In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Oh, my! It does my heart good to be with you all again. Parish Secretary Sean Curnyn has kept me up-to-date with the prayer needs of our congregation and so I have been praying for you. And that is something we can do for one another even when we are separated from one another. But it is even nicer to be really present with you here in church.

Before I launch into my sermon, let me thank you for all of the support you have given me over the past five weeks. I fell backwards down hard stairs here at the church five weeks ago. Since then I have had three surgeries, because I broke both of my wrists and my right elbow. I feel I am on the mend and I am delighted to be back with you here at Immanuel. I want you to know that Carol and I have been awfully grateful for all of your prayers, cards, emails, visits, chocolate, and fruit baskets. I have been touched and uplifted by your help.

Now let me turn to my sermon for this morning. We have splendid Bible Lessons for today. Especially I love the conclusion to our Gospel Lesson. There Jesus gives his beautiful invitation to a weary and heavy-laden humanity to come onto him. And if we come unto him, he will in no wise cast us out. Rather the angels in heaven will rejoice that we have found and come to our Good Shepherd. His yoke is not heavy. Indeed, I sometimes wonder how we could make it in life without his help. I join many of you in my testimony that I have tried to walk with Jesus Christ, to bear his yoke with some true measure of integrity, and I have found it to be a good walk.

For my sermon text, I am drawn to the last verse of our Psalm for today. That is Psalm 145. You can find it there in our worship folder. It is the last verse which is especially on my heart. It goes this way:

\[15\text{The LORD upholds all | those who fall;}^*  
\text{he lifts up those who | are bowed down.}\]

You understand, I bet, why I am drawn to this verse. I am awfully grateful for what it says – awfully grateful that our Lord “upholds all those who fall.” I have fallen, perhaps you have fallen too, and so I am glad to hear that our Lord upholds those who have fallen.

Let me reflect on this verse three times. I want to approach this divine promise three times – once from the point of view of God’s creation, second from the perspective of our human bodies, and finally, from the spiritual and
moral perspective, for it is the way of us human beings that we can fall not only physically but also spiritually. My theme is that it is good to know that our Lord upholds us even when we fall, is gracious and kind toward us even when we fall, and that Jesus welcomes even the fallen “to come unto him.” He will give us rest. Praise God, he will give us rest.

So, first: let’s consider this divine promise from the point of view of God’s creation. In Romans Chapter 8, Saint Paul speaks of a groaning, a cosmic sorrow.

22We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:22-23, NRSV)

He says that all of creation is groaning and waiting for the liberation of the children of God. Things are not yet as they ought to be. Since the fall of Adam and Eve in the beginning, things have not been right. They have not been right for humanity, and they have not been right for nature. The sunlight is not as clear and soft as it should be, the air is not as clean as it should be, the trees and flowers and vegetation are stunted in various ways compared to God’s desire for them, the oceans and the streams and the lakes are not as clean as they ought to be, and the animals of God’s world are not as happy as they should be. Whales, bears and tigers and all kinds of unknown creatures living their lives across our planet: they are struggling in various ways because of what the Bible calls “the fall.” Adam and Eve fell into sin, and we, their descendants, follow them all too much in falling into sin. God’s creation suffers because of the fall.

Recently, Carol and I returned from a trip to Alaska. This was a long-awaited trip. We had saved up our pennies for this trip for a long time in order to celebrate our 35th wedding anniversary and our birthdays. So we have returned from Alaska. Before heading out, Father Green – that is, Reverend Dr. Thomas Nelson Green, who preaches and worships with us here at Immanuel – Father Green had told me that even people who are ordinarily indifferent to nature find a visit to Alaska to be breathtaking. And this is so. A visit to Alaska can put us in mind of the beauty of God’s creation, of the grandeur of God’s creation. But again, God’s creation is groaning and waiting and hoping for the liberation of the children of God. Nature awaits salvation. Nature awaits healing and better times. Our divine promise in Psalm 145 tells us that the Lord upholds those hopes. This includes our whole world and all of nature.

The healing of nature means healing for humanity too. There is a longing in the human soul for beauty. But many people in this world do not have
enough beauty. They live in cramped quarters, with too much noise outside, too much crime outside, two little beauty in their lives. Well, the uplifting of a fallen creation means that our world is going to become beautiful once again. And this will be good for the souls of many people.

