

Making a Way Out of No Way

Every year seems to bring with it greater and greater challenges for congregations and their leaders. Many are struggling with the changed ministry landscape in the aftermath of the pandemic. Some are seeing resources dwindling and are unsure of what the future holds. It is a challenging time to be a leader, a church member, or anyone who cares deeply about the church.

And yet, we navigate this time holding in tension with the challenges the trust and hope that God is not finished with us just yet. Ministry may never look the way it did before and we may have no idea of how the church of the future will gather or worship or serve. We are, however, given many glimpses throughout scripture of God making a way out of what seems to be no way at all, of God creating a future for and with God's people, when truly all seemed lost.

This year's Lenten resource uses "Making a Way Out of No Way" as a guiding theme. The opening litany borrows from Isaiah 43:19 "I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." The stories for each week all find a thread of God making a way where no way seems to be, whether because it feels hopeless or because the person God chose tries to run away or because we feel we have nothing to offer.

Each week includes a basic service outline including a short reflection and prayers. Also included are discussion questions. These questions could serve as a conversation starter during or after worship, or could be printed in worship materials for worshipers to consider on their own. As with any ministry resource, please feel free to adapt as needed to better fit your context.

The hope with this resource is to remind us of the many ways God moved the faithful out of spaces of uncertainty and despair and into spaces of joy and abundance. May we hear and be inspired by the ways God has acted in the past, and have our eyes opened to the ways God in Christ Jesus acts in the here and now.

Alongside you,
Rev. Jen Christenson, Associate to the Bishop for Candidacy and Community

Making a Way Out of No Way

Week One: God will make a way even when the way isn't obvious

Opening Litany

L: The prophet Isaiah proclaims that the Lord is about to do a new thing.

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When the world feels hopelessly caught up in cycles of violence and chaos,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When our souls are parched and weary,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When it feels as though everything is lost,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: Behold, the Lord is about to do a new thing!

C: Let us be bold to join God in making a way out of no way.

All: Amen!

Song

Prayer

L: God who calmed the chaos with but a word, we thank you for always finding a way when to us the future seems closed off forever. For Abraham and Sarah, who took you at your word and followed, we give you thanks. For all those who are able to see past what is to what yet might be, we give you thanks. Give us the courage to follow you and to listen to those who are calling us to seek out new ways of living as your people in this world. In Jesus' name we pray.

C: Amen

Reading – Genesis 11:27-12:1

Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran, and Haran was the father of Lot. Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans. Abram and Nahor took wives; the name of Abram's wife was Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife was Milcah. She was the daughter of Haran the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren; she had no child. Terah took his son Abram and his grandson Lot son of Haran and his daughter-in-law Sarai, his son Abram's wife, and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there. The days of Terah were two hundred five years, and Terah died in Haran. Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

Reflection

You can learn a lot from genealogy. More than a list of names and "begats," the history that is told in these verses from Genesis reveal a story, a lineage that appears to be reaching its end. One of Terah's sons has already died. One of the others is married, but has not yet had children and it seems unlikely that he ever will. At the ripe old age of 205 Terah died uncertain if his family name would continue on. Add all of this up and this group is not a likely choice when considering a family to be the patriarchs of a great nation. And yet, this is precisely whom God chose to be the parents of generations too numerous to count. The God who spoke over the formless void, the great Nothing, is now creating a people out of almost nothing as well. As the writer of Hebrews says so bluntly, "Therefore from one

person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, 'as many as the stars of heaven...'” God reveals early on in the story between God and God’s people that making a way out of what appears to be no way at all is not too great a task for God to manage. We might pass this motley crew right by when choosing families to go down in history, but God saw that Abram and Sarai, even in their old age, were exactly the people for the role.

Question for discussion: Consider inviting worshipers to write down or share a time when they witnessed God not choosing the obvious path or person for a task or role.

Song

Offering

Prayers

L: Trusting that God is always at work in the world in ways both obvious and hidden, we lift our prayers in confidence and hope.

L: Holy God, on days when we feel we have reached the end of our rope, help us to feel your presence, lifting us up and giving us strength. Open our eyes to those around us who may be in need of your encouragement. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, we lift up all those who have been entrusted with the authority to lead. Give them discerning minds and compassionate hearts. Move them to set aside the need for power and might in favor of creating a better world for all. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, the chaos and confusion of this world can lead us to believe that there is no cause for hope. Help us to lean on you in these difficult times, trusting that your mercy and justice will find a way to prevail. Hear us, O God.

