spirit is needed to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:1–21). It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is useless (John 6). The Spirit enables us to abide in love (John 4) and live the life of love that is the Cross (Romans 5:1–5). Finally, the Spirit joins with the Son in inviting us into the full life of God (Revelation 22:17).

When we confess our belief in the Holy Spirit, we are affirming the whole work of God to create, sustain, convert, reform, lead and fulfill our destinies as they are joined to the body of Christ, the Church.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the Acts of the Apostles and 1 Corinthians 12–13 to appreciate the vital role of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the Church.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Read the collects for the Feast of Pentecost and the collect for Trinity Sunday. Likewise, look at the services for Baptism and Confirmation, and observe how the Holy Spirit is a central actor in the work of God in these sacraments.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

How is the Spirit revealed to you through the reality of your local church? How does the image of a living—Spirit-filled—body apply to your local church? Can you give concrete examples?

MY CALLING:

By the baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit, we confess our faith in the One God who is three Persons, receive divine charisms (gifts), and seek to bear the fruit of charity as members of the Church and participants in God's mission to the world. I am called to be faithful to the gifts and to the leading of the Spirit in the Church.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Pray with the words of the ancient Latin hymn to the Spirit, *Veni Creator Spiritus*, which has been translated into many languages. The most famous English version begins: "Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire and lighten with celestial fire; thou the anointing Spirit art, who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart." A modern English version begins: "Come, Holy Spirit, Creator blest, and in our souls take up Thy rest." Find a liturgical version that you can sing, or some other hymn to or about the Holy Spirit. Make it part of your prayer.

LESSON TEN

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH; THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

TEACHING:

The reality of the Church is a central part of the Christian faith. We believe in the Church, and we *believe* in this Church as *holy* and *catholic*. Catholic means *whole* or *gathered* from *everywhere*. In this sense, all Christians are catholics. The word *church* translates the New Testament Greek word *ecclesia*, and it signifies a *calling out together* of Israel's people. Israel was called out (made *church*) through God's unbreakable promise of divine commitment (Jeremiah 32:40; Hosea 2:19). Jesus says that this gathering is built on the rock of faith in Him as Messiah and Son of God, a faith Peter confessed openly (Matthew 16:16–18). The Church, then, is a gathering of those who confess Jesus as Lord. Furthermore, this gathering is strong enough to withstand the *gates of hell*—that is, of death and destruction. Therefore, coming together in the faith of Christ is something that partakes of God's eternal life. Faith in Israel's Messiah joins the believer to this unbreakable divine promise and to God's power to create and sustain. To believe in the Church is to believe in the promises God made to His people, and in Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God, in whom all God's promises are affirmed in Jesus' answer of total yes (2 Corinthians 1:20).

To believe in the holiness of the Church is to believe in the promises of the holy God who makes holy those whom He calls to be joined as one to His Son, as to a body or a building (Leviticus 20:8; 1 Corinthians 1:20; 12:13; 1 Peter 2:5). To believe in the catholic Church is to believe in the wideness of God's holy calling, whose Son *preached peace to those who are near and those far off* (Ephesians 2:17), and who makes us *one new man* with Him.

To believe in the communion of saints—*saint* means someone who is made holy—is to believe that God's calling of us is shared. It is in communion with and shared with the One who makes us holy, and it is shared, too, with those He has made a part of His body. This is why the Nicene Creed adds that the Church is one (Ephesians 4:4), not divided, and why Christians are called to work for Christian unity. Because the Church is bound to the promises of God that are fulfilled in the flesh of Jesus shared with us, it is a central part of Christian faith. Gathering, praying, worshipping, teaching, and serving one another in the Church are essential aspects of Christian life, for they embody God's faithfulness to us in His Son.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Exodus 19:1–7; 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Peter 2:1–10; Colossians 3:12–17; Revelation 21.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Baptism joins a person to the Body of Christ—that is, to the Church. Together, as the Church, we confess the faith according to the Apostles' Creed. Modern Prayer Books use the language of Covenant in the liturgy of Holy Baptism. A covenant is a promise made by God to us, and us to God, and to one another. This coming together of divine and human promises is at the heart of what the Church is.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

How does thinking of the Church as *Israel* help us to understand her experiences? How might the holy Church that is joined as one body to Jesus reflect His life? How does life in the Church help you become like Jesus?

MY CALLING:

Acts 2:41–47 shows us the church of the Apostles and saints who rely on God's promises. This is how we are called to live.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Think of another member of your church, and pray each morning that God's promises, as you can describe them, might be fulfilled in this person's life. If you are able, ask this person to pray the same thing for you. In praying this for and with another person, what have you learned about the church?

LESSON ELEVEN

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

TEACHING:

To say that *I believe in the forgiveness of sins* is to affirm a core conviction of the Christian faith. This part of the Creed tells us something important about who God is and about His gifts and our response. Before the fall of humanity, God created a perfect world, and humans were made in His image to live in harmony with Him. However, sin entered the world through human disobedience, causing separation from God and the introduction of chaos and brokenness into creation. In His infinite love and mercy, God initiated a plan for redemption and reconciliation, beginning with His call to Abraham and to Israel. Central to this plan is the forgiveness of sins, which restores the relationship between God and humanity, and reveals a core aspect of God's character, which is mercy.

The fact that God forgives is the foundation for our call into repentance, something we have seen throughout Israel's history. God's love for us draws out our willingness to return to Him, as Jesus describes it in His parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:32). God, in His justice, cannot overlook sin, but in His love, He has provided a way for sin to be forgiven. This was accomplished through His self-offering, in the life, death, and Resurrection of His Son, Jesus

Christ, who bore the penalty for our sins on the cross and lifted us into a new life with God through His resurrection. Through a repentant faith in Jesus, we receive forgiveness and are cleansed from all unrighteousness. This forgiveness is not based on our merit, but only upon God's grace and the sacrificial love of Christ.

The belief in the forgiveness of sins assures us that no sin is too great to be pardoned, and that God's grace is sufficient to cover all our transgressions. Our faith in God's mercy invites us to turn to Him in repentance and live in the freedom that comes from being reconciled to God, no longer enslaved to guilt and shame. Moreover, it calls us to extend forgiveness to others, reflecting the grace we have received (Matthew 6:14–15). By believing in the forgiveness of sins, we embrace the transformative power of God's mercy, which enables us to walk in newness of life and to participate in His redemptive work in the world.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Genesis 1:1, 3:6–7; Romans 3:23–25; 1 John 1:9; Ephesians 2:8–9; Psalm 103:12; Matthew 6:14–15; 2 Corinthians 5:17–19.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The General Confession and absolution provide a full picture of the relationship between our repentance and God's forgiveness. They provide a way to act out our faith in this part of the Creed. The Prayer of Humble Access in the Communion service describes how God's forgiving power is embodied in the person of Jesus, to whom we are joined. What Biblical themes and passages do you hear in these prayers?

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

The Book of Common Prayer envisioned confession and forgiveness both as a community prayer (the General Confession in the Eucharist) and as an individual prayer (in the Daily Offices, if said privately). Describe how each—confessing with others and confessing privately—is important in the Christian's life, and why *both* are needed.

OUR CALLING:

Believing in the forgiveness of sins and going through the motions of confession do not guarantee that we will be forgiven. God knows whether we have truly repented, and we must humbly and sincerely sorrow over our disobedience, as we are led by Jesus and willingly give ourselves over to the merciful arms of our Father. The story of the thief who repents (Luke 23:39–43) is one of the great examples of such self-giving, even in great suffering and near the end of his life.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Sing “Amazing Grace” and think about what is so amazing about God's grace.

LESSON TWELVE

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY; AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING.

TEACHING:

The final affirmations of the Creed, which deal with our resurrection and life everlasting, come under the heading of *I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life*. That is because it is the Spirit who leads us to our end, and who invites and carries us into the life of God. The Spirit says “Come!” and takes us to the *water of life* (Revelation 22:17).

