



WEEK OF PRAYER 2016

Topics

1. *Monday Night*: Called to be messengers of joy (Isaiah 61:1–3 and Philippians 2:1–5)
2. *Tuesday Night*: The witness of fellowship (Jeremiah 31: 10-13; Psalm 122, 1 John 4: 16b-21; John 17:20-23)
3. *Wednesday Night*: A priestly people called to proclaim the Gospel (Genesis 17:1-8; Psalm 145:8-12; Romans 10:14-15; Matthew 13:3-9)
4. *Thursday Night*: The communion of the apostles (Isaiah 56:6-8; Psalm 24; Acts 2:37-42; John 13:34-35)
5. *Friday Night*: Hospitality and prayer (Isaiah 62:6-7; Psalm 100; 1 Peter 4:7b-10; John 4:4-14)
6. *Saturday Night*: Burning heart to be together (Isaiah 52:7-9; Psalm 30; Colossians 1:17-19 and Luke 24:13-36)

Introductory

"Rejoice always. *Pray without ceasing*. Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is what God in Christ Jesus expects of you" (Thessalonians 5:16-18), Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia.

Jude wrote his lesser-known letter to unidentified Christians all over the known world of that time. They and their faith in Jesus Christ, experienced strong opposition, as is often the case today. The Message translation of Jude's encouragements (1:20,21) says: "But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by *praying in the Holy Spirit*, staying right at the centre of God's love, keeping your arms open and outstretched, ready for the mercy of our Master, Jesus Christ. This is the unending life, the real life!".

Paul writes to Timothy (1st letter, 2:1). "The first thing I want you to do is pray. *Pray every way you know how, for everyone you know*. Pray especially for rulers and their governments to rule well so we can go quietly about our business of living simply, in humble contemplation. This is the way our Saviour God wants us to live. "

Here are three important prayer perspectives. Pray continually. Focus on the Holy Spirit when you pray. Pray for everyone you know (another translation: 'for all people'). Let's keep this in mind as we bow before our Lord during the 2016 week of prayer and thereafter.

For our prayers over the six days of the 2016 prayer week, we join the World Council of Churches in their *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*. We focus together in our prayers on the prescribed themes in order to strengthen the unity of Christ's church, the mutual connectedness and the communal vocation of Christ's disciples. The different days of the week focus on different aspects of the church's life in unity. Every time we pray we are challenged to remember the relationship between calling, witness, community, mission, hospitality and connectedness.

May the Lord graciously and lovingly hear our collective prayers and supplications.

We thank Lisel Joubert (DRC), Wessel Cronje (RCA), Eugene Beukes (URCSA), Gideon van der Watt (DRC), Donald Gantana (URCSA), Johannes Kofa (DRCA), members of the United Ministry for Service and Witness of the DRC family, who wrote the guidelines for the prayer week. May the Lord bless the Week of prayer 2016 abundantly.

Eddie Orsmond, Donald Gantana, Gideon van der Watt (On behalf of the Task Group of the United Ministry for Service and Witness of the DRC family)

Departure Points of the writers

The following points undergird the drafting of the guidelines for the Week of Prayer 2016.

- The goal of the Week of Prayer is *to pray together*. We bring in prayer before God's face the work of the congregation and the church in our unity with the world church, for the year ahead.
- We deliberately choose to *place our focus on prayer* in the guidelines. The devotional guidelines are very short in order to make more room for us to pray together. However, the guidelines should stimulate the thoughts on specific themes.
- Prayer is not one of a variety of spiritual activities among many others. Prayer is first and foremost a mind-set and attitude that fills and determines our whole way of life. In our private room we make sure that we are focused on God, so that we may live focused on God in our public room. In this way our entire life becomes prayer.
- The Week of Prayer is an intensive "private room" for the congregation with a view to address the year with a deliberate focus on and commitment to God, in unity with brothers and sisters of all denominations of Christ's church. The prayer meetings wish to assist us, to be busy with God's things in such a way that God will always be in the centre. Therefore openness and availability to God is emphasised.
- We present these guidelines in the form of meditations with some suggestions for prayer themes. The authors of the guidelines each have their own approach in writing the guidelines. This approach introduced diversity for the six days of the prayer week.

