

Prayerful Reflections

A Lent Devotional for 2023



Edited by Julia Styles

Spring 2023

Prayerful Reflections: A Lent Devotional

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A note from the editor

Prayerful Reflections is a daily resource for connecting with God and the larger Christian community during the season of Lent, the 45 days prior to Easter. Christians around the world practice Lent as a way to meditate/reflect on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how Jesus influences our lives today.

Inspired by the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina*, or sacred listening, each daily reflection will be an opportunity to **Read** the Bible, **Reflect** on the message, **Respond** to what we have heard, **and Rest** in the love of God. This devotional could be read independently or with a community. If you would like to connect virtually, the reflections are posted daily at www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com/blog with opportunities to comment.

You are welcome to share this free resource with anyone you like, just send them the link www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com/prayerful-reflections and they will be able to download a free PDF version of *Prayerful Reflections: A Daily Devotional for Lent 2023*.

I started publishing *Prayerful Reflections* in 2021 as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the new reality of socially-distanced churches. An online devotional seemed like the appropriate way for Christians from around the world to connect in their shared identity in Christ, especially during Lent and Advent. I also published *Prayerful Reflections* out of a deep yearning to share my thoughts about God and to amplify the voices of female theologians. You will notice that all 45 authors presented in this devotional are women. Jesus called women to proclaim the Good News to the world, not just to women or children, but also to men. So although this devotional is written by all women, it is meant for ALL people.

The theologies and interpretations of scripture held in these pages are valuable and worth reading and investing your time and thought. The women represented in *Prayerful Reflections* are pastors, chaplains, authors, spiritual directors, teachers, parents and community leaders. We range in age, ethnicity, race, denominational background, political and theological stances, and are from varied locations across North America. What do we have in common? We all follow Jesus and have been prompted by the Holy Spirit to share the insight God has given us through scripture.

I want to thank all of the women who made this volume of *Prayerful Reflections* possible. Your time, thought, prayers and insight are invaluable. I also want to thank the family and friends that supported me and all of the authors, so that we could have the time and space to contribute to this book.

-Rev. Julia L. Styles

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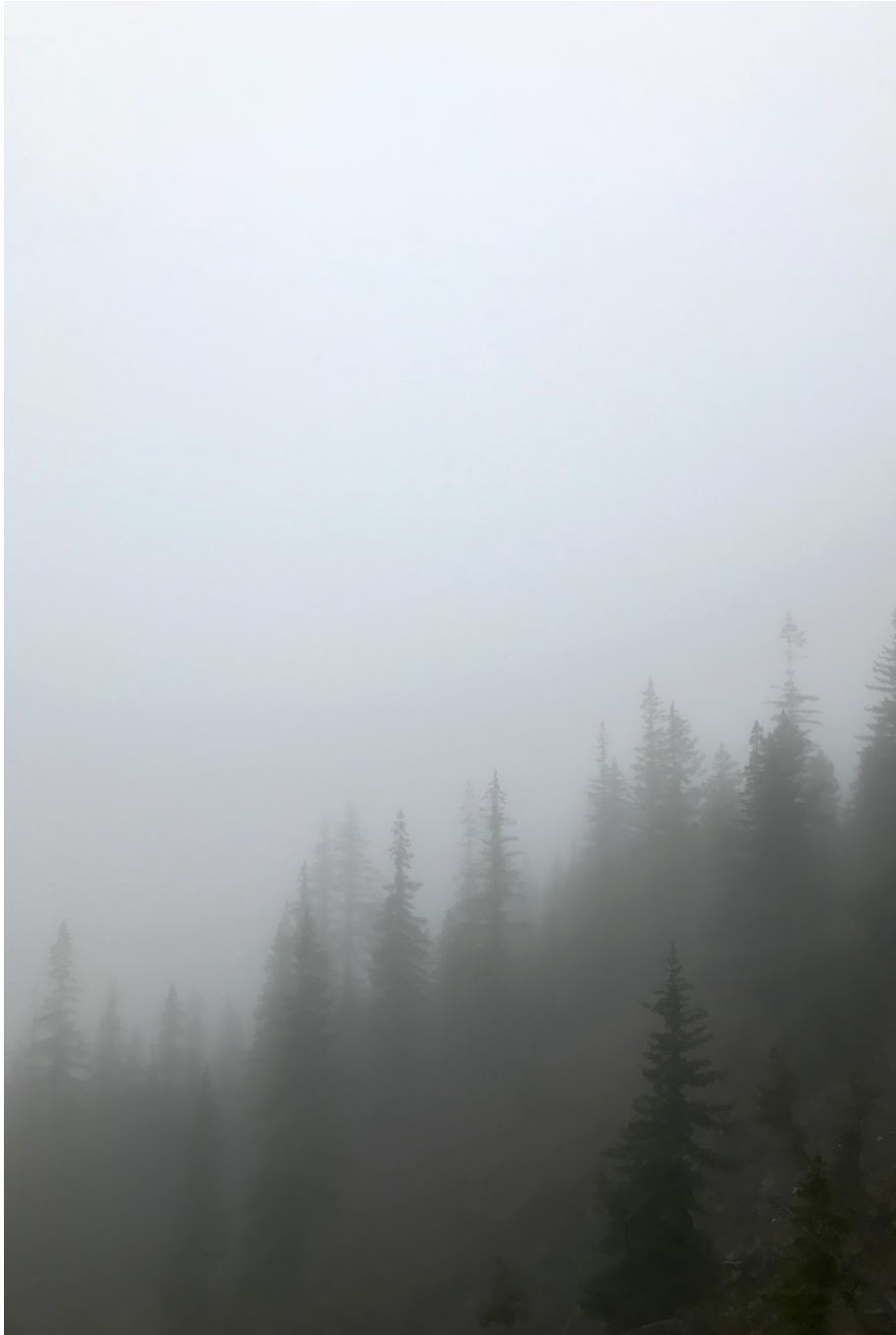
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The Week of Ash Wednesday

Wednesday, February 22 - Saturday, February 25, 2023



A Lent Reflection for Ash Wednesday

By Melanie Myatt

Lectionary reading for 2/22/2023: [Joel 2:1-2, 12-17](#); [2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:1](#); [Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21](#)

Selected passage: [Joel 2:1-2, 12-17](#)

Read

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17, *New Living Translation*

Sound the trumpet in Jerusalem!!
Raise the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let everyone tremble in fear
because the day of the Lord is upon us.

It is a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of thick clouds and deep blackness.
Suddenly, like dawn spreading across the
mountains,
a great and mighty army appears.
Nothing like it has been seen before
or will ever be seen again.

That is why the Lord says,
“Turn to me now, while there is time.
Give me your hearts.
Come with fasting, weeping, and
mourning.

Don't tear your clothing in your grief,
but tear your hearts instead.”
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is merciful and compassionate,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing
love.
He is eager to relent and not punish.

Who knows? Perhaps he will give you a
reprieve,

sending you a blessing instead of this
curse.
Perhaps you will be able to offer grain and
wine
to the Lord your God as before.

Blow the ram's horn in Jerusalem!
Announce a time of fasting;
call the people together
for a solemn meeting.

Gather all the people—
the elders, the children, and even the
babies.
Call the bridegroom from his quarters
and the bride from her private room.

Let the priests, who minister in the Lord's
presence,
stand and weep between the entry room to
the Temple and the altar.
Let them pray, “Spare your people, Lord!
Don't let your special possession become
an object of mockery.
Don't let them become a joke for
unbelieving foreigners who say,
‘Has the God of Israel left them?’”

Reflect

As a child, I struggled with holidays. The idealistic dreamer in me thought that everything about the whole day had to be absolutely perfect for the holiday to be perfect. Parents shouldn't argue, my sister shouldn't get mad at me, I should have the perfect outfit to wear, and the whole day should be filled with smiles and sunshine.

Maybe you can see why I was so often disappointed.

But now I view holidays—and all days, of course—differently. I can now make space for good feelings alongside some bad feelings. Maybe the meal I cook doesn't turn out perfectly, but I am happy for those who gather around the table. Maybe one person gets a little mad at someone briefly, but there is an opportunity for forgiveness and love, and we move on.

In my old way of thinking, Ash Wednesday wouldn't be considered a "holiday" at all. A day set aside to consider that I came from dust, and I will return to dust one day? A day to consider my fallenness as a human being? Give me the sunshine and sparkles of a day like Valentine's Day instead..

When we read through this passage in Joel, however, I see the richness and blessing that comes from acknowledging the ugliness in our lives (verse 12) so that we can lay it down before God and experience God's tender mercy, compassion and forgiveness, and, oh, that unfailing love (verse 13).

The holidays that I always hoped for and never experienced promised only a shell of happiness. I wanted to pretend, even for just a day, that everything in my life and my family was perfect. But it was always only a pretense, and that is why I never succeeded in having my perfect day. Our reality of shame and guilt remained under the surface no matter how smiley we tried to act. Ash Wednesday is a day for us all to name the hard reality of our sinfulness *and* remember that we are loved in the midst of that reality. God sees us as we really, truly are and provides a path out of that ugliness and shame.

We have leaders and representatives who do not want to model for us repentance, mourning, and grief for bad behavior, either currently, or in our nation's past. We are experiencing a movement where our kids are protected from feeling "bad" or "sorry" for sins.

The richness and the blessing come from naming our sins, from mourning our mistakes, either as individuals or as a nation, and from finding a path toward God's forgiveness and love. Ash Wednesday may actually be a day more about love than Valentine's Day. Ash Wednesday is a day to remember that you are both imperfect *and* deeply loved. You came from dust, you will return to dust, *and* Jesus died so that you could live. Ash Wednesday is just the beginning of the Love Letter that promises that nothing can separate us from God's love.

Respond

Is there anything you have been holding onto as “unforgivable”? What would it be like to offer that up to God today and see how God responds?

Sit in stillness. Ask God for an image of God’s love for you. Rest in God’s enjoyment of you today.

Rest

God, sometimes it is hard to hold both the truth of our sinfulness and your great and amazing love for us together. Sometimes we hold more tightly to one than the other. Only by holding them both together do we begin to glimpse the depths and riches of your amazing love. As we receive the ashes today, literally or figuratively, help us also receive your forgiveness, love, and blessing. You are our great and wonderful God. Amen.



About the Author

Melanie started a new job this year as a chaplain at a retirement community, and she absolutely loves it! She is also a spiritual director, a mom of four, and Program Assistant at the C. John Weborg Center for Spiritual Direction. Melanie also writes daily Bible study questions to receive through email. If you are interested in her current study on Hosea, you can [sign up here](#).

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, February 23rd

By Tori Mack

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 51, Jonah 3:1-10, Romans 1:1-7](#)

Selected passage: Jonah 3:1-10

Read

Jonah 3:1-10 *New Revised Standard Version*

3 The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” ³ So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

⁶ When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. ⁸ Humans and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.

Reflect

When it comes to serving God, we don’t always get it right, at least not the first time. It’s not always because we don’t *understand* what is being asked, it may be that we don’t want to *accept* it.

We cry out, “Use me, Lord!” but go the opposite direction when the Lord calls. I distinctly remember telling God I would go wherever He called me. But when it was time to go, rather than obedience, I offered excuses.

Lord, can we wait until the kids get older?
Lord, our family needs us.
Lord, how can we leave our church?
Lord, do you really mean, now?

Jonah loved God but didn’t want to go. He tried to run! And yet despite Jonah’s disobedience, God continued to trust Jonah for this assignment. Although Jonah didn’t fully

understand *why* God wanted to offer repentance to a city like Nineveh, he could *accept* the command to go.

Grace is a beautiful gift from God. Through repentance we can tell God what is really bothering us and trust He will correct us. Repentance invites reconciliation, and draws us back to Him.

After Jonah and God talked about Jonah's heart, the word of the Lord came the second time, and this time, he responded differently. Jonah went.

As a result, the people of Nineveh were offered the same gift of grace and chose repentance. They responded by fasting and turning from their evil ways. When God saw this, He relented from bringing calamity.

We have the same invitation of repentance. May your, "Use me, Lord", be authentic. When He calls, rather than excuses, be honest. Don't allow excuses to disrupt your obedience to God. Learn from me and Jonah, when the word of the Lord comes to *you* a second time, go.

Respond

The word of the Lord is purposeful. Ponder this in silence and notice the presence of the Holy Spirit.

What has God asked of you? The first time? The second time?

Can you respond with obedience?

Rest

God, You desire for every knee to bow and every tongue to confess that Jesus is Lord. And we also desire the same, but sometimes we wish you would send someone else. We repent. May we partner with You, rather than hinder Your work and message for all. Amen.



About the Author

Tori Mack is currently a student at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago. She co-pastored a church plant in her hometown, Louisville, KY. She is on a mission to be ordained and teach northerners the proper way to enjoy sweet tea. She loves her loud and crazy family deeply. If you're looking for her, you'll find her getting lost on a train in search of her next museum adventure.

A Lent Reflection for Friday, February 24th

By Christina Burrows

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 51; Jonah 4:1-11; Romans 1:8-17](#)

Selected passage: Jonah 4:1-11

Read

Jonah 4:1-11 (NIV)

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. **2** He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. **3** Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

4 But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. **6** Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. **7** But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. **8** When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

9 But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

“It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”

10 But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. **11** And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

Reflect

Jonah is so angry with God. He shakes his fist in the air. I knew it, Lord!

“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”

Wait, what? This is what Jonah is angry about? That God is gracious and compassionate? That's hilarious!

Jonah had finally, *finally!* obeyed the Word of the Lord, after running away, getting swallowed by a big fish, and repenting in the belly of the fish. He had agreed to go to Nineveh and had proclaimed a message of repentance to the people, who actually did repent in sackcloth and ashes, to his great amazement and chagrin.

He was amazed because he thought they deserved judgment. And indeed they did. The Ninevites were evil people, sadistic and cruel, the bane of the ancient world¹.

Think Nazis. Think Khmer Rouge. Think chattel slavery. Who would that be today?

He was amazed because they repented and turned back to the Lord. The Holy Spirit worked a miracle in their hearts, and all the Ninevites, from the greatest of them to the least, from the king to the animals, had repented in sackcloth and ashes.

God loved the undeserving Ninevites so much that in his relentless love, he pursued Jonah, his recalcitrant prophet so that they would have the opportunity to receive God's immeasurable grace, and to be reconciled with God. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

And now, God is now so kind and so patient with Jonah. God gives him an object lesson with the plant, and shows him, "My dear child if you were so concerned about the plant, shouldn't I be concerned about this great city, these 120,000 people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals."

Respond

How does this passage make you feel?

Do you identify with Jonah, mad at the fact that God responded with mercy over judgment? If so, who in your contemporary world do you think deserves judgment? The Taliban? Human traffickers? Vladimir Putin? Would you rather see them "canceled" than be given a chance to repent? Do you need to ask God to give you his heart of relentless love for *that* city, for *those* people, for *that* person so that you can extend to them the good news of the forgiveness found in Jesus Christ that each one of us sinners has also received?