Many of us wonder what happens after we die. The answer is: God acts! Just as God creates, He recreates. When we die, God takes who we are back to Himself and transforms us into the fullness of His purposes. Following Jesus, our Lord, we say to our Father creator, “Into your hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:42). This self-offering is the Spirit’s great and final work in us (Hebrews 9:14). The whole of Romans 8 gives us a wonderful sense of this promise. Christ is risen in the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18), and so too are we risen in the Spirit that raised Christ (Romans 8:11). This *following of Jesus, in the Spirit, to new life* is underlined in the Creed itself. Just as the second part of the Creed ends with Jesus’ Resurrection, Ascension, judgment, and eternal rule, so this last part of the Creed ends with our resurrection, judgment, and, in our hope, with our joining Jesus

as we are *conformed to His image* (Romans 8:29).

But the life we live today in our bodies is important. Jesus Himself makes this promise: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29). Our future hope will resemble how we have lived *in this bodily world* (2 Corinthians 5:10). We are not creatures who are only spirit, but creatures of body and spirit together. Just as it is the same Jesus who lived, taught, and died who is risen, so it is our same person who lives again in God’s power. Human beings are made of *dust* and *breath* (Genesis 2:7), just as Jesus is *incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary*. So too, the fullness of our being, body and spirit together, is taken into the life of God.

Resurrection—the raising to life of our dead bodies—is hard for us to understand. Paul realizes this, and in 1 Corinthians 15:35-54, he wants us to see that the resurrection is not a resuscitation, like the healing of Lazarus, but involves a real and final death, a death through which, when we are raised by God, He *transforms* our bodies into beings readied to meet Him. We are not sure what this means; after all, Jesus’ resurrected body could pass through doors (John 20:26). Yet it could also eat food (John 21:12). Our resurrection therefore involves the Spirit at work in our dead bodies, turned to dust perhaps, *and* in our spirits—bringing about new life in what was dead, and breathing new vigor into what was lifeless due to sin. God gives us life in this world, and then, after we have run our race in this world, He takes us into His own new life forever, life in His presence, life in His light (Revelation 21:3, 5; 22:5). Just as Jesus ascended in His human flesh to the Father, so we will be drawn in our bodies with Him before the Father’s throne.

We should not think, however, that we are simply waiting here in this world for something good that happens only after we die. Since Jesus in the Spirit shares His resurrected life with us, there is a sense in which we *already* taste the resurrection and the life everlasting. We do so in our faith and in following His way, and in our sharing of His word and sacraments. Jesus tells His disciples, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25). And after the two disciples were joined by Jesus on the road to Emmaus, though they did not recognize Him until He was gone, they said to one another, “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). In the Spirit, life with Christ is now. In the resurrection, life with God is forever. Our *Amen* at the end of the Creed—which means *Let it be!*—is a great affirmation of our faith in the God of life who has made us and who will remake us.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

A careful reading of Romans 8 as a whole will help us see how our lives are now joined to Christ, who—in the Spirit—takes us to the Father. This is the hope of our resurrection.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Comparing the Easter collects (or those of the Easter Vigil in many modern Prayer Books) with the service for the Burial of the Dead shows us how our Creed’s affirmation is lived in our common prayers. They demonstrate the truths of the Scripture’s and the Creed’s faith in the resurrection of the dead, a life raised by God that is joined to Jesus’ new life.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Ezekiel 27—the Valley of Dry Bones—is often read as a prophecy of our resurrection. But the whole Old Testament is filled with both promises and examples of God giving *new life* to Israel and her people. Where do you see this? And where, in the life of your own church and Christian community, do you see God *raising up the dead in the Spirit*? Does this give you hope about your personal future after death?

MY CALLING:

With Jesus, I offer my spirit to the Father, not only today, but in my weakness and death. It is God who has created me, and God, the Life-Giver, who receives me in His just and loving judgment. I place my faith in His power of life.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Part of our faith in the resurrection is founded on our acknowledgment of the Father as *giver of our life*. Make a list of all the life-giving gifts you have received, from your birth to today. Give thanks for each and offer this prayer: *May I have faith that you will grant me life somehow tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, even in my death*. Say or sing a version of Psalm 23.

○

THE
LORD'S PRAYER

LESSON ONE

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN

TEACHING:

When Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray, He tells them to speak to God as our Father, the Father all of us share with Jesus, the Son of God joined to us in His Spirit. Calling on God is the most ancient desire of human beings (Genesis 4:26). All creation in heaven and on earth exists to sing His praise. Though God has a name, we know Him best as Father. As Isaiah 63:16 tells us, this was a gift for Israel to know and for all people to share. As Father, God's creative power is one of care and provision (Psalm 103:13). Moreover, our Father is Jesus' Father before all things. We can pray to the Father for our needs because we are taken into Jesus' family as His adopted brothers and sisters (John 14: 20). Jesus gives us His spirit to cry out *Abba*, *Father*, with Him (Galatians 4:6).

Although the Father rules all things from heaven as our creator, He still invites us into an intimate relationship with Him. We are His humble children, grateful for His powerful love. We seek to honor our Father in our praise, gratitude, and service. As we learn from the fourth Commandment in the Decalogue, we must honor our fathers and mothers. How much more we must honor our heavenly Father! To disrespect or reject Him is to dishonor His holy name.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Our Father: Isaiah 63:16, a familiar text; Matthew 6:9; John 14:2–3; Luke 15:11–2; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6.

Who Art in Heaven: 2 Chronicles 20:6; Isaiah 57:15, *I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit* (KJV).

Hallowed Be Thy Name: Exodus 3:1–18; Isaiah 6:1–4; 2 Samuel 7:26; Ezekiel 36:23; Philippians 2:11; Revelation 19:11–16.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Lord's Prayer is in every public service in the Prayer Book. The *Sanctus* (*Holy, Holy, Holy*), is a central part of every Eucharistic prayer. In the Decalogue, the second Commandment forbids us from *taking God's name in vain*. January 1 is a traditional day celebrating when the infant Jesus was brought into the Temple and given His *Holy Name*—the one that joined Him to His Father in Heaven.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Praying to God and having a personal relationship with Him is part of what it is to be a Christian. It is a way of life. Christ models this, and He commands us to follow His example. How are you doing with this?

The *Our Father* is the prayer of the Church. The Church has been praying the *Our Father* since Christ first uttered it in the first century. Our Eucharist liturgy says: "*Now as our Savior Christ hath taught us, we are bold to say, Our Father...*" How often do you say this prayer?

We pray *our Father*, not *my Father*. Does this make a difference?

To *hallow* means to *make holy* or to *sanctify*. How do we do this for God's name? How do we fail to do this? (Think about the Second

Commandment, which forbids us from *taking the Lord's name in vain.*)

How can God be both in heaven yet close to us as our Father?

How is God like and unlike an earthly father?

OUR CALLING:

I will let Jesus pray with and for me to His Father; I will seek to honor God's name by doing His will and respecting Him before all others.

I will trust in God like a child (Mark 10:15).

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Begin each day, when you wake up, with the Lord's Prayer. Sing the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

LESSON TWO

THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE,
ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

TEACHING:

The Lord's Prayer is Jesus' own prayer, which He teaches to His disciples. Every part of the prayer expresses who Jesus is and what He seeks before God. The words are especially tied to Jesus' ministry. He opens His ministry by announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14–15), and throughout His ministry, His teaching is filled with references to the Kingdom (Matthew 13:1–52). At the Last Supper, as Jesus offers the cup of wine to His disciples, once again His words recall them to the hope of the Kingdom to come (Luke 22:18–30). And in His epistle to the Colossians, St. Paul reminds the early Christians that God has taken them from the shadows and transferred them into the Kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:13). Finally, in Jesus, the Kingdom of heaven takes form on earth (Luke 17:21). In all this, Jesus both utters the hopes of Israel (Micah 4:1–9) and announces the promises of God to fulfill them (Mark 1:15).

The next words of the Lord's Prayer, *Thy will be done*, are the same that Jesus utters in the Garden of Gethsemane in the face of His death (Luke 22:42). Obeying God's will is at the heart of who Jesus is and what He teaches. Earlier in His ministry, Jesus has identified

His true relatives as those who accept and obey this will (Matthew 12:50), and He sees His own life as God's Son as doing the will of the Father who sent Him (John 6:38).