C: Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Holy God, hold close to your heart all those who grieve this day for any reason. Give us comfort and the assurance that you are walking with us and all who are hurting, today and every day. Hear us, O God.

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Into your hands we commend these prayers and all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**C: 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.**

or

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

L: When the path before you is uncertain and unclear, may you sense God's abiding presence with you always.

C: Amen

Song – Suggested closing song for the season is ELW 326, "Bless Now, O God, the Journey"

Sending

L: Go in peace, trusting that God will make a way for you.

C: Thanks be to God!

Making a Way Out of No Way

Week Two: God will make a way even when we try to run away

Opening Litany

L: The prophet Isaiah proclaims that the Lord is about to do a new thing.

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When the world feels hopelessly caught up in cycles of violence and chaos,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When our souls are parched and weary,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When it feels as though everything is lost,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: Behold, the Lord is about to do a new thing!

C: Let us be bold to join God in making a way out of no way.

All: Amen!

Song

Prayer

L: Loving God, just as you called and re-called Jonah, we thank you for not giving up on us when we fail to hear or outright refuse to see the way you have made for us. Give us the courage to go to the places you need us the most and to respond with a cheerful and hopeful heart. In Jesus' name we pray.

C: Amen

Reading – Jonah 1:1-3 and Jonah 3:1-4

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

One big fish later...

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

Reflection

Jonah really, really, really did not want to go to Nineveh. When one considers the terrible things the Assyrians, aka the Ninevites, had done, one can hardly blame him. However, the word of the Lord had come, and it would succeed in the thing for which the Lord had sent it (Isaiah 55:11). Jonah learned that if God wishes to do the seemingly impossible – get an exceedingly great city of exceedingly sinful people (and animals!) to repent – nothing would get in God's way. Not Jonah running away. Not Jonah

giving a brief, half-hearted (if that) prophecy when he finally did go where God told him to go. It was a messy, and likely smelly lesson to learn – the belly of a giant fish doesn't sound like an ideal vacation spot to this writer. And yet, through this little story of Jonah, we learn that if God wishes to create a way forward even for the lousiest sinner among us, it will happen. Even if God ultimately has to send God's only begotten to handle the job in person. May we recognize, either before or after we try to dodge God's call, that when it comes to redeeming the world, God can and will make a way forward, with our help, or perhaps, at times, even in spite of it.

Discussion Question: Have you ever sensed God calling you to do something you didn't want to do? How did you respond?

Song

Offering

Prayers

L: Trusting that God is always at work in the world in ways both obvious and hidden, we lift our prayers in confidence and hope.

Silence for reflection

L: Holy God, thank you for continuing to call out to us, even when we aren't listening or are pretending not to hear. Open our ears and our hearts to your voice and help us to trust in your promise to accompany us to all the places you send us. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, we thank you for the waters of the earth, from the great oceans to the tiny ponds. Inspire us to protect our waterways from pollution and misuse. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, bless all those who are burdened by a heavy conscience. Help us to trust in your mercy and to remember that you are always ready to receive our repentance and to shower us with the gift of forgiveness. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Holy God, guard and keep all who are hurting in any way this day, whether in mind, body, or spirit. Use our words and our actions to bring relief to those who suffer. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Into your hands we commend these prayers and all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**C: 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.**

or

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

L: When the path before you is uncertain and unclear, may you sense God's abiding presence with you always.

C: Amen

Song – Suggested closing song for the season is ELW 326, "Bless Now, O God, the Journey"

Sending

L: Go in peace, trusting that God will make a way for you.

C: Thanks be to God!

Making a Way Out of No Way

Week Three: God will make a way even when the odds feel stacked against us

Opening Litany

L: The prophet Isaiah proclaims that the Lord is about to do a new thing.

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When the world feels hopelessly caught up in cycles of violence and chaos,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When our souls are parched and weary,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When it feels as though everything is lost,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: Behold, the Lord is about to do a new thing!

C: Let us be bold to join God in making a way out of no way.

All: Amen!

Song

Prayer

L: Loving God, so many times we feel as though we are trapped and have nowhere to turn. Remind us through the story of the Israelites passing through the Red Sea that with you there is always a way. Give us the courage to step into the paths you open up for us and the wisdom to leave behind the things that are no longer life-giving. In Jesus' name we pray.

C: Amen

Reading – Exodus 14:10-14, 19-22

As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Reflection

The Israelites are desperate. Before them is an impassable body of water. Behind them Pharaoh's army bears down on them. They cry out in anguish and anger to Moses, "Why bring us here to die?"

