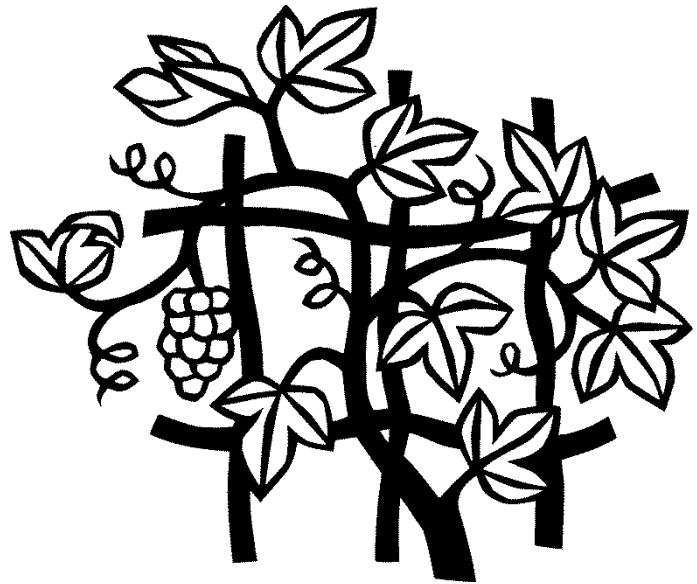


# That All May Be Fed

*A Vision for the South Dakota Synod, ELCA*

*Synod Assembly Bible Study Resource  
to Take Home to Local Congregations*



**Nurtured in Word and Sacrament,  
God sends us to become a joyful sign of God's abundant blessing as we:**

- **proclaim** the good news of Jesus to every hungry soul,
- **share** compassion with all who suffer, and
- **feed** all whose bodies lack nourishment.

## **CORE VALUES**

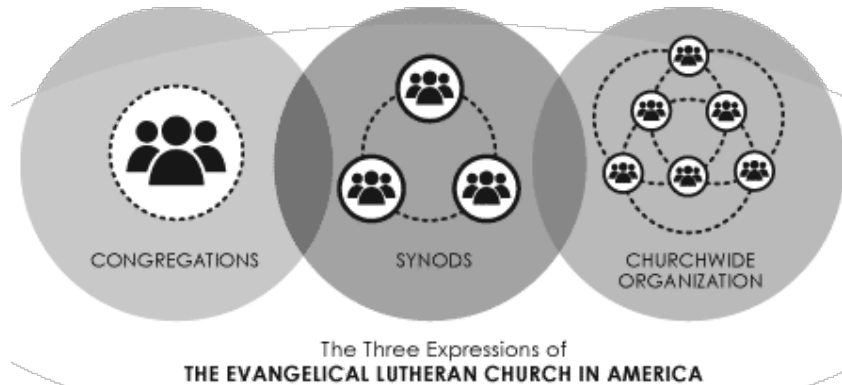
**prayer, human dignity, gratitude, the neighbor, grace**

We commit ourselves to:

- pray without ceasing,
- respect the sacred dignity of every human being,
- cultivate a deep sense of gratitude to God, the giver of all good things,
- seek out and befriend the neighbor,
- remain humble in the conviction that our calling comes purely by the grace of God.

## Explanation of this Resource / Ideas of How It May be Used

ELCA congregations are part of a church body organized in three expressions; congregations, synods and the churchwide organization. Each of these expressions are grounded in a vision for ministry. **God's Work. Our Hands.** is the tag line for the ELCA churchwide organization, many congregations also work hard at casting a clear simple vision for ministry within their context.



Over the last months your South Dakota Synod has been hard at work claiming a vision for our common ministry together. **That All May Be Fed** is a tag line that flows out of the ELCA's vision (God's Work. Our Hands.) and hopefully flows seamlessly into your congregation's vision for ministry within your particular context. We do not presume to replace your congregation's particular vision for ministry through this work but rather to enhance it as together we participate in God's Work with our hands that all may be fed for the sake of the Gospel.

We have created this resource so that congregations might spend some time studying the values under girding the work your Synod has been doing.

The introductory session might take an hour or more to complete with a group while the three Vision Practice studies can generally be completed in 20 minute sessions perhaps before as devotions for a church council or WELCA meetings.

In addition, we have placed a Missional Planning resource on the SD Synod website ([www.sdsynod.org](http://www.sdsynod.org)) for congregations that would like to dig deeper into this vision and thinking more strategically about some of the ideas discussed.

For more information about this study, the website resource of missional planning within your congregation, please contact Rev. Bill Tesch, Associate to the Bishop and Director of Evangelical Mission at 605-274-4026 or e-mail Bill at [btesch@sdsynod.org](mailto:btesch@sdsynod.org).