God is king because He has made and rules all things. God becomes our King, and we do His will when we acknowledge who He really is, and we accept His rule and obey His commands. In no other person have God's rule and our humble obedience been so perfectly united than in Jesus, who brought heaven and earth together as one (Philippians 2:5–11). (Note that in the Lord's Prayer, *earth* means *here where we live*, and Jesus is King *here*. However, in John 18:36, when Jesus tells Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world," *earth* or *world* refers to the shape of worldly power, not to the earth of our daily life.)

Thus, Jesus Himself is the place—the person, the presence, the power—in which God's will and rule take flesh. When we pray these words, we pray that we might be with, like, and in Jesus, and thus that we might be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29; 12:2). This opens our vocation to follow Jesus' commands and teaching (Matthew 28:18–20) and to take up our cross and join Him in His sufferings and resurrection (Romans 6:3–6). We need God's grace to do this. In doing this, we enter the very life of the God of Heaven and on earth as well (Revelation 21:3). This is among the most profound and daring prayers one can pray because, like Jesus in the Garden, it asks God that we might be willing to lose our life for the sake of gaining all (Matthew 16:25; Philippians 3:8–10). Because the Lord's Prayer is the prayer Jesus taught us, and it is oriented to our daily needs (like bread), this means that our daily vocation is always of the deepest kind: to go where Jesus has gone and find God's Kingdom there even now!

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read 1 Samuel 8:6–9; Psalm 97; Isaiah 44, 55; Matthew 13.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Advent, the four weeks before Christmas, is the season of prayer for the coming of God's Kingdom, in Jesus. The readings, collects, and hymns reflect this.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

God's will is given to us in Scripture, and God's Kingdom gathers in those who listen to Scripture, even in their different ways. Even though the Lord's Prayer does not mention Scripture explicitly, what do you think it is saying about the Bible when it speaks of *Thy will*? And since Jesus' submission to God's will takes Him to His death, what is the relationship between the Bible and our lives as Jesus' disciples?

OUR CALLING:

We pray this prayer for the world of nations, that they may truly be *God's Kingdom* where *God's will is done*. We pray this also for our daily lives, obedient to God's rule in the form of Jesus' life.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

List five things that, if they happened today, you believe would represent God's will for you or for the world in which you live. How are these things related to Jesus' Kingdom of humble obedience? Now pray for each of the matters on your list.

LESSON THREE

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

TEACHING:

We are told to ask, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11; Luke 11:3), as an expression of our trust in God’s daily care and provision (Matthew 6:25–26). For the disciples, this request would have recalled *manna*—the miraculous daily portion of bread the people of Israel received in the desert (Exodus 16:1–5)—as well as a rich variety of realities that pointed to the true heavenly gift of God’s sustaining grace (Psalm 78:25).

Bread is a basic food for many peoples, including the ancient Israelites. In the Old Testament, the bread God provided had a broad range of meanings and associations. It was a sign of God’s love and blessings for an individual (Genesis 28:20), for His people (Ruth 1:6), and for all flesh (Psalm 136:25). A lack of bread was seen not simply as a need, but as a test of confidence that God would provide (Genesis 47:12; Isaiah 30:20; Amos 4:6). The gift of bread to the poor revealed God’s justice. The Israelites were invited to reveal this justice by sharing their bread with others (Deuteronomy 10:18–19), and even with their enemy in need: “If your enemy is hungry, give him food” (Proverbs 25:21). In the sanctuary, the bread placed on the golden altar was a sign of the everlasting Mosaic covenant and of God’s presence among His people (Exodus 25:23–30; Leviticus 24:5–9), and the bread offered in thanksgiving acknowledged the

many gifts of God (Leviticus 7:12–15). The seven-day Feast of the Unleavened Bread at Passover recalled the hasty departure of the Israelites from Egypt, when they gained freedom from slavery (Exodus 13:6–8).

At the Last Supper, which took place at a Passover meal on the eve of His Passion (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–23), Jesus gave new meaning to the unleavened bread when He shared it with His disciples and told them: “This is my body, which is offered for you.” Jesus is the Bread of Life, and whoever eats of this bread will have eternal life (John 6:22–40). Since its beginning, the Church has perpetuated this gesture in the Eucharist: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26). We interpret the Lord’s death as Christ’s Passover sacrifice (1 Corinthians 6:7). The bread becomes a sign of Christ’s redemption, for He is the sacrifice that removes the sin of the world: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The bread is also the sign of God’s final promises as they are revealed in the messianic banquet and *the marriage supper of the Lamb* (Revelation 19:9). Therefore, when we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” the words turn our hearts to God who gives Himself to us for our redemption and new life.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

God’s provision of daily bread as manna (Exodus 16:15; Nehemiah 9:15).

Jesus’ multiplication of bread (Matthew 15:33–37; see also Deuteronomy 12:18; Psalm 145:15).

The Bread of Life (John 6).

The bread for tomorrow and the messianic banquet (Isaiah 25:6–8; Luke 13:29; Revelation 19:9).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

In the Holy Communion service in many modern Prayer Books, after the Breaking of the Bread and a period of silence, the celebrant may say, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore, let us keep the feast" (1 Corinthians 6:7). The breaking of the bread is a sign of Christ who offered His life to liberate us from the chains of oppression forged by sin.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Jesus invites His disciples to depend on God for their basic daily needs. How do I relate to God for food provision? How do I respond to the Donor who freely provides my food as a daily gift? The mention of bread is a sign of the deepest need for Jesus' disciples to nourish their fellowship through the Bread of Life, which is Jesus Christ Himself, who offered His life. How are daily bread and the life of Jesus related?

OUR CALLING:

These words open our minds to a deep hunger that needs to be satisfied by God. They summon us and our congregations to works of care and provision for those in need in our community, as well as to an ever-trusting dependence on God.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Before beginning a meal, give thanks to the One who provides daily bread, which feeds your family, your community, and you. Most BCPs have sections containing graces at meals. Memorize one or two and use them regularly, either by yourself or with your family.

LESSON FOUR

AND FORGIVE OUR TRESPASSES, AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US

TEACHING:

Seeking God's forgiveness may seem a lot easier than forgiving other people or asking their forgiveness, partly because human beings are all too aware of God's holiness on the one hand, and of our limitations, failings, and imperfect nature on the other. When we repent and ask for forgiveness, our merciful God is willing and ready to forgive us. What is often more difficult is *to forgive those who trespass against us* (Matthew 6:12). The fact that Jesus included these words when He taught His disciples how to pray shows how important it is to forgive others. Yet, as both Matthew and Mark emphasize, it is not easy, especially when the person who has trespassed against us has not asked for our forgiveness. Matthew explains, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15). We receive from God what we give to others (Matthew 7:2).

Much as we may condemn the transgressor for sin, the duty and responsibility to forgive remains, particularly because there is a link between forgiveness and prayer. Mark records Jesus as saying, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, for-

give him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25). The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23–35) illustrates this in a dramatic manner. It follows Peter’s question, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” (Matthew 18:21). “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times,” Jesus replies (Matthew 18:22). To illustrate the way forgiveness works, Jesus tells the story of the unforgiving servant, whose large debt has been forgiven by his master. But when another servant owes him a much smaller debt, the unforgiving servant refuses to forgive the debt. When the merciful master finds out, he condemns and punishes the unforgiving servant. This is a lesson for all of us. Forgiving someone who has injured us, or asking forgiveness from someone we have injured, are hard things to do. In the end, however, we should understand that it is God’s forgiveness in Christ that, through the Spirit, converts and enables us to forgive others (Ephesians 4:30–32). This is why we ask God for His mercy whenever we need to forgive or be forgiven.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Matthew 6:5–13; Luke 11:1–4; Mark 11:25–26; Matthew 18:23–35.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

In addition to the repeated use of the Lord’s Prayer in every service of the Prayer Book, look especially at the two Exhortations before Communion in the 1662 Prayer Book. These lay out how our life with our merciful God is bound up with our reconciled life with our neighbors, in which forgiveness reigns even in our daily encounters and relationships.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Can God forgive us even when we have not asked Him to forgive?

Can God still forgive the offender who does not seek forgiveness?

