

### Call to Worship

Come, let us go up to the holy mountain, to the house where our ancestors worshiped, that we may learn God's way and walk in God's paths.

**We are thankful that at last we take the first steps of a journey much traveled, yet wholly new. These precious days of preparation for the feast of the Passover are days of Thanksgiving. May we shed the artificial cares of the world, and instead come to pray and worship.**

Come, people of God, walk in the light!

### Prayer of Invocation

**May we, with all of creation, pause, keep silence, and breathe deep of the mystery that surrounds us. Open our hearts to your word, that we may learn with joy your desire for us, your destiny which we share, your dream of peace which will be fulfilled because your will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. We wait with fear and trembling – we wait with joy. Amen.**

### The Word

#### Psalm 122

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let's go to the LORD's house!"  
**Now our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem!**

Jerusalem is built like a city joined together in unity.  
**That is where the tribes go up—the LORD's tribes!**

It is the law for Israel to give thanks there to the LORD's name,  
**because the thrones of justice are there—the thrones of the house of David!**

Pray that Jerusalem has peace: "Let those who love you have rest."  
**Let there be peace on your walls; let there be rest on your fortifications."**

For the sake of my family and friends, I say, "Peace be with you, Jerusalem."  
**For the sake of the LORD our God's house I will pray for your good.**

### Living the Word

Thousands of pilgrims have made the journey to Jerusalem for Passover; many have made the journey to Jerusalem to see where Jesus died and rose again; many will make that same journey again this year. For those of us that will be in this country for Passover and Easter, our journey is in some ways different, but in some ways very similar as we seek a holy place of God.

Often before we go somewhere we envision what it will be like. Psalm 122 is written in that way. These words at first seem like one person saying to another how the journey will be according to their past experience, or should be according to the stories they have heard through the ages from other travelers, seeking God.

*'I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let's go to the LORD's house!"  
Now our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem!  
Jerusalem is built like a city joined together in unity.  
That is where the tribes go up—the LORD's tribes!'*

But imagine a chorus of voices, such as we experienced as we read it together, repeating these words as they have learned them, memorized them, in a chorus of pilgrims anticipating the trip and the goal. Arms linked, or

hands connected, they are in this together; a comradery of journeying together with those who have gone before and those who are ready to experience a new adventure.

*'It is the law for Israel to give thanks there to the LORD's name,  
because the thrones of justice are there—the thrones of the house of David!'*

In November, my house in Hayward becomes 'the hunting shack.' Though bow hunting and camouflage have been around for a couple months already – that is a relatively new sport in the family tradition, with only a few participating. Now it is time to really focus on the traditional hunt.

I am only a spectator in this sport, but through the years here is some of what I observe annually about this 'journey' to the woods: Males from as far as Kansas City , Kansas; Bemidji, MN; River Falls WI and parts in between gather the night before to 'make a plan' for opening morning. Yet the following morning the plan to be out at sunrise, has been moved back an hour or so, the organizational skills have been misplaced along with one deer tag, two blaze orange caps and more than one compass.

At least one jacket has shrunk since last year and everyone seems to be in an anxious tizzy about the days ahead. Even so, in time, the journey seems to be on its way as two vehicles head out, down to the next house to pick up some stragglers. Yet 5 minutes later one truck returns to get a forgotten gun. The song that is sung is about who will get the 'big one,' who will shoot first and the chorus is to the effect that they are going to hunt 'to feed the family.'

I doubt that I am the only one who is beginning this journey of hunting season having to pray and trust that it will all go safely and well.

For the Hebrew people, it is now time to leave their community. They begin their trek toward the hills in their anticipation of seeing that city of Jerusalem which is set in a kind of saucer inside the top of the hills. They have just sung the first two Psalms of Ascent before beginning their journey, looking toward the hills, and then as they begin moving, they look at the crowd around them and they say: "Let's go to the Lord's house."

What a pleasant thought for God's people to be able to go together to the house of the Lord to pray, to be able to worship together and sing the great songs of Zion, to hear of the great love of God, who has given peace to those who ask for it. The word Jerusalem means "The City of Peace," and that is what they go seeking.

As they begin to climb that steep ascent, these psalms remind them to say to themselves: "There are two things that we must do before we enter into God's presence. We must pray, and we must trust. 'Pray that Jerusalem has peace: "Let those who love you have rest.

*Let there be peace on your walls; let there be rest on your fortifications."  
For the sake of my family and friends, I say, "Peace be with you, Jerusalem."  
For the sake of the LORD our God's house I will pray for your good.'*

All journeys in our lives should bring us to prayer and trust. One that really affected my prayer life and trust in God was when my sons left home for school in another place. It is difficult for parents to let them go on their own. No matter how long you have prepared them and yourself for this moment, it takes trust and prayer to let go and let God...

With each of my sons, I got accustomed to this new change, but then for each of them this was followed by a day when I sent each of them off to a stint in Iraq. At one point when they were leaving me, I wrote my own

psalm. It began as a psalm of lament – why God? This can't be right Lord, how will I endure? Of course the answer was revealed through that time in prayer and trust.