# Vision: Nurtured in Word and Sacrament, God sends us to become a joyful sign of God's abundant blessing.

## A Seed: The Joyful Sign<sup>1</sup> Introductory Study

### Opening Prayer

Lord let our hearts be good soil, open to the seed of your word. Open our eyes to see where you are sending us to be your embodied word planted in the soil of our world. As the seed is crushed to make our bread, so make us a blessing of life and a nourishing presence in the lives of our neighbors, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and brother. Amen.

### Discussion Questions

*Dear Leader: invite answers from the group, not everyone needs to answer every question, but work hard to insure that everyone is invited to share something at some point. You do not need to ask every question, just enough to get some good discussion going, and get folks thinking about seeds and planting and harvesting – something Jesus' audience would have had on their mind all the time!*

1. Think of a time of planting seeds that stands out in your mind - when you planted seeds as a child and/or in your vocation as a farmer, or gardener. What feelings did you have as you planted? How did it go? Were there setbacks, frustrations? Anyone care to share what you thought of?
2. Take a seed into your hand and keep it throughout the Bible Study. What do you notice about it? How do these words apply to a seed?

*Inert/Dead - Alive*

*Incomplete - Complete*

*Vulnerable - Tough*

*Improbable/Doubtful - Potential*

*Hopeless - Hopeful*

*Weak - Strong*

3. How is it that these totally opposite words can apply to the same thing?
4. Do some of these same opposites apply to you? Your congregation? How so?



**Focus Text:** Mark 4:26-29

[Jesus] also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup> Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. <sup>28</sup> All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. <sup>29</sup> As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

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*This introductory session takes longer than the remaining three sessions. Please plan accordingly.*

*For this first session, each participant should be provided with a seed. When choosing seeds, pick one that is significant enough in size to be studied and reflected upon.*

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<sup>1</sup> A greatly expanded version of this study for use as a full planning retreat or for a four-session planning series among leadership is available on the synod website (sdsynod.org) in the missional toolbox.

## READ ALOUD

Have you ever wondered, “Why is it that some people hear the word of God and believe while others hear the same word and do not believe?” Or perhaps you have asked, “How is it that ANYONE comes to believe such an outrageous story!?” Maybe you have wondered, “What is my role in this unfolding drama of people coming to faith in Jesus Christ?” “What is God doing in my church and my community to bring people to faith in Jesus?”

This parable is a way of answering these questions, by opening the eyes of Jesus’ disciples to see the mystery of God’s growing and often hidden reign.

1. Tell us about a tree or plant you have seen growing in an unlikely place or against all odds.
2. How do you think people come to believe and trust in Jesus?

## Engaging the Text

Read Mark 1:1 *The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

1. Mark has committed a grammatical error. Do you see it?
2. In what ways does this sentence fragment contain the “DNA” of this story?
3. Consider the seed in your hand. How is this way of beginning a story similar to the way a plant begins from a seed?

The Gospel according to St. Mark begins with this fragment of a sentence – “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” It is incomplete (like a seed), but (like a seed) it contains everything we need to know about Jesus: “Jesus is the Messiah; he is God’s Son; this is good news!” That’s the “DNA” of this story. It is unlikely that Mark would accidentally start with an incomplete sentence. In literature there is a name for an incomplete sentence at the beginning of a story that contains much of what you need to know: it is called the “title.” If this is the title of Mark’s gospel, then that is significant, because it means that Mark’s whole gospel is intentionally incomplete. It is not the whole story; it is only *“the beginning of the story.”* Consider the possibility that YOU are the rest of the story!

It is no coincidence that this story, which begins with an incomplete sentence, also ends with an incomplete sentence. The literal translation of Mark 16:8 is: *“And they went out quickly from the place, because fear and great wonder had come on them: and they said nothing to anyone, because they were full of fear that...”* Bible scholars agree that this verse is the original ending of Mark’s gospel. Mark has committed another grammatical error. Mark stopped writing (mid-sentence!), because the story isn’t finished. It’s still going. 2000 years later the seed is still being scattered, and it is still growing, “we know not how.”

***At the end of Mark’s Gospel a question hangs in the air – “how will it be possible for anyone to hear the good news and come to believe when Jesus’ disciples are all hiding in fear?”***

And the answer is in our seed parables: “Someone scatters seed on the ground. <sup>27</sup> Night and day, whether she sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though she does not know how.” The disciples are the seeds carrying the DNA of this good news. They have been cast into the soil of the world, and like those seeds they are weak, hopeless, doubtful and incomplete, but like our seeds, with the word that is planted in them, they are also strong, hopeful, and full of potential. Make no mistake, the seed will sprout and grow, it will produce a harvest! God’s reign comes!