Or do you need to receive these words of mercy for yourself? "You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." Perhaps you need God's grace to heal a broken situation in your life today. Will you receive the miracle of God's relentless love and miraculous grace?

¹ For gory details, see James Brucker's commentary on the book of Jonah

Rest

Heavenly Father, fill us with your grace and compassion today. Help us to see ourselves and to see others with your eyes of love. May we, undeserving as we are, breathe in your love and grace. May we also breathe it out to those around us, however undeserving they are. We believe in the redeeming work of your Son Jesus Christ, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to bring new life into seemingly impossible situations. Let us be your prophets of love and grace today. Amen.



About the Author

Christina Burrows is a Korean-British spiritual director, pastor, adjunct faculty at North Park Theological Seminary, and intercultural agility coach. She is the author of [Relentless Love](#), a small group Bible study on the book of Jonah. In her spare time, she loves dance parties, visiting art museums, going to concerts, and walking in nature with family and friends. She lives in Sacramento, CA with her pastor husband, two tween girls, and their yellow labrador, Friar Tuck.

A Lent reflection for Saturday, February 25th

By Mary Putera

Lectionary Reading: [Psalm 51](#); [Isaiah 58:1-12](#); [Matthew 18:1-7](#)

Selected Passage: Isaiah 58:1-14

Read

Isaiah 58:1-14(The Inclusive Bible)

“Shout for all you are worth,
Raise your voice like a trumpet!
Proclaim to the people their faults,
Tell the house of Leah and Rachel and Jacob
their sins!
They seek me daily
they long to know my ways,
like a nation that wants to act with integrity
and not ignore the Law of its God.
They ask me for laws that are just,
they long for God to draw near.
Yet they say, “Why should we fast,
if you never see it?
Why do penance
if you never notice?”
Because when you fast, its business as usual,
and you oppress all your workers!
Because when you fast, you quarrel and fight
and strike the poor with your fist!
Fasting like yours today
will never make your voice heard on high!
Is that the sort of fast that pleases me –
a day when people humiliate themselves,
hanging their heads like a reed,
lying down on sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call fasting,
a day acceptable to YHWH?
On the contrary!
This is the sort of fast that pleases me:
Remove the chains of injustice!
Undo the ropes of the yoke!
Let those who are oppressed go free,
And break every yoke you encounter!
Share your bread with those who are hungry,
and shelter homeless poor people!
Clothe those who are naked,
and don't hide from the needs of your own
flesh and blood!

Do this, and your light will shine like the dawn
–
and your healing will break forth like lightning
Your integrity will go before you,
and the glory of YHWH will be your rearguard.
Cry, and YHWH will answer;
call, and God will say, I am here' –
provided you remove from your midst
all oppression, finger pointing, and malicious
talk!
If you give yourself to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light will rise in darkness,
and your shadows will become like noon.
YHWH will always guide you,
giving relief in desert places.
God will give strength to your bones
and you will be like a well watered garden,
Like a spring of water
whose well never runs dry.
You will rebuild the ancient ruins,
and build upon age-old foundations.
You will be called Repairer of Broken Walls.
If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath
And doing business on the holy day,
If you call the Sabbath delightful
And the day sacred to YHWH honorable,
If you honor it by not pursuing your own ways,
seeking your own pleasure,
or speaking your own words,
then will you find your happiness in YHWH,
and I will lead you triumphant over the heights
of the land.
I will feed you on the heritage
Of Leah and Rachel and Jacob, your
ancestors!”
The mouth of YHWH has spoken.

Reflect

Isaiah 58 has become for me the long version of the Schema (Deut. 6:1-12) that points to the two commandments of Jesus (Matt. 22:34-40). Isaiah 58 holds within it the history and future call of God for our lives! YHWH's word spoken here serves as a bridge between the Hebrew people of God and Jesus followers.

This passage, as well as the Schema and Jesus words are spoken in each case to those who wield the power of position and the power of influence in their religious circles, communities of faith and communities they live in, just like us today. It is a call to all Jesus followers to inspect the integrity of our community dialogue (vs. 10) and our actions in the world we live in (vs. 10-14). Oppression is inflicted through socio-systemic injustice and can only be dissolved through collective effort. To transform the world where non-love exists, we must become and bring God's love. To transform the world where non-peace thrives, we must become and bring God's peace. Becoming the Peaceable kin-dom is a **WE thing!**

Can you imagine the joy of being called "Repairer of Broken Walls, and Restorer of Ruined Neighborhoods? Can you imagine joining the path our ancestors Leah and Rachel and Jacob walked with YHWH that our grandchildren's children may find their way too? God will strengthen our bones if we try!

Respond

Becoming the Peaceable kin-dom is a **WE thing!**

To do this WE must listen, as a community, to the voices of the oppressed.

Some opportunities include:

- **Learn about the LGBTQIA community**
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/being-an-lgbtq-ally>
connect with your local care providers to ensure appropriate services are available in your community for LGBTQIA friends.
- **Learn about Indigenous People's organizations such as the MMIW**
<https://mmiwusa.org/>, connect with your local tribe and listen to their stories
- **Learn about the Jewish Community:** <https://www.jewishfederations.org/>, connect with your local synagogue
- **Learn about the efforts of the Poor People's campaign in your city/state:**
<https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/>
- **Learn about much needed Bail and Parole reform:**
<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/jails.html>

What does it look like to remove finger pointing and malicious talk from your own inner dialogue and expressions as a local community?

If you are looking for some assistance in this, may I suggest: The Anti-Racism Daily: <https://the-ard.com>. Each day a short article is posted that addresses a circumstance of oppression.

Perhaps along with the Lenten devotional, engaging with people suffering oppression would prepare us for Easter, for the path of Love, for our journey towards the Peaceable kin-dom of God.

Rest

*Lord wherever non-love lives, strengthen us to hold non-love in your love,
That non-love may be transformed by your love.*

*Lord wherever non-peace lives, strengthen us to hold non-peace in your peace,
That non-peace may be transformed by your peace.*

Dearest Lord Jesus, thank you for loving us so much.

And all God's people say: Amen and amen. Rev. M



About The Author

Mary Putera is a second generation Maltese Italian American immigrant. She lives on the unceded territory of the Narragansetts in Rhode Island. She is dually ordained with the ECC and PCA denominations. She also serves locally and globally as a Licensed Counselor, Community Care Provider, Trainer and Organizational Consultant.

Week One

February 26 - March 5, 2023



A reflection for the first Sunday of Lent

By Rev. Julia L. Styles

Lectionary reading for 2/26/2023: [Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11](#)

Selected passage: Matthew 4:1-11

Read

Matthew 4:1-11 *New International Version*

Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you,
and they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Reflect

After Jesus' baptism, and before the start to his public ministry, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. I believe that God sent Jesus to the wilderness, because God wanted Jesus to spend time in God's presence, without distraction. I believe the wilderness is always a place where God chooses to meet with God's beloveds. In this situation, God wants Jesus to know that he can rely on his Holy Parent for everything he needs. After 40 days of solitude in the desert, Jesus may have felt connected to the Spirit but he is also hungry. The devil uses this circumstance to tempt Jesus to change his current situation.

Have you been in situations where you wished the circumstances were different? Every single day I wish life was easier or more pleasant: I wish my children obeyed me, I wish people were less selfish, I wish traffic wasn't so bad, I wish the weather was more cooperative. I wish I never had to experience suffering or pain.

In the midst of Jesus' suffering, the devil tempts Jesus with the desires of the heart:

You are hungry—*say the word and you will be fed.*

You are vulnerable—*dare to be invincible and it will be so.*

You are lonely and afraid—*the whole world will bow at your feet.*

The devil is saying, *Where is God in your suffering? Turn to me instead.*

Jesus is aware of his hunger and exhaustion in the wilderness, yet, over and over again, Jesus turns from temptation and towards God.

"I let go of my desire for security and survival." *God's got me.*

"I let go of my desire for power and control." *God's in control.*

"I let go of my desire for esteem and affection." *I am God's beloved.*

"I embrace this moment as it is." *God is here.*

Most days, the desire for control, security and affection, or the desire to change our current circumstances, will tempt us to turn our attention away from God and take a situation into our own hands. In Matthew 4, we see Jesus do the opposite, instead of turning away from God and relying on himself, he leans on the character of God to see him through his temptation. And what happens? God sends angels to tend to him.

Lent is a time in the liturgical calendar when Christians symbolically enter the wilderness and fast for 40 days. Just as the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, the Spirit leads us to let go of distractions and false-comforts, so that we can face the things that tempt us, and experience the God who tends to us when we are vulnerable.

Respond

Since last Lent, One way I have entered the wilderness, per se, is to listen to my body and emotions rather than drowning them out with distraction. I find that when I welcome my emotions, especially negative ones, they lose the power they have over me, and I can recognize the temptations behind the emotions. I do this through a practice called the Welcoming Prayer. The Welcoming Prayer is a method of consenting to God's presence and action in our physical and emotional reactions to events and situations in daily life. The purpose of the Welcoming Prayer is to deepen our relationship with God through consenting in the ordinary activities of our day².

The process of the welcoming prayer looks like this:

1. Feel and sink into what you are experiencing this moment in your body.
2. "WELCOME" what you are experiencing this moment in your body as an opportunity to consent to the Divine Indwelling.
3. Let go by saying "I let go of my desire for security, affection, control and embrace this moment as it is."

This week, practice Welcoming Prayer in small moments of frustration, for instance when you are stuck in traffic or find yourself irritated with a coworker or family member. As you practice feeling negative emotions in small situations, you will become better at accepting them in bigger moments.

To learn more about Welcoming Prayer visit [Contemplative Outreach](#).

Rest

In this moment, take a moment to check in with your body and your emotions.

Take a few deep breaths and recognize how you are feeling.

Welcome what you are feeling with the following prayer:

"Welcome, welcome, welcome.

I welcome everything that comes to me today because I know it's for my healing.

I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions.

I let go of my desire for power and control.

I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval and pleasure.

I let go of my desire for survival and security.

I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person or myself.

I open to the love and presence of God and God's action within. Amen."

-The Welcome Prayer as written by Father Thomas Keating.

² <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/welcoming-prayer-method/>



About the Author

Rev. Julia L. Styles is a Spiritual Director and ordained minister. She is passionate about women in ministry and believes the church needs to hear their voices—in the pulpit, on the page, in the classroom, and in positions of leadership both within and outside the church. To contact Julia for a free spiritual direction session visit www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com.

Julia resides in Atlanta, Georgia with her husband Derek and two little ones, Jakob and Zoe.

A Lent Reflection for Monday, February 27th

By Kendall Smith

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 32: 1 Kings 19:1-8; Hebrews 2:10-18](#)

Selected passage: 1 Kings 19:1-8

Read

1 Kings 19:1-8 NIV

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

Reflect

Growing up, “mountain-top experiences” were a big thing. Youth group, retreats, summer camp...all of these were events where I was on fire for God, ready to go home and convert the masses. And then I’d come home and life would happen. The forces creating this epic “high” were removed, and life seemed hard and boring again.

I couldn’t help but be surprised as I reflected on this passage—Elijah has just come off the most “mountain-top experience” I can imagine: he’s proved once and for all that the God of Israel is the Most High God when God rains down fire on to the sopping wet altar, and all the prophets of Baal are humiliated and proven wrong. BOOM. Mic drop. If mountain-top experiences could sustain us for long seasons, Elijah would have been good to go for a *long* time. But the truth is, he wasn’t.

It wasn't long before Jezebel was furious at him and he retreated into the wilderness, utterly depressed. *It's too much, LORD. Just let me die.*

If I were finishing this story, I'd write the following: "Then God, full of anger, told Elijah: 'Do you not remember the miracles I performed in front of the prophets of Baal? Didn't you watch how I proved once and for all that I am the One True God? Get up and go back to your people! Proclaim my goodness! Oh, you of little faith. Maybe I should find someone else'."

But thankfully, the version we find in 1 Kings shows us a much more gracious God: *Get up and eat. Here is some warm bread. Here is some cool water. You are exhausted. I'm here with you. This, too, is sacred ground.*

Lent is a season of intentional reflection, lament, and preparation. Whether you are experiencing the joys on the mountain-top, or are looking for a place to lay down and rest, our God is present in both places. We're not asked to maintain the energy and passion from that mountain-top experience that we had last week or month or year. God knows that we are fragile and tired and that what we most need is our Daily Bread and Living Water.

Respond

What "mountain-top" experiences do you remember? Are there seasons when, like Elijah, you have curled up and wished to die? (literally or metaphorically) In what ways do you sense God providing for you? What expectations are you carrying that you could lay down this week?

Rest

God of Elijah, we are so humbled that you don't shame us for our exhaustion or lack of faith. You respond as a nurturing Mother, understanding that we are human, in need of food and rest. Provide what we need today. Amen.



About the Author

Kendall Smith works part-time as a science teacher, and also provides pastoral counseling for those walking through spiritual hurt or confusion. She loves reading, writing, thunderstorms, and long walks outside. She and her brother write a blog called *Not All Who Wonder Are Lost* (www.invitationtowonder.com/wonderings) where they write about science, faith, doubt and the goodness of God.

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday, February 28th

By Jillian Evans

Lectionary reading: Psalm 32; Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 4:14-5:10

Selected passage: Hebrews 4:14-5:10

Read

Hebrews 4:14-5:10 NIV

Jesus the Great High Priest

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

5 Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3 This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. 4 And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." 6 And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." 7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Reflect

For years, I struggled with always doing the "Christian thing" in every situation. It felt confining to me. I just wanted to break loose from those shackles and do something out of the ordinary. I proposed in my heart that I was going to try to just be myself and let the chips fall where they may. Soon thereafter, I was waiting for a parking space at the gym when a woman came around the corner and pulled in as I was lining up my car to back into the space. I was angry and I thought that this is the day that I will step outside of myself and confront her once I was in the gym. I knew she would be taking the same class as me and I envisioned myself "accidentally" hitting her with my dumbbells or step board. As it turns out, she left the class before it was over. God knew my heart and kept me from being sinful that day. I allowed myself to feel my feelings so I did not feel the constraints that I normally would have. I learned from this situation that God

wants me to be the best me that I can be and that did not include feeling stifled. He let me be me and I let Him be God and in the end, we were both happy.

Have you ever been chided for not reacting to a situation as a Christian should? When we take up the cross and carry it every day, some days seem heavier than others. In the selected passage, We are reminded that Jesus empathizes with our weaknesses. Jesus walked the earth like us and was tempted to sin just like us. We will suffer temptation in this life to do wrong. It's how we respond to the temptation that matters. Even if we falter, verse 16 tells us to **“approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”** As humans, we will fall short but God’s grace and mercy are sufficient and abundant to cover us.

Respond

The next time you are feeling “less than Christian”, contemplate how God sees you. If it helps, journal about both the situation and how you think God feels about you.

Rest

Dear God,

Thank you for creating me in your image. Thank you for giving Jesus to be the example of how to avoid sin in the face of temptation. Though I may not always live up to this example, I am confident in your grace and mercy. Thank you father for accepting me as I am and loving me always.

