

MESSIAH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

A faithful, serving community, joyfully sharing Christ's love



Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 15, 2026

228 Ramapo Valley Rd, Oakland NJ 07436

www.messiahoaklandnj.org | 201-337-4900

@MessiahOaklandNJ

Sunday Worship 10:00 am

The congregation is invited to worship in any way that is comfortable and meaningful such as standing, sitting, kneeling, coloring, etc. You may join in worship by speaking the responses in bold type.

SILENT MEDITATION DURING PRELUDE

WELCOME

GATHERING WORDS

On this fourth Sunday in Lent, we journey again toward the cross. We feel the weight of all that lies ahead. We wrestle with coming sorrow. We balance our growing needs. God, we come here today braced for the hazards of this journey.

Instead, you pour out grace.

Instead, you anoint us with oil.

Instead, you fill our cups to overflowing.

We find beauty in dry places, abundance in want, and welcome in despair.

You call us to the waters of life, and we respond, our longings now fulfilled.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism.

We know the pull of all that separates us from God. We long for the cleansing water poured out over us again. We seek anointing, the oil running its healing course. We feel this call to reconnect, so we confess our sins.

God, we have forgotten your call, insistent though it is. We stay back though the waters of baptism call us forward. We separate ourselves though the bread and cup beckon us to community. We hide our wounds though the oil of anointing waits at the ready.

God knows us better than we know ourselves. Yet God does not withhold any good gift from us. Like Naaman at the river, we are surprised at how easy it is to experience God's outpouring of grace. Like the woman at the well, we share living water and watch impenetrable barriers break. Like Mary at the feet of Jesus, we empty ourselves of all we have, only to be filled again. Beloved, you are forgiven. Receive now, for yourself, the abundant grace that opens your soul to love.

May grace flow free through us once again!

GATHERING HYMN O Christ, Your Heart, Compassionate ELW #722



1 O Christ, your heart, com - pas - sion - ate, bore ev - 'ry hu - man pain.
 2 As once you wel - comed those cast down and healed the sick, the blind,
 3 O Christ, cre - ate new hearts in us that beat in time with yours,
 4 O Love that made the dis - tant stars, yet marks the spar - row's fall,



Its beat - ing was the pulse of God; its breadth, God's vast do - main.
 so may all bruised and bro - ken lives through us your help still find.
 that, joined by faith with your great heart, be - come love's o - pen doors.
 whose arms stretched wide up - on a cross em - brace and bear us all:



The heart of God, the heart of Christ com - bined in per - fect rhyme
 Lord, join our hearts with those who weep that none may weep a - lone,
 We are your bod - y, ris - en Christ; our hearts, our hands we yield
 come, make your church a ser - vant church that walks your ser - vant ways,



to write God's love in hu - man deeds, e - ter - ni - ty in time.
 and help us bear an - oth - er's pain as though it were our own.
 that through our life and min - is - try your love may be re - vealed.
 whose deeds of love rise up to you, a sac - ri - fice of praise!

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **And also with you.**

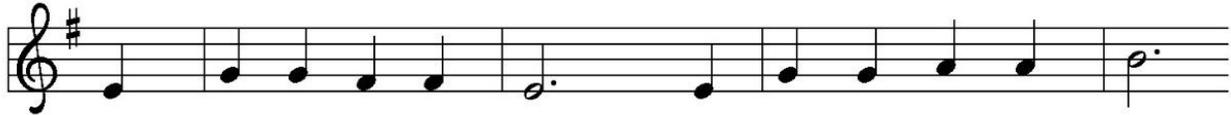
PRAYER OF THE DAY

Advocating God, you are never far from those who need your attention. You turn our faces to injustice and invite us to look again,

seeing the assumptions that stand in the way of abundance. When we are lost in our mourning, anoint us with the oil of joy. When guilt presses hard, give us a garment of praise. **Amen**

KYRIE

ELW pg.203



- 1 Have mer - cy on us, Lord, and hear our sol - emn prayer.
- 2 Have mer - cy on us, Christ, and wash a - way our sin.
- 3 Have mer - cy on us, Lord; make sin and shame de - part.



We come to hear your liv - ing word; it saves us from de - spair.
Pour out your grace and make us whole that new life may be - gin.
Re - new us with your sav - ing pow'r; cre - ate in us new hearts!

FIRST READING: A Reading from 1 Samuel 16:1-13

¹ The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ² Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.'" ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do, and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴ Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ He said, "Peaceably. I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely his anointed is now before the LORD." ⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him, for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse

made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him, for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him, for this is the one." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.

