

Clifton Presbyterian Church is a welcoming Christian Community driven by compassion, generosity, resilience and service to others.

Breath Prayer:

INHALE: Grant me courage, EXHALE: that I may be brave.



Esther by Sarah Beth Baca Art sarahbethart.com

September 13, 2026
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

WE GATHER TOGETHER TO WORSHIP GOD

*Words in **BOLD** indicate the congregation reading together. Words of the worship leader are in PLAIN type. An asterisk * indicates that the congregation may stand, as you wish.*

Gathering Song GtG 399 **God Welcomes All**
God welcomes all, strangers and friends;
God's love is strong and it never ends.

Time of Prayer and Care

Prelude

*** Call to Worship** *from Psalm 124*

One: If God were not with us,

All: the troubles of our world would have swallowed us whole.

One: If God were not with us,

All: the sorrows of our times would have swept us away.

One: Let us worship God!

All: We offer our gratitude and praise.

***Presbyterian Hymnal 457 I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art** *vv 1, 3, 5*

**I greet thee, who my sure Redeemer art,
my only trust and Savior of my heart,
who pain didst undergo for my poor sake;
I pray thee from our hearts all cares to take.**

**Thou art the life, by which alone we live,
and all our substance and our strength receive;
sustain us by thy faith and by thy power,
and give us strength in every trying hour.**

**Our hope is in no other save in thee;
our faith is built upon thy promise free;
Lord, give us peace, and make us calm and sure,
that in thy strength we evermore endure.**

Prayer of Confession

One: We trust in God's steadfast love and mercy that holds us in spite of anything we may have done wrong. Confident of that love, let us confess our sins. Let us pray.

All: Creating and rescuing God, your power amazes us. Yet even in our amazement, we take too long to turn to you, forgetting that you are the power that makes and saves and sustains us. Even when we claim your power, we often do so for our own success and comfort, ignoring your command to use your power on behalf of the weak, the small, and the vulnerable. In Jesus Christ, you show us that you are on the side of all people, but never at the expense of the weakest among us. Forgive us when we try to hoard you for ourselves and try to control who has access to your love. Forgive us when our greed, our control, and our scandals keep others from knowing you. Redeem us and transform us, O God. Open our hearts, our lives, and our ministries, that we may become a doorway to your realm.

Assurance of God's Grace

One: God turns our sorrow into gladness and our times of mourning into celebration.
God hears the prayer of faith. Be confident as we pray for one another,
for God heals us and forgives us.

All: Thanks be to God for God's goodness and grace!

Sing Glory GtG 582 Glory to God, Whose Goodness Shines on Me

**Glory to God, whose goodness shines on me,
and to the Son, whose grace has pardoned me,
and to the Spirit, whose love has set me free.**

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen.

The Peace of Christ

One: Since God has forgiven us in Christ, let us share signs of reconciliation and peace.
The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

All: And also with you.

One: Let us share that peace with one another.

*Those in the sanctuary are invited to greet those around you.
Those on zoom are invited to offer greetings in the chat.*

Cornerstone for Kids

Elder Nikki Lehman will lead the children (preschool – kindergarten, ages 3 – 6 years) through a spiritual journey of learning by listening, reading, and discussing bible stories as well as creating fun, hands-on crafts! The children will be excused from the worship service. Children are also always welcome to remain in worship.

Offering our Gifts to God

For those who would like to make a physical offering, the offering plates are available in the middle of the sanctuary. Donations can also be made online. www.cliftonpc.org

One: Jesus Christ is on our side, offering us the love of God—a love that gives us all we have, a love that makes us all we are. Jesus Christ is with us in every circumstance, suffering with us when we are in trouble, and rejoicing with us when we are glad. The generosity of Christ calls us to lives of gratitude and generosity. In Jesus Christ we are given new life. Let us celebrate this life by giving generously to the work of God's redeeming love. Let us pray.

All: Giving God, we can never match your generosity. When we are in need, you are at our side, present to us even in our darkest moments. You rescue us

from harm. Make us into a people who celebrate your goodness, drawing others into the celebration of your many blessings. Receive our offerings, even if they are as small as a drink for someone who thirsts. Transform them into the mystery of your reign here and now on earth, in the name of Jesus, your greatest gift. Amen.

WE HEAR THE WORD OF GOD

Prayer for Illumination 322 Spirit of the Living God

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Melt me; mold me; fill me; use me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Scripture Reading Esther 3:1-4:17 (NRSVUE)

^{3:1} Sometime later, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, Hammedatha the Agagite's son, by promoting him above all the officials who worked with him. ² All the royal workers at the King's Gate would kneel and bow facedown to Haman because the king had so ordered. But Mordecai didn't kneel or bow down. ³ So the royal workers at the King's Gate said to Mordecai, "Why don't you obey the king's order?" ⁴ Day after day they questioned him, but he paid no attention to them. So they let Haman know about it just to see whether or not Mordecai's words would hold true. (He had told them that he was a Jew.) ⁵ When Haman himself saw that Mordecai didn't kneel or bow down to him, he became very angry. ⁶ But he decided not to kill only Mordecai, for people had told him Mordecai's race. Instead, he planned to wipe out all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. ⁷ In the first month (that is, the month of Nisan) in the twelfth year of the rule of King Ahasuerus, servants threw pur, namely, dice, in front of Haman to find the best day for his plan. They tried every day and every month, and the dice chose the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar).