In Jesus Name, Amen



About the Author

Jillian Evans is a Spiritual Director in Chicago, Illinois. She is passionate about children’s ministry and has spent over half her life in ministry to children and their families. She and her husband are recent empty nesters with a son and daughter in college and one daughter who is a college graduate working in Washington DC.

A Lent Reflection for Wednesday, March 1st

By Jenny Hoskins

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 32](#); [Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28](#); [Matthew 18:10-14](#)

Selected passage: Matthew 18:10-14

Read

Matthew 18:10-14 *NIV*

10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. **11**

12 “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? **13** And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. **14** In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.”

Reflect

“What do you think?” the writer of this passage asks.

In my reading of this passage in this Lenten season, the word “wander” really called my attention. Wander. To ramble without a definite purpose or objective; roam, rove or stray. To move aimlessly or indirectly. Wander.

Growing up in the church, this passage of the shepherd and the sheep was one I encountered many times. Most often it was talked about in terms of sin and the lengths that God would go to in order to save the ones that wander off. Those whose sin had taken them far from the flock and where they were supposed to remain. And while this passage certainly has something to say about our lives and God’s relationship with us even in our sin, I wonder if it could also have something to say about God’s posture towards us when we wander away from who God created us to be. How God responds to us in those moments and seasons of our life when we are filled with self-doubt or are looking longingly at others, wishing to be more like them. Or when we lose ourselves trying to fit into boxes or patterns or expectations that our families or religious communities or systems of oppression like patriarchy and white supremacy place on us. Perhaps this passage has something to say to each of us about the extent that God would go to call you back to who you are.

You. The you God created. You are worth pursuing. You are one God will follow when you start to stray from yourself and call you back. Through God's overwhelming love perhaps we see the lengths the Good Shepherd will go to bring you back when you wander away, away from who God created you to be.

What do you think?

Respond

Do you feel like you have wandered away from who you truly are? In what ways might God be calling you back to the you God created?

Rest

Our creator God, thank you for promising to be with us always and for calling us back to ourselves. Help us to trust the voice of the Good Shepherd when we wander away from who you created us to be. Amen.



About the Author

Jenny and her family recently relocated to Nashville, TN after about a decade of living and serving in Ecuador. She is a mother to two, wife to one and still trying to figure out what she wants to be when she grows up. She is happiest when she can spend time outdoors or when she is gathered around a table with good friends and rich conversation. She continues to partner with Serve Globally of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 2nd

By Rev. Oreon K. Trickey

Lectionary Reading: [Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-7](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 121

Read

Psalm 121 - *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?

2 My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.

4 He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

5 The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

6 The sun shall not strike you by day
nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.

8 The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in

Reflect

For many of us, Lent is a season of inward focus and reflection, taking an inventory of our soul, of our discipleship, of our lives. In a perfect world, putting aside one of our usual daily pleasures will help us to be less distracted, to better focus on how we are really doing in the depths of our being. This is a good and important process that opens up opportunities for healing and transformation, for sure.

But it can also lead to our being a little too self-absorbed. Yes, in one sense this is all about our plunging into the darkness of Lent in preparation of the light of Easter. Of owning our stuff, coming clean to ourselves and to God. Of opening up in new ways to who we can be as followers of Jesus.

At the same time, a sense of spiritual balance is needed.

Psalm 121 gives us a good perspective for our Lent experience. As we look inward, we also look upward. We lift up our eyes and see all that God is and all that God does for us. To allow the Lord to keep us in the midst of our Lenten experience. (Note that the word “keep” is used six times in this short Psalm.)

Lent is not just about us being all alone in dealing with our stuff, it's about walking with our keeping God, partnering together towards transformation.

Respond

Read through Psalm 121 three times, slowly, section by section.

Pause between each section and invite God to show you how God is keeping you today and in this season of Lent.

Rest

Keeper God, please give me the faith and trust that you are indeed with me, keeping me as I seek to bring my darkest failings and frailties into Your light. Help me to rest in your power to stay with me and see me through this season, to help me, heal me, grow me, and lead me toward Resurrection. Amen.



About the Author

A long-time resident of Chicago, Oreon is a seasoned urban ministry practitioner, spiritual director, retreat facilitator, and Enneagram consultant. She currently lives and serves with the Jesus People community in the city's Uptown neighborhood. Oreon plays a mean blues guitar, loves to laugh deeply, and appreciates a serious cup of coffee. @oreont

A Lent Reflection for Friday, March 3rd

By Gillie D. Abdiraxman-Issa

Lectionary reading³ [Psalm 121](#), [Micah 7:18-20](#); [Romans 3:21-31](#)

Selected passage: Micah 7:18-20 New American Standard Bible

Read

Micah 7:18-20 NASB

18 Who is a God like You, who pardons wrongdoing

And passes over a rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?

He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.

19 He will again take pity on us;

He will trample on our wrongdoings.

Yes, You will cast all [b]their sins Into the depths of the sea.

20 You will give [c]truth to Jacob

And favor to Abraham,

Which You swore to our forefathers From the days of old.

Reflect

As I read the passage in Micah, I struggled to find myself in the scriptures. I studied for a while on the references and the meaning of the text, and ultimately what to say to you; the person reading this, and to me, the one he is speaking to. Admittedly, it was not easy to “Be” with him at this moment. You know, it is one thing to reflect on the scriptures, it's another to write your reflection and be open to what he reveals... The part where he tells you; there was another way to handle that situation or maybe you shouldn't have gossiped about that person or acted ugly towards them. Maybe you need his mercy, too!

Many of you may feel like that as you reflect on some things you may not be proud of in your personal and professional lives. Perhaps, you feel a tug to reconcile your wrongdoings and repent your sins because that prayer point you read in the devotional or scripture you stumbled upon reveals the truth of his word.

As for me, the scripture that rang true was verse 19. When I stopped wrestling and asked the question, What is God saying? What is he asking or telling me? I realized he wanted me to insert my name in verse 19.

In the text, When God is about to deliver his people, he stirs up their friends to pray for them. Micah is filled with wonder at the goodness and long suffering of God. Micah, the prophet revels in the thought of Divine goodness.

If left to ourselves, our sins will be too hard for us; but God's grace shall be sufficient to subdue them so that they shall not rule us, and then they shall not ruin us. When God forgives sin, he cares that it will never be remembered again against the sinner. He casts their sins into the sea;

not near the shore-side, where they may appear again, but into the depth of the sea, never to rise again. All their sins shall be cast there, for when God forgives sin, he forgives all

Response

During this Lenten season, take the time to reflect on the imagery of your sins being put into the depth of the sea, never to rise again.

Remind yourself by drawing a picture of God tossing your sins into a sea of forgetfulness. Think of it dissolving like salt on ice. Remember ALL your sins shall be cast there, for when God forgives sin, he forgives all.

Exercise: What is God saying? What is he asking or telling me?

Insert your name in verse 19.

He will again take pity on _____
He will trample on _____ wrongdoings.
Yes, You will cast all _____ sins
Into the depths of the sea.

Rest

Lord, we take refuge in you. Thank you for your divine love. Thank you for showing pity on me. Thank you for your ability to forget and help me lean on you so I can be merciful and kind toward others. Show me how to have wholesome speech and kindness. Thank you for Jesus who died for all of our sins. Thank you for taking care of me and those that I care for. I bow before you wanting to learn of your ways. Teach me how to have your thought and teach me your secrets. I want to be trusted by you, Lord. I want to be like your prophet Micah, trustworthy and an exhorter to and for your people. In Jesus' name. Amen.



About the Author

Gillie is a lover of people and creative outlets. In her spare time, she enjoys quiet moments with God, imagining her next beautiful trip or preparing tasty meals for loved ones while listening to worship music; her new favorite is Victoria Orenze. Hearing and listening with clarity is a desire she seeks after often. She is a wife, a #Boymom of four, a Spiritual Director, a Businesswoman, and a budding author who helps entrepreneurs and business owners who are trainers and coaches establish stronger brands. Connect on IG: @GillieIssa and ask to be on her mailing list for her upcoming book by sending an email to gillie@gillieissa.com

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, March 4th

By Rebekah Bolin

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 121](#); [Isaiah 51:4-8](#); [Luke 7:1-10](#)

Selected passage: Isaiah 51:4-8

Read

Isaiah 51:4-8 NIV

“Listen to me, my people;
hear me, my nation:

Instruction will go out from me;
my justice will become a light to the
nations.

⁵ My righteousness draws near speedily,
my salvation is on the way,
and my arm will bring justice to the
nations.

The islands will look to me
and wait in hope for my arm.

⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
look at the earth beneath;
the heavens will vanish like smoke,

the earth will wear out like a garment
and its inhabitants die like flies.

But my salvation will last forever,
my righteousness will never fail.

⁷ “Hear me, you who know what is right,
you people who have taken my
instruction to heart:

Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals
or be terrified by their insults.

⁸ For the moth will eat them up like a
garment;

the worm will devour them like wool.
But my righteousness will last forever,
my salvation through all generations.”

Reflect

As I near the big 4-0 birthday this year, I have been contemplating on how I want to enter my 40's by “not caring what people think.” However, I feel this statement is overused, used incorrectly, and/or quite honestly, not realistic. What I believe my heart desires is to be in a place where I respect people's thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives, but not to let anxiousness and depression creep into my soul if someone says something against me, does not love or respect me in return, or tries to tear me down. In other words, to walk with confidence knowing who I am (a child of God!) and knowing my purpose (to love God and to love others as myself). Anyone or anything that goes against my identity or purpose does not need to take away from my precious peace and joy.

What I love about this passage is that it expresses God's confidence, especially in times of turbulence. This seems silly to point out (of course God is confident!), however, it is a model for us as we seek to walk in confidence—even when things around us look bleak. God knows who he/she is and God knows what he/she is doing. God knows to bring justice, righteousness, and everlasting salvation. Others will have their opinions, reproaches, and insults, but these do not

concern God. And God tells us not to fear these things either. In the end, nothing outside of God will matter because it will be God's righteousness and salvation that will reign forever.

As we approach Easter and all that it means, may we have a deeper understanding that God sees us for who we are and loves us unconditionally. God is faithful, offers an arm of hope, and desires justice. May this knowledge allow us to walk in confidence and not fear. Even when we are surrounded by injustice, may we not allow anyone to come against our identity and purpose. And may we not care if they do because ultimately God's righteousness, justice, and salvation will always come through.

Respond

Reflect on an area of your life where you desire more confidence and an area where you need God's assurance. Write this reflection down and then imagine God next to your side, cheering you on. Imagine God whispering, "I got you. Though your circumstances appear grim and lonely, know that you are my child and you have purpose. Do not worry what others think--the only thing that matters are my words to you." Write down what you would tell God in response to this encouragement.

Rest

Dear God,

Thank you for your words of hope. May we be encouraged to walk in confidence, knowing you are with us, for us, and forever loving us. May we be confident that you are next to us, even in times of trouble and distress. May we know in the depths of our souls that our identity is in You, we are your children. May we walk with purpose and not fear reproaches and insults. Thank you for your faithfulness and everlasting love. In Jesus' name, Amen.



About the Author

After growing up in Wisconsin, Rebekah graduated from Fuller Seminary and lived in Los Angeles for 15 years. She now finds herself living in the magnificently beautiful state of Hawaii. While in LA, she started and pastored a church in Downtown LA. The church is currently on hold, but the vision is still alive and well and she hopes to eventually make it back to the city. Until then, she is living it up on the Big Island—exploring and enjoying the scenery and working for a major U.S. airline. In her free time, she loves to travel, hike, play soccer, and laugh around the dinner table with family and friends, and enjoy the adventures of life the Lord takes her on.

Week Two

March 5-11, 2023



A Reflection for the Second Sunday of Lent

By Rev. Williadean Crear

Lectionary Reading for 3/5/2023: [Genesis 12:1-4a](#); [Romans 4:1-5, 13-17](#); [John 3:1-17](#); [Matthew 17:1-9](#)

Selected Passage: Romans 4:1-5;13-17

Read

Romans 4:1-5;13-17 NASB

4 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, the wages are not credited as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness

13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, then faith is made void and the promise is nullified; 15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. 16 For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 (as it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed, that is, God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that do not exist

Reflect

Paul recounts, for the Jews in Rome, Abraham's journey into faith and righteousness. Abraham's *not seeing* what God is talking about, yet *believing* what God says and it pleases God. Abraham's weighing God's promise against all he has ever known and going with God who "calls into being things that do not exist" is the only basis for his faith being counted to him as righteousness. The keepers of the law wanted to blend works into the way of Jesus in order to continue to appear righteous. Paul reminded them that Abraham's faith credited to him as righteousness happened before the law was written. He verbally removed their façade of righteousness through the law by retelling Abraham's story of faith.

I had to believe God when I left Birmingham to live in Chicago in order to complete my MDiv. Chicago is very unlike Birmingham. Chicago was one of my stops on the way to chaplaincy. I

had to let go of all that was familiar in order to grow spiritually. My family and friends thought it was an extreme move, but I believed God (with a certain amount of trepidation).

Lent is a time of self-imposed discipline for the sake of spiritual growth. It is a season of time to take our eyes off of what we see as necessary and focus on the self-imposed discipline of Christ who for our sakes left his throne. In this season, we sit in silence and sacrifice waiting for God to reveal what is necessary for following Jesus to the death. How did Jesus stay in the wilderness? How did the promise sustain him?

Respond

As we discipline ourselves in our chosen ways this Lenten season, we remember Abraham following the call of God into the unknown, on a promise. We remember that our righteousness does not come from our doing for God but from our believing and responding to the promises of God. What has God “called into being” for us? God called into being Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. What dead thing is God calling to life for you? What non-existent thing has God called forth in you that will come into existence?

Rest

Lord, help us to love your promises as much as we love that which is familiar to us. Help us to trust and depend on your word as much as we defend that which we hold onto. Thank you that you have a place, a purpose, and a plan for us in your Kingdom building.

About the Author



Willadean was born and raised in Birmingham, AL. She worked for 27 years as an x-ray technologist at UAB Hospital. She retired and then received a BA in Biblical Studies from Southeastern Bible College. She received an MDiv and ordination from North Park Theological Seminary. She earned a certificate in Family Systems Theory at The Center for Family Consultation in Evanston, IL. She is now a Chaplain at Grandview Medical Center in Birmingham. She is a member of New Life Covenant Church in Atlanta, GA. She is passionate about the Bride of Christ, the Church, being ready for his return. She believes when we prepare the Bride of Christ one family at a time through repairing family rifts, restoring broken hearts and minds, reconciling one to another, then we are better able to be the Bride

Christ is coming for. Willadean splits her time between work, her quilting group, writing, and

family of two sons and four grandchildren. She has written three books, *Anika and Her New Body*, *Letters from the Bride of Christ*, and *Biblical Heroes and the Families That Formed Them*. To receive a copy of either or connect email wcrear58@gmail.com

A Lent Reflection for Monday, March 6th

By Renee Cunningham

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 128](#); [Numbers 21:4-9](#); [Hebrews 3:1-6](#)

Selected passage: Hebrews 3:1-6

Read

Hebrews 3:1-6 *New International Version*

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. **2** He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. **3** Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. **4** For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. **5** "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. **6** But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Reflect

Over the last few years, I've gotten to know a fair share of home contractors. My husband and I along with my sister and brother in law bought a home together and have spent much of our energy, time, money and google searches loving it towards what we wanted. While many of these contractors were initially strangers, we got to know them as they taught us new skills, gave input when there was a problem and worked diligently on a projects.