MY CALLING:

I commit to forgive those who have offended or hurt me greatly, and to do so in the power of Christ's merciful receiving of me, in all my sin and fault.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

If you have not done so already, memorize the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13). Now, in your thoughts, bring into this prayer all those with whom you are not yet at peace. Say the prayer as if *they* were the ones praying it, and add, "Lord, let their prayer also be answered."

LESSON FIVE

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

TEACHING:

To ask God not to lead us into temptation follows from asking God to forgive us our trespasses. We are asking that we not come under judgment for our sins, nor be delivered over to our worst instincts, which, bound by the Evil One's desires, can overwhelm us in evil. For this we need God's grace, leading us closer into His transforming power. Temptation doesn't refer simply to a bad situation, but to the way we respond to such situations. The best way to respond to any situation, whether it is a good or bad one, is by living it with God, and not on our own. In fact, in his epistle, James speaks of the benefit of trials and tribulations in this life: "you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (James 1–3). Our virtues, like faith and endurance, are strengthened when we use them with God as our help and do not try to rely upon ourselves. Otherwise, we slip into the grip of evil.

There are always three actors in our lives: ourselves, Satan (or his servants) who would draw us away from God, and God Himself. After He was baptized by John, Jesus followed in the footsteps of the Israelites by going into the wilderness to be tested (Deuteronomy 8:2; Luke 4:1–13), and in the wilderness, Satan attacked him with

temptations three times. With Jesus, we are tested by Satan (think about the experience of Job [Job 1:6–12, 2:1–7]) who tries to manipulate our desires for self-sufficiency, power, success, or pleasure. But in the desert, just as He was with Jesus, our Father awaits us, offering His word as a source of strength and life (Luke 4:4).

We are thereby transformed. James denies that it is God who tempts us, “for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one” (James 1:13). But because the Evil One works *through* our desires, James also emphasizes that we are responsible for how we encounter these times of testing, since we too often allow our evil thoughts to overwhelm us. Nevertheless, whether we attribute our temptations to our moral weakness or to the Devil, God, with his gifts, remains in control.

If we persist in refusing God’s ordering direction, it is possible that He will deliver us over to our passions (Romans 1:24–32), which we have allowed to slip into the hands of evil. Still, God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). So, this prayer is about praying! “Pray at all times and do not lose heart,” Luke writes (18:1). God is near and ready to help. And in helping, He changes us into the image of His Son.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Psalm 95; Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13; 1 Corinthians 10:1–13; Job 1; James 1:2–4, 12–15; 1 Peter 4:12–19.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

From at least the fourth century until today, the Church has recited Psalm 95 at Morning Prayer. In it, we are reminded of how the Israelites were tempted to turn against God amid difficult times. As in Hebrews 3:8–9, “Harden not your hearts as in the provocation,

and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness; When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works.” Hardening our hearts points to our responsibility to be open to God’s grace in the midst of temptation and to be attentive to His gifts, His Word, His grace. The recitation of Psalm 95 here points to our call to prayer.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What kinds of situations have you encountered when you felt your inner desires were not turned towards God? What did you feel instead?

Why does God *permit* our testing?

Can blessings from God ever be a test of faith?

What are some basic strategies for avoiding temptations? What does Jesus do in the desert?

MY CALLING:

I will seek to watch and pray against temptation, “for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). I will ever pray to God for the gift of his living Word amid my trials.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

In addition to reciting the Lord’s Prayer daily, also try praying Psalm 95 every morning.

LESSON SIX

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, THE POWER
AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER AND EVER. AMEN.

TEACHING:

This ending of the Lord's Prayer is found in some early versions of Matthew 6:13, and seems to be drawn from 1 Chronicles 29:10–13." It quickly became a standard ending to the prayer. Sometimes the phrase is called a *doxology*, which simply means it is a way of *giving glory* to God. In this case, we give glory to God by ending the Lord's Prayer with an affirmation of His almighty and wonderful rule over all things. The key words here are *kingdom*, *power*, and *glory*. A kingdom cannot exist without a King. In this context, God is the King of all things, and the kingdom belongs to Him (as we have already prayed, "Thy kingdom come"). We end the Lord's Prayer, then, in an expression of faith in God's ordering of the world we live and pray in.

As we are drawn to acknowledge a King, we affirm that He is not weak, but powerful. Unlike some earthly rulers who wield human power for the sake of personal gain or cruelty, God is a just ruler who uses His power to redeem and restore. In other words, God uses His power to draw us to Himself and give us the power to become His children, who can pray "Our Father" with trusting confidence. All the things we ask for in this prayer we ask with a humble and grateful

assurance, for the powerful King of the universe is our Father. He will give us *good gifts* (Matthew 7:11).

Consequently, God is glorified. God's *glory* (*kabod* in Hebrew, which implies a heavy weight of something wonderful) is often represented as a *weighty* and gleaming light. God's fatherly yet powerful care for us is, in Jesus, the *light of life* (John 8:12). As we say the prayer Jesus taught us, we accept the gift God has given us of being *children of the light* (Ephesians 5:8), living in trustful dependence upon our Father, reflecting His grace and mercy to others.

The final element in this part of the Lord's Prayer is *eternity for ever and ever*. Human kingdoms, earthly power, and glory do not last forever. We end our prayer proclaiming, "Let God be God!"

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

"Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the Kingdom; you are exalted as head over all." (1 Chronicles 29:11).

Glory in a context of worship: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Lord's Prayer is featured in every public liturgy within the Prayer Book. This demonstrates that the Church acknowledges God as King—not as an earthly king, but as the King with power to rule His Kingdom both in heaven and on earth. The Lord's Prayer also acknowledges that glory and honour belong to God, and to Him alone. The Prayer Book's repeated and central use of the Lord's Prayer helps us to see how offering petitions to God is a way of worshipping Him. Our worship of God is also a way of receiving the gifts of His love.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What does it mean that all the kingdoms of the earth belong to God (Revelation 11:15)? Where do we see God's rule, even in a confused world? Where should we look?

What do you trust God's power with accomplishing in your life or in the world?

Where, in your life or in the lives of others, do you see God's light and glory?

MY CALLING:

As a member of God's kingdom, I will always seek to allow God's power to be at work in my life through His Spirit, and in the form of His Son, and I will give glory to His name, in times of both weakness and strength, forever.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

One of the most beloved doxologies in the Anglican world is the hymn "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," and it is sung today in many versions and languages. Learn and sing it. It is a good hymn to know and can be used on many occasions, including as a grace before meals.

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OUR CALLING
& GOD'S GIFTS
IN CHRIST

LESSON ONE

CHRISTIAN VOCATION AND WORK

TEACHING:

The word *vocation* means *calling*. God creates us, provides us gifts and freedom, and calls us to live with Him. We are not left on our own. At the heart of our lives is God *calling us*, asking us to come close to Him, as He did with Adam (Genesis 3:9). Our response to God's calling is enacted in obedience, prayer, service, and worship. These mark our *vocation* as God's creatures and embody our love for and thanks to Him.

In the fallen world of sin and separation from God, when these actions are so often frustrated, God takes them up in His Son, Jesus, and carries us close in Christ's own response of loving obedience. Our vocation is now fulfilled in hearing Jesus' call (Mark 1:20) and following Him, His word, His way, His holiness. We who follow Jesus are *called to be saints* in Christ (Romans 1; 1 Corinthians 1:2). This vocation or calling is not otherworldly. Sometimes people use the word *vocation* to refer only to being a monk or nun or priest. This is a limited understanding of its meaning. In reality, our Christian vocation takes up the full range of service and obedience to God and neighbor that marks the revelation of God to Israel and that Jesus and Paul describe. It means our work, family, community, and business, as well as our prayer and worship.

All living creatures have their proper work to do. But so does God. Work is an essential part of our vocation. The centrality of work is expressed from the first pages of Scripture, where our first image of God is as one mysteriously at work in the act of creation (Genesis 2:2–3). While some of the most memorable language about human work in the Book of Genesis comes as a consequence of human sin (3:17–19), it is important to recognize that the first humans were designed to work in and tend the Garden before the Fall (Genesis 2:15–18).