⁸ Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "A certain group of people exist in pockets among the other peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of everyone else, and they refuse to obey the king's laws. There's no good reason for the king to put up with them any longer. ⁹ If the king wishes, let a written order be sent out to destroy them, and I will hand over ten thousand kikkars of silver to those in charge of the king's business. The silver can go into the king's treasuries."

¹⁰ The king removed his royal ring from his finger and handed it to Haman, Hammedatha the Agagite's son, enemy of the Jews. ¹¹ The king said to Haman, "Both the money and the people are under your power. Do as you like with them." ¹² So in the first month, on the thirteenth day, royal scribes were summoned to write down everything that Haman ordered. The orders were for the king's rulers and the governors in charge of each province, as well as for the officials of each people. They wrote in the alphabet of each province and in the language of each people. They wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed the order with the king's royal ring. ¹³ Fast runners were to take the order to all the provinces of the king. The order commanded people to wipe out, kill, and destroy all the Jews, both young and old, even women and little

children. This was to happen on a single day—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar). They were also to seize their property. ¹⁴ A copy of the order was to become law in each province and to be posted in public for all peoples to read. The people were to be ready for this day to do as the order commanded. ¹⁵ Driven by the king's order, the runners left Susa just as the law became public in the fortified part of Susa. While the king and Haman sat down to have a drink, the city of Susa was in total shock.

^{4:1} When Mordecai learned what had been done, he tore his clothes, dressed in mourning clothes, and put ashes on his head. Then he went out into the heart of the city and cried out loudly and bitterly. ² He went only as far as the King's Gate because it was against the law for anyone to pass through it wearing mourning clothes. ³ At the same time, in every province and place where the king's order and his new law arrived, a very great sadness came over the Jews. They gave up eating and spent whole days weeping and crying out loudly in pain. Many Jews lay on the ground in mourning clothes and ashes. ⁴ When Esther's female servants and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, the queen's whole body showed how upset she was. She sent everyday clothes for Mordecai to wear instead of mourning clothes, but he rejected them. ⁵ Esther then sent for Hathach, one of the royal eunuchs whose job it was to wait on her. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was going on and why he was acting this way. ⁶ Hathach went out to Mordecai, to the city square in front of the King's Gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him. He spelled out the exact amount of silver that Haman promised to pay into the royal treasury. It was in exchange for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave Hathach a copy of the law made public in Susa concerning the Jews' destruction so that Hathach could show it to Esther and report it to her. Through him Mordecai ordered her to go to the king to seek his kindness and his help for her people. ⁹ Hathach came back and told Esther what Mordecai had said.

¹⁰ In reply Esther ordered Hathach to tell Mordecai: ¹¹ "All the king's officials and the people in his provinces know that there's a single law in a case like this. Any man or woman who comes to the king in the inner courtyard without being called is to be put to death. Only the person to whom the king holds out the gold scepter may live. In my case, I haven't been called to come to the king for the past thirty days."

¹² When they told Mordecai Esther's words, ¹³ he had them respond to Esther: "Don't think for one minute that, unlike all the other Jews, you'll come out of this alive simply because you are in the palace. ¹⁴ In fact, if you don't speak up at this very important time, relief and rescue will appear for the Jews from another place, but you and your family will die. But who knows? Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family."

¹⁵ Esther sent back this word to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa and tell them to give up eating to help me be brave. They aren't to eat or drink anything for three whole days, and I myself will do the same, along with my female servants. Then, even though it's against the law, I will go to the king; and if I am to die, then die I will." ¹⁷ So Mordecai left where he was and did exactly what Esther had ordered him.

One: For the Word of God in scripture, for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Diane Walton Hendricks

**More Than Meets the Eye: Discovering God at Work in Esther
Help Being Brave**

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD AND ARE SENT TO THE WORLD

Presbyterian Hymnal 420 God of Grace and God of Glory *vv 1, 2*

**God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient church's story;
bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.**

**Lo! the hosts of evil round us
scorn thy Christ, assail his ways!
From the fears that long have bound us
free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days,
for the living of these days.**

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

**All: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead
us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**

Minute for Ministries

Ring of the Bell

Charge and Benediction

Benediction Response GtG 543

O Christ, Surround Me *vv 1, 4*
God, be the love to search and keep me;
God, be the prayer to move my voice;
God, be the strength to now uphold me:
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.

Walking behind to hem my journey,
going ahead to light my way,
and from beneath, above, and all ways:
O Christ, surround me; O Christ, surround me.

Thank you for joining us for worship this morning. We can be reached at office@cliftonpc.org

Liturgy by Amy Hunter from [MinistryMatters](#)

Permission to podcast/stream the music in this service obtained from One License #A- 721138 and CCLI License 20618208.

Thanks to those leading us in worship
Hosts: Valerie Schalk and Joanne Woodward
Liturgist: Joyce Rarumangkay
Prayer Notetaker: Mark Lorey
Technical Team: Jen Basham
Nursery Volunteer: Nikki Lehman
Mission Elder: Kimberly Davis
Sanctuary Flowers: Open

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