Looking at a builder's work tell us about who that builder is. We see attention to detail, precision, thoughtful planning, creative problem solving. While we may celebrate the finished product, the accolades and attention belong to the builder.

In these verses in Hebrews, Paul is drawing our attention to Jesus. Jesus' faithfulness, guidance, honor outsize the example that we have in Moses. Moses was a steward of God's house, Jesus is the centerpiece of it. God is building, forming, putting together a house that belongs to Him and tells of who He is. We are that house. The people of God, brothers and sisters formed together in the wild, beautiful and always growing family of God. Jesus faithfully tends to the construction of that house.

Paul urges us to stay close to Jesus as God builds His house among us. We don't just celebrate the work He does, but we marvel at the builder along the way. We watch the builder. We get to know the company, the invitation, the care and the construction of the builder who loves us more than we can imagine.

Respond

Take a few minutes to reflect on God as the builder of and within your story. When you find a quiet spot, take a deep breath and identify what attributes have you noticed about God as a builder. How do those attributes expand your understanding and perspective of God?

Rest

Oh God, thank you for story you are building within us. We desire to be formed and put together by you. Fill us with hope and confidence to trust you through the process.

About the Author



Renée is a Chicago-based ordained pastor who is committed to the training, development and well-being of ministry leaders and clergy in thoughtful learning experiences. Renée spends her time writing, preaching, training preachers and coaching clergy. You can learn more about this work at intheconservatory.com

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday, March 7th

By Chaplain Ellie VerGowe

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 128](#); [Isaiah 65:17-25](#); [Romans 4:6-13](#)

Selected passage: Isaiah 65:17-25

Read

Isaiah 65:17-25, NRSV

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Reflect

Can you imagine how these words might have sounded to a people well acquainted with suffering?

The prophet Isaiah wrote these words to an ancient people who followed God, and when they heard these words, they had suffered from war and violence. Friends and family had died and the places they called home were destroyed. Some were captured and taken off to a land where they did not speak the language or know anyone else. They were alone, afraid and aching.

These words came to Isaiah and were shared with the people in the middle of that immense suffering. I can imagine I might have felt a certain way if I heard these words offered in the middle of suffering. I imagine that first I would have felt frustration and bitterness. How in the world, with all I have weathered, could I possibly believe any of this goodness the prophet speaks about? It feels naive and unrealistic (people with hope are often called these things after all). I would feel like the picture the prophet paints with these words is impossible. In my suffering, it feels disingenuous and even a little like toxic positivity to imagine hope. I might feel angry such ridiculous hope was mentioned in the first place.

And then, what I usually find, is that underneath my bitterness and frustration is sadness. I would feel bitter and angry, and then if I stick with my feelings for a bit, I would feel my grief. Why didn't these beautiful things happen to begin with? Why did I suffer like I did? I would look out on all the distress and death and I would weep. There couldn't possibly be any beauty after all of this devastation. I would grieve what had happened and I would wait for what I had experienced and was experiencing. Hope would still be far off.

And once I wept all my tears and was exhausted with the effort, then and only then would I be able to sit with these words. To feel their balm on my spirit beaten raw from suffering. Only once I had felt every single feeling, letting them cycle through my body like the weather, would I be able to accept the comfort and begin to grasp on to a tiny sliver of hope.

And every single emotion that I felt after hearing these words would be valid and right, no matter how long (hours, days, months, years) it took to feel them. Sometimes we think that only hope is good and that only comfort is holy. But what about our anger and grief? Didn't Jesus turn over tables in anger and weep with grief? I tend to think that God meets us in those places and honors those feelings too.

And hope does come. It isn't naive or unrealistic to feel hope. Receiving hope and comfort from the Divine is also something that God offers us. Our ancient siblings in faith from this text teach us that God is present with us in suffering and our suffering cannot last forever. One thing I have learned as a hospital chaplain and from the writings of late theologian James Cone, is that if our theology or the gospel isn't good news and liberation for those who are oppressed, suffering or who are at the end of their lives, it doesn't work for the community as a whole and is not Christianity. And this text does that...not only for those it was written and spoken to in an ancient culture, but also for people today. It can *eventually* comfort those who ache. It invites all of our human emotions to the table and can even bring us to comfort and hope if we stay in conversation with it for as long as it takes.

Respond

While this text was written to an ancient people and not to us specifically, I wonder what you feel when you hear these words? Do you feel bitterness and anger? Do you weep with grief over what has been? Do you feel comfort and like these words are a balm for your wounded soul? If

it feels safe for you in this moment, see if you can stay with the text and feel your emotions as they cycle through. This may take a while, and that's ok. Honor your feelings by naming them and offering no judgment on them. Bless your emotions if you can. What do your emotions have to tell you about what has happened in your life? What do they tell you about yourself? See if you can notice God's presence with you and imagine God's care for you as you cycle through the emotions. How do you think God sees you? How does God delight in you? What might God be saying to you? How do you imagine God comforts you?

Rest

God, join us in anger over what has happened.

God, wail and grieve with us.

God, comfort us and show us slivers of hope.

God make things right.

Amen.



About the Author

Ellie VerGowe is staff chaplain for the Intensive Care units and the Bone Marrow Transplant unit at the Seattle VA Puget Sound Hospital. Ellie feels honored to hear people's stories and meet with them in moments of crisis. She is studying grief, and emerging and long term trauma from a spiritual care perspective. She loves finding beauty in everyday things. Ellie lives in West Seattle on the traditional lands of the Duwamish people with her fiancé, Aaron and their Australian shepherd, Fiona. She loves hiking in the mountains, singing, painting and writing, eating good food with good people and reading a well written book on a rainy day with a cup of tea.

A Lent Reflection for Wednesday, March 8th

By Rev. Corenna Boucher Hoyt

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 128](#); [Ezekiel 36:22-32](#); [John 7:53-8:11](#)

Selected passage: Ezekiel 36:22-32

Read

Ezekiel 26:23-26,29-32 *NRSV* (emphasis added)

²³ I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them, and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, says the Lord GOD, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴ I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ **A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.**

²⁹ I will save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. ³⁰ I will make the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field abundant, so that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. ³¹ Then you shall remember your evil ways and your dealings that were not good, and you shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominable deeds. ³² It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and dismayed for your ways, O house of Israel.

Reflect

It was 2 a.m. as I sat in silence with a distraught high school friend when she suddenly whispered, "I don't want God to give me a heart of flesh, my heart of stone keeps me safe." She had been abused and abandoned in unthinkable ways by those who were supposed to keep her safe. I had to affirm her. She was right, her heart of stone kept her safe!

"But," I told her, "There is nothing left for a heart of stone but to shatter. A heart of flesh can heal." She began the slow road of healing. As I watched her transform into a generous, compassionate, thoughtful woman, she often struggled with feelings of unworthiness and, at times, self-hatred. There were times she ran; literally running states away, to escape God and people who loved her because it was just too much to accept the kind of love she was being offered. She did not feel worthy. She remembered all the awful things she had done. She knew she had not earned this love, so she would run to people who treated her as poorly and undeserving as she felt.

The first time I read, “It’s not for your sake I will act,” in verse 32, I wanted to cross it out! Yet, as I walk with this high school friend, these are words she needed. They are words of relief. When she did not see herself as worthy, she needed to know that, sometimes, what God is doing in her is not for her; the blessing God is pouring onto her is not for her alone.

Yes, God has given all for you, more than you can imagine. Yes, God will restore you. Yes, God has great things for you. Yes, he has poured out grace upon grace, AND, sometimes, what he does is not for you. It is for his witness in the world; it is for the next person. When God's unfathomable grace is more than we can accept, verse 32 can help us create room to allow God to transform our hurting and hard hearts. God has created space for us to receive gifts and grace that we have not earned and do not deserve. He does this before we believe ourselves worthy. He does it before we repent or change our behavior. Sometimes he pours out this grace because he is correcting his witness that we, in our hard-heartedness, have damaged. Sometimes, like my high school friend, this is the only way we are ready to receive his grace.

AND he invites us to reckon with our behavior. I confess that my hard heart has allowed me to do unkind and selfish things. My sense of unworthiness had caused me to run from being known and loved, but also from loving and knowing. It has allowed me to have a hand in the hurt, loss and neglect of others.

When we don't run from the abundant grace of God, when we allow it to begin to soften our hearts, we are invited to also recognize our mistakes. This passage tells Israel, “be ashamed and dismayed for your ways.” God does not ask us to wallow in shame or self-hatred. Rather, when we recognize how our own hard heartedness has impacted those around us, we can begin to participate in the healing and abundance God is offering, and our hearts will be softened, even unto ourselves.

Respond

- The Message version says, “What a mess you made of things.” Take some time to honestly examine the messes your communities and you, personally, have been a part of. What have you done and what have you have left undone? How have your communities contributed to mess and hurt? Pour out the guilt and shame onto Jesus, who is both our sacrificial lamb and our scape goat. He will remove your sins as far as the east is from the west.
- Imagine what peace, justice and grace can look like for yourself, your family, your community. Confess these desires and dreams to God. What abundance is he offering you?
- How is he calling you today to soften your heart toward yourself? A friend or family member? The community? How can you participate more fully in what God is restoring this week?

Rest

Lord God of Justice, Love and Mercy,

gather all the scattered pieces of my heart and life. Clean me from all thoughts, actions and feelings that would close or harden my heart. Free me from idols of self-doubt, shame, comparison, pride and control. Save me and renew a right spirit within me. May the fruit of my life be gentleness, grace, mercy, humility, justice and your power made perfect in my weakness. Show me today how to live courageously, using all you have given me to further your Kingdom righteousness and reconciliation. Lord, soften my heart, even onto myself so I may fully experience the renovation you are doing in me.



About the Author

Corena has a lifetime passion for ministries of reconciliation and healing. She enjoys speaking and preaching for various ministries. Corena is an Evangelical Covenant Church pastor, sent as a missionary to Young Life in Rhode Island, where she lives with her two sons who enjoy church, martial arts, music and outdoor activities together. corena.hoyt@gmail.com

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 9th

By Rev. Dr. Cynthia P. Stewart

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 95](#); [Exodus 16:9-21](#); [Ephesians 2:11-22](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 95

Read

Psalm 95 NIV

1 Come, let's sing for joy to the Lord,
Let's shout joyfully to the rock of our
salvation.

2 Let's come before His presence with a
song of thanksgiving,
Let's shout joyfully to Him in songs with
instruments.

3 For the Lord is a great God
And a great King above all gods,

4 In whose hand are the depths of the earth,
The peaks of the mountains are also His.

5 [a]The sea is His, for it was He who made
it,

And His hands formed the dry land.

6 Come, let's worship and bow down,
Let's kneel before the Lord our Maker.

7 For He is our God,

And we are the people of His [b]pasture and
the sheep of His hand.

Today, [c]if you will hear His voice,

8 Do not harden your hearts as at
[d]Meribah,

As on the day of [e]Massah in the
wilderness,

9 "When your fathers put Me to the test,
They tested Me, though they had seen My
work.

10 For forty years I was disgusted with that
generation,

And said they are a people who err in their
heart,

And they do not know My ways.

11 Therefore I swore in My anger,
They certainly shall not enter My rest."

Reflect

What is your morning routine? Is it getting kids ready and off to school? Is it checking your phone for emails or a glimpse at your calendar of meetings for the day? Is it rushing out of bed, getting dressed, and out the door, because you hit that snooze button too many times? What I like about Psalm 95 is that it gives us instructions for how we can start our day.

When I have taught classes on prayer, one thing I always tell students is before you put your feet to the floor, begin with a prayer to God, it can be as simple as "Good Morning, God, thank you for letting me see another day."

The first seven verses of Psalm 95 are a call to worship, acknowledging who God is in your life (Great God, Rock of Salvation, Great King above all gods, maker of the sea, dry lands). When was the last time you sang a joyful noise to God? It can be in the shower, while you are getting dressed, cooking breakfast, driving in your car, walking the dog, exercising, while sitting at your desk at work or home or just sitting still. For me, because my commute is at least one hour and a few minutes here or there, that is my praise and worship time to God.

During this lenten season, it is a time to reflect and hear the voice of God. The second half of Psalm 95 is a call to obedience. After you have spent time giving praise and worship to God, then spend time listening to God's voice. In Psalm 95 verse 7b, it states, "O, that "TODAY" you would hear his voice." God speaks in many ways to each person individually and the more time you spend with him, you will know his voice. Interesting how the verse before this states, "we are the sheep of his hand" that means the sheep (us) follow the voice of their shepherd (God).

As we listen for the voice of God, remember to ask God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart, test me and know my thoughts (Psalm 139:23)." We ask this, because we do not want to have hardened hearts, but we want to remove anything that will cause us to be distant from God. God can remove hearts of stone and give us a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:21), if we acknowledge any sins that easily beset us (Hebrew 12:1). This is what the latter half of Psalm 95 is providing for us as an example of those who chose to test God, let their hearts go astray, and did not regard God's ways, while they were in the wilderness. Because they were disobedient, God did not allow them to enter his rest.

What is on your heart that during this lenten season you would like to give over to God? What steals your peace? What worries you when you can't rest at night?

Respond

After reading the scripture passage, find some quiet time, with a journal, a candle, and meditation music of your choice. You will then conduct an Examen, which is a prayerful reflection of your day. The examen might take 10 to 15 minutes to complete

There are five steps to the Examen - the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola:

1 Give thanks

Spend a few moments in gratitude for the gifts and blessings of the day.

2 Ask for light

Ask God to enlighten you, showing where he has been at work and present in your day through events, people and places.

3 Examine the day

Review the moments of the day, noticing what has led to *consolation* and what has led to *desolation* and my reactions to these events, people and places (see below on *consolation* and *desolation*).

4 Seek forgiveness

Ask God's forgiveness for the times when you have acted, spoken or thought contrary to his grace and calling for you.

5 Resolve to change

Decide what in your behavior or attitude you will try to improve tomorrow.

Rest

God we come to you today with open hearts to give praise and honor to your holy name. May we feel your presence and be guided by your Holy Spirit. We thank you for this time of prayer. In Jesus Name, Amen.

About the Author



Rev. Dr. Cynthia P. Stewart works at Loyola University Chicago and is completing Spiritual Direction Internship. Wednesday at 5am, she leads a women only prayer call. She received her Master of Divinity and Master of Arts from North Park Evangelical Theological Seminary and Advanced Master of Theological Studies and PhD from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary.