THE PSALM: Psalm 23 will be read responsively

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

² **The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.**

³ You restore my soul, O LORD, and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

⁴ **Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

⁶ **Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

SECOND READING: A Reading from Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸ Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.



Noth-ing in all cre - a - tion can sep-a-rate us from the love of God.



Noth-ing in all cre - a - tion can sep-a-rate us from the love of God.

THE GOSPEL: The Holy Gospel according to John 9: 1-41
Glory to you, O Lord.

¹ As [Jesus] walked along, he saw a man blind from birth.² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes,⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see.⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?”⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.”¹⁰ But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?”¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.”¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.”¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided.¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had

received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight¹⁹ and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?”²⁰ His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind,²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.”²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue.²³ Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.”²⁵ He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”²⁶ They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”²⁷ He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?”²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses.²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.”³⁰ The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will.³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind.³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”³⁴ They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”³⁶ He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.”³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.”³⁸ He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.³⁹ Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.”⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?”⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

SERMON

HYMN OF THE DAY

Beautiful Things

ACS #925



1 All this pain; I won - der if I'll
2 All this earth; . . . could all that is
3 All a - round, . . . hope is spring - ing



ev - er find my way. I won - der if my
lost ev - er be found? . . . Could a gar - den
up from this old ground. . . . Out of cha - os,



life could real - ly change at all.
come up from this ground at all?
life is be - ing found in you.



You make beau-ti-ful things, you make beau-ti - ful things out of the dust,



You make beau - ti - ful things, you make beau-ti -



ful things out of us.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH: APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

God, in your grace, **tend to our prayers.**

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **And also with you.**

The people may greet one another with a sign of Christ's peace, such as a handshake, hug, or peace sign and may say, "Peace be with you," or similar words.

OFFERING

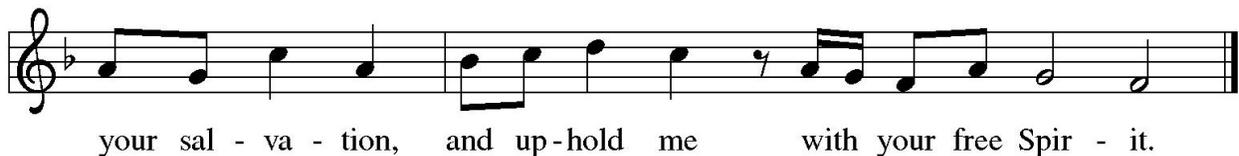
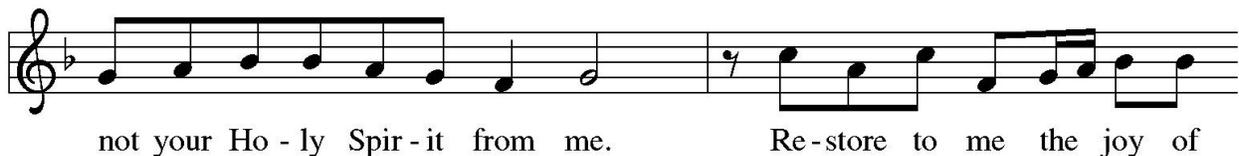
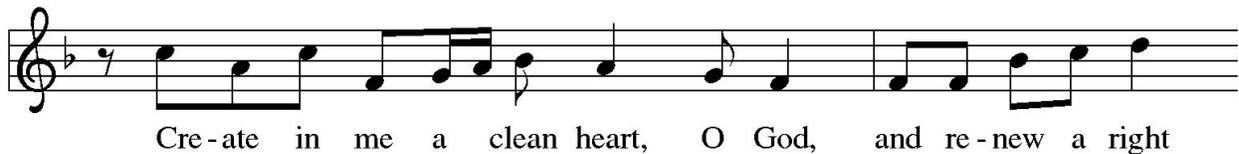
Offering can be left in the plates at the back of the sanctuary, sent to the church office, or given online by using the QR code to the right.



OFFERTORY

Create in Me a Clean Heart

ELW #186



OFFERING PRAYER

God of grace, you give us all that we have and all that we need. Teach us to recognize your gifts and to share with you all that we have. Though we don't yet know what you have in store for us, we pray that you bring overflowing abundance out of what we offer. Amen.

DIALOGUE

God is with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to our God.

Let us give thanks to God, our saving grace.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow'r and
 God of might, heav - en and earth are full of your
 glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est.
 Bless - ed is the one who comes in the name of the
 Lord. Ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est.
 Ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est.

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

One loaf, broken yet abundant. One cup, poured out yet more than enough. Come, share in the feast.