### **...YOU are the seed.**

Of course, Jesus teaches that **the Word of God is the seed**. However, it is also clear that in Mark's gospel this Word is never un-incarnate – the Word always takes on flesh – it always has a human delivery vehicle! So in a sense, we, as bearers of the word, are the seed – or at least the husk of the seed!

### **Applying the Text to the Vision – “A Joyful sign of God’s abundant blessing”**

God has gifted you and placed you in your community for a purpose: to be a joyful sign of God’s abundant blessing. In your community, you are the seed bearing human agents of the healing, life giving, soul convicting and saving Word of God!

### **You are God’s seeds of the Kingdom – explore together the question, “What is unique about you?”**

Explore together the following ways in which you are unique as God’s seeds of the kingdom. As a group, call out and list as many as you can in 10 minutes or less. Put the list in a place where all can see.

- What passions and hopes?
- What talents?
- What significant relationships with individuals or organizations in the community?
- What physical assets?

*Consider conducting an “Asset Mapping” exercise for a deeper exploration of your giftedness – check out the online missional toolbox on the SD Synod Website for a guide on conducting an asset mapping exercise.*

### **Respond and Celebrate**

Explore together where your unique gifts and passions align with what you know about the hopes and hurts of your community. On a piece of newsprint (chalkboard, whiteboard, smart board, overhead projector, computer projector... you get the point) put up all of the gifts and assets you’ve identified on one side. On the other side name a few of the real hopes and hurts of your community. Now connect the dots – Where or in what situation in your town, city or open country congregation is God calling you to be “planted” next?” How might God be calling you to be the joyful sign of God’s abounding blessing in a new way?

**Closing Song**            You are the Seed (WOV #753)

### **Closing Prayer**

Keep, O Lord, your household the church in our steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> From the Book of Common Prayer, contemporary Collect for the Season after Pentecost, Proper 6.

# Vision Practice 1

## Proclaim the Good News of Jesus to Every Hungering Soul

### Opening Prayer

Living God, help us to put on our listening ears. May we listen with open hearts and minds to your word and to each other. Draw us closer to the light, to your Son, Jesus Christ. Equip us with the courage that we need to never be fearful of sharing the light of Christ, the good news, to all who need to hear. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

**Discussion Question(s)** invite each person to respond to one of the following questions

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 how nervous do you get when asked to speak in front of a group? What helps you get through it?
2. Have you ever discovered something that had been hidden or forgotten that turned out to be valuable?
3. Have you ever been outside when it was dark without a light source? Why? What happened?

### Focus Text Mark 4:21-23

[Jesus] said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand? For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

### Engaging the Text

In the gospel of Mark, the parables both reveal and conceal who Jesus is and what he is doing. For those who have ears to hear, it comes as good news of the kingdom of God. For those who refuse to hear, it only sounds like a jumbled jive from a man named Jesus. How will we discover our vision of working together as a people of God who are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus to every hungering soul?

There are many places in the Bible that the image of light is used. Read Psalm 119:105 ***Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.***

1. How does this verse help you understand Jesus' story about the lampstand?
2. Why would anyone try and hide a lamp?
3. How (or in what ways) do we hide the good news of Jesus?
4. How (or in what ways) do we let the good news of Jesus shine brightly in our lives?

Jesus is not only God's word, but God's light that reaches the dark places. The good news of Jesus is not something to be hidden away, but is to be shared and passed on to others to let it shine. The good news is that we are called to work together to tell and show others the light of Christ.

### Applying the Text to the Vision Practice

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*To begin this Bible study, in the center of your table gather together one large candle (perhaps the Christ candle from your worship space) and enough tea lights for each participant. If there is any concern about open flame, all of the candles can be electrical. Only light the large candle.*

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It may not always be easy to share Christ's light with those around us. We become reluctant, nervous, or worried about what others will think of us or that we won't know what to say. The good news is that we share *Christ's* light (not our own) and it happens in our daily lives through both our words and our actions.

1. What are the dark places in your life and in your community that need the light of the good news of Jesus?
2. Who hungers for the light in your community? How can you reach them with God's word?

Don't think too hard! Sometimes, it takes the simplest idea to share the good news. It could be helping a neighbor with their yard work and simply telling them you are offering a hand out of God's love. It could be saying hello to someone in your community who feels friend-less. Maybe your congregation can create and distribute a prayer resource for people to use in the home or on vacation. Make a list of ways in which you and your congregation can reach out in your community to share the good news to those who hunger for the light. Then, put a star next to the 2 that you will work on in the next 6 months.