- We focus consciously on the fact that the congregation and the church as the "body of Christ", continues Jesus' humanity in this world, in their 2016 service and ministry.

Our prayer is that the Lord will use the work of our congregations and broader church in 2016 to bring about the kingdom of heaven also on the earth.

Donald Gantana, Lisel Joubert, Wessel Cronje, Johannes Kofa, Eugene Beukes en Gideon van der Watt, members of the United Ministry for Service and Witness of the DRC family.

Day 1: Called to be messengers of joy

Isaiah 61:1–3 and Philippians 2:1–5

1. Joy comes from the Lord.

In our world many people are chasing after joy in different ways. Most people, if not all of us, long for joy in life. God's people who are in crisis situations, who are mourning, troubled, experiencing difficult circumstances and real life challenges, will surely hope for God's special presence in their struggles.

When he delivered God's prophecy to the Israelites, the prophet employs three different images in Isaiah 61:3. Isaiah proclaimed that the Lord will give his troubled people beauty for ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. The Lord has called Isaiah in his day – and also us today – to proclaim the good news of God's intervention in the lives of his people in need. Isaiah proclaimed: "the spirit of the Lord is on me to proclaim good news". Who does not want to hear good news – for a change?

2. Crown of beauty instead of ashes

In Isaiah's day, it was the custom for people who mourned or experienced deep discouragement to lie down on the ground with ashes strewn over them. In that state of affliction, the mourner or suffering person would not use oil as symbol of God's care. They would only mourn in a spirit of despair.

Those who were overwhelmed by life's challenges would figuratively sit down in ashes. There is nothing pretty about ashes. However, God's word promised his covenant people of old that he would transform their difficult, disgusting, depressing and horrible situation into beauty. He was prepared to pick them up from the ash heaps of life and turn their lives into something beautiful.

God also knows that we will suffer life's difficulties and afflictions today. At the same time, God can replace our burnt-out mess with something beautiful. Bill Gaither wrote the following song:

Something beautiful, something good
All my confusion Jesus understood
All I have to offer him is brokenness and strife
But he made something beautiful out of my life

We can rest assured that whatever God's hand touches, will turn into something beautiful. All you need today is a touch from the Master's hand.

3. Oil of joy instead of mourning

Oil was applied to the face to make it shiny and lively. Instead of the disfiguring effect of mourning on the face of the mourner, oil created a different image. In times of mourning, mourners would not apply oil to their face so that other people could see and be aware of their state of mourning.

In the Bible oil is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. His touch and presence in our lives is compared to the effect of oil on the skin. Touched by the Holy Spirit we become lively and radiant as if oil was applied to the skin. We need the touch of the Holy Spirit in the practice of everyday life. We need to rather focus on the goodness of the Lord, instead of falling into negativity through the world's influence on us.

4. Garment of praise instead of the spirit of heaviness

The spirit of heaviness refers to inner hurt, depression, feelings of rejection, hopelessness, suicidal tendencies and self-pity. The root of this spirit of heaviness grows from a lack of praise, bitterness and

ungratefulness. This spirit of heaviness attempts to steal your joy and to prevent you from experiencing God's blessings for you.

The garment of praise God promised to Israel in the time of Isaiah was a gift from God for their spiritual flourishing. It is still applicable to us today. It helps us to see earthly challenges from God's perspective and entitles us to tackle these challenges with his grace. Therefore, you should not surrender to the spirit of heaviness. Use the Word of God like a sword. When the devil says you are no good, remember the message of 2 Corinthians 5:17, that you are a new creation. When the devil says you are not saved, hold on to the promise of 1 John 5:12–13 that you can be certain of your salvation. When life's worries haunt you, remember 1 Peter 5:7. God wants you to only trust him. When you feel defeated in life, remember Romans 8: we are more than conquerors in Christ and nothing can separate us from his love.

Praise to God gives us the strength to live faithfully. It silences the voice of the devil. We literally need to clothe ourselves in praise, put it on like a garment. In the same way we decide every morning what clothes we should wear for the day, we must decide to live our life with praise to God. It is a decision. The garment of praise leaves no gaps for hostile spirits to penetrate.