COMMUNION

We invite you to commune in whatever way is comfortable to you either from your seat using the prepackaged elements or by coming forward to the altar rail. To commune at the altar rail, please proceed down the diagonal aisles and pick up a cup from the silver plates. You will be given a wafer and then offered wine (first chalice) or grape juice (second chalice). For those communing online, please join us using whatever bread/crackers and wine/grape juice you have at home. All are welcome at God's table.

The body and blood of Christ, given for you. **Amen**

COMMUNION SONG

Lamb of God

ACS pg.40



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on



us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have



mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the



world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

COMMUNION HYMN

Shepherd me, O God

ELW #780

Refrain

All



Shep-herd me, O God, be-yond my wants, be-yond my fears, from

to stanzas 1, 2, 3, 5

to stanza 4



death in - to life. life.

Leader or All



1 God is my shep-herd, so noth-ing shall I want, I
2 Gent-ly you raise me and heal my wea-ry soul, you
3 Though I should wan-der the val-ley of death, I



rest in the mead-ows of faith-ful-ness and love, I
lead me by path-ways of righ-teous-ness and truth, my
fear no e-vil, for you are at my side, your

Refrain



walk by the qui-et wa-ters of peace.
spir-it shall sing the mu-sic of your name.
rod and your staff, my com-fort and my hope.

Leader or All

4 You have set me a ban-quet of love in the face of

ha-tred, crown-ing me with love be-yond my pow'r to hold.

Refrain

Leader or All

5 Sure-ly your kind-ness and mer-cy fol-low me all the days of my life;

I will dwell in the house of my God for-ev - er - more.

Final refrain
All

Shep-herd me, O God, be - yond my wants, be -

yond my fears, from death in - to life.

TABLE BLESSING

The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you and keep you in God's grace. **Amen**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Let us pray. O Jesus, you have shared a feast more gracious than we could ever ask, the outpouring of your own self with us. Send us out into the world to be conduits for your goodness, channels of your grace, anointing this world with the new life you have given us. Amen.

BLESSING

Beloved, receive now this blessing: Life and life abundant is yours, today. As you leave this place, embrace the transformation you have found here. Like water changed to wine, we can share delight beyond

measure. Like new wineskins for new wine, we can stretch and change, new vessels for God's goodness. Like the wine and oil of the Samaritan on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho, we can offer blessing, even as we seek healing. God blesses you with abundance. Christ blesses you with grace. The Spirit blesses you with love overflowing. Trust this blessing as you go, and pour yourself out to a world in need. **Amen.**

SENDING HYMN

Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross

ELW # 335



1 Je - sus, keep me near the cross, there's a pre - cious foun - tain;
 2 Near the cross, a trem - bling soul, love and mer - cy found me;
 3 Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes be - fore me;
 4 Near the cross I'll watch and wait, hop - ing, trust - ing ev - er,



free to all, a heal - ing stream flows from Cal - v'ry's moun - tain.
 there the bright and morn - ing star sheds its beams a - round me.
 help me walk from day to day with its shad - ow o'er me.
 till I reach the gold - en strand just be - yond the riv - er.

Refrain



In the cross, in the cross be my glo - ry ev - er;



till my ran - somed soul shall find rest be - yond the riv - er.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BENEDICTION

Go in peace. Believe the good news. **Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE

UPCOMING WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Mid-Week Lenten Worship | 7:30 on Zoom

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 22, 2026 | 10:00am Worship Service

MARCH BENEVOLENCE OF THE MONTH

ELCA World Hunger

THIS WEEK AT MESSIAH

MONDAY: 7:30 pm Worship and Music Meeting on Zoom

TUESDAY: 6:30 pm AA Meeting

WEDNESDAY: 7:30 pm Mid-Week Lenten Worship on Zoom

THURSDAY: 12:00 pm Bible Study

7:30 pm Band practice

SUNDAY: 10:00 am Worship

11:15 am Youth and Family Meeting

TODAY'S MINISTERS

PASTOR: Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund

MUSIC DIRECTOR: Bob Luderer

LAY READER: Brigitte Albrecht

USHER: Cesar Rios

GREETER: Megan Rotella

COMMUNION ASSISTANTS: Jerri Angermueller & Nancy Krause

ALTAR GUILD: Jerri Angermueller & Nancy Krause

VIDEO TECH: Alex Boyce

COUNTERS: Alex Boyce & Arnold Ludke

COORDINATING COUNCILOR: Eleanore Orman

COFFEE HOUR: Linda Axtell

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Outreach Meeting: Today, following worship join us for an outreach meeting after worship to plan our service projects for the upcoming year.

Music and Worship Meeting: March 16th

Please join us for a worship and music meeting on March 16th at 7:30 pm on Zoom to talk about our music ministry in the congregation.

