



“The Inventions of Summer”
Summer 2026 Services for Home

*You can use these services on Sunday mornings or anytime, indoors or outside, alone or with others!
May they bring you joy this summer!*

1. Gathering (the same every week)

Get ready to worship! Read to yourself or aloud:

God meets us here, in the ordinary, just as we are.
God’s love and mercy is with us always, no matter where we are, what we are doing, or how we feel.
We come to worship, to notice, to listen, to pray.
In the quiet work of creation, God is present-in what delights us and in what troubles us.
We open our hearts: to receive, to learn, to wonder, to wisdom, to the Spirit’s gentle leading.

Sing: “Praise God” (or say the words)

Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise God all creatures, high and low
Give thanks to God, in Love made known
Creator, Word, and Spirit: One!

Pray:

Holy God, Source of Life, Maker of all things, in this season of long light, warmth, and growth, we give you thanks for the beauty, the ordinary, the abundance, and even the disturbances of life. May your creation help to teach us your way: the way of praise, the way of gratitude, the way of compassion, the way of faithful prayer. We come in wonder, honesty, and hope. Amen.

2. Reading and Reflecting on God's Word

*Each week there is a scripture passage to read,
a poem by Mary Oliver on a similar theme,
and some thoughts and questions for reflection.*

July 5- Assurance

Matthew 6:28-33

Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all of his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these. If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow it's thrown into the furnace, won't God do much more for you, you people of weak faith? Therefore, don't worry and say, 'What are we going to eat?' or 'What are we going to drink?' or 'What are we going to wear?' Gentiles long for all these things. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Instead, desire first and foremost God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

“This Summer Day”

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean—

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

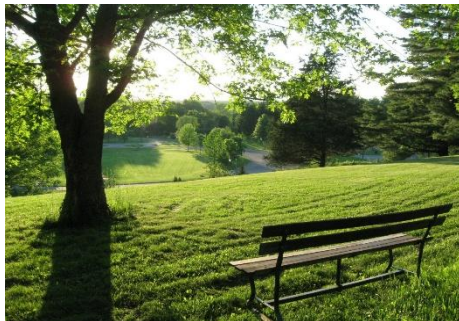
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth

instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and
complicated eyes. Now she lifts her pale forearms
and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed,
how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Reflect:

In Matthew 6, Jesus assures us of God's love and care for us, without us needing to work for it or earn it. Of course, we do need to concern ourselves somewhat with what we eat, drink, and wear. But Jesus cautions against being overly anxious and spending too much of what Oliver calls our "wild and precious life" worrying about what we don't have. Instead we are to pay attention to God's kingdom. What blessings do you notice around you on this summer day? Can you find some time to be "idle and blessed"?



July 12- Wisdom

1 Corinthians 13: 8-13

Love never fails. As for prophecies, they will be brought to an end. As for tongues, they will stop. As for knowledge, it will be brought to an end. We know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, what is partial will be brought to an end. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, reason like a child, think like a child. But now that I have become an adult, I've put an end to childish things. Now we see a reflection in a mirror; then we will see face-to-face. Now I know partially, but then I will know completely in the same way that I have been completely known. Now faith, hope, and love remain—these three things—and the greatest of these is love.

“Daisies”

It is possible, I suppose that sometime we will learn everything there is to learn: what the world is, for example, and what it means. I think this as I am crossing from one field to another, in summer, and the mockingbird is mocking me, as one who either knows enough already or knows enough to be perfectly content not knowing. Song being born of quest he knows this: he must turn silent were he suddenly assaulted with answers. Instead

oh hear his wild, caustic, tender warbling ceaselessly unanswered. At my feet the white-petalled daisies display the small suns

of their center piece, their — if you don't mind my saying so — their hearts. Of course I could be wrong, perhaps their hearts are pale and narrow and hidden in the roots. What do I know? But this: it is heaven itself to take what is given, to see what is plain; what the sun lights up willingly; for example — I think this as I reach down, not to pick but merely to touch — the suitability of the field for the daisies, and the daisies for the field.

Reflect:

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul admits something that can be hard for us humans- he doesn't know everything! There is actually great wisdom in knowing how much we don't know. We should be open-minded, and keep learning and growing throughout our lives, but we also need to get comfortable knowing there are some mysteries which we will not have the answers to in this lifetime. And yet, what we do know is significant: that the love of God is eternal- it never fails, and ever will, even when the things of this world pass away. What heavenly wisdom does "the sun light up willingly" for you in the world today? What new things do you want to learn?



July 19- Kindness

Matthew 5:43-48

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your family, what more are you doing? Don’t even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.

“Why I Wake Early”

Hello, sun in my face.