5. The mark of Christ

In Philippians 2 Paul writes about the mark of Christ that should be on us. The mark of Christ should be something that others can see and recognize in our attitude of following Christ Jesus and imitating his character. This attitude should reveal to others what Christ has done for us and teach us to behave accordingly. It also creates in us the willingness to do what God expects from us; as people of God we want to be obedient to Christ.

Michael Blankenship explained that it is a matter of your theology (demonstrated with a basin of water and a towel). In Matthew 27 Pilate took a basin of water and washed his hands to show he was not part of the conspiracy against Jesus. He knew what he should have done but chose to satisfy the will of the people. He passed the responsibility on to others.

In the Gospel of John, chapter 13, Jesus took a basin of water and did what he did not have to do. He served his disciples and washed their feet. Jesus' basin serves as a contrast to that of Pilate. Pilate used his basin to avoid his responsibility. Jesus used his basin to take up his responsibility.

6. Some prayer themes:

- Thank God for his promises of new life in Christ.
- Pray for the courage to follow Christ in his obedience to the will of God.
- Pray that God will help us, as his church, to take up the message of good news in a time of hardship and hopelessness.

Day 2: The witness of fellowship

Jeremiah 31: 10-13; Psalm 122, 1 John 4: 16b-21; John 17:20-23

This reflection will focus on Jeremiah 31: 10-13, with the New Testament texts brought into dialogue later on.

All the chosen readings for today remind us that we are not meant to be believers on our own. God gave us to one another. Gifts of God, not only for times of dance and rejoicing but also for times filled with sorrow and fear.

The context of Jeremiah is a context of crisis. It covers the era of the reign of King Josiah (626 BCE) up till the death in exile of King Jehoiakin in 582 BCE. Three times Judah rebelled against Babylon. Each time the cream of the citizenry was taken into exile and in 587/6 the temple was also destroyed. A world filled with securities came tumbling down. War and oppression is the arena of violence, rape, famine and hopelessness. The prophet Jeremiah tried to make sense of events in light of that which he knows about God.

In the middle of the Book of Jeremiah we find chapters 30-33 which is known by the name: "Little Book of Consolation". These chapters of hope form the smaller context of our reading. O'Connor writes: "Only shreds of hope appear in this book to counterpoise the deep river of devastation, grief, and despair that pervades most of it..." One can be horrified by this statement. If it is so gloomy how then does one preach Jeremiah? The reality is that for a lot of people in our country today hope is also few and far in between. But it is still there. It is amidst difficult circumstances that we as church proclaim that hope must never be individualistic, that our celebration and suffering happens in community and fellowship. The danger however if we only read verse 10-13 we can be influenced by the joyous tone of these verses and forget the context of suffering which is the backdrop of these words.

The prophet visualises a shared new future. This future is seen in light of what the prophet knows about God, and what he knows is part of the experience of Israel through the ages.

In our reading, the following is said about God: The One who scatters also gathers (verse 10); He is the shepherd of the flock (verse 10); He redeems them out hands stronger than theirs (verse 11); He is the giver of good things (grain, wine, oil, flocks) (verse 12).

What God initiates in the community is: flourishing like a watered garden (verse 12); young men and women and old men will be merry and dance (verse 13); mourning will turn into joy, they will be comforted and be full of gladness (verse 13).

Still the reader is left with some unease. What is the worth of words of joy that has not yet been realised? Isn't it just like empty words delivered to someone who experienced loss? The prophets used

the “prophetic perfects”, past tense that speaks of God’s redemptive work as if it has already happened, although in reality it hasn’t.

The theological implication however is these words are rooted in a certain understanding of God and humankind. Is it then about hope that has been realised? Or is it about an attitude that is lived based on a communal understanding of who God is?

What do we have here? We have words of abundance in a time of scarcity. We have promises of God as shepherd who gathers and looks after his flock. We have images of moments of rejoicing. These are all well-known witnesses about God. All these things has been experienced somewhere in Israel’s past and therefore it can happen again in the future.

The greatest witness about God is when a community in midst of crisis hope together and celebrate together. In Jeremiah the people were still on the road to healing, maybe there wasn’t any sure sign yet. But even healing is a process, the break away from brokenness a communal event. The fellowship becomes the witness and communal anticipation the proclamation of God.