The connection between work and our relationship with God surfaces in important ways throughout the Old Testament. The Sabbath cycle, which includes six days of work and one day of rest, established for the ancient Israelites a kind of liturgical pattern for daily life. They were directed to bring the *first fruits* of the harvest into the presence of the Lord (Deuteronomy 26:1–11). Following other parts of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 14:29, 16:15), the psalmist prays for God to bless or establish the work of his hands (Psalm 90:17). Likewise, unethical work practices (Amos 8:4; Isaiah 58:3) serve as vivid indicators of deeper spiritual maladies. In the New Testament, it is striking how many of the parables of Jesus relate to work or labor, suggesting again that work and our spirituality intersect in powerful ways. We fulfill our vocation as we tend to the good gifts God gives us, and we do so according to God's will, commands, and character.

Whereas all Christians are called to work in a general sense, a vocation can refer to a more specific calling to a particular field or project. One's vocation is often discerned through prayer, a recognition of unique giftings, and other sources of Christian wisdom. There can be a distinction between an individual's daily work and a unique sense of vocation to serve God in some specific capacity, but the two are always intertwined. Every Christian is *called* to see their daily work

as a place to witness to our love for God and neighbor and to see our relationship with God as shaping our daily labor. There is no work either too high or too humble to exclude our relationship with God.

Vocation includes but is not limited to daily work, family, and community. We have callings in the church, too. Some are universal, such as praying, witnessing, and gathering on the Lord's Day. We may also be called to steward the church's resources, to catechize the young, to serve on a church council. The older sense of vocation as a calling to ordination as a bishop, priest, or deacon remains important, and points to particular ministries that illuminate the meaning of the broader calling of all Christians. Ordained ministry involves duties required by our Lord: to absolve, to preside at Holy Communion, to preach the Word, to encourage Christians, to bless, to serve the poor. Beyond this, ordained ministers are meant to be examples for us all. The bishop reminds us to be faithful to our inheritance from the apostles; the priest reminds us that, week by week, the Lord is near in His Word and sacraments; the deacon reminds us that throughout our labors we are to serve rather than be served. Vocation to ordination is unique precisely because it gives us an image of the nature of all of our vocations. It reminds us how we are all part of a *royal priesthood* (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9), in the great vocation of serving God with all the gifts of our lives that He has given us.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Genesis 1:26—2:15, 3:16—22; Deuteronomy 26:1—11; Amos 8:4—6; Ecclesiastes 2; Luke 12:13—21; Colossians 3:23; Ephesians 4:28.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

The Prayer Book includes collects that commemorate our vocation

to follow Jesus, but also to live by that calling in our daily lives. The two collects that follow deal expressly with each of these callings.

The collect for St. Andrew's Day commemorates our vocation to follow Jesus: "Almighty God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil thy holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Many modern Prayer Books include collect for the Rogation Days (the three days before the Ascension), a traditional time of planting when the Church seeks God blessings upon our daily life and work: "Almighty and merciful God, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift: Bless, we beseech thee, the labours of thy people, and cause the earth to bring forth her fruits abundantly in their season, that we may with grateful hearts give thanks to thee for the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Every culture awards status to some jobs over others, and sometimes to men's work over women's work. From God's perspective, what work has value and why?

According to Luke 12:13–21, what are the temptations of wealth? Is wealth a gift of God? If so, how are we supposed to use this gift? In this life, does God promise us riches based upon our faith?

MY CALLING:

Jesus calls me to follow Him, as He takes us close to the Father. I do that through various means: through prayer and worship, as well

as through my daily work in strengthening the bonds between my family, friends, and community. In my job, I am a witness of God's call to my colleagues and employer.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

As I begin each day, I will pray for the strength to respond to God's call to be faithful, to love and follow Jesus, and to be a good example of these things to others in whatever task I have taken up.

LESSON TWO

SUFFERING, DYING, HOPING

TEACHING:

Every human being suffers in this life, from the pain of birth to the struggles of dying, and in between there are all kinds of agonies, both physical and emotional. We sometimes wonder why this suffering seems unequally distributed among people, something Job was troubled by, too (Job 30). Yet, for all the variety in our life experiences, without exception every human being also dies. We are truly equal here. Christians have long debated whether God created us mortal—that is, liable to death but *growing* into life eternal—or whether we were originally immortal and only became mortal as a punishment. But all agree that the *sting* or *power* of death, lodged in our fear of it (Hebrews 2:15), is a consequence of the first sin of Adam and Eve. That sin is bound up with the curse of brutal toil and pain, such that our lives seem to lead nowhere but back to the *dust* from which God made us (Genesis 3:19). For many, this shared destiny can lead to despair, and Christians too can cry out to God in desperation, “Who will save me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

Yet Christians also have faith in the Incarnation of God in Jesus, in whom God took on all our existence, including our suffering and fear, and finally even our death (Hebrews 2:5–18). God’s sharing of

our lives in Jesus does not remove the experience of pain and death; rather, God transforms our suffering and death through an act of infinite love. That act of divine sharing ends by transcending our hard experiences, allowing them to be used as gifts of love for the lives of others—in labors of compassion and in sacrifice (John 12:23–27, 13:1–17). In Christ we can offer our lives, lived in love for others, back to our Maker, in thanks and hope. Suffering becomes a grace, in which we can even “boast” (Galatians 6:14). In joining our offering to Christ and His cross, we are carried by Him beyond death into His resurrection. As He told His disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Genesis 3; Ecclesiastes 3:1–2; Psalms 90:10, 23:4; John 11:25–26, 6:51; 1 Corinthians 15:55–57; Hebrews 12:1–3.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

In our baptism, we are joined to Christ’s suffering and death and thereby caught up in Jesus’ destiny of Resurrection (Romans 6:3–5). In the Eucharist we celebrate and enter into the great mystery of how Jesus, in His human body and through His divine love in the Spirit, took our suffering and death as His own and offered it to His Father, turning a curse into a gift. In our participation in this offering, our own bodies and souls are strengthened for a life lived, like His, in preparation for our eternal home. The Litany offers the sweep of our mortal lives to God in Christ. The Burial Service summarizes our equality in death, our hope in Christ’s Resurrection, and our humble reception of His grace in our deaths.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

We sometimes think of death as a blessing. Is that ever true? In which case, why do we fear death (Hebrews 2:15)? How does our faith in Christ change this fear into hope? What might it mean to offer our suffering to God, joined to Christ's self-offering, and how or when might this be a service of love to other persons? Are our suffering and death ever, in Christ, something for which we can give thanks (that is, give *Eucharist*)?

MY CALLING:

Matthew 16:24–26 lays out Jesus' summons of His disciples. This touches the whole of our existence, in health and in sickness. If we are to answer His call truly, we must take up our crosses, whatever they may be, and follow Him.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Memorize Romans 8:16–17. Reflect on how we can, through the Spirit, *become like Jesus* in our daily struggles and finally in our deaths. Becoming like Him in these things also means we become like Him in His resurrection.

LESSON THREE

SEXUALITY, MARRIAGE, FAMILY, SINGLENESS

TEACHING:

Our survey of the Old and New Testaments gives us the pattern for how to live (in the Decalogue), what to believe (in the Creed), and how to pray (in the Lord's Prayer). It also shows us who God has created us to be, and who God is transforming us to become. How we understand human sexuality, marriage, family, and singleness flows from this. The Scriptures define humanity as made in the image of God, *male and female* together (Genesis 1:26–27). In love, God commissions Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply, fill, and rule over the earth (Genesis 1:28). They fulfill this commission by the covenant of marriage, which the Bible defines as the union in one flesh between one man and one woman, patterned after the union between Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:21–23). This union of marriage is a place of joy and reflects God's love for Israel (see the whole of the Song of Songs).

This union leads to the procreation of children. After sin entered the world through the Fall, marriage and childbearing were the means by which God kept His promise of grace alive. In God's promise, an offspring from Eve's descendants would overcome death and the serpent (Genesis 3:15) and would bring the blessings of salvation to all

the nations (Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–5; 17:1–17; 22:15–18). Furthermore, throughout Israel's history, God demonstrated this powerful promise by giving children to certain barren women of Israel—to Sarah and Abraham (Genesis 21:1–7), Rebecca and Isaac (Genesis 25:21), Rachel and Jacob (Genesis 30:22–24), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:19–20), and to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5–7, 23–25, 57–58). The children all these women bore carried out God's will. In a larger sense, the women, upon whom God looked with favor when He reversed their shame and disappointment, represented barren Israel (Isaiah 54:1).