Their situation feels hopeless. Moses reminds them that the Lord who brought them thus far has no intentions of abandoning them. Moses assures them that God will fight for them and all shall be well. Although Moses tells his people that they only need to “keep still” and watch this great victory unfold, that instruction isn’t entirely accurate. Yes, the Lord hems them in before and behind and then to their right and to their left once the waters part. But they do need to move forward in faith, they do need to take this unexpected path that God has opened up before them. The way back, to what was familiar, if not necessarily life-giving, has been blocked off, doubly so – both Pharaoh’s army AND the pillar of cloud stand in the way. God has opened the path, turned despair into hope. May we, like the Israelites did so long ago, have faith to move forward into the future God has in store.

Discussion question: Have you ever been in a position where you felt there was no way out, or no good option? How did that situation resolve? How did you sense God’s hand in helping you find a way?

Song

Offering

Prayers

L: Trusting that God is always at work in the world in ways both obvious and hidden, we lift our prayers in confidence and hope.

Silence for reflection

L: Holy God, as the psalm-writer reminds us, you hem us in before and behind, meaning whichever way we turn, you are there. Thank you for guarding our lives and for helping us to follow the pathways you open up for us. Help us to continue to step out in courage. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, we hold before you all those who feel as though they have nowhere to turn. Help us to create a society that offers those in need places of refuge, rest, and hope. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear those around us who are in need. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, move us to care for this created world, from the tiniest of critters to the grandest of mountains. Help us to work together to clean our air and water, and to preserve needed resources for generations to come. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Holy God, surround with your healing Spirit all who suffer this day. We thank you for health care professionals and for the gift and promise of medicine and medical research. Give comfort to those who are ill and to their caregivers. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Into your hands we commend these prayers and all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**C: 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.**

or

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

L: When the path before you is uncertain and unclear, may you sense God's abiding presence with you always.

C: Amen

Song – Suggested closing song for the season is ELW 326, "Bless Now, O God, the Journey"

Sending

L: Go in peace, trusting that God will make a way for you.

C: Thanks be to God!

Making a Way Out of No Way

Week Four: God will make a way even when we feel like we have little to offer

Opening Litany

L: The prophet Isaiah proclaims that the Lord is about to do a new thing.

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When the world feels hopelessly caught up in cycles of violence and chaos,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When our souls are parched and weary,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When it feels as though everything is lost,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: Behold, the Lord is about to do a new thing!

C: Let us be bold to join God in making a way out of no way.

All: Amen!

Song

Prayer

L: Loving God, sometimes the path ahead is clouded by scarcity thinking – we don't have enough, we aren't good enough, what we do have to offer won't amount to much. Remind us that with you our jars of flour and our jugs of oil will never run dry. Help us to use what we have, however small it might seem to us, trusting that in your care it is enough. In Jesus' name we pray.

C: Amen

Reading – 1 Kings 17:8-16

Then the word of the LORD came to [Elijah], saying, "Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Reflection

Rain was scarce and because rain was scarce, food was scarce. The widow that God appointed to take care of Elijah was planning out her last meal and steeling herself and her son for the end. She had so little. Everyone had so little – what could be done? Enter the man of God, Elijah, bringing a word of abundant hope. Yes, there was very little in the widow’s jar and jug. Yet in God’s hands, with God’s blessing, it was enough. We feel, at times, like we have so little to offer. Not enough people, not enough funds, not enough energy, not enough time. Yet God can work with very little – can create out of absolutely nothing, in fact! God can work with our “not enough” and transform it to “more than enough.” May we trust as the widow did, even if our trust is borne out of desperation, that the God who wills us life abundant will work with what we have to create a way forward.

Discussion question: Sometimes we focus on the empty space in the jar, instead of the flour that we have left (metaphorically speaking). How can we reframe our scarcity thinking so we focus on the gifts and resources we do have available to us? (e.g., saying, “We have five people who want to learn more about the Bible!” vs. “Only five people showed up to Bible study today.”) How would that change our approach to life and/or ministry situations?

Song

Offering

Prayers

L: Trusting that God is always at work in the world in ways both obvious and hidden, we lift our prayers in confidence and hope.