A Lent Reflection for Friday, March 10th

By Pastor Cindy Riley

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 95](#); [Exodus 16:9-21](#); [Ephesians 2:11-22](#)

Selected passage: Ephesians 2:11-22

Read

Ephesians 2:11-22, *New Living Translation*

¹¹ Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. ¹² In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. ¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. ¹⁷ He brought this Good News of peace to you Gentiles who were far away from him, and peace to the Jews who were near. ¹⁸ Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.

¹⁹ So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. ²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. ²² Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

Reflect

Paul begins today's passage with the imperative, "Don't forget", or put another way, remember where you used to be and who you are. In this time of polarized thinking, we all find ourselves on one side or another of various issues. The systems of the world create points of division across lines of race, gender, sexuality, economic status, and the list goes on. This polarized thinking has created barriers within communities, families, relationships, and yes, the church. Paul refers to the dividing wall in the temple courts that served as a barricade to keep Gentiles from getting any closer to the Holy of holies where the presence of God resided. The Gentiles who sought to worship God and be part of His people were relegated to being on the outside looking in because of this dividing wall.

I wonder what dividing walls we have erected that keep those who are seeking God relegated to being on the outside looking in. Where are we as the body of Christ erecting walls between ourselves that keep others from wanting to be part of this “new” way of life Jesus ushered in?

We are often blind to these walls because we think we have erected them in defense of the gospel or to protect the faith in some way. The gospel doesn't need to be defended. The gospel is The Good News but I am afraid that we've turned it into bad news with our own walls of hostility.

Take some time and ask God where you might be more committed to an issue, a conviction, or way of understanding and therefore building walls. Maybe you have a difference of opinion with someone so you avoid eye contact with them for fear of where the conversation could go. Perhaps you avoid connecting with certain family members because they sit on the opposite side of an issue from you. Or, maybe you avoid interacting with a certain person or group of people because you don't understand how they can be the way they are or why they don't see scripture and God's ways the same as you do. These are all building bricks for walls of hostility.

Jesus tore down these walls through his death, burial and resurrection.

Respond

This Lenten season, allow God to disrupt your comfortable spaces and reveal where you have built walls. What bricks of gender, race, class, difference of understanding, etc. have you built walls with?

Let go of the security these bricks provide for you and humbly

Repent of your part in building walls;
Receive God's forgiveness;
Risk reaching across differences and spend time with those not so like you;
Restore unity one step at a time with the help of the Holy Spirit;
Remember who you are and whose you are as we all sojourn together;

And...be patient & kind with yourself. These walls were not built in a day.

Rest

*Holy Spirit,
I trust in your healing work that tears down the walls of hostility in our lives.
Please give me eyes to see what you see as barriers to the Good News
And fill me with courage to make a change.
Amen.*



About the Author

Cindy is currently the Planting Pastor of New Beacon Covenant Church in Swannanoa, NC. She and her husband Dennis share four daughters and 5 grandchildren aged 2 months to 13 years. Cindy enjoys hiking the trails of NC, traveling (especially to see grandchildren), reading, writing, and a good cup of tea.

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, March 11

By Pastor Sally Carlson

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 95](#); [Exodus 16:27-35](#); [John 4:1-6](#)

Selected passage: Exodus 16:27-35

Read

Exodus 16:27-35 *New International Version*

27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. **28** Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you[a] refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? **29** Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” **30** So the people rested on the seventh day.

31 The people of Israel called the bread manna.[b] It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. **32** Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt.’”

33 So Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come.”

34 As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant law, so that it might be preserved. **35** The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

Reflect

Are you tired? I'm tired. I come to this reflection - and this Lenten season - feeling much like Bilbo Baggins in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. “I feel thin, sort of stretched... Like butter spread over too much bread.” I'm not feeling stretched because of some fantastical ring, but because of the product of my own choices - what I say 'yes' to and what I say 'no' to. I say 'yes' to too many things and then I live with the consequences later. It is so easy to get caught up in all the activity of the day and not create space and margin for the Spirit to work in and through me. The desire to say 'yes' all the time and fill my days is really a desire for control and to be needed and important - and to do it all by myself.

We are always trying to do things ourselves. Trusting in others and God to care for us in ways that we can't care for ourselves is a challenge. How can we be sure that what we need (or what

we think we need!) will be provided? It's so hard for me! Just as I have disappointed others, others have done the same to me - we're human! And certainly God has provided - just not always in the ways that I wanted or thought that I was promised. I am in a deep season of grief over some of the things that I trusted God to provide (because I ~~needed~~ wanted them!) and I'm disappointed. Like the people of Israel I am grumbling! In the verses prior to this passage, they were complaining that life had been better in Egypt. The words, 'if only...' were on their minds and hearts. Now they are wandering in the wilderness, feel abandoned, and so God provides for their needs by promising manna and quail. They were told to gather only what they needed. Those who gathered too much and those who gathered too little all received just what they needed. Any extra got all full of maggots. Gross. With this literal gift raining down from heaven they were reminded to gather extra so that they could rest on the Sabbath. Even with these explicit instructions they still didn't get it and some went out on the Sabbath morning and found nothing. Verse 28 says, "The Lord says to Moses, 'How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? *Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath...*'"

God provided the people of Israel the Sabbath as an opposite way of life that they had lived in Egypt. There they lived to work - they were forced to. In Egypt there was no rest, and their food came at the whim of the empire. In the wilderness, they had to trust in God in a whole new way and adjust to a new rhythm of dependence on God. In this season I am finding it hard to turn from the constant busyness and work in an attempt to feel in control - even as I sometimes feel I am stumbling around in the wilderness. In the midst of grief and doubt, I find myself saying both, 'if only' about my current situation and also trying to store up the manna God is sending me rather than engaging in Sabbath rest and connection. What does it look like to gather God's provision for today and not try to control tomorrow? How do we slow down to listen to the Spirit and see God at work in the moment, even in the midst of the wilderness? Lent is an opportunity to pause in the remote wilderness and allow God's provision to rain down upon us and give us what we need - particularly when we are stretched thin.

Respond

We grumble when we get caught up in the past (which we can't change) and the future (which we can't control). Take a moment to be still and take in where you are today - in this moment. What do you need to hear from God today? What sorts of provision do you need from Him today? Do you need rest? Fellowship? A conversation? Watch for the ways that God offers you provision for today.

Rest

Gracious God, may we be able to recognize you at work in the everyday. So often we are caught up in the moment, in the grief, in the busy, and we can miss what you are doing. Open our eyes to the movement of your Spirit in our lives and in our world. Help us to find both purpose and rest in You, who gives us all that we need. Amen



About the Author

Sally Carlson serves as associate pastor at Shoreline Covenant Church in Shoreline, WA. She loves reading, the outdoors, hotdish (she's from MN!) and a good cup of coffee! Sally especially loves walking with people as they walk with Jesus. Sally lives in Shoreline, WA with her husband, Daniel.

Week Three

March 12 - 18, 2023



A Reflection for the Third Sunday of Lent

By Amanda Svejda

Lectionary reading for 3/12/2023: [Exodus 17:1-7](#), [Romans 5:1-11](#), [John 4:5-42](#)

Selected passage: Romans 5:1-11

Read

Romans 5:1-11, *The Message*

¹⁻² By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that’s not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God’s grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

³⁻⁵ There’s more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we’re hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we’re never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can’t round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

⁶⁻⁸ Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn’t, and doesn’t, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn’t been so weak, we wouldn’t have known what to do anyway. We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.

⁹⁻¹¹ Now that we are set right with God by means of this sacrificial death, the consummate blood sacrifice, there is no longer a question of being at odds with God in any way. If, when we were at our worst, we were put on friendly terms with God by the sacrificial death of his Son, now that we’re at our best, just think of how our lives will expand and deepen by means of his resurrection life! Now that we have actually received this amazing friendship with God, we are no longer content to simply say it in plodding prose. We sing and shout our praises to God through Jesus, the Messiah

Reflect

I wish I could impart the precise, exhilarating sense of freedom, hope, love, and peace that these words bring me:

¹⁻² By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that’s not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God’s grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

For me, these words are fresh air. They encapsulate the very center of the Gospel message. The fulfillment of my [our] longings and hope: To be loved, accepted, and welcomed. By God. Because, out of love, on God’s own initiative, God was willing to send His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins. And because of this, *we have peace with God.*

I have been a Christian for most of my life. But I haven’t always understood—or lived practically like I believe in my core—the Gospel truth found here: That while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6, NIV). That it is not because *I [we]* loved God, but that *God loved us* and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10, NIV) that we are in right standing and at peace with God.

It’s not that I never believed this or don’t currently. It’s just that it’s so easy to become a Christian by faith one day, and then to spend every day after that *doing* all that is within our power to prove that we are worthy of the grace we never earned in the first place!

Why I [we] do this is a lot more complicated than I have expertise or space to explain here. But *that we function this way* tells us why it’s so important to keep going back to God, every day, and choosing to trust in God’s love for us shown through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. That same love that we find poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

It will not always be easy to believe, hold onto, and walk in this truth. But it will be worth it. Let us ask God to remind us through prayer, scripture, and our communities, that God loves us. That our salvation, our right standing, is a gift of grace [aggressive forgiveness, unmerited favor] through faith. And we can be absolutely confident in the hope we have in Christ Jesus our Lord, which will never disappoint us. Amen.

Respond

I pray—and I know—that the Holy Spirit will speak right to your heart, mind, and soul, and give you what you need from this passage.

Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you of God’s powerful love and acceptance of you today. Then sit awhile and bask in the pure joy of that feeling in God’s amazing, love-drenched presence.

Rest

Lord, in Your precious and merciful way, please remind us today:

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:37-39, NIV)

In the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

About the Author



Amanda Svejda lives just north of Chicago and is married to her best friend and favorite humorist, Joey. She is also a dog mom to sweet Kona, who teaches her about unconditional love and the power of a good treat at an opportune time.

Amanda is a daughter of God who is seeking to fully embrace and believe in God’s love and acceptance. She believes her life mission is to love the Lord with all her heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love her neighbor as herself.

Her greatest hope is for all people to know and experience the love of God we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. And ultimately, to see ourselves and each other as made in God’s image and therefore, inherently worthy of love and dignity.

A Lent Reflection for Monday, March 13th

By Rev. Alicia Vela Anderson

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 81](#); [Genesis 24:1-27](#); [2 John 1:1-13](#)

Selected passage: 2 John 1:1-13

Read

2 John 1:1-13 *CEB*

From the elder.

To the chosen gentlewoman and her children, whom I truly love (and I am not the only one, but also all who know the truth), because of the truth that remains with us and will be with us forever.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, will be ours who live in truth and love.

I was overjoyed to find some of your children living in the truth, just as we had been commanded by the Father. Now, dear friends, I am requesting that we love each other. It's not as though I'm writing a new command to you, but it's one we have had from the beginning. This is love: that we live according to his commands. This is the command that you heard from the beginning: live in love.

Many deceivers have gone into the world who do not confess that Jesus Christ came as a human being. This kind of person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves so that you don't lose what we've worked for but instead receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not continue in the teaching about Christ does not have God. Whoever continues in this teaching has both the Father and the Son. Whoever comes to you who does not affirm this teaching should neither be received nor welcomed into your home, because welcoming people like that is the same thing as sharing in their evil actions.

I have a lot to tell you. I don't want to use paper and ink, but I hope to visit you and talk with you face-to-face, so that our joy can be complete. Your chosen sister's children greet you.

Reflect

There's a box in my basement that's filled to the brim. I bought the box at the Container Store because I wanted something fancy to keep some of my most prized possessions. I wanted it to be durable but also stylish so that I could have it out, always within reach for the days I need it.

Inside the box are papers, cards, and notes. Simple reminders of moments in my life - big and small, written by mentors, former students, my parents, cousins, aunts and uncles, nieces, and

my goddaughter. I treasure these frozen memories and pull them out when my life has become too hectic or I need to remember the song of my heart. Whenever I pull them out and read them, I give thanks to God for the people who took the time out of their lives to write these notes.

This letter from John reminds me of that box of letters. It's a short little note of encouragement and warning. Its salutation brings to mind pictures of well loved women within the community of believers. John expresses his love for these women and their children and makes a point to mention that he's not the only one. He speaks to these women and their children, reminding them that for as long as they've existed as followers of God, the command to love has been the same.

Even in light of false witnesses around them, those who may want to pull them from the light of Christ - those who are tempting them to forget about loving every single person who comes across their path. John gives them the reminder, the nudge from Jesus, to not let those kinds of people take root in their lives.

John ends his little letter with the promise to see them soon, face to face, in order to tell them all the things he's holding onto, as well as a greeting from their chosen family. Thirteen short verses filled with mutual love and respect. I can imagine the women reading this lovely little letter, keeping it to reread when they are feeling discouraged. Much like my own box of letters.

Respond

Today, as a lenten practice, hand write a note to a chosen sister or brother. Write them something you love about them whether it's something small and subtle, or a big way in which they show up in your life.

Rest

Gracious God, thank you for our chosen family. Thank you for the people you've placed in our lives to sing the songs of our hearts over us when we've forgotten how they go. Thank you for the ways we get to share this journey with people and for the privilege it is to love your beloved creation.



About the Author

Rev. Alicia Vela Anderson spends her days teaching 7th graders about the life of Jesus and creating experiences for middle schoolers to grow deeper in Christ and in community, to discover who they are created to be, and be challenged academically. You can find her on social media @aliciavelaanderson

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday, March 14th

By Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Lobello Edwards

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 81](#); [Genesis 29:1-14](#); [1 Corinthians 10:1-4](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 81

Read

Psalm 81: 1-7 *The Message*

1-5 A song to our strong God!
a shout to the God of Jacob!
Anthems from the choir, music from the
band,
sweet sounds from lute and harp,
Trumpets and trombones and horns:
it's festival day, a feast to God!
A day decreed by God,
solemnly ordered by the God of Jacob.
He commanded Joseph to keep this day
so we'd never forget what he did in Egypt.

I hear this most gentle whisper from One
I never guessed would speak to me:
6-7
"I took the world off your shoulders,
freed you from a life of hard labor.
You called to me in your pain;
I got you out of a bad place.
I answered you from where the thunder
hides,
I proved you at Meribah Fountain.

Reflect

"I hear this most gentle whisper from One I never guessed would speak to me..."

Have you ever learned something that allowed you to listen in a new way?

My daughter is in speech therapy and through her evaluations and speaking with the therapists working with her I have learned so much about the physical movements you must make with your mouth in order to make specific sounds. For example, in order to help my daughter learn to make "blended" sounds - "st" (stop), "sl" (slow), etc. - we've had to take each word and break it down letter by letter to listen carefully to where the "s" sound stops and the rest of the word blends and continues. Once we identify where the word blends together, we work on making our mouths make the correct sounds. We've played many games sticking out our tongues and touching our tongues to the tops of our mouths and back of our teeth to make certain sounds - and while the end goal is speaking clearly, we can't get there without careful listening first. Careful listening that leads to action.