In the New Testament the whole idea of being on our way together in feast and suffering gets new meaning because Jesus Christ is now the head of the *ekklesia* the “new community”. I John 4: 16b - 21 reminds us that the test of our faithfulness to God is our faithfulness to our neighbour. It is in our mutual love of the other that our confessions stand or fall and our witness rings true or false.

John 17: 20-23 reminds us that our unity is rooted in the unity of God, our unity and fellowship witnesses to the unity and fellowship of the Trinity. Fellowship and unity on the road to healing in the midst of suffering, people there for one another is what the world is searching for. We can surprise others when we can embrace diversity. Hope as witness is hope in fellowship.

Some prayer themes:

- Pray that we become aware of one another’s joy and sorrow
- That Christians in South Africa will see the bigger picture of healing and will long for it and work for it
- That we acknowledge God as the healer
- That we long for unity because we long that the world would recognise God as source of reconciliation and healing in our fellowship and unity
- That the Holy Spirit will inspire us to find different ways, symbols and actions in our different contexts to remind one another that we are given as gifts to one another.

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Day 3: A Priestly People called to Proclaim the Gospel

Genesis 17:1-8; Psalms 145:8-12; Romans 10:14-15; Matthew 13:3-9

1. God confirms God's covenant with Abraham

Genesis 17 deals with the confirmation of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants through the introduction of circumcision as sign of the covenant. In the first verse God not only puts a demand to Abraham, but also shows him how to live up to the demand. The demand is: "Obey me and always do what is right" (Good News Edition). God gives Abraham the instruction to live only in God's presence and, for every decision he will have to make, take into account what God expects from him.

The covenant (which is mentioned in chapter 15 already) here refers to the covenant of circumcision, although it is mentioned only in verse 10 which falls outside the prescribed portion of Scripture. On God's own initiative a covenant relationship is created by God, provided that Abraham keeps to the counsel of God according to the first verse.

Through the posture of prayer Abraham shows he honors God as King. The promise is made to him that he will have many descendants. From God's side it is made clear that the covenant is permanent in nature. The establishment of the covenant between God and Abraham, as far as God is concerned, points both to the demands of the covenant and to the promises for Abraham's descendants. The consequence of this relationship is that Abraham and his descendants have a prophetic calling in the world (van Selms).

2. God of compassion

The portion of Scripture from Psalm 145 is the last of eight acrostic songs in the psalter, as well as the last psalm of David. Kidner calls it "An Alphabet of Praise". Verses 8 and 9 give praise to the compassion of God. Verse 8 repeats the self-revelation of God at Sinai almost word for word. It is one of the most quoted sayings in the Old Testament. The emphasis in verse 10 to 13 is on the majesty or Kingship of God. The sovereignty of God stands firm. It is as much a cause for joy as is the compassion proclaimed in verses 8 and 9 (Kidner).

3. Proclaiming the message of salvation

God's plan of redemption for the world is a given. It is however also something that needs to be manifested in every person's life. The Israelites believed that only those who were sent by God and were called by God to do so had the right to speak to them. Paul appropriates himself the right to convey this message of salvation to them (Heyneman). Romans 10:15b is a direct quotation from Isaiah (52:7). In this verse the praises are sung of the real proclaimers of the Good News, not that of imaginary messengers (Ridderbos). This part of Scripture mentions the messengers of a new age in which God will be King.

The content of this message is the salvation that was brought about by the passion and death of Jesus Christ. It should be proclaimed all over the length and breadth of the earth. The intention is that those who listen to the proclaimed Word will hear Christ speak to them through the voice of those who were sent by God (Jonker). Indeed, the coming of messengers who bring good news (Good News Edition), the feet of those who bring good news (New International Version), will be wonderful!

4. The manifold fruit of proclaiming the gospel

The parable of the sower makes the central point that not everyone who hears the good news (see Romans 10:15b) will respond favorably to it. Proclamation does not guarantee one-hundred percent success. However, when proclamation bears fruit, it produces multiple and manifold fruit.

When the priestly people of God is being called to proclaim the gospel, the basis thereof lies in the truth that the church (the New Testament people of God), as descendants of Abraham, received this prophetic task (see paragraph 1c). In living according to this calling they can count on the grace, the

compassion, the patience and the love of the Lord. It is of fundamental importance that cognisance is taken of God's strength, royal power and majesty (Psalms 145:11 and 12).