Natural procreation was not the only fulfilment of God's promise. Single persons also furthered God's grace, like eunuchs (Isaiah 56:3–5) or the unmarried prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 16:1–4). Such individuals pointed forward to Jesus, the unmarried and self-sacrificing Saviour who reconstituted the family of God (Mark 3:34–35; John 19:25–27) as the Church renewed by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3–8). This new family, then and now, includes eunuchs devoted to the kingdom (Matthew 19:11–12; see also 1 Corinthians 7:1, 7, 38), whose making of disciples is like that of a mother (Galatians 4:19; 1 Thessalonians 2:7) and a father (1 Thessalonians 2:11–12). We should note that those who remain unmarried or without children are often celebrated for their faith, as they remain in their loving service a part of the great body and family of Christ (1 Corinthians 7:38–40; Mark 3:33–35). Marriage, childbearing, and celibacy, while they embody the creative purposes of God for human beings, point to higher realities: the union between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:31–32) and the family of God born of the Spirit (Titus 3:5), with Christ as the firstborn brother (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:10–17).

We are all called to honor marriage, first by honoring our parents and their offering of our lives (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:2–3), and second by honoring the life of faithfulness in marriage (Hebrews 13:4). But not everyone is called to the married life. Some people are called to singleness in the service of God. Yet whether married or single, we are all called to further the work of God's creative, *abundant*, and fruitful life that marriage and procreation embody (John 10:10).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

List all the elements of marriage outlined in the first bodily union in Genesis 2:18–25. Notice how they reflect the union between Christ and His Church in Ephesians 5:22–33.

Read Isaiah 56:4–7. How does this passage complement our understanding of procreation and family?

Notice how Jesus, in Matthew 19:1–12, reaffirms that marriage is between one man and one woman, even while He paves the way for a new era in which the kingdom of God is reflected both in marriage and in singleness.

Study how Jesus, in Luke 20:27–40, places the good of marriage in a temporary framework, to be superseded at the final resurrection by a higher, more permanent union, the union of the family of God.

Read Revelation 19:6–10 and 21:1–5 and discover how the joys of marriage are a shadow pointing toward the greater joy of the eternal union of Jesus Christ with His bride, the Church.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

In many modern Prayer Books, the prayers of blessing for the couple at the very end of the liturgy point to a greater celebration at the table of the Lord, a celebration that not even death can undo: "Most

gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother ... Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that table where you saints feast for ever in your heavenly home. As it is in the Bible, the gracious reality of human marriage is affirmed, and it also exists to point us to the full reconciliation of creation.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Many cultures in the world today are redefining sexual identity and practice in terms of the individual's self-expression, attractions, and desires. How does the larger story of Scripture help us respond to these newer versions of teaching on human sexuality? How does it help the Church to minister to the many young people who struggle with Christian teachings on sexuality? How does the eternal reality to which marriage points—Christ's union with the Church—redefine our sense of sexual desire and longing?

MY CALLING:

God has called me either into marriage or singleness. If I am married, He has called me and my spouse to model Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22–30), and if He blesses our marriage with children, He has called me to raise them in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). If I am single, he has called me to show the world through my celibacy that the eternal pleasures of union with Christ (Psalm 16:11; Isaiah 62:5; Revelation 21:2) far outweigh the temporary joys of marriage and family, and that the family of God is born through regeneration of the Holy Spirit and not by bodily procreation alone (John 1:12–13).

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

If you are married, at the end of every day, ask yourself whether you have acknowledged your faults to your spouse. Then ask for their forgiveness for the ways you have caused hurt, including to your children (BCP 1979, 429). On your wedding anniversary, review your vows with your spouse (BCP 1979, 427). Write out your vows again. If you are single, consider living in a community of believers who have a shared rule of life and a common friendship that seeks to honor the Lord in singleness. Sketch out such a communal life.

LESSON FOUR

RECONCILIATION

TEACHING:

God has created all people in His image. The diversity of ethnic groups and cultures reflects God's beauty. Our lives as Christians are enriched by ever-widening circles of fellowship. At the same time, the universal character and openness of the Church can be a challenge. The closer and more authentic our relationships become within our churches, the more self-contained we become, and the more our weakness and poverty are exposed to others. As a community of sinners, we often cause harm to others even when we do not intend to.

As Christians, we believe and try to live as St. Paul proposes: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17–18). We seek God's mercy and reconciliation so that we may convert our hearts and turn from ways of thinking, speaking, and acting that harm our relationships with one another.

Many of our Catechism lessons have dealt with forgiveness, including the central petition of the Lord's Prayer, *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*. Therefore, as St. Paul

says in 2 Corinthians 5, among the great witnesses of the Christian life and church is a *ministry of reconciliation*. This ministry, literally a service, much as Jesus comes as *one who serves* (Luke 22:27), is an offering we give not only to individuals but to the world around us. Christians, in the power of the Spirit of Christ, are called to live a reconciled life with others and to promote reconciliation among others. This touches on our individual relationships with families, friends, and coworkers, on the internal life of our churches and their relationships with other churches, and on the life of our larger communities and nations. To be faithful to this calling will involve several things: the willingness to treat others as better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3); the willingness to bear the burdens of others (Galatians 6:2); the willingness to suffer at the hands of those who see our following of Christ's reconciling humility as a weakness rather than a spiritual strength, or as a form of opposition to their plans (1 Peter 2:19-21); and, of course, the willingness to give ourselves over to the hands of God's ordering of events, and ceasing to insist on having our way (1 Peter 2:23). Amid conflict, Christians bear a special responsibility to *conform to Christ* (Romans 12:2).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

God's presence in a renewed Israel: Isaiah 4:2-6; Psalm 122.

Salvation for all: Isaiah 55:1-11; Psalm 42:1-7.

A new heart and a new Spirit: Ezekiel 36:24-28 ; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 ; Colossians 3:3-10.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

In modern Prayer Books, there is a rite called The Reconciliation of a Penitent. If your Prayer Book has this, read through the liturgy. Read the sections concerning the Rite of the Ministry of Reconciliation

and Forms I and II of the Reconciliation of a Penitent. In the 1662 Prayer Book, revisit the Exhortations before Communion and the absolution provided in the Visitation of the Sick for those “moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter,” which begins “Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power...”. In all these places, both individual and communal reconciliations are shown to be closely related, and these are bound to the mercy of God’s reconciling grace in Christ. The Eucharist takes place within the body of believers reconciled by Christ, and those invited to it are exhorted to “in love and charity with” their neighbors. Modern services of Holy Communion contain the passing of the peace between worshippers, which symbolizes this mutual forgiveness.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

In what way is the diversity of ethnic groups and cultures a reason to thank God? How does this diversity enrich the life of the Church? Can you recall times when this diversity, perhaps in some local way, became a trial for you? Can you also recognize God’s mercy and reconciliation in such moments?

MY CALLING:

Christ calls us, as sinners, to repent and open ourselves to the grace of reconciliation that strengthens our fellowship with one another. As the Epistle of James urges us: “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed” (5:16). With St. Paul, we accept the offering of being *ministers of reconciliation* in all our relationships.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

In prayer, identify a personal situation in which reconciliation is needed, perhaps with another individual, or within a group at church. Pray about this. If you feel moved by God, speak to this person, or engage the situation you have thought about. If this does not seem right, continue to pray for God's Spirit to bring forgiveness, new understanding, and new life to you and those involved. If your church practices private confession or the *Reconciliation of a Penitent*, explore with your pastor how you might do this.

LESSON FIVE

MONEY, WEALTH, TITHING, CARE FOR CREATION

TEACHING:

In many Prayer Books, there is a prayer said over the offerings of the people just before the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. In some, the words are these: “Yours, Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendor, and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.”

These words echo 1 Chronicles 29:11–13 (see also Revelation 4:11). The Bible teaches us to acknowledge God’s greatness in the truth that everything in heaven and on earth belongs to Him. More importantly, we are exhorted to give back to God what belongs to Him. We are stewards of God. Using what we have to nourish ourselves is important. But we must also be mindful that giving for the work of the Kingdom is a better way. This includes supporting our churches and their work with our money as well as with our service. Tithing, which means giving ten percent of our income or goods, is a common, healthy, and faithful habit.