### Respond and Celebrate

Light the large candle in the center of the table and say, "Christ's light is good news for us and for all people! We are thankful for the ways in which we reach one another in God's love. We ask for courage to not be afraid to share the good news in all that we do and say in our daily lives so that Christ's light is on display. Psalm 27:1 reminds us - **"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"** Now, give each participant a tea light and light it off of the large candle (or turn them on if they are electric) and say, "You carry Christ's light with you. Go and let it shine brightly!"



**Closing Song**      This Little Light of Mine(ELW 677)

### Closing Prayer

Almighty God, we thank you for the ways in which we share your light on a lampstand. We thank you for the ways in which we share Christ's light in our community. Help us to let your light shine in our daily lives. Encourage us to proclaim the good news to every hungering soul. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our light. Amen.

## Vision Practice 2

### Share Compassion with All Who Suffer



#### **Focus Text** Mark 4:24-29

And [Jesus] said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you. <sup>25</sup> For to those who have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

[Jesus] also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, <sup>27</sup> and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. <sup>28</sup> The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. <sup>29</sup> But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

#### **Opening Prayer & Time of Sharing**

Go around the room and each person fills in their own personal thanksgiving, "Thank you, Lord, for the compassion I experienced from\_\_\_\_\_."

#### **Applying the Text to the Vision**

This short little parable is often called the parable of the seed growing of itself. There seems to be confidence or faith in the one who sowed the seed that allows him to sleep. What is happening to that seed? How is life and growth taking place for that seed under the ground?

The word "share" means to divide and parcel into shares, to cut. When we think of sharing we often romanticize it acting as if sharing is always pleasant and easy. Henri Nouwen, Donald McNeill and Douglas Morrison in their book Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life, remind us that compassion means "to suffer with."

- ⌘ *How do we take seriously our mission to share compassion with all who suffer?*
- ⌘ *When have you found it difficult to sharing compassion?*
- ⌘ *How do we begin to see, notice and reach out to all? How about people we don't like? How about people with whom we don't agree?*

We are incarnational people who believe that God took on flesh and now acts in the world through us, the body of Christ. Daniel Berrigan once said, "It all comes down to this: Whose flesh are you touching and why? Whose flesh are you recoiling from and why?" How do we honestly face these questions in our personal lives and in our congregation? Can we be honest about our hopes and fears as we search for ways to shared compassion with all who suffer?



## Respond and Celebrate

In her book *City Farmer: Adventures in Urban Food Growing*, Lorraine Johnson writes, “Real food carries its dirt along with it, no matter how hard we scrub. Soil memory lurks in the folds & wrinkles & even in the smooth skins of fruits and vegetables, giving them their character and their flavor. The French call this *terroir* and while the term is mainly deployed for wine it applies equally well to everything edible. Flavor identity comes from place.

As we think about suffering we know that often our own sadness, grief, trauma, and brokenness allows us to empathize with others in ways we never imagined as we were walking through our own valley of darkness.

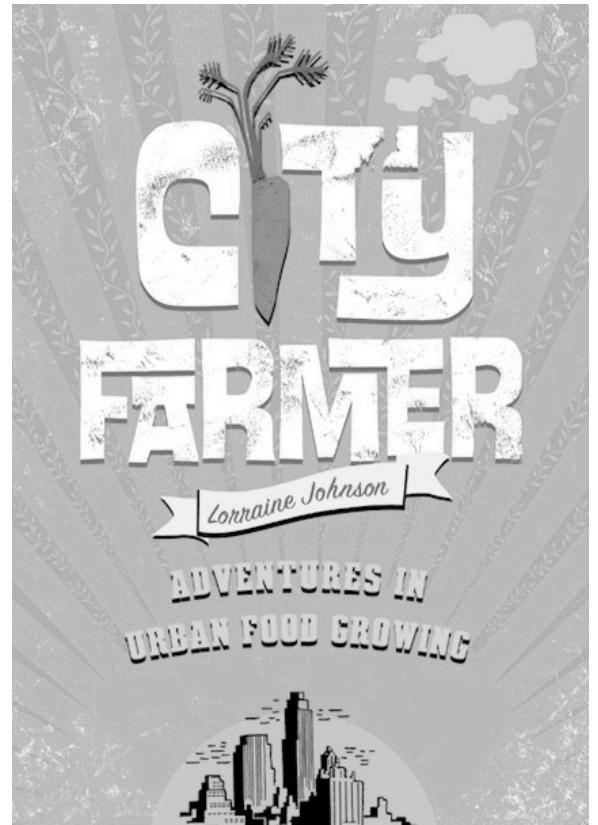
List all the ways people in your group have experienced suffering either as the one suffering or the one providing compassion. Now list all the ways that were helpful in how compassion was shared. How you currently offering that compassion in your congregation? What are ways you could expand your caring acts?