Today our scripture calls the worshiping community to celebration and then offers a pause as a reminder from God (a voice not expected and in other Biblical translations, not known) pulls the community to remember the mighty acts of God's salvation: answering their cries, rescuing them from bondage, leading them safely through the wilderness. Listening to this voice redirects their worship from a regular liturgical celebration to a response to God's gracious acts toward Israel in the past. The scripture continues to share that the worshiping community forgets these acts of God and does not listen - but still God calls. God's voice continues to ring out in the wilderness. And listening to God's voice leads to action.

I wonder how you best listen to God speak in your life? Watching my daughter patiently work on parsing together words and sounds I am reminded that active listening can lead to major transformation, but that transformation takes time and needs work and perseverance.

Where is God speaking in your life?

How can you actively listen in a way that leads to transformation in your life and in your community?

Respond

Today you are invited to give space to actively listen for God's transforming word through prayer. Pick a short verse of scripture that is familiar or challenging and offer it as a prayer by repeating the verse and leaving off the final word until you are left with only one word. After each time you repeat this scripture leave space and silence to listen.

Here is an example of this practice using Psalm 46:10. Feel free to use this as your prayer today.

Psalm 46:10a: "Be still and know that I am God."

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know that I

Be still and know that

Be still and know

Be still and

Be still

Be

Rest

Holy and Merciful God,

In your grace you call to us each day. Forgive us when we do not take the time to slow down and listen. Open our ears and our hearts that we may hear your voice and allow our lives to be transformed as we remember your mighty deeds and live our days in the promise of your love. Amen.



About the Author

Rev. Dr. Elizabeth Lobello Edwards is an elder in the United Methodist Church currently on family leave. Elizabeth received her MDiv and DMin from Candler School of Theology and resides in Atlanta with her children (Willow and Thomas), Great Dane (Pepper), and husband (Adam). She enjoys hosting nerdy board game nights and exploring new restaurants around the city.

A Lent Reflection for Wednesday, March 15th

By Prophetess Lesley Morales

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 81; Jeremiah 2:4-13; John 7:14-31, 37-39](#)

Selected passage: John 7:37-39

Read

John 7:37-39 *NIV*

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Reflect

Isn't it just like Jesus, the gift, to offer yet and still this great gift to all who would come- in the form of this living water? These verses take place during the Feast of Tabernacles, the very celebration of the presence of God “tabernacling” or living very close quarters (tents/tabernacles) with the people of Israel many years prior. Jesus stood in the midst of the hustle and bustle and celebration and essentially said (and I paraphrase) “Yes! This celebration is great- we (Holy Trinity) did dwell with the Israelites in temporary tents of old, but I offer you my presence and Holy Spirit to dwell within YOU wherever you go right now.

Oftentimes we can get caught up in the tabernacling methods that fit the convenience of our schedules: “Come Father, Son, Holy Spirit... but only for about the 10-30 minutes I have to fit you into my schedule.” Jesus, is offering us His presence and Holy Spirit to not only dwell within us but to flow from within us at all times. Sometimes we can get so busy and tied up in celebrating the old and even the past victories with God (which should be celebrated) that we forget to hunger and thirst for more and make room to receive more of Him for His presence in our lives. We need the hunger for more of His presence to remind us that we need His presence or living water to flow into everything we do. If we are reminded even of the need our physical bodies have for literal water and the fact that without much of it our entire lives are at a deficit and even just a few without it we will not survive. This water that Jesus offers us- when we drink until we are full- our thirst is quenched because Holy Spirit is then able to dwell within us and flow out of us to others.

Respond

-How can you make intentional space and time today to allow the Spirit of God to flow from within you? (Would it be praying for someone else? Serving the homeless? Sharing what Holy Spirit has spoken to you to encourage, edify, or exhort someone else?)

-How can I receive more of Him? What does coming and drinking look like for you?

-Who else may be thirsty and also need a drink?

Rest

God, We are so grateful that you give us the best gifts! More of you is what we need. Lord, fill us up so that we can poured out like a drink offering as rivers of living water flow from us and then... fill us to overflow all over again. We celebrate you, we remember what you have already done and we are excited and expectant for what's yet to come! Help us to always make room for you Holy Spirit in Jesus name. May the rivers of God flow from within us to this dry and weary land and it's inhabitants. Amen



About the Author

Prophetess Lesley is became acquainted with this living water at a young age. Lesley has been involved with the ministry for over 2 decades. As a worship leader and an artist, she has had the privilege over her time to tour, record, and sing background under both her given and artist names. She has been trained in the ministries of the prophetic, deliverance, healing, children, youth, and prayer. She is blessed to be the visionary of Secret Place Ministries, a parachurch ministry, ministering to the people of God across several cities and states. It is her desire and pleasure to see God “SET THE CAPTIVES FREE” according to Isaiah 61: 1-3 and use every tool possible to do so!

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 16th

By Rev. Dawn Holt Lauber

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 23](#); [1 Samuel 15:10-21](#); [Ephesians 4:25-32](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 23

Read

Book Chapter: Psalm 23 (*King James – *this is the version we say all the time as chaplains*)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Reflect

Throughout the scriptures, the Lord is described as the Shepherd who provides for and protects His sheep. Sometimes “His sheep” refers to the people of Israel, and in others we see ourselves as “His sheep.” In Isaiah 40:11, the Lord tends to His flock - the children of Israel. He gathers His lambs in his arms, and draws them close to his heart. In John 10, Jesus speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep, declaring: “*I know My sheep, and My sheep know Me.*” In 1st Peter, Jesus is described as the Chief Shepherd, the guardian of our very souls, who gives to all those who believe in Him the crown of glory that never fades away.

At the center of this psalm is our deep need for a Savior, a Shepherd, a Messiah: The Lord is my Shepherd. We are one of the sheep resting in the protections of God who is our Shepherd. Faith in the Good Shepherd takes away any desire for something other than God; it is the end of want and dissatisfaction. Because all of our needs are supplied by the LORD, we proclaim: “I shall not want.”

God provides the rest and assurance we need. The Shepherd knows when we should rest and where we should rest. We are not left alone in our choices. We lean on the wisdom of the Lord. The Lord makes us rest in places that are safe and fertile – places of true refuge for our weary souls. Trusting in the Good Shepherd leads us to green, plentiful, abundant spaces, and calm, comforting places that refresh us.

On our own, sheep stray from green pastures and do not know where still waters are. *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”* We do not need to do this life alone. We have a loving Savior to guide and sustain us. For the glory of the Shepherd’s own name, He leads us in the right paths. The closer we follow the Lord and trust in His good word, the calmer and more confident we become in our concerns and questions.

God leads us to the abundance of green pastures and the safety of still waters, and through uncertain pathways. Life has peaks and valleys and every kind of height and depth in between. We cannot navigate any of these paths without God. Even in the darkest valley, we have nothing to fear because God is with us. We are not alone. The presence of the Shepherd casts out all fear of evil – not the presence of evil, but our fear of it. Evil is still present in this world, but we can withstand it because God goes before us. We do not face evil alone. *“The Lord is for me; I do not fear.”*

From the valley, we turn to the Lord’s rich and abundant table. Even within the presence of our enemies, we trust that the Lord has not abandoned us. God anoints us with oil, and fills us up until we are overflowing with His mercy. Despite the deadly valley we have traversed and in the presence of our enemies, we enjoy the goodness of the Shepherd’s provision at the table.

The psalm ends with a prayer of thanksgiving: grateful that God’s goodness and steadfast love pursue us all of our earthly days and all our days in heaven.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is the one who restores our souls, leads us in the paths of righteousness, accompanies us through danger, spreads the holy supper before us in the presence of sin and death, and pursues us in His gracious love all the days of our lives.

Respond

Are you in a place of want? Do you wonder where God is in the day to day, or in the midst of a troubling time? Are you seeking abundance from the Lord? Do you need to be re-filled by the Holy Spirit? Or perhaps you need the calm, comfort, and security of stillness – away from chaotic waters? Ask God to help you find some space and silence often in the days leading up to Holy Week to give these needs over to the Lord.

Rest

Be our Shepherd, O Lord, and bless us with all good things that we may be refreshed with your overflowing cup and dwell in your house forever; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

About the Author

Rev. Dawn Holt Lauber is a Covenant Pastor who is committed to intergenerational worship and ministry at the local church level. She and husband, David (a theology professor) have two sons, a daughter, a daughter-in-law, and a dog named, Wrigley. Dawn and David share a home with Dawn's parents, and give thanks for their many nieces, nephews, and adult children who stop by for a meal and conversation each week. Dawn came to pastoral ministry through music - as a singer for The Riverside Church of New York City and in the band, *Churchjazz*. Follow her at: www.dawnholtlauber.com



A Lent Reflection for Friday, March 17th

By Ruth Jensen Zschoche

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 23](#); [1 Samuel 15:22-31](#); [Ephesians 5:1-9](#)

Selected passage: 1 Samuel 15:22-31

Read

1 Samuel 15:22-31 (NLT)

²² But Samuel replied,

“What is more pleasing to the LORD:
your burnt offerings and sacrifices
or your obedience to his voice?

Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice,
and submission is better than offering the
fat of rams.

²³ Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft,
and stubbornness as bad as worshipping
idols.

So because you have rejected the
command of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king.”

²⁴ Then Saul admitted to Samuel, “Yes, I
have sinned. I have disobeyed your
instructions and the LORD’s command, for I
was afraid of the people and did what they
demanded. ²⁵ But now,
please forgive my sin and come back with
me so that I may worship the LORD.” ²⁶ But

Samuel replied, “I will not go back with you!
Since you have rejected the LORD’s
command, he has rejected you as king of
Israel.” ²⁷ As Samuel turned to go, Saul tried
to hold him back and tore the hem of his
robe. ²⁸ And Samuel said to him,
“The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel
from you today and has given it to someone
else—one who is better than you. ²⁹ And he
who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor will
he change his mind, for he is not human
that he should change his mind!” ³⁰ Then
Saul pleaded again, “I know I have sinned.
But please, at least honor me before the
elders of my people and before Israel by
coming back with me so that I may worship
the LORD your God.” ³¹ So Samuel finally
agreed and went back with him, and Saul
worshiped the LORD.

Reflect

Is there a Scripture passage in your life which was a watershed moment for you? One you can return to over and over and remember where you were, what was happening in your life at the time and what God showed you through it? This passage in Samuel is one of those moments for me. I believe that the situation in this passage was a watershed moment for both Samuel and Saul also.

In the earlier verses of this chapter Samuel told Saul what God wanted him to do. God told Saul through Samuel in verse two “...I have decided to settle accounts with the nation of Amalek for opposing Israel when they came from Egypt. Now go and **completely destroy** the entire Amalekite nation – men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys.” There is no question here about who and what are to be destroyed. The entire Amalekite nation is to be completely destroyed.

For some people this story is a difficult one to read, as we have difficulty understanding God's wrath. But right now, please don't focus on that part of the story. The focus in this story is about obedience. Saul's obedience to God's command. As the story continues to unfold, we see that Saul didn't completely destroy the Amalek nation. He destroyed everyone but Agag the King who he captured and brought back with him. Saul and his men kept the best of the livestock, everything that appealed to them, and destroyed "only what was worthless or of poor quality."

In verse 11, God said to Samuel, 'I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command.'

Saul then tried to justify his disobedience. He told Samuel that he did obey the Lord. He said that he did destroy everyone else and only brought back King Agag. He also tried to justify keeping the best of the livestock by saying he wanted to sacrifice them to God.

In verse 22 we read Samuel's response. He asked Saul the question, "what is more pleasing to God, burnt offerings and sacrifices, or obedience to what God has commanded?" In verse 23, we read that Samuel is telling Saul that God has rejected him as king because of his disobedience. Not only did Saul lose God's favor and the kingdom, but he lost the mentorship of Samuel as well.

At the time that I read this scripture, as a ministry leader, I was in a difficult, unhealthy relationship with a person I was mentoring. As a very empathetic, caring person, I was allowing myself to be used and manipulated. As I would come before God and ask what to do, I kept hearing God tell me that the relationship needed to be ended. Doing that was easier said than done. I would try to end the relationship and then would open the door a crack to let the person back in. As this continued over a number of months, friends were confronting me and trying to help me. One day I read a devotional on this I Samuel passage titled "Partial Obedience is Disobedience".

The watershed moment came when I realized that I was being partially obedient to God's words to me to end the relationship. I was justifying that He made me empathetic and caring and thus I could stay in this relationship but in a much smaller way. Being partially obedient made me disobedient.

How often in our lives have we only partially obeyed what God is commanding or asking us to do? Just as Saul justified his not following completely God's command to destroy the Amalekites, we justify by telling what parts we are doing right!

When I read about God rejecting Saul and removing him from the throne as king, I envisioned my disobedience causing God to remove His blessing on the ministry I lead and removing me from my leadership role. I knew clearly what I had to do. I am grateful for God's mercy in not giving me what I deserved as He did with Saul and His grace in giving me what I did not deserve which was to continue in leadership and bless the ministry with great growth.

I am now a Spiritual Director because of that moment in my life. God emptied me of everything that was not glorifying to Him. I spent a number of months feeling like I was wandering in a wilderness. Who was I? How did God see me? What did He want me to do for Him? As I began to yield my life in obedience to Him, He led me to Spiritual Direction. Spiritual Direction for myself and then on to seminary where I studied to become a Spiritual Director.

I often return to this passage as a reminder of the lesson I learned that partial obedience is disobedience.

As we walk through Lent we are being led up to the moment where Christ in full obedience took upon Himself my sins, our sins, and died on the cross. He knew in that moment that His obedience would save me from my times of partial obedience. As we read in Ephesians 5:1-2 "Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice, a pleasing aroma to God."

Respond

Is there a watershed moment in your life where you realized that partial obedience was being disobedient? What were God's blessings when you obeyed and followed God's way? Thank Jesus for His obedience in going to the cross so that we could know God's mercy and grace when we are disobedient.

Rest

Lord, help me to imitate You in everything I do. Thank you that I have the gift of being one of your dear children. Help me to live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. From the beginning of time, I was already known and loved by God. Christ knew He would offer Himself as a sacrifice for my disobedience and sin becoming a pleasing aroma to God. I want to live so others can see Christ in me.

About the Author



Ruth is grateful for retirement from church ministry but continues as a Spiritual Director as well as Enneagram Coach. She delights in holding space and walking alongside women who are listening for God's movement in their lives. She is mom to one son, a daughter-in-love and Omi to two beautiful granddaughters. She enjoys running, biking, swimming, reading and praising God in the beautiful Colorado mountains.

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, March 18th

By Jennifer Andersson

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 23](#); [1 Samuel 15:32-34](#); [John 1:1-9](#)

Selected passage: John 1:1-9

Read

John 1:1-9 The First Nation Version – An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament

He Shows Good Will (John) tells the Good Story

Creator's Word comes down

Long ago, in the time before all days, before the creation of all things, the one who is known as the Word was there, face to face with the Great Spirit.

This Word fully represents Creator and shows us who he is and what he is like. He has always been there from the beginning, for the Word and Creator are one and the same.

Through the Word all things came into being, and not one thing exists that he did not create. Creator's life shined out from the Word, giving light to all human beings. This is the true Light that comes to all the peoples of the world and shines on everyone.