Jesus commends even the poor in their offerings in this regard (Mark 12:41–44). In the story of Jesus and the poor widow, note how Jesus contrasts the widow’s generosity in the face of her poverty to the gifts of the rich whose offerings cost them little. When God blesses us with wealth, then we should be lavish in our giving, for to

whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48). In our giving, it is our hearts that matter, and the offering of our whole lives. For God has given us these lives, and it is these He asks us to offer back in return (Luke 12:16–21). How we deal with our money reflects the way our hearts respond to God. Hence, when the rich young man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus' response, "Go, sell what you have, give to the poor, and follow me (Matthew 19:16–22), is not so much a formula for everyone to follow, but something by which to measure our heart's faithfulness. Each of us must seek the grace to hear how these words are meant to shape our lives.

Our stewardship and generosity in tending and sharing God's gifts include taking care of God's creation. We must never forget that God's covenant extends to all creation (Genesis 9:12). We are a part of creation, and caring for it is a way of lifting our hearts in praise to our Maker because of it (Psalm 104; 148). Through His creation, God sustains us. Our survival depends upon the survival of creation, which in turn provides us with water, vegetables, crops, minerals, and the very air we breathe (Genesis 2:10–15). We are called to take seriously how our individual and communal decisions affect our land and our common life, extending to future generations. Political and economic concerns come into play, and there will be disagreements about how best to follow this call. But the call is clear, for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1).

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

The earth and all that is in it belongs to God (1 Chronicles 29:11–13; Psalm 24:1–2).

The integrity of Creation (Genesis 1:29–30, 2:10–15).

Investing in the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:19–21).

On tithing (Deuteronomy 26:10–11, 26:12–15; Malachi 3:8–10).

On the spiritual rewards for those who are generous (2 Corinthians 9:6–8).

On generosity to the poor (Luke 3:11).

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Every Anglican Prayer Book contains offertory sentences to be used as the Holy Table is prepared for the celebration of Holy Communion. They are all taken from Scripture. Examine these, which come from both the Old Testament and the New Testament, and focus on individual and communal generosity, as it is founded upon God's grace given to us first.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

How often do you hear about tithing in your local church? Can you list other ways that a Christian can support mission and ministry and still honor God and acknowledge that all in heaven and on earth belongs to Him?

Are there ways in which an individual and the church community can take care of creation?

MY CALLING:

I will honor God with all the gifts God has given me: my money, possessions, wealth, skills, energy, and service for the work of the Kingdom locally and far beyond.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Memorize 2 Corinthians 9:6.

Prayer: I pray that I may have a generous heart that trusts in God's grace to fulfill my needs, even as I share my material blessings with others.

LESSON SIX

MISSION

TEACHING:

Many organizations aim to serve and help people. In so doing, they seek to add members. Over time they expand and adapt to new and far-flung settings, even as they debate how to adapt their strategy. This statement is true enough for the Church, too, but it fails to describe the Church's mission. Why? Because the Church's mission is defined, start to finish, by the *Resurrection of Jesus*. It is the resurrected Jesus who sends out his apostles to carry on the mission of the Son of God (John 20:21).

What is the mission of the Church? First of all, *mission is the new moment of invitation in the history of salvation*. In the Old Testament, the prophets foretold that when the kingdom arrived, the door of salvation would finally be opened to the nations of the earth, undoing the disaster of Babel (Isaiah 2; Acts 2). This means that the same Gospel must be preached so that it may be understood among *every family, language, people, and nation* (1 Corinthians 9:20-21; Revelation 5:9).

Second, mission is the *empowerment of the Church to be a sign of Christ's risen presence*. While the Church has no power in itself, the risen Christ commissions it to speak His word of forgiveness (John

20:22–23), celebrate His presence in His supper (Luke 22:19–20), and welcome us into His risen body in baptism (Matthew 28:18–19). Furthermore, in serving those in need (Matthew 25:40) and suffering with Him who still bears the wounds (Colossians 1:24), the Church also witnesses to His presence.

Third, *mission enables Christ's people to live by the gift of hope for the kingdom*. Because the Risen One is among us, we enjoy gifts properly ours in the Kingdom, and so by grace we are witnesses to the world's hope. We, though sinful and subject to death, are nevertheless forgiven and healed, so as not to lose heart (2 Corinthians 4:16) in the presence of Him who has *the keys of death and hell* (Revelation 1:18). Thus, we are bearers of hope to others to the *ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8). One of the key elements of bearing hope involves teaching them about the Christian faith. In this we follow Jesus, whose final words in the Gospel of Matthew are: “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, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). Thus, *catechesis*, or instruction, is a central part of mission, and in the history of the Church, as we see in all the Epistles, it is the great apostolic task.

The history of the Church's mission has had both inspiring and discouraging chapters. From time to time, the Church has bowed to imperial powers, but, it has also challenged them. It has both preserved cultural gifts and suppressed them. It has further emphasized church divisions, but it has also overcome differences among churches (as we have seen in missionary gatherings in Edinburgh 1910, in the formation of the united Church of South India in 1947, or in Vatican II, the great Catholic Council of 1962–65). Jesus tells us that the work of healing the divisions among churches is essential to the Church's mission (John 17:14–26).

The gospel has spread in numerous ways: along trade routes in the early missions of the Oriental churches, through private mission societies (for example, the Church Missionary Society or the YMCA and YWCA), and especially through local catechists and evangelists. Often this mission has advanced surprisingly and suddenly. We see this in the East African Revival, in the people's movements of the lower castes in India, in the house churches of China, and Pentecostals in Latin America. The Church has included friendship amid debate with other religions.

The work of mission has not been without suffering. Often and strikingly, *the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the Church* (in the words of Tertullian, a second-century North African Christian leader). We saw this suffering in the early Church, as the earliest persecutions were recorded in the Book of Acts. But it has also happened in many parts of the world over the centuries, and some Christians have even persecuted other Christians whose doctrines did not exactly mirror theirs. In our time, Christianity has been persecuted in many countries, and missionaries have lost their freedom or even their lives. All this mission work counts. As with Stephen in Acts 7, the witness of Christians even to death, following Jesus' cross in the hope of resurrection in Him, has known enormous power in spreading the gospel.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

There are many passages that can give rise to a conversation about the shape of mission where you are. Here are three:

First Corinthians 8 deals with meat sacrificed to idols. The issue for Paul concerned rites and customs that had been practiced by new Christians before they received the gospel. They were asking what, as Christians, they could still practice. New Christians everywhere face

a version of these questions.

Romans 12:2 deals with conformity to the cultural norm. Paul is explicit. He says, “Do not be conformed ... be transformed.” How is this an issue for where we find ourselves now? How do we determine what conformity and transformation look like in different contexts?

Acts 17:30 deals with the hold of the past when *the times of ignorance were overlooked*. The past exerts a powerful influence upon human beings. It often shapes our identity. But as Christians, we have been made anew. How then should we think about the time of our ancestors, or before the Gospel arrived? Do we deny its value, or do we invite it into our service of God?

Acts 6:2 deals with the idea of service, like waiting on tables, and how our example of service may spread the Word of God. How do we balance service and teaching in our situations today? How can these two aspects of Christian ministry support one another in what is now called *holistic mission* (that is, mission that addresses the whole of human life and need)?

EXPLORING THE BCP:

In 16th-century England, after many centuries of the Latin Mass, which few ordinary people could understand, Thomas Cranmer, the main compiler of the Book of Common Prayer, placed great importance on *using such language as people use* (see the Preface to the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549, still printed in most Prayer Books). The Prayer Book Catechism used in preparation for Confirmation has been an important tool in explaining and spreading the Christian faith. Moreover, the common form of Prayer Books in Anglican churches throughout the world, with various ordained leaders and customs of worship, has been fruitful in spreading the gospel and strengthening the lives of the faithful.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

Review the section *Exploring the Scriptures*, and reflect on the questions each of the cited Bible texts there have raised. The Church, over her history, has usually understood that the core of our faith and what Christians need to learn are the Scriptures, the Decalogue, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. This is also how the Catechism is written. What else must a Christian know to engage faithfully in the Church's mission?