**Closing Song**      We Are Called (ELW 720)

## Closing Prayer

Holy One, we call out your name in as many ways as we can. We fix your role towards us in the ways we need. We approach you from the particular angle of our life. We do all that, not because you need to be identified, but because of our deep need, our deep wound, our deep hope. And then, we are astonished that while our names for you serve for a moment, you break beyond them in your freedom, you show yourself yet fresh beyond our utterance, you retreat into your splendor beyond our grasp. We are – by your freedom and your hiddenness – made sure yet again that you are God...beyond us, for us, but beyond us, not at our beck and call, but always in your own way. We stammer about your identity, only to learn that it is our own unsettling before you that wants naming. Beyond all our explaining and capturing and fixing you...we give you praise, we thank you for your fleshed presence in suffering love, and for our names that you give us. Amen.

*From Awed in Heaven, Rooted in Earth, prayers of Walter Brueggemann*



## Vision Practice 3

### Feed All Whose Bodies Lack Nourishment

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#### Did You Know

*1 out of every 7 individuals in South Dakota lives at or below the poverty line.*

*Combined the Sioux Falls and Rapid City food pantries served over 65,000 people last year.*

*Almost one-half of those served by food pantries in South Dakota are infants and children.*

#### Resources

**Feeding South Dakota**  
feedingsouthdakota.org

**ELCA World Hunger**  
elca.org

**Bread for the World**  
bread.org

**South Dakota Synod**  
sdsynod.org

***If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?***

*~James 2:15-16*

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#### Opening Prayer

God of Abundant Life, through your disciples, you fed the 5,000 as once you had fed your people manna in the wilderness. Day by day, God, you are our provision. As a mustard seed grows into the greatest of all plants, may the seed of your Word be grown in our life together that we would become a life-giving sign of your Kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Discussion Question(s)** *invite each person to respond to one of the following questions*

1. Have you ever struggled with growing something in your yard or in a garden?
2. Have you ever been a part of something that became much larger /better than expected?
3. Has someone ever encountered you with a small gesture that made a big difference?

**Focus Text** Mark 4:30-32

[Jesus] also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup> yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

#### Engaging the Text

"The lame will walk, the blind will see and the dead will live again..." The promises of the Kingdom of God are great. Yet, the reality of our human condition is frail. Despite the miracles and signs people have questions. What is the kingdom of God? How does it work? When will it come?

In response Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a seed. Something small and insignificant. Something by itself which can do nothing. Yet, when planted in soil, feed with water and sun, the seed becomes more. More than a combination of just seed and soil and water and sun – but instead a new creation.

Jesus' parable reminds us of a parable God told long ago through the prophet Ezekiel. "I will take a spring...I myself will plant it...in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit...under it every kind of bird will live." (Ezekiel 17:22-24)

Jesus' parable is an encouragement to the small, disregarded and seemingly insignificant disciples. What you do, who you are matters. God is at work. Kingdom acts are never done in isolation but rather always begin with God are sustained by God and brought to completion by God. "...what we will be has not yet been revealed." (1 John 3:2)

### Applying the Text to the Vision Practice

The disturbing reality of the hungry in our world is so overwhelming that the small gifts we have to offer seem inconsequential in their ability to affect change. Yet, the parable of the mustard seed reminds us that there is often more potential in small kingdom acts (such as feeding the hungry) than we would first imagine. This is true because our kingdom acts are NOT "our" kingdom acts but rather they are God's. God's work. Our hands. God is at work giving the world "daily bread". Good news! Our small seeds of compassion, when **given** away, become kingdom acts growing into "the greatest of all shrubs" providing life for all.



### Respond and Celebrate

Make two columns. In the first column list all the ways that the people of your congregation feed the hungry. This should include formal ministries, participation in other ministries and even things that you have heard people do individually. In the second column, list ideas of other things that you might be able to do in your congregation to participate in feeding the hungry of this world. Include all ideas big and small. Rejoice! Your seeds are accomplishing big things.

**Closing Song**      Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ (ELW #674)

### Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are the provider of all good things. We give you thanks for your many acts of providence and seek your forgiveness for the ways our sin have stopped all from being fed. Save and redeem us that we may be joyful signs of your abundant blessing, offering bread for the hungry and hope for the brokenhearted. We ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, the Bread of Life. Amen.