However, it is not only about the fact that the people of God are called to proclaim the good news of salvation in and through Christ. No, they are also *sent* to do it. They should never lose heart while engaging in this. The church will have to stay aware that conversion isn't the response of everyone who hears the gospel. Nevertheless, the calling will have to be executed with continued dedication and loyalty to the One who sent us!

5. Some prayer themes:

- We pray that in 2016 the congregation and the church will locally as well as globally continue proclaiming the gospel to its full extent and in line with the prophetic demand of the distinctive context in which the church exists.

Day 4: The communion of the Apostles

(Isaiah 56:6-8; Psalm 24; Acts 2:37-42; John 13:34-35)

Theme: The disciples washed each other's feet because Jesus had washed their dirty feet.

Text: John 13:34, 35 and Acts 2:37-42.

In different ways and places in the Bible we hear this message: love is the greatest command. To love God and our neighbor – that is the essence of the law. But this love starts with God's love for his people. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son," The Son so loved us that he died on the cross on our behalf. That is why the Bible repeatedly states that we should love one another as God loved us. In today's text Jesus affirms this truth: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Through our love – God's love in our heart that overflows into Christian charity – people will see that we belong to the Lord. If we do not have this love, people will know that we do not belong to the Lord. This love has certain attributes:

- It's a love that causes us to become humble. Just as Jesus washed his disciples' feet, so we must serve and care for one another in humility. This love is not concerned with its own well-being but rather with the welfare of others.
- It's a love that forgives and refuses to hold a grudge. This love therefore causes us to reconcile with our neighbour.
- It is a love that crosses boundaries and creates a safe space for other people. Even for those who think and act differently. That is why the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 56, expresses the longing that people of all languages, cultures and ethnic groups praise the Lord in his temple – nobody must be excluded from worship.
- Where love is present, people care for one another. It is a love that is demonstrated with good deeds and not just empty words. Therefore, the first Christians shared their bread and homes: looking after one another according to the need.
- It is a love that brings peace between people causing them to live and pray together. When love is absent hostility takes its place, leaving people vulnerable and easily defeated by the enemy.
- But love also means that we may beseech, correct and warn one another because of this bond of love.

1. Love in the church

It is important that love is always present in the church and in our local congregations. After all, we are part of the one body of Christ for which he laid down his life. If we love one another as members of Jesus's church, we bear a powerful witness to the world. If we do not love one another, if there is division and strife, the world will not believe our testimony – notwithstanding how much we proclaim God's love.

It is especially important that leaders in the church love one another. If the clergy fail to love one another, it opens the door for further division within the church. Leaders should set a positive example of selfless charity. When love is present in the church, people will enjoy attending worship and serving the Lord as was shown by the early church.

Beloved, it is the responsibility and calling of each believer to demonstrate Christian charity to a world desperately in need thereof – a poor and suffering humanity. The church of Jesus Christ must pray for those people, that God will bless them abundantly.

2. Some prayer themes:

I therefore ask you during this week of prayer, that we pray for the presence of more love. Let us pray especially for the needy and the sick; for those without jobs and the hungry. And finally, let us pray for rain across our country so that God's creatures may live prosperously and with Jesus's peace. Amen.

Day 5: Hospitality and prayer.

Isaiah 62:6-7; Psalm 100; 1 Peter 4:7b-10; John 4:4-14

Text: "Offer hospitality to one another..." 1 Peter 4:9

1. Fear versus hospitality

We are concerned about the fact that there are so much anger and hate in our country and that it is presumably on the rise. Beneath and behind the emotions of anger and hate there is often fear. That is why we talk of *xenophobia*, which can be directly translated to fear of strangers. Likewise, *homophobia* is the fear for people with a different sexual orientation than ours. Behind racism lies what we could call "a fear of equality". Fear that others may threaten our living space and our means of living, thereby result in anger and hate. Subsequently, others should be excluded, isolated, rejected or even be wiped out.

Contrary to fear, that excludes others, the Bible suggests hospitality as an alternative: to include others, to embrace them, to create space and time for strangers, to serve them and share with them. Through hospitality, the anger, hate and fear in our country can be overcome. This is why this evening we reflect on and pray for hospitality.