OUR CALLING:

The Pentecost reading from Acts 2:1–11 affirms our commitment to witness to God's mighty works to people of all languages and backgrounds. In light of the Church's larger mission, I offer this personal commitment as someone bound to the *whole* Church, supporting her larger witness locally and in the world, praying for her faithfulness to testify to the hope offered in the death and resurrection of Christ, seeking her unity so that *the world may believe* (John 17:21), and joining in whatever way I can with others in this testimony and labor.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Pray for mission locally and internationally, in the Anglican tradition and beyond; for the Church's unity; for transformation to Christ and not conformity to culture; and for balance between service and teaching.

Finally, sing a hymn about mission—for instance, “Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun” or “Here I Am, Lord.”

LESSON SEVEN

LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS

TEACHING:

As the body of Christ, in our services of worship we meet to offer adoration and praise to God and to receive His grace. Our worship is *liturgical*, a word that refers to the form of worship that we use to express our service to God. We offer prayers and perform sacramental rites that have been handed down through the Church from its earliest generations. Our liturgy, or worship service, celebrates and partakes of the greatest work, God's work of salvation in Christ's gift of Himself on our behalf. In every service, we worship and give honour to God alongside the Church throughout the ages. At the same time, we participate in the eternal worship of the age to come, and even of today in the realms of God's holy angels. In some of our Communion prayers, before we recite *Holy, Holy, Holy*, the priest invites us to say together, *Now, joining our voices with angels and archangels, we sing*. This is an astonishing reality: when we worship, we are joined to heaven.

Our Sunday worship in the service of Holy Communion naturally divides into two main parts: the liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of Holy Communion. In the Liturgy of the Word, we gather and invite the Lord to *cleanse the thoughts of our hearts* and, by His

Spirit, enable us to *worthily magnify His holy name*. We confess our sins, and the priest declares God's forgiveness in Christ. We hear the Scriptures and are instructed through the preaching. In the Liturgy of Holy Communion, we receive the sacrament of communion with Christ. The prayers spoken by the priest and the congregation give thanks and honour to God for the gift of salvation. In the Sanctus, we sing *Holy, Holy, Holy* and join our voices to the everlasting song of praise that surrounds God's throne. Using Christ's words, *this is my body and this is my blood*, the Prayer of Consecration proclaims the saving deeds of God in Christ for us and the recounting of the Last Supper and the Lord's institution of the sacrament anchors the prayer in Scripture and in history.

Our liturgy and sacraments tell the story of salvation. But they don't merely retell the story; they *bring us into* God's presence, they convey to us the benefits of His passion (prayer after Communion 1), and they make us part of His mystical body (prayer after Communion 2). Sacraments are outward, visible signs of an inward and invisible grace that God is working in us. In other words, they are signs that communicate or mediate to us the spiritual realities they represent.

There are two sacraments commanded directly by the Lord, baptism and Eucharist. In baptism we are united to Christ in His death and resurrection, and our sins are washed away. In the Eucharist, we receive His Body and Blood and are nourished by Christ, who is true bread and true drink, and these nourish us unto eternal life (John 6:54-55). Although baptism happens only once in our life, and Communion every Sunday (*on the Lord's Day*, which commemorates the day of the week that Jesus rose from the dead), both sacraments, represent gifts given by Christ to join us literally to Him. They are essential to our lives as Christians, who are members of *Christ's body*.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Read Acts 2:42; Exodus 24:1–10; Romans 6:1–10; John 6:32–40; 1 Corinthians 10:16–21, 11:23–26; Revelation 5:6–14.

EXPLORING THE BCP:

Read the Third Exhortation before Communion in the 1662 Prayer Book and the Prayer of Consecration in either that Prayer Book or later version. These give a sense of what the purpose of divine worship is, as they include the great sacrament of Communion at the centre of Christian worship.

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

What does Christ mean when He says that He is the bread that came down from Heaven (John 6:33)?

What does it mean when Scripture calls believers the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:12–13; Colossians 1:18)?

What part of the liturgy is particularly meaningful to you right now?

MY CALLING:

Jesus has forgiven my sins and made me a child of God. He invites me to be united to Him, to be baptized into His death and resurrection, to feed on Him in faith. I am called to receive these gifts in a worthy manner, to live as one dead to sin and alive to God, and to share my faith with others.

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Review the baptismal vows and reflect on the Prayer of thanksgiving after Communion that is used in your version of the Prayer Book.

LESSON EIGHT

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WORSHIP, AND THE CHURCH YEAR

TEACHING:

The Book of Common Prayer, especially the 1662 version, is the prayer book for many Anglicans worldwide, from England to other Anglican churches around the globe. The Prayer Book uniquely gathers into one small volume all the main worship services of the Church's life: daily prayer, Communion, Baptism, Confirmation, Ordination, Marriage, and Burial, along with the Psalter, catechism, and services and prayers pertaining to the various pastoral needs of congregations. It has stood the test of centuries of revisions and local adaptations, while maintaining its essential *common* and shared form across cultures, all ordered in a fashion aimed at communicating and reflecting the Scriptures. In this, the Prayer Book stands as one of the great gifts that the Anglican tradition both shares and offers to others.

The Prayer Book is a reflection of the 16th-century Reformation in England, and it was originally compiled by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. While it was largely based upon an English translation of many elements of the Roman Catholic Latin Mass, and it included many ancient prayers from the Christian tradition, it had a unique purpose. This was to bring together the Christian people of England

in a form of prayer and worship that everyone could share, or hold in *common*, that was scriptural, and whose language could be understood by all. By doing so, the people of the church would be shaped together in a way that *conformed* to the image of Christ, the Word incarnate. Such conformity was understood as *true worship* of God, a kind of offering we make of ourselves to God in humble thanks, so that God might remake us in His image.

According to the Prayer Book, Scriptural prayer, infused by the Spirit, is the means for transformation. The Prayer Book seeks to do this in three main ways. First, it exposes the people to regular and comprehensive hearing of the Bible. Scriptural readings are arranged in a *lectionary* (literally, a *list of readings*) that covers the Old and New Testaments (including the Psalms in a central place) in both daily Morning and Evening Prayer, as well as in Sunday Communion services, with weekday Eucharists usually following the lectionary for the preceding Sunday. The arrangement of the Lectionary ensures that we hear the whole Bible repeated at least every few years.

Second, the Prayer Book arranges the church calendar according to the seasons of Christ's life, ministry, and work. The Word of God in Scripture and the Word of God Incarnate are brought together in this way over the course of the seasons from Advent (Christ's coming), through Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost, with Holy Days, Major Feasts, and days of special devotion running throughout them.

Third, all the prayers and services of the Prayer Book, including those dealing with life situations like marriage or burial, are filled with Scripture, and many of the prayers are direct quotations from Scripture. By praying Scripture together daily and weekly—listening, meditating, obeying, seeking comfort, and confronting challenge—the People of God become more and more like their Lord, the Word

of Life. As the Prayer Book was translated into other languages and used in cultures outside of England, revisions were inevitably made to it. The test of these revisions, however, remains the same as in Archbishop's Cranmer's day: are they Scriptural, shared, and understandable? And do they present Christ to us and us to Christ?

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah's encounter with God in the Temple (Isaiah 6:1–8).

Hearing and understanding the Law together as a people (Nehemiah 8:1–8).

Praise and adoration to the Lord (Psalm 103:1–5).

Worshipping God in Truth (John 4:24).

Word, Sacrament, and the Life of Jesus (Luke 24:13–35).

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER:

How do people hear Scripture together in your church? How much of it do you hear?

Do you think that prayerful hearing of the Word changes a person, and thus, if willingly taken up in thanks, is a form of worshipping God?

If you are familiar with the Prayer Book, how does it compare with other prayer books used regularly in your local churches?

MY CALLING:

I will strive to worship God in truth according to His Word, doing so with others in a daily way (this may involve Morning or Evening Prayer according to the Prayer Book, or both).

DEVOTION AND PRACTICE:

Most versions of the Prayer Book contain a *Family Service* section. Pray this with family or friends each day for a week.