Silence for reflection

L: Holy God, you can take the smallest crumb and turn it into a feast that will feed thousands. Help us to live with a sense of abundance, trusting that you will provide a way for us to accomplish the ministry you have set before us. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, the message that we are “not enough” is all around us. Help us to drown out the negative voices in our lives with words of affirmation from you – that we are yours, we are beloved, and we are enough. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, move your people to use the gifts of creativity and imagination to produce solutions to the many challenging issues we face, including climate change, hunger, violence, and wars that seem to never cease. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Holy God, we lift before you all those we know who are struggling with pain, whether mental or physical. Give them relief from their suffering and watch over all who serve in the role of caregiver. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Into your hands we commend these prayers and all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**C: 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.**

or

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

L: When the path before you is uncertain and unclear, may you sense God's abiding presence with you always.

C: Amen

Song – Suggested closing song for the season is ELW 326, “Bless Now, O God, the Journey”

Sending

L: Go in peace, trusting that God will make a way for you.

C: Thanks be to God!

Making a Way Out of No Way

Week Five: God is making a way even when the way doesn't seem clear

Opening Litany

L: The prophet Isaiah proclaims that the Lord is about to do a new thing.

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When the world feels hopelessly caught up in cycles of violence and chaos,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When our souls are parched and weary,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: When it feels as though everything is lost,

C: God will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

L: Behold, the Lord is about to do a new thing!

C: Let us be bold to join God in making a way out of no way.

All: Amen!

Song

Prayer

L: Loving God, we try to be faithful, but sometimes we aren't sure of the way. Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to guide us and point us in the right direction. Help us to listen for your voice when you speak to us through your Word, through other people, and even our dreams. In Jesus' name we pray.

C: Amen

Reading – Acts 16:6-15

[Paul and his companions] went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Reflection

Earlier this season we heard the story of Jonah, who tried to run away from the path God was placing before him. In this story, we see Paul and his travel companions trying very hard to answer God's call, but instead running into roadblocks, placed by the Holy Spirit no less. Nevertheless, they persisted – responding to the “no” and the “not here” and patiently waiting for the path ahead to be revealed. Even when they got what must have felt like a blessedly clear sign – a dream with a specific location! – still they had to wait around to see where this all would go. Indeed, our path forward in faith, as individuals and as congregations, isn't always easy or clear. We get what feels like a great idea for ministry or life, only to sense the Spirit gently nudging us in a different direction. It can be confusing, even the cause for doubt and despair. And yet, as we have learned this Lent, God is continually at work in us and in the world, making paths where only rocks and thorns once were, creating new ways for us to be God's people in the world. God's choices are not always the obvious ones and don't always take us where we want to go. We have to step out in faith, knowing that we can't go back to the way things were, but still uncertain of what lies ahead. We have to follow the call even when we get turned back (or, a la Jonah, when we WISH we got turned back, but didn't). Yet we do all of this knowing that God, from the very beginning of the story, is used to making a way out of no way at all. A created order out of chaos. A people from an aged, childless couple. A path through the sea. Abundance out of crumbs. May we continue to follow God through these paths as yet unknown, trusting that the wilderness will be tamed and the deserts will gush with new life.

Discussion question: Paul and his companions experienced the Holy Spirit saying “no” more than once in their travels. Have you ever encountered a “no” from the Holy Spirit? How would it change our approach if we reinterpreted those times when our ministry ideas didn't go the way we hoped as the Holy Spirit redirecting our efforts somewhere else?

Song

Offering

Prayers

L: Trusting that God is always at work in the world in ways both obvious and hidden, we lift our prayers in confidence and hope.

Silence for reflection

L: Holy God, we thank you for the continued presence of your Holy Spirit. Help us to watch for signs of both “yes” and “no” as we seek out ways to share your saving Word with the world around us. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, the challenges in this world are so great and often so very complicated. Help us to follow your path through the chaos that we may see where our efforts are most needed. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Holy God, raise up leaders, healers, and peacemakers who will strive to create systems that benefit all people, and all of creation. Grant wisdom, compassion, and a discerning mind to all who have been called to positions of authority. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Holy God, bless all those who are sick, suffering, or near death. Help them to feel the soothing balm of your Spirit surrounding them and holding them close. Hear us, O God,

C: Your mercy is great.

L: Into your hands we commend these prayers and all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen

The Lord's Prayer

**C: 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.**

or

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Blessing

L: When the path before you is uncertain and unclear, may you sense God's abiding presence with you always.

C: Amen

Song – Suggested closing song for the season is ELW 326, "Bless Now, O God, the Journey"

Sending

L: Go in peace, trusting that God will make a way for you.

C: Thanks be to God!