Thrivent Dinner: March 25th at 6:00 pm at Messiah Lutheran Church. Learn about Thrivent's *Savvy Tax Strategies* at dinner hosted by Thrivent's Pater Manke, FIC, RICP. Please sign up in the narthex.

Easter Sign Ups: Please sign up on the sheet in the narthex to dedicate the flowers that decorate our altar for Easter. We ask for a donation of \$10.00 per plant

Easter Breakfast: Please join in on some wonderful food and fellowship with a continental breakfast on Sunday, April 5th at 9:15 a.m. There will be lots of goodies to choose from before services. If warranted, we will put another coffee pot on and continue after services with eating and enjoying conversation and watching the Sunday School children's egg hunt. Please see the sign-up sheet in the narthex. Should you have any questions, please contact Valerie Nicolosi. This is always a fun event!!

ELCA Good Gifts: March 1st to March 29th, Palm Sunday.

This coming month we will be working toward donations of animals or items such as bibles and feeding those in need. Last year there was an amazing amount of \$700.00 raised for this charity. I know we are all hurting a little more this year, but any and all donations are welcome. You can find the animal and costs in the Narthex and banks for home are also available. Please return your barns or envelopes by March 29th.

Youth and Family Meetings: March 22nd following worship and during Sunday School

On March 22nd we will be doing two special activities during Sunday School. There will also be a discussion with our youth about activities they would like to do. During coffee hour, we invite the parents and other adults to discuss activities they would like to do in the next few months. Look for updates in the May/June newsletter.



**Please keep in prayer the following people in our
Messiah family:** Bob, Helen, Joan B, Jonny & Natalie,
Kim, Len, Mike, and Sue.

And the following friends and family:

All affected by seasonal illnesses

All those in the armed forces, especially those connected to our
congregation, Evan and Joseph

Jeff

David

Kurt

Peter & Joyce

Mark and Keith, Susanne's friends

Gayle, friend of Joan & Eleanore

June, Lee's mother

Miro, Vesna's father

Erika, Kristen's sister

Thomas, friend of Tony & Edie

John, Joan, Herb, Todd, Gus, Peggy, Jim, Kathy, and Carol, Ron and
Marilyn's friends

The family and friends of Ethel, Brigitte's sister-in-law

Kim, friend of Sue

Marilyn & Vincent, Lisa's parents

Ron & June, Karen's parents

Melinda & Paul, Eleanore's sister & nephew

Jennifer, friend of Sue & Eleanore

Nancy, friend of Kim

Peggy & Christine, Alex's aunts

Karol & Barbara, Eleanore's friends

Alexa and Hank friends of Nancy

Peter, Terri's father

Julie, family friend of Nancy

Paula, friend of Nancy

Janice, food pantry volunteer

*Please let us know if you have changes we should make to our
prayer list*

ADVOCACY FOR ALL

Fourth Sunday in Lent



Walter Brueggemann sees lament as essential to faith and justice. He argues lament is the language of people who refuse to accept the world as it is and dare to voice their pain, grief, and protest before God. Lament interrupts denial and makes space for truth-telling about suffering and injustice. By lamenting, communities resist silence and passivity, opening themselves to God's new possibilities.

Advocacy is the holy work of imagination. Once we lament, we must take loving action to help make things right. Advocating for ourselves and others is central to our faith because God imagines a world of wholeness, healing, and equity for all people. Scripture calls us not only to love God but also to love our neighbor in tangible, restorative ways. When we seek justice, we participate in God's work of making all things new.

LAMENT: CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

God of liberation and mercy, we cry out for those harmed by a system that punishes instead of heals. We mourn lives stolen by mass incarceration, families torn apart by long sentences, and communities targeted and surveilled. We grieve the violence of racism woven through courts, policing, and prisons. We lament the myth that punishment brings peace, and power used to dehumanize rather than restore. The pain is heavy. The injustice runs deep. How long, O God? How long until justice is restorative, until dignity is not denied? Lord, have mercy.

Silence: Take a moment to reflect and lament as you prepare your heart for action.

ACT: KNOWING YOUR NEIGHBOR'S REALITY

How much do you know about the criminal justice system where you live? Could you name a local judge or locate the nearest prison?

In Matthew 25, Jesus said, "I was in prison and you came to visit me." Yet many of us know very little about what incarceration actually looks like in our own communities—the conditions, the processes, or the people affected.

This week, spend time learning. Research incarceration statistics in your area. Find out about prison conditions—housing, food, climate control, and access to healthcare. Learn who your district judges are and how the local court system works. Consider attending a public court session or inviting someone from the justice system to speak to your congregation. Knowledge is the first step toward advocacy and compassion.