2. We are hospitable because God is hospitable

Why is hospitality so important? Because this is how God made himself known to us: God cares for Abraham, the father of all believers, who roams as a stranger and landless person throughout an unknown land. God cares and provides for his people in the desert. We are all God's guests on earth; He is the great Host that cares for us. And not just for those of us that are his children; God wants to care for everyone. God blesses his people so that they may be a blessing to other peoples or the nations. That was the dream throughout the Old Testament: that Israel and all the other nations will gather in the house of the Lord and sit together at the feast table, where God himself is our Host. That is why the people of the Lord sing in Psalm 100 about God's love that endures forever. Therefore the guards on the walls of Jerusalem, remind their God of his promises, that all nations may eventually join Israel in declaring God's fame in Jerusalem, the city where God's peace and glory resides (Isaiah 62:6-7).

When Jesus Christ came down to earth to live among us, this Son of God did the same. He was hospitable, always. He invited everyone to the feast table: tax collectors, pharisees, sinners, the poor, the sick, and the least: people that were marginalised and excluded from society. He told the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate to us that our hospitality must cross all borders. Christ himself ventured across borders when, at the well, he asked the Samaritan woman for water, explaining to her that he is actually the true Host. He invited her to be his guest and to receive living water from Him, water that would satisfy her deepest thirst (John 4).

3. Believers are known by their hospitality

Hospitality is therefore one of the most important features of a Christian's life. It is the means by which you are identified; therein rests your uniqueness as believers in this world. It is proof of your

faith in God; the proof that you recognise God as the Host that takes good care of you. By being hospitable towards others, you therefore bring honour to God's Name.

The first believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, were known for their hospitality. They came together joyfully, breaking bread together and sharing their possessions with one another and their neighbours. They were open towards other people, their gatherings became hospitable spaces. That is exactly why Acts 2:47 describe the first congregation as: "...having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

Being hospitable is of course not always an easy assignment. It can even be dangerous. People may abuse your hospitality and others might resist it. When Peter wrote his letter to the believers, he knew that they were enduring hardship. Because they belong to Jesus Christ, they are persecuted, wronged, marginalised and they endure suffering. They are like strangers and foreigners in their own country. How must they answer to all the suffering and injustice done to them? Of course, they must continue to place their trust in Christ, believing that he will hold them tight and will have them share in his victory and glory. But thinking about it practically – that is how Peter encourages believers in our text verse 1 Peter 4:9 – it is precisely during such circumstances that they must remain hospitable. Such hospitality must witness to the love of the Lord that is within them. And it must lead towards them serving others with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. That way they will be witnesses for the Lord and will Jesus Christ be exalted through their acts of love, hospitality and service. To this end the Lord himself will empower them.

4. Some prayer themes:

Because hospitality is not something we can do through our own strength, we have to pray about it. We must pray to God for it; we must ask that God grant us the power through his Spirit to love others, to be hospitable and to serve – even though it may sometimes be extremely difficult!

- Thank the Lord for accepting and embracing us undeservedly, just as the Father did in the parable of the prodigal son. Pray that the Lord will guide us to be just as hospitable towards our neighbours, to embrace rather than to exclude others.
- Thank the Lord for his gracious hospitality towards us, that he invites us into the space of the Triune God's love, communion and care. He chooses and assembles us to be his congregation. Pray that the Lord will make our congregations a hospitable space, where there is caring and love, where others feel at home and enjoy a sense of belonging.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show us on a practical level how we can be more hospitable within our own contexts or communities.

Amen

Day 6: Burning heart to be together.

Isaiah 52:7-9; Psalm 30; Colossians 1:17-19 and Luke 24:13-36

Opening remarks (in reference to Isaiah 52:7-9)

1. Guards on the walls receiving glad tidings

The guards on the ruins of the once secured city wall,
Were on the verge of despair...
Then, on the faraway horizons, a movement...
A hurrying messenger, my imagination tells me.
Carrying a tiding of joy, of peace, salvation and consolation.
Like the rising sun, the tiding of joy so warms our hearts from afar
Because, God is returning from exile, back to Sion!
The King is returning to Sion
Why not turning back to God!
(Once again) we stand in your gateways, o Jerusalem!