I shared with each of them when it was their turn, that I would be praying for them every morning as they would know night, and every night as they would see morning. I began to go to sleep with them as my last thoughts and awake with them as my first thoughts. Prayer and trust got me through the days, along with a few tears and fears...

Can't you just see those Israelites during those long and turbulent years of their history, praying for the peace of Jerusalem? When the Assyrians attacked it and built trenches around it, they prayed for the peace of Jerusalem, and in one night 185,000 of those Assyrians died out there beyond the walls in a plague and the rest fled.

Or when Babylon came down from the north, and laid up a siege for three years so that nothing and no one, could come in or go out, and the people died of hunger by the thousands...can't you hear them praying for the peace of Jerusalem? Or coming back from those years of bondage in Jerusalem, can't you hear them singing: *"Now our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem."*

From the Gospel of Luke, chapter 18 we read: *"Jesus took the Twelve aside and said, "Look, we're going up to Jerusalem, and everything written about the Human One by the prophets will be accomplished. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. He will be ridiculed, mistreated, and spit on. After torturing him, they will kill him. On the third day, he will rise up."*

Today's Psalm says: *"because the thrones of justice are there—the thrones of the house of David!"* That is where judgment was set on Jesus, though justice was hard to find for him. It was part of a plan for our salvation, put into play at the beginning of time. Then the Psalm breaks in: *"Pray that Jerusalem has peace: "Let those who love you have rest. Let there be peace on your walls; let there be rest on your fortifications."*

And here comes Jesus toward the city where judgment was to be made upon him. He grieves for the city when they reach the top of Mount Olivet, looking down into that saucer which is Jerusalem. Luke 19:42 *"He said, "If only you knew on this of all days the things that lead to peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes."* Then He goes back to the Psalm: *'For the sake of my family and friends, I say, "Peace be with you, Jerusalem." For the sake of the LORD our God's house I will pray for your good.'*

How are we affected as we journey with others? The disciples knew this was to be a different journey, but they probably didn't understand how different this, their annual Passover journey, would be. Still the mood of Jesus and the atmosphere of the politics and religious orders over them would have changes the uphill steps to get there. As they climbed up and up was it more of a strain for the uncertainty that they faced.

Could their confidence in God begin to shake? Even Jesus, in a moment lost His confidence in His Father. It was that moment on the cross when He said: *"My God, My God, why have you left me?"* In that moment he didn't even call Him Father. Yet that is the moment when God is the most near. We have our times when we feel that God is very far away. Then, is the moment that trust becomes even more precious.

I am not sure how God feels about come of our choices...I'm not sure how Jesus feels about joining us in some of our wilder decisions. I admit, I was praying and trusting a lot as I climbed the Dunn's River Falls in Jamaica on vacation. 180 feet high with water rushing at you. Inside I was saying "OK Lord, it is only 800 feet long, and you are with me right?" Step after step, being helped by the person before me and then turning to

help the next one, blindly seeking the next foot hold and finding it; 90 minutes of climbing and then seeing the sign before us "Congratulations, You have just completed the climb of the World Famous Dunn's River Falls..

If we have an ounce of trust we can steel ourselves to face the things before us. Thus it was that Christ set His eyes steadfastly toward Jerusalem. His heart was steadfast as he went to obey the call of His Father! He had made His decision what He must do, for His Father and for us. His eyes never left the hand of His Master who was beckoning Him to make a great sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the World.

How did the Psalmist, David know of the words that would be used by Christ as he made that journey toward the cross? Aah, all scripture is divinely inspired; written at the beginning of time for Gods purpose for all people. And so it still has meaning for us today. David did have his own moments which brought him to the writing of this Psalm.

One day the Israelites took the ark of the Covenant of God into battle with the Philistines. But Israel lost the battle anyway, and the Ark was captured. Now the Philistines had it! It is a long story how they got it back, but many years later, when David became king and made Jerusalem his capital, he decided to bring it into his capital city.

On the great day of the procession, David gathered his army together. He also called for his trumpeters, his harpists, his cymbal players and all of the rest of his musicians along with his choirs. There they stood, by the thousands, surrounding the Ark of the Covenant down at the bottom of the hills, looking up to the top, over which Jerusalem stood, and they began singing and playing psalms. As they marched further up the hills toward Mount Zion, they would stop and sing another psalm, until they stood at the walls of Jerusalem, and they finished singing and playing.

The psalms were used on many great occasions, but none more important to our faith than this final journey of Christ to Jerusalem. He came to the city to bring Peace to the people. Not an end of conflict between the people, but inner peace through prayer and trust, which then can transform conflict into peace.

So as we begin this journey with Jesus and the disciples, sharing the Songs of our tradition, we find an opportunity to fill our lives with prayer and trust, enough to know peace within us and share that peace with a world in the midst of conflict. "*For the sake of the LORD our God's house I will pray for your good.*"