Hello, you who make the morning
and spread it over the fields
and into the faces of the tulips
and the nodding morning glories,
and into the windows of, even, the
miserable and crotchety—

best preacher that ever was,
dear star, that just happens
to be where you are in the universe
to keep us from ever-darkness,
to ease us with warm touching,

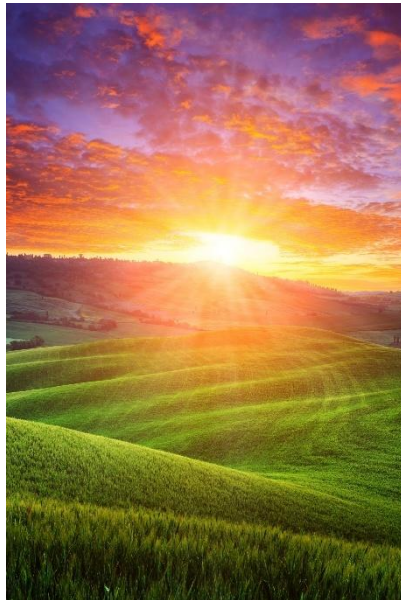
to hold us in the great hands of light—
good morning, good morning, good morning.

Watch, now, how I start the day
in happiness, in kindness.

Reflect:

Oliver calls the sun the “best preacher that ever was”; its warmth and light help her start the day in happiness and kindness. In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, he tells us to love not only our neighbours but also our enemies; and he points out that God causes the sun to rise and shine on all people.

Whether today is a bright sunny day, or one where the clouds are covering the clouds, give thanks for this gift of light and warmth, and commit to starting the day in happiness and kindness. What ways can you find to treat even those who you don’t like all that much with love and kindness?



July 26- Praying for Others

Mark 2:1-6

After a few days, Jesus went back to Capernaum, and people heard that he was at home. So many gathered that there was no longer space, not even near the door. Jesus was speaking the word to them. Some people arrived, and four of them were bringing to him a man who was paralyzed. They couldn't carry him through the crowd, so they tore off part of the roof above where Jesus was. When they had made an opening, they lowered the mat on which the paralyzed man was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven!"

"Fireflies"

At Blackwater fireflies
are not even a dime a dozen—
they are free,
and each floats and turns
among the branches of the oaks
and the swamp azaleas
looking for another
as, who doesn't?
Oh, blessings on the intimacy
inside fruition,
be it foxes
or the fireflies
or the dampness inside the petals
of a thousand flowers.
Though Eden is lost



its loveliness
remains in the heart and the imagination;
he would take her in a boat over the dark water;
she would take him to an island she knows
where the blue flag grows wild
and the grass is deep,
where the birds perch together,
feather to feather, on the bough.
And the fireflies, blinking their little lights,
hurry toward one another.
And the world continues, God willing.

Reflect:

Fireflies speak a language of love. They communicate with each other through flash patterns of yellowish light, the result of a chemical reaction in their lower abdomen. Each one has a unique flash and they find each other through their twinkling conversation. When we say: "I'll pray for you," it is also a language of love. This is the offering of the gift of carrying the other, of interceding for them. The gospel story in Mark tells of four people who were literally carrying their friend and placing him before Jesus. Isn't that a great image of praying for others with body and soul? Sometimes praying for others, placing our concerns before God, is the only thing we can do, the only way we can cope with our own fear or anger or sense of uselessness in the face of pain. Other times, we are called to embody our prayers with prayer-filled action. Who are you praying for today? Listen and see if you are invited to simply leave your concern with God, or if God is calling you to act in some way.

August 2- Transformation

Romans 12:1-2

So, beloved, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

“The Swan”

Did you too see it, drifting, all night,
on the black river?

Did you see it in the morning,
rising into the silvery air –

An armful of white blossoms,

A perfect commotion of silk and linen as it leaned
into the bondage of its wings;

a snowbank, a bank of lilies,

Biting the air with its black beak?

Did you hear it, fluting and whistling

A shrill dark music –

like the rain pelting the trees – like a waterfall

Knifing down the black ledges?

And did you see it, finally, just under the clouds –

A white cross Streaming across the sky, its feet

Like black leaves,

its wings Like the stretching light of the river?

And did you feel it, in your heart,
how it pertained to everything?
And have you too finally figured out
what beauty is for?
And have you changed your life?

Reflect:

Oliver's poem *The Swan* describes the beautiful transformation of a swan taking flight- from quietly drifting on the river at night, to the commotion of takeoff, to the grace of it streaming across the sky like "a white cross". And then she asks if witnessing this beauty causes change and transformation in us as well. In the letter to the Romans, Paul also encourages transformation- a renewal of our minds to be in line with God's will, instead of the patterns of the world. However, not all of us are comfortable with change, even positive change. How do you feel about the transformation Paul speaks about- anxious, hopeful, unsure? Practice seeing the world through God's eyes today- look for what God would find "good and pleasing and mature".



