

### Call to Worship

**Leader:** God welcomes us to worship on this new day!

**People:** **It is a day of new hopes and fresh opportunities!**

**Leader:** Let us leave behind our fears and doubts and offer our prayers to God.

**People:** **God calls us each by name and welcomes us as Christ welcomes the children.**

### Opening prayer

Loving God, you watch over us and take care of us.  
 When the world seems frightening,  
 you calm us, and assure us that you will never abandon us.  
 And in doing that, you empower us  
 to speak out for justice,  
 to act on behalf of others,  
 and to help make our world a better place.  
 Be with us this day and always,  
 we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Prayer of confession

**One:** Sometimes, God, we try and stop others from doing what you call us all to do. We interfere with other people's work for justice and righteousness, and we hamper their work for good in our world.

**Two:** When we put up stumbling blocks in front of ourselves and others,

**All: forgive us, God, and help us to clear them away.**

**One:** Sometimes, we cannot see what is in front of us. We put ourselves in the way, and do not see you present in our world.

**Two:** When we put up stumbling blocks in front of ourselves and others,

**All: forgive us, God, and help us to clear them away.**

**One:** Sometimes, we are at risk of losing our saltiness – the very essence that makes each one of us unique, and makes us who we are: your special and beloved children.

**Two:** When we put up stumbling blocks in front of ourselves and others,

**All: forgive us, God, and help us to clear them away. Amen.**

### Words of Assurance

St. James told us: "My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God." So let us encourage each other in faith, and serve God in love. Amen.

### Scripture Sharing

**Esther 7:1–6, 9–10; 9:20–22**

*Those unfamiliar with the entire story of Esther will benefit from some background to today's lectionary reading. Below is a light-hearted way to introduce the reading, presented in the form of a morning talk show. Two readers can stand at separate microphones or, for more dramatic effect, can sit in chairs resembling a television talk show. The Youth lesson for this week also includes a drama/conversation between five teenagers who are getting ready to watch the next episode of their favourite soap opera "All God's Children" to introduce the Esther reading. Five youth could present this in church.*

**Reporter one:** Welcome to “News of the Week.” And what a week it’s been.

**Reporter two:** That’s right, *name*. Queen Esther has really made a name for herself this week.

**Reporter one:** She certainly has. But before we get to that, how about some background for our viewers?

**Reporter two:** Indeed. Of course, Queen Esther came to the throne after Queen Vashti publicly defied her husband, King Ahasuerus, at a banquet. The King’s advisers suggested that women everywhere might be inspired by her actions to defy their own husbands – so Vashti had to go!

**Reporter one:** But who could replace Vashti as queen?

**Reporter two:** Beautiful young women were summoned from far and wide and among them was the young Jewish woman named Esther. After a year of makeovers and cosmetic treatments in the royal harem, and –

**Reporter one:** – it was a beauty pageant, really.

**Reporter two:** – the king fell in love with Esther and made her queen. Meanwhile, a villain called Haman is promoted to be the king’s second in command. With his promotion comes a little bit of arrogance. Haman insists that all people bow down to him as a sign of their respect. Esther’s cousin Mordecai, a faithful worshipper of God, refuses to break the laws of his faith. You may recall the first commandment: “you shall have no other gods before me.” Mordecai won’t bow down to Haman. Haman is pretty upset by this disrespect and plans not only the execution of Mordecai, but the genocide of the Jewish people throughout the Persian Empire, from India all the way to Ethiopia.

**Reporter one:** So what does Esther do?

**Reporter two:** Esther is in a dilemma. If she approaches the king without being invited, he has the right to kill her. If she does nothing, she will be killed, along with her people. Esther calls on her people to pray and fast. She approaches the king and is permitted to speak. She invites the king to a banquet that she has prepared for Haman and him. At the banquet Esther invites the two men to a second banquet...

**Reporter one:** ...and that’s where we take up today’s story. Okay.

*(Either Reporter two, or a third person, now reads Esther 7:1–6, 9–10; 9:20–22.)*

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### **Prayer of intercession (based on James 5:13-20)**

**Leader:** God of grace and patience, we all have our share of times when things go wrong, times when relationships fail us or we fail them, times when grief cries out for healing; times when our bodies are filled with pain and our minds are filled with worry.

**Response:** **Jesus, gentle teacher, teach us the power of prayer.**

**Leader:** There are times when we can’t make sense of what is going in this world, times when we even might doubt your presence and care for us. Yet through it all, you remain steadfast, and are always with us.

**Response:** **Jesus, gentle teacher, teach us the power of prayer.**

**Leader:** When life seems out of control and injustices seem too many to bear, give us the strength to challenge them – firmly and assuredly, knowing that you are always at our side.

**Response:** **Jesus, gentle teacher, let us come to you with hope and with trust. In your presence we shall be loved and restored in strength. Amen.**

**Prayer of dedication**

Take our gifts, O God, and use them to change the world. Use them to bring justice and goodness. Use them to make our planet a safe home for all living things. Amen.

**Blessing**

As we leave this place now, let us go, daring to do great things for God! Let us dare to take the risks to love, to live, to forgive, and to welcome each other in God's love. And may the power and gentleness of Christ go with us all. Amen.