The Light shines into the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it or put it out.

Into the wilderness of the Land of Promise (Judea) came a man named Gift of Goodwill (John). He was sent by the Great Spirit to tell what he knew about the Light so everyone could believe. He was not the Light but came to speak the truth about the Light. The true Light that shines on all people was coming into the darkness of this world.

Reflect

This familiar passage comes to us today from the First Nations Version of the New Testament (C 2021). This beautiful translation brings often missed nuances to "In the beginning was the *Word*, and *Word* was with God, and the *Word* was God." Here, we are brought into the narrative of the Creator in an expanded way. The mystery and acknowledgment of the longevity of the Trinity is getting unpacked in these verses. We are offered context, a promise, and ultimately, an expanded and descriptive picture of the hope that not only the darkness in this world needs, but those of us experiencing it cry out for.

In the traditional translation, John uses the Greek word *logos* to describe Jesus "in the beginning," or before creation and time began. Logos means word, specifically, the spoken word or a statement. *Jesus is God's spoken word*, according to John. In the First Nation Version of the New Testament, the Trinity also has many names, both as a collective, and as individual expressions in the three-in-one. The various names/words describe the Trinity's characteristics

– “The Word fully represents Creator and shows us who he is and what he is like” (vs.2). Here the *Word* is also referred to as *Light*, the true Light that shines on all people, breaking into the darkness. Here, we are also assured that this has been so since the very beginning of time. Long before any of us took our first breath. *Creator* is ever-present in what has been and goes before us into what will be. I receive great comfort from this.

Later in the text of the First Nation Version, the *Word* (Jesus) is also called *Creator Sets Free*, and *Wisdom-keeper*. The Holy Spirit is called *Spirit of Truth*, and the *One True Spirit Guide*. God is referred to as *Great Spirit*, *Creator*, *Great Mystery*, *Maker of Life*, *Giver of Breath*, *One Above Us All*. Are these new and enhanced names for and descriptions of God for you? How have you experienced the Creator? The Word? The Great Spirit?

Respond

Take a breath. Quiet your own spirit. What name(s) describing the Trinity, collectively or as individual expressions, rise up in your spirit, right now? What name(s) resonate most for you in this very moment of your life? What name(s) draw you closer to the Holy One? What name(s) do you long to call out to or connect with?

Make a list of these names. Sit with them in the quiet and loving presence of the One Who Loves You. Breathe. Allow three of them to distinguish themselves in this moment. Breathe. Now, perhaps allow just one to float to the forefront. Breathe. Repeat that name slowly, either in your spirit or aloud, ten times. Pay attention to how your heart, mind, and body respond with every utterance. What is the Holy One offering you, just you, in the saying of the name?

Rest

Great Spirit. Creator Who Sets Free. Spirit of Truth. We come to you, longing to meet you in familiar and new ways. We seek a sense of grounding in who you are. We long to experience you in an expanded way. Reveal to us what we need, especially that which we don't even realize we need right now. We rest in your faithfulness and mystery.

About the Author

Jennifer Andersson is an active pursuer of the Sacred and Holy in her life call to create environments that point toward the healing and welcoming love of God. She is passionate about human beings, creation, music, arts, justice, and reconciliation. She is also a spiritual director and clinical social worker, living with her husband in the greater Detroit area, where she is currently following God's lead in developing a healing and seeking community called the Journey Center of Michigan.



Week Four

March 19 - 25, 2023



A Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Lent

By Rev. Cindy M. Wu

Lectionary reading for 3/19/2023: [1 Samuel 16:1-13](#), [Ephesians 5:8-14](#), [John 9](#)

Selected passage: John 9

Read

John 9:1-41 (NIV)

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

9 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. **2** His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. **4** As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. **5** While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. **7** “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” **9** Some claimed that he was.

Others said, “No, he only looks like him.”

But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

10 “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked.

11 He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

12 “Where is this man?” they asked him.

“I don’t know,” he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. **14** Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. **15** Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”

16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.”

But others asked, "How can a sinner perform such signs?" So they were divided.

17 Then they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

The man replied, "He is a prophet."

18 They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. **19** "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. **21** But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." **22** His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. **23** That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! **29** We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."

30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. **31** We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. **32** Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. **33** If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

Spiritual Blindness

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

38 Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

39 Jesus said,^[a] “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

41 Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

Reflect

Stepping into the scene of John 9, I sense chaos. Jesus had just healed someone on the Sabbath in a most unconventional manner, and this raises a lot of doubts and questions. Neighbors, Jews, Pharisees, and even the blind man’s parents are all trying to make sense of what they just witnessed.

In ancient times, physical ailments were often attributed to spiritual causes, especially personal sin. The disciples’ opening question reveals their theological understanding: the man is blind, therefore someone must have sinned, either he or his parents. This understanding seems to have been shared broadly, as we see the crowd trying to uncover the layers of sin and its involvement in the blind man’s healing, questions like:

- Who bears responsibility for the man’s blindness
- Jesus’ breaking the Sabbath
- The legitimacy of being a disciple of Jesus vs Moses
- Whether sinners can heal others
- The testimony of the parents

These issues detract from something great—miraculous healing from blindness! The crowd expends so much effort trying to dissect the sin problem they cannot rejoice at the miracle. Jesus says he came into the world for judgment, that “the blind will see and those who see will become blind” (v. 39). In modern times, we have amazing medical technology that corrects all sorts of vision problems, but there’s one type of blindness we still cannot correct on our own—spiritual blindness.

In this scenario, I like to imagine myself as the blind man, who readily accepted Jesus’ healing and believed in him. Indeed I once was blind, and after Jesus entered my life, I could see. But I constantly hold doubts and judgments that cloud my ability to truly see what Jesus is doing. At times I’m like the neighbors who question Jesus’ methods. At times I’m like the parents who are afraid of retribution. At times I’m like the disciples who are trying to pin the problem on someone. And too often I’m like the Pharisees, trying to argue my way around the main point.

Whom do you relate to in the story of John 9? Do you relate with the man healed? With those who doubt? With those who still cannot see? Many artists have been inspired by the miracle in John 9. I invite you to gaze upon this painting, "Christ Healing the Blind," by El Greco, and engage in *visio divina* (holy seeing). *Visio divina* involves meditating on a visual image to see what the Spirit might stir in you. Allow your eyes to take in the entire painting. Where do you see yourself in this scene? What do you notice? What are you feeling? Pause. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through your meditation on the painting.



"Christ Healing the Blind," El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos), ca. 1570

Oh, that we would have eyes to see and faith to believe!

Respond

What is the Holy Spirit trying to reveal to me today? What am I seeing and what am I missing? Where are areas of spiritual blindness in my life?

Rest

El Roi, "the God who sees," help me to see. Open my eyes to the areas of my life needing your healing touch. Help me trust in your good will to heal and reveal my physical and spiritual ailments. Amen.



About the Author

Rev. Cindy M. Wu is a missions mobilizer and ordained minister. She is the co-founder of Mosaic Formation, a missional formation ministry serving leaders of underserved communities. Cindy holds an M.A. from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and is the author of books on global Christianity and refugees. You can get further acquainted at www.cindymwu.com.

A Lent Reflection for Monday, March 20th

By Rev. Melissa Lee Emerson

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 146](#); [Isaiah 59:9-19](#); [Acts 9:1-20](#)

Selected passage: Isaiah 59:9 and Psalm 146

Read

Isaiah 59:9 *NIV*

“So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.”

Psalm 146 *NIV*

“Praise the Lord, my soul. I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever.

He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord.

Reflect

I can feel the deep shadows. Turkey and Syria have lost thousands to a devastating earthquake. The responses to President Biden’s State of the Union address was another sharp reminder of our growing partisan divide. My congregation has been trying for months to help a refugee from Afghanistan find a job in his career field.

It’s easy to let the darkness consume us. But Lent teaches us to approach the darkness differently - with hope. The Psalmist knew darkness in his life, but he held onto hope in the One who would make darkness run with perfect, luminous light. The kind of light that banishes broken systems, that crushes evil attitudes of selfishness that lead to oppression, that release the wrongfully convicted and those who are bound by shame, that restores bodies broken by others or ravaged by sickness, that goes to the margins and restores dignity to those subjugated.

As our souls cry out in the piercing darkness, Lent tells us to keep crying out while reminding the depths of our souls that God is in control. Not only does God see every longing refugee,

abandoned child, weeping widow (and will fight for them), but He sees each act of evil and moves to interrupt their ways. Because God is the righteous King, we can trust that as citizens of His Kingdom, God will have the last word and bring justice to darkness.

What a gift that we get to join God in casting out darkness! But it starts with first recognizing the deep, dark shadows in us. How do we block God's light in our daily lives? Do we put our in human beings instead of God? Do we get overly preoccupied with our hustling that we forget about those whom God cares about?

Respond

In prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any ways our darkness blocks God's light from reaching our hearts and from those around us. Confess and commit to trusting in God above anyone else. Ask the Spirit to reveal how God is inviting you to shine His light in the midst of the unique darkness around you.

Rest

Lord, true light and source of all light, listen to our morning prayer.

Turn our thoughts to what is holy and may we ever live in the light of your love.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN (Cathedral of Saint Matthew)



About the Author

Melissa Lee Emerson pastors with her husband, Anthony, at Mosaic Community Covenant Church in Houston, TX. She received her M.Div. at North Park Theological Seminary. When she's not chasing her 4-year-old daughter around, she can be found learning the cello or re-organizing pockets of her home for the 9238th time.

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday, March 21st

By Rev. Julia L. Styles

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 146](#); [Isaiah 42:14-21](#); [Colossians 1:9-14](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 146

Read

Psalm 146 The Message

1-2 Hallelujah!

O my soul, praise God!
All my life long I'll praise God,
singing songs to my God as long as I live.

3-9 Don't put your life in the hands of
experts

who know nothing of life, of salvation life.
Mere humans don't have what it takes;
when they die, their projects die with
them.

Instead, get help from the God of Jacob,
put your hope in God and know real
blessing!
God made sky and soil,

sea and all the fish in it.
He always does what he says—
he defends the wronged,
he feeds the hungry.

God frees prisoners—
he gives sight to the blind,
he lifts up the fallen.

God loves good people, protects strangers,
takes the side of orphans and widows,
but makes short work of the wicked.

10 God's in charge—always.
Zion's God is God for good!
Hallelujah.

Reflect

In Psalm 145:21 the psalmist writes, "My mouth is filled with God's praise. Let everything living bless him, bless his holy name from now to eternity!" What follows are five psalms of praise, or Hallel psalms, all ending with the praise shout "Hallelujah."

Esther Menn, from Luther Theological Seminary, summarizes, "Psalm 146 celebrates the good news that in the face of human frailty and mortality God remains trustworthy. What is more, God's sovereignty from creation to eternity is dedicated to assisting those in deepest need and direst circumstances. Lifelong praise through bearing witness to God's reign is the theme of Psalm 146."³

3

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-23-2/commentary-on-psalm-146-9>

How can we live our lives in life-long praise? By all means, let's continue to sing songs about the glory of God and the goodness we witness here on earth, but let's not stop there! Let us also praise God through our life—through acts of kindness, and joy, and thanksgiving. Grow a garden, coach a kid's sports team, paint a picture, spend time outdoors, go for a walk and breathe air into your lungs, tell someone "I appreciate you," tell someone, "I love you," give a hug, share a recipe, volunteer, fight for justice in your community.

Even in the midst of brokenness and injustice, God is making things new—healing, repairing and renewing. Pray that God gives you eyes to see all of the ways the Spirit is moving in your community—through non-profits, neighbors, churches and every day connections. Then spend a moment praising God, through a psalm of your own or just a "Wow."

Respond

There are so many ways to praise our Creator. Choose one (or all) of the options below.

1. Take a time to be in silence reflecting on the goodness of God and the blessings in your life and then write your own praise psalm.
2. Take a walk outside and mindfully notice all the good and beautiful things around you. Thank God for the air in your lungs, and for the beauty of God's creation.
3. Join God in good work—join a community organization to defend the marginalized, feed the hungry, work on prison reform, heal the wounded and lift up those that are feeling down.

Rest

Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and rest in the loving presence of God.

About the Author

Rev. Julia L. Styles is a Spiritual Director and ordained minister. She is passionate about women in ministry and believes the church needs to hear their voices—in the pulpit, on the page, in the classroom, and in positions of leadership both within and outside the church. To contact Julia for a free spiritual direction session visit www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com.

Julia resides in Atlanta, Georgia with her husband Derek and two little ones, Jakob and Zoe.



A Lent Reflection for Wednesday, March 22nd

By Ashley James (Jacobson)

Lectionary reading: [Isaiah 60:17-22](#); [Matthew 9:27-34](#)

Selected passage: Matthew 9:27-34

Read

Matthew 9:27-34 *New Living Translation*

Jesus Heals the Blind

27 After Jesus left the girl's home, two blind men followed along behind him, shouting, "Son of David, have mercy on us!"

28 They went right into the house where he was staying, and Jesus asked them, "Do you believe I can make you see?"

"Yes, Lord," they told him, "we do."

29 Then he touched their eyes and said, "Because of your faith, it will happen." 30 Then their eyes were opened, and they could see! Jesus sternly warned them, "Don't tell anyone about this." 31 But instead, they went out and spread his fame all over the region.

32 When they left, a demon-possessed man who couldn't speak was brought to Jesus. 33 So Jesus cast out the demon, and then the man began to speak. The crowds were amazed. "Nothing like this has ever happened in Israel!" they exclaimed.

34 But the Pharisees said, "He can cast out demons because he is empowered by the prince of demons."

Reflect

I'm the type of person that likes to know all of the details or do all of the research before I participate in most things. This can be anything from engaging in conversation about certain topics or trips that I go on. Sometimes this is a weakness of mine, especially when it comes to being vulnerable in conversations, but friends and family enjoy this about me because if we are going on a trip together they know that I will try to learn and plan as much as is needed. One hobby that I have is backpacking and my desire to know and do research comes in really handy here. This last summer I was able to go hike half of the Oregon Coast Trail with my friend Abbie. This trip was 13 nights and 14 days out on the trail. Before this trip the longest either of us had ever done was 7 days so this was quite the adjustment. As soon as we decided where

Prayerful Reflections: A Lent Devotional

we wanted to go, I immediately got to work on the itinerary and learned as much as I could about a place I had never been before. The first 2 things that I found out about the trail when I started researching was 1. It was not well marked at all and 2. You needed to purchase *Hiking the Oregon Coast Trail by Bonnie Henderson*.

I bought the Kindle version of this book so we could take it on the trail with us and immediately read the whole thing cover to cover. When I had a question or something seemed confusing, I would just email Bonnie and she would fill me in if it wasn't in her book. She became this incredible resource.