August 9- Justice

Ephesians 6:10-18

Be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. Put on God's armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. So, stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word. Offer prayers and petitions in the Spirit all the time. Stay alert by hanging in there and praying for all believers.

"Egrets"

Where the path closed
down and over,
through the scumbled leaves,
fallen branches,
through the knotted catbrier,
I kept going. Finally I could
not save my arms from thorns;
the mosquitoes smelled me,
hot and wounded, and came
wheeling and whining.



And that's how I came to the edge of the pond:
black and empty except for a spindle
of bleached reeds at the far shore which, as I
looked, wrinkled suddenly into three egrets – – –
a shower of white fire!

Even half-asleep they had such faith in the world
that had made them – – –

tilting through the water, unruffled, sure,
by the law of their faith not logic,
they opened their wings softly and stepped
over every dark thing.

Reflect:

It can be hard to live out our faith in a troubled world- as if we are struggling down an overgrown path, attacked by thorns and mosquitoes. The letter to the Ephesians uses the image of enclothed warriors to encourage beleaguered Christians to live faithfully in a hard world. We hear the bad news in the world today: violence, unrest, hatred, the crumbling of beloved institutions, the cost of food, the threats to community, the culture of loneliness. This teaching calls us to embodied action- to wake up and join the struggle against the powers of this world that deny justice for all. And just like sturdy shoes and protective clothing would make it easier to travel down an overgrown, mosquito-y path, this passage calls us to clothe ourselves with justice, faith, and truth, to help us “keep going” and follow in Jesus’ Way. What areas of justice are you most concerned with? How do you “clothe” and protect yourself while living in a world that is often opposed to the values of our faith?

August 16- Praise

Psalm 113:1-4

Praise the Lord!

You who serve the Lord—praise!

Praise the Lord's name!

Let the Lord's name be blessed
from now until forever from now!

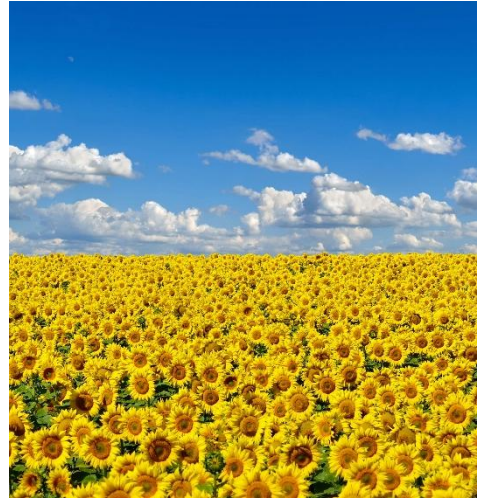
From sunrise to sunset,
let the Lord's name be praised!

The Lord is high over all the nations;
God's glory is higher than the skies!

“The Sunflowers”

Come with me
into the field of sunflowers.
Their faces are burnished disks,
their dry spines
creak like ship masts,
their green leaves,
so heavy and many,
fill all day with the sticky
sugars of the sun.

Come with me
to visit the sunflowers,
they are shy
but want to be friends;
they have wonderful stories
of when they were young –
the important weather,
the wandering crows.
Don't be afraid



to ask them questions!
Their bright faces,
which follow the sun,
will listen, and all
those rows of seeds –
each one a new life!
hope for a deeper acquaintance;
each of them, though it stands
in a crowd of many,
like a separate universe,
is lonely, the long work
of turning their lives
into a celebration
is not easy. Come
and let us talk with those modest faces,
the simple garments of leaves,
the coarse roots in the earth
so uprightly burning.



Reflect:

The authors of the Psalms often compare God's glory to the glory of the heavens- the sun, moon, and stars. Psalm 113 encourages us to praise God from sunrise to sunset- like sunflowers who turn their faces to follow the sun! Do you have a daily rhythm or routine? Are there times of the day when you find it easiest to pray and talk to God- as you wake, or before you sleep? If you don't already, try adding prayer or spiritual practice to your daily rhythm. As you set your face to the sun today, how many ways will you find to praise the Maker?

August 23- Gratitude

Colossians 3:12-17

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.

“Beans”

They're not like peaches or squash.
Plumpness isn't for them. They like
being lean, as if for the narrow
path. The beans themselves sit quietly inside their
green pods. Instinctively one picks with care,
never tearing down the fine vine,
never noticing their crisp bodies, or feeling their
willingness for
the pot, for the fire.

I have thought sometimes that
something—I can't name it—

watches as I walk the rows, accepting the gift of their lives to assist mine.

I know what you think: this is foolishness. They're only vegetables.

Even the blossoms with which they begin are small and pale, hardly significant. Our hands, or minds, our

feet hold more intelligence. With this I have no quarrel.

But, what about virtue?