Let me move on to a second perspective on the divine promise that our Lord lifts up those who fall. This time let’s look at the promise from the point of view of our bodies. One of the fun passages in the Old Testament is about Moses at the end of his life. The Bible says about Moses that when the Lord was ready to lay Moses to rest and to take him up to heaven, Moses was still a healthy man. He was a hundred and twenty years old and yet, as the Bible says, his eye was not dimmed and his natural strength was not abated (Deuteronomy 34:7). Now why do you suppose the Bible mentions these details about the clearness of Moses’s sight and the retaining of his natural strength? I think the reason the Bible speaks of these things is that they are so rare in our world. For most of us as we get older our eyes dim and our strength declines. Even for the young, their strength can decline, their eyes can dim. And they can be subject to illness and injury.

Here at Immanuel I have been blessed to see many examples of people aging gracefully. But now that I am getting older myself I find that it is no easy thing to be getting older. It takes discipline. It takes exercise. It takes some attention to diet. It takes trying not to fall or to injure yourself in other ways. But even when all these things are done, still our bodies decline and fall in various ways as the years go by. I am grateful for today’s divine promise about the Lord of holding those who have fallen because many of us have fallen and declined, and if we have not yet declined, we might well face it in the future. But it is good to know that our Lord upholds those who have fallen.

Think of the ministry of Jesus. We know that he talked and he preached and he cast out demons. But let us also count as precious the stories of Jesus healing the sick and the injured. Jesus seemed drawn to those who were suffering, whether in body or soul. Think of that man at the pool of Bethesda – the one who lay as an invalid for thirty-eight years (John 5). When the angel stirred the water, he could not get to the pool in time to be healed. I understand that. In any foot race now, I bet I would come in last. I would not make it to the pool first in order to be healed. So it was with this poor man. But no matter. When Jesus came on the stage, Jesus came to the poor man. Jesus cares about our bodies. And so he is the one who can in good concrete fashion uphold those who have fallen.

Even if they have fallen into death, Jesus can uphold them. It so happens that my dear friend and teacher Rev. Dr. Robert W. Jenson is in hospice care at home now in Princeton. For more than half my life I have been blessed by Dr. Jenson and his wife, Blanche. Now it seems that the Lord is laying him to rest. But the good news of today’s text is that the Lord can uplift those who fall,
even those who fall into death. And we know that Jesus, because of his love, not only can but will raise up his people. Even death must surrender before the power, authority, and goodness of Jesus. So that is the second point: our Lord upholds our dear old bodies, even when they fall, even when they fall into death.

Now let’s turn to the third perspective on the divine promise that our Lord upholds the fallen. This time we speak of fallen men, of fallen women. We human beings are capable of falling into sin, even into grievous sin. Someday down the road, when we have regained our health and peace and integrity, we will look back on these fallen days with regret. Perhaps we even regret these fallen days now, while in the very midst of them. Because of our sin we are hurting others, even people dear to us, and we are hurting ourselves. We know it. We know that we could be living better lives. We know that we could be bearing the name of Jesus Christ with more integrity.

What is to be done? Answer: we are to come on to Jesus Christ. He bids us to come onto him. Every sin-sick soul should understand, and in understanding be pleased to know, that Jesus bids us to come unto him. It will mean laying down our sin. It will mean the start of a life of repentance. But is not that what we really want? Do we not want to live better lives, to live lives that are more a blessing to others and to ourselves and lives that do not constitute a burden on the world?

Do not think that any of us has fallen so far that the invitation of Jesus does not apply to us – that his invitation could not apply to such as us. Jesus offers no qualification on his invitation. He does not call simply the righteous. Rather he calls those who are heavy burdened and weary, and if any of us should be weary of our sins and our own unworthy practices and habits, then we are exactly the people Jesus has in mind when he says, come unto me.

The portion of Psalm 145 we sang today began with a beautiful expression of the kindness of our Lord. That first verse goes this way:

8The LORD is gracious and full | of compassion,*
   slow to anger and | of great kindness.

Think of this: think of the magnitude of the claim here. Our text says that our Lord is gracious and full of compassion slow to anger and of great kindness. Furthermore the text goes ahead to speak in the most universal of terms. It speaks of the Lord’s love for everyone. Listen to the great verse again:

9The LORD is loving to | everyone*
   and his compassion is over | all his works.

You and I are among his works. We are the product of our triune God’s creation, salvation, and sanctification. We were created by him and he looks
upon us with love, even though we have fallen and are too often unworthy of such love -- of such love that led Jesus to the cross for you and me. And to him belongs the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.