2. Elements of a meditation

* Opening prayer

* Call to praise (Continuing)

– Based on Psalm 30, on the re-inauguration of the Temple:

The lighting of new lamps,
Lit festive lights!
Also in our downtrodden spirits. God is returning to his dwelling ... sanctified
For the Lord of Hosts.
Footprint of a desacralized foot, and a soldier's violent shoe
still lie only in our memory.
O beneficiaries of the Lord,
stand ready to praise him
because our lament has been consumed by a choral dance!
Our commitment is glowing anew!

* Ministering of the Word:

- Epiclesis (prayer) (based on Colossians 1:17-19)

Lord, you entrusted your Word to us. We don't really appreciate the immensity of this responsibility. For we understand that we need to rebuke, also to instruct in wisdom, but above all we have to proclaim Christ. Your servant Paul helped us with the cosmic unity dream that we dare to do this, so that every person will be in a whole relationship of commitment. May our unity find expression in this. Amen

* Scripture reading: Luke 24:13-36

3. Proclamation

Let us, once again, tell one another the special account that is clearly confirming that Jesus is alive.
(In telling the story, please note):

- (i) The many times this account refers to the cross and resurrection of Jesus, as “actual events”. All those in and around Jerusalem were supposed to know about it, except, of course, the foreigner on his way to Emmaus, 12 km from Jerusalem (verses 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21 and 30);
- (ii) How God’s factual involvement in the happenings is hidden in the language (verse 16). They were prevented (verse 31). He is indeed resurrected and he appeared to Simon (verse 34). Jesus is recognised by them (verse 35) (The author emphasised the factuality in his account by the use of Greek verbs in the Aoristic Indicative Passive form);
- (iii) How often the theme of “together” is emphasised in the passage (verse 13, 15, 24, 29, 30, 33 and 36). It is a multifaceted “being together”, for at one stage the disciples are together, then they are separated again, just to come together again. Jesus is apparently absent, but then actually present. (and with them) from Jerusalem until they reached Emmaus, while dining together and then again in Jerusalem! Even the contradiction in the temporary geographical separation in verse 13 underlines the idea of being together. Then follows a reunion of the followers of Jesus in verse 33. The Emmaus pilgrims earnestly persisted beseeching the Foreigner, both in the words used by the author and in their own pleas: “Please stay with us! (verse 29)”;
- (iv) How the two fellow travellers’ wearisome discussions, in which they ignorantly questioned each other, could not come to clarity, but rather brought them to a tedious cessation. (verse 17 – Gr. *estathesan*).
- (v) Over against the reaction in (iv), caused by Jesus joining the “word-tennis” discussion (see Gr. *antiballetē*) and his exposition (Gr. *dihermeneuete*) of the Scriptures referring to himself, their tired hearts became burning;
- (vi) They, whose hope reached a low point again, (verse 21) – the end of the third day – not only took up the challenge of the 12km journey back to Jerusalem, but also the potential dangers along the road to be with the others and share their experiences with them.
- (vii) The author also put additional markers in the account to heat up the cold hearts of the readers: look at verse 15 and 30. The indicators of questions (Gr. *ouchi*) in verse 26 and 32, serve as prove! In this way Jesus is turning the social customs of his time upside down – see verse 30 – when he, the guest, takes over the role of host – so that he could also visibly expose his stigmata (crucifixion wounds) – as proof that it is indeed him who are alive – the Crucified!

5. Some prayer themes:

- Pray for all those who are working as expositors and teachers/trainers of Scripture: theological faculties, publishers of Christian literature, (CLF, BibleMedia, CAVA, etc.), curatoria of theological faculties, Sokhanya, NBI and others. Pray that all of them will commit themselves to unlock the accounts of salvation in such a way that readers and listeners’ hearts will be warmed and that they will join those who testify that Jesus is alive!
- Pray for the goals and the work of the WCC (World Council of Churches); that the followers of Jesus Christ will be one, according to Jesus’ prayer in John 17.
- Pray Article 2 of the Belhar Confession (1986), or parts of it: Gods church is one (a brief summary):
- We believe that God is calling Christians to stand together, work together and serve him together. There may not be separation, hate and animosity amongst believers. All believers must serve God in one church. We believe it is wrong that believers, who share the same believe, worship in separate churches.