Reflect:

Paul reminds us to be thankful. The practice of gratitude reminds us that there are so many gifts in the world. Big gifts and small. Oliver reminds us that when we are picking beans we rarely think about “their willingness for the pot, for the fire” and “the gift of their lives to assist ours.” We honour the gifts we receive when we say thanks. But gratitude does not end with the expression of our thanks. What comes after thanksgiving? We have a responsibility to keep gifts in motion by giving back when we have received. Take a moment to imagine all the gifts in circulation in all of Creation. What gifts do you want to give thanks to God for today? And how can you offer some of your own gifts back?

August 30- Lament

Psalm 137:1-4

Alongside Babylon's streams,

there we sat down,

crying because we remembered Zion.

We hung our lyres up

in the trees there

because that's where our captors asked us to sing;

our tormentors requested songs of joy:

"Sing us a song about Zion!" they said.

But how could we possibly sing

the Lord's song on foreign soil?

"Wild Geese"

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours,
and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,

the world offers itself to your imagination,

calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—

over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

Reflect:

Old certainties waver. Life feels raw. Events haunt us. Tragedies overwhelm. We feel disorientated; we lose our bearings, fall into depression, our hearts harden, our faith thins. God seems to vanish. This is the world of lament. Many of the Psalms are laments, either personal or community laments. We tend to make our prayers grateful and respectful, but it is a well-established Biblical practice to cry out to God in despair, doubt, or anger in the midst of hardship! God can handle all our prayers of lament, and the very act of praying draws us closer to God, even if we feel alone. In Psalm 137, the author is in exile, looking back at how things were, and wondering how they could possibly “sing the Lord’s songs” in this new reality. And yet the lament they offer is itself a song and prayer handed down to us in scripture! What laments do you have to offer to God today?



September 6- Shine

Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how will it become salty again? It’s good for nothing except to be thrown away and trampled under people’s feet. You are the light of the world. A city on top of a hill can’t be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

“When I Am Among the Trees”

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness,
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.
Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

Reflect:

We often call Jesus “The Light of the World”, and yet, in this passage, he calls us “the light of the world” and tells us to “let our light shine”! This can feel a bit intimidating, as if we are called to be centre stage with a spotlight on us, or keep ourselves busy with endless good deeds to bring glory to God. Oliver’s poem speaks of the glory and gladness of trees simply being as they were created to be, and how they teach her to slow down, to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine. If you’re able to, spend some time “among the trees” yourself today. I’ve reflected on how trees are trees in all seasons- in the blossoms of spring, the fullness of summer, the glory of autumn, and even the bareness of winter- we never say a tree isn’t right or enough. Could it be that simple for us as well? As this is Labour Day weekend, and the end of summer, try to slow down and go easy. Remember that you are already filled with the light of God, and that letting your light shine is as simple as being yourself, and not hiding yourself away.



3. Closing (the same every week)

Closing Prayer:

God, we praise you for the beauty of your creation for all that grows, all that breathes, all that shines, all your good gifts....

(name things you are thankful to God for)

We praise you for your presence in our daily lives in moments of joy, in quiet awakenings, in small and unexpected blessings.....

(name places you have seen God at work)

We pray for our world, longing for your light to shine in places of hurt and fear....

(pray for someone or some situation for which you have a deep concern)

God, in all times and places, turn us toward your light, give us what we need...

(pray for what you need today)

Teach us to live as people of praise, turning toward you, and helping as we are able.

We lift up all these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

*If you wish, finish by saying **The Lord's Prayer***

Sing:

*Sing "Praise God" again,
or sing or listen to a favourite song!*

*Thank you for worshipping today!
As you say this blessing, picture others from our
community of faith praying these same words:*

Blessing

May we turn, again and again,
toward the eternal light of Christ.
May the Spirit keep us united,
with one another, with creation,
and with our Creator.
May our lives become a song of praise,
not only in words,
but in the way we notice,
the way we bless,
the way we live. Amen.





A Note from Kristin:

The idea for these services came from a four-week Summer Sabbath Series by Janice MacLean of “The Prayer Bench”, which was purchased by Prairie to Pine Regional Council for congregations in the Region to use this summer, and which I’ve adapted and expanded for the full summer. The series used several pieces of poetry by Mary Oliver, including in its name:

*“There is no end, believe me!
to **the inventions of summer**,
to the happiness your body is willing to bear.”
Mary Oliver, “The Roses”*

Mary Oliver (1935-2019) was an award-winning poet. Most of her poetry is not explicitly Christian, but as she reflects on the sacred found in the beautiful and ordinary world around us, she touches on Christian themes such as awe, love, resurrection, prayer, and gratitude. Her work can be seen as a form of modern-day scripture and a call to mindful prayer and spiritual practice. I hope you enjoy her poems paired with scripture throughout this series!