When we got on the trail, Bonnie's book helped us at every point. Each site we needed to stay at was correct, every turn we needed to make at certain landmarks, places where we could get water and food...etc. Everything was perfectly laid out in this guidebook. One thing that came up in the guidebook that was a little uneasy for me was having to cross an estuary. I didn't even know what that was but it is where a tidal mouth of one body of water meets another. In our case a stream and the pacific ocean. According to Bonnie you needed trekking poles and a tide table. We had both and I spent time studying the tide table and knew exactly when we needed to cross on the date we would be crossing: 6:19am. Abbie did not research at all. She didn't need to, she had me. But she did like to ask a lot of questions about what we were doing, especially when we got to the estuary.

We wake up the next morning to get to the estuary at 6:10am and it is raining and foggy. But I'm persistent and follow the guidebook even in the midst of Abbie wondering if Bonnie is a "bad guy" and leading us astray. We get to the estuary and you can see the tides pulling at each other and lowering. The time reaches 6:19am and we go for it despite our reservations. We had faith in what the guidebook was telling us.

If we would have not crossed the estuary we would have added 6.5 miles of road walking to our hike that day and would have missed out on hiking on a beach all to ourselves and an incredible view at the top.



Jesus says to the two men that are blind "Because of your faith, it will happen." I'm struck by them crying out to Jesus, but then the text moves on to Jesus walking into the house and them following him there. He didn't respond when they cried out. He responds later in the house. Their faith. They had a faith in Jesus that led them to not only call out to him but to be persistent and follow him into his space. And Jesus responds to them.

Respond

I think about the faith that I put into a guidebook to lead me on the Oregon Coast Trail and wonder if I have that kind of faith in Jesus? What I've learned is that my faith in Jesus—gives me more Jesus. What do I miss out on by not having faith in Jesus? I think about what I would have missed out on by not crossing the estuary and how miserable 6.5 more miles on a road would have been. Jesus offers us freedom through our faith, are we willing to step into that with him? Where in my life is Jesus asking “Do you believe?” And how am I responding to that question?

Rest

Lord, we are grateful that you allow us to be in relationship with you. Help me to have faith in you like these two men did. Help me to be persistent in that faith even when I'm unsure. Give me opportunities to answer the question “Do you believe?” And remind me of the kind of faith I am able to have and experience in you.



About the Author

Ashley James (Jacobson) lives in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois with her husband Jevaughn, where she is the Area Director for Young Life. One of Ashley's favorite things that she gets to do is coach high school boys and girls soccer at a local high school. She is passionate about people knowing that they matter and that they are worth showing up for. You can find Ashley on IG @cutter24aj

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 23rd

By Rev. Christy Bouris

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 130; Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3; Revelation 10:1-11](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 130

Read

Psalm 130 *NRSV Updated Edition*

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

² Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵ I wait for the LORD; my soul waits,

and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸ It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.

Reflect

The words of this psalm transported me back to camp. In college, I spent summers working at a Christian camp and remember learning a new worship song based on this text. As I remembered the song, something struck me. The song began in the same spirit as the text and we sang, "From the depths of woe, I raise to Thee a voice of lamentation." As you hear these words, what kind of tune would you expect to accompany words like that? Decades after my first introduction to the song, I am newly confounded by the absolutely bizarre arrangement we sang. Imagine singing these words along with a catchy, rhythmic acoustic guitar in a major key with a dancy little rhythm between each verse. Why didn't it seem off to me then when I was singing words (in the first person!) about crying out from the depths, all while jamming on my guitar leading a room full of clapping teenagers? Why was a text like this - a lament - set to upbeat, fast-paced guitar chords?

Now, in retrospect, I imagine it's at least partially because the kind of tune that would fit this psalm text would need to be dark, slow, and unresolved. And, as Martin Marty reflects, "Talking about a cry from the depths does not fit into a theology that markets well, as theology is

supposed to do today.”⁴ Perhaps a different (more appropriate) tune would have been uncomfortable to sing.

That is because being in the depths is uncomfortable, to put it mildly. And witnessing someone else in that place can also be challenging. In our feel-good culture, it’s tempting to present an “I have it all together” picture. And if things aren’t all together, at least we should do our best not to be too much of a Debbie Downer. Since we are taught to “look on the bright side,” hearing someone speak honestly about being in the depths can be striking and unnerving. The psalmist’s words are stark, unfiltered, unapologetic and direct.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

The depths are real—life is deeply beautiful *and* deeply distressing. Sometimes we don’t have it all together. In these moments, it is tempting to mask our own situation or, when someone else is in the depths, to try to fix their situation. When facing the depths, I’m learning to intentionally pause. To let the depths be what they are. I try not to jump quickly to fixing, alleviating, or moving the conversation along to solutions. I try (and don’t always succeed at) listening to the voices crying from the depths (this includes listening to my own voice!). I try not to be distracted by whatever is accompanying those in the depths - whether it is energetic guitar chords or a friend’s forced optimism. Let’s not distract ourselves or others in the depths. Let’s acknowledge those who are waiting in the depths for morning. Let’s become more comfortable in the uncomfortable depths.

Waiting in the depths is part of life and it is not antithetical to the Christian life. Jesus himself was there. In the wilderness. When he wept. When his friend died. In the Garden of Gethsemane. The psalmist frees us to be in the depths and to cry out, without shame. And with God there is steadfast love in the depths.

Respond

Where do you find yourself this Lenten season?

If you find yourself waiting in the depths:

The psalmist’s position and punctuation give you permission to be free. To be honest. With yourself, with others, with God. To cry out! To scream! To swear! It isn’t odd or strange to find yourself in the depths. It’s very human. Release your reality to God without reservation, knowing that with God there is steadfast love. Invitation: find physical space and time today to cry out to God.

⁴ Martin E. Marty “Psalm 130” in *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, edited by Bartlett David Lyon and Barbara Brown Taylor. 1st ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 2008.

If you are on level ground:

Look around. Let's notice the depths around us. Be with those who are there. Cry out with them! Wait with them with God for the morning while it is still dark. Let's discipline ourselves to sit in the minor keys that are a part of life. Invitation: consider the depths around you - in your neighborhood, your larger community, in our world. How might you wait with others in the depths?

Rest

Redeeming God,

Help us! We are waiting for and with you. Amen.



About the Author

Christy is an ordained pastor and lover of kalamata olives. She continues to hold to her New England roots by drinking water from bubblers while enjoying life with her family in the Midwest. On a good day, you'll find her sitting in the sun with a warm cup of tea, listening to music next to a good friend.

A Lent Reflection for Friday, March 24th

By Rev. Jeannette Conver

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 130](#); [Ezekiel 33:10-16](#); [Revelation 11:15-19](#)

Selected passage: Revelation 11:15-19 (*First Nation's Version*)

Read

Revelation 11:15-19

¹⁵*Then when the seventh spirit-messenger sounded his eagle bone whistle, I heard loud voices in the spirit-world above.*

“The power to rule this world now belongs to our Great Spirit Chief and to his Chosen One,” the voices thundered, “and the guidance of his good road will last beyond the end of all days.”

¹⁶Then the twenty-four elders, who sit in seats of honor before Creator, fell face down on the ground to give honor to the Great Spirit.

¹⁷“We offer thanks to you, O honored One,” they said *with one voice*. “You are the All-Powerful One, Who Is and Was, for you have received your great power and established your good road.

¹⁸The nations were furious, but now the time of your fierce anger has come. It is time for you to decide the fate of the dead and to honor the ones who serve you—both prophets and holy ones—all who have deep respect for your name, from the smallest to the greatest among us. *And it is time for you to bring to an end the ones who have brought destruction to the land.*”

¹⁹Then I looked and saw that the *way into* Creator’s sacred lodge in the spirit-world above was open. Inside the lodge the cedar box of the peace treaty came into view. Lightning flashed with the sound of crashing thunder, and the earth shook while large hailstones fell from the sky.

Reflect

The apostle John does his best in this Scripture to give us a glimpse into the awe-inspiring moment when heavenly voices thunder out, “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever.” I have to admit that when I hear the words of verse 15 in a traditional English translation, I am immediately immersed in the majestic, soaring music of the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*. I am transported to the alto section of a massed chorus, overlooking a full orchestra in a massive cathedral. Chills run down my body from head to foot. I shout God’s praise with all my might. This music was the composer, George Frideric Handel’s vision of God’s presence in all its

radiance and glory. And just as the twenty-four elders fall on their faces in worship, so this piece of music has evoked worship and awe in audiences for centuries.

But I felt I needed a fresh look at these verses—and the First Nations Version, an indigenous translation of the New Testament, gave me just that. The words still carry the sense of awe John experienced as he heard and saw this vision. He is overcome by the power of the thundering voices that declare that at last, the power to rule the world belongs completely to the Great Spirit Chief and his Chosen One.

Then I was impressed by the words “good road.” The All-Powerful One has established a good road for us to walk. Oh how we long for a good way through the chaos and wars all around our world—a way that is just and right. Even though the nations are furious—bringing down their anger upon their citizens and neighbors—God has revealed God’s great power to bring this destruction of the land to an end. An indigenous perspective of the good road God establishes includes the ultimate good of all creation—the land included. No more un-natural disasters—no more famine, drought, fire, or flood. No more war and violence and injustice. What a beautiful hope awaits us!

John continues with the affirmation that all of us who have deep respect for God’s name—from the smallest to the greatest, will be honored. No one will be overlooked, insignificant, or marginalized ever again.

The vision ends with a glimpse into the sacred lodge in the spirit world. There John sees the covenant, a peace treaty between God and humanity. God’s covenant will be renewed. Worship and praise will be unhindered. God’s goodness will have free reign on the earth. God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven!

Respond

John had this hope-inspiring vision during a time of persecution, violence, and enemy occupation. He heard voices proclaiming that God’s power for good will at last come in completeness. What reminds you of God’s power and goodness? Walk out in nature and praise creator God for the beauty of the land. Listen to the “Hallelujah” Chorus. Look at this painting of the seventh angel from John’s vision.



The Seventh Angel of the Apocalypse Proclaiming the Reign of the Lord, Unknown Spanish Miniaturist around 1180

Rest

Our God the Chosen One, sometimes I lose sight of your good road that leads me into the future. Please remind me of your promises that you will make all things new and good! Thanks be to God.



About the Author

Jeannette was lead pastor at an ECC Church in Vermont and now pastors Community Covenant Church in Clear Lake, Washington. She has an MDiv from North Park, coaches leaders, strives for justice and racial righteousness, and has served as president of Advocates for Covenant Clergywomen. She and her husband have four adult children and two grandchildren.

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, March 25th

By Amanda Munroe

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 130](#); [Ezekiel 36:8-15](#); [Luke 24:44-53](#)

Selected passage: Psalm 130

Read

Psalm 130, New International Version

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;

2 Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.

3 If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?

4 But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve
you.

5 I wait for the Lord, my whole being
waits,

and in his word I put my hope.

6 I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the
morning,

more than watchmen wait for the
morning.

7 Israel, put your hope in the Lord,
for with the Lord is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.

8 He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.

Reflect

Psalm 130 is fitting for Lent, a season of waiting. The practice of waiting is so important to the Christian tradition that we observe it twice a year. Have you ever noticed how much longer Advent and Lent are than the celebration of Christmas and Easter? A lot longer!

Why? What's so important about waiting?

Delayed gratification seems like a good guess: If you've ever seen the [Cookie Monster](#) short explaining the idea, he makes a strong argument that hunger, from waiting, makes cookies taste better. But that puts the focus on the cookies - the reward, the end result. And I happen to be wondering what happens *in* the waiting.

What happens now, when we can do nothing but wait?

One idea is that waiting grants the opportunity to change focus. When I am waiting, I feel highly sensitive to time. I feel great anxiety about not *yet* being where I long to be, of not *yet* having what I long to have. It's interesting what happens when I shift my heightened sensitivity from awareness of time to awareness of place. When my sensitivity shifts to place, I often find that a sense of constriction (which has a tendency to intensify as my anxiety does) dissipates. It's

almost as if it seeps into the ground. As I take up space and ground into place, I feel stronger and more able to breathe. Focusing my awareness on where I am and who is with me in this *place* frees me, in some way, from the fever dream of all that is not *yet*.

What's a season of waiting for? Maybe as much about relishing what is to come as about being with where we are now. I wonder if this might be what the Psalmist is encouraging when she speaks directly to God in verse 4: "*with* you, there is forgiveness" and to Israel, in verse 7: "put your hope in the Lord...*with* the Lord is unfailing love." Perhaps to this Psalmist, hoping is less about imagining the future, and more about calling God's presence into the midst of where we are.

She's imploring God to be *with* us - not to be there, but to be here.

Respond

Spend some time today grounding in the place where you are and inviting God to be with you there. You might contemplate your surroundings with your senses, experience the weather and current season, or learn about your local ecosystem and geography. You might connect with a neighbor or animal with whom you share this place. Notice what happens.

Where might God be, in this place, as we wait?

Rest

"Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord. Lord, hear my voice!" We join our voices with the Psalmist's, Lord, to cry out to you as we wait. Stay true to your character, God, do not leave us alone where we are. Fill the places we inhabit. Instill us with hope. Be with us as we wait - here, now. Amen.



About the Author

Amanda Munroe is passionate about embodied spirituality and transformative change. Amanda identifies as a queer Christian with radical politics and a contemplative spiritual practice, and has extensive experience facilitating, teaching, and providing spiritual care in culturally diverse, interfaith settings, especially within the contexts of social movements. She is currently pursuing ordination in the United Methodist Church. Amanda holds an M.A. in Conflict Resolution from Georgetown University and will graduate in May, 2023 with an M.Div in Ministerial Leadership & Interreligious Engagement from Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

Week Five

March 26 - April 1, 2023



A Reflection for Fifth Sunday of Lent

By Seanna Wong

Daily Lectionary reading for 3/26/2023: [Ezekiel 37:1-14](#); [Romans 8:6-11](#); [John 11:1-45](#)

Selected passage: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Read

Ezekiel 37: 1-14 *New Living Translation*

A Valley of Dry Bones

1-3 The Lord took hold of me, and I was carried away by the Spirit of the Lord to a valley filled with bones. He led me all around among the bones that covered the valley floor. They were scattered everywhere across the ground and were completely dried out. Then he asked me, “Son of man, can these bones become living people again?”

“O Sovereign Lord,” I replied, “you alone know the answer to that.”

4-6 Then he said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to these bones and say, ‘Dry bones, listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look! I am going to put breath into you and make you live again! I will put flesh and muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will put breath into you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’”

7-8 So I spoke this message, just as he told me. Suddenly as I spoke, there was a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones of each body came together and attached themselves as complete skeletons. Then as I watched, muscles and flesh formed over the bones. Then skin formed to cover their bodies, but they still had no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, “Speak a prophetic message to the winds, son of man. Speak a prophetic message and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, O breath, from the four winds! Breathe into these dead bodies so they may live again.’”

10 So I spoke the message as he commanded me, and breath came into their bodies. They all came to life and stood up on their feet—a great army.

11 Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, ‘We have become old, dry bones—all hope is gone. Our nation is finished.’ **12** Therefore, prophesy to them and say, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. **13** When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the Lord. **14** I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done what I said. Yes, the Lord has spoken!’”

Reflect

When I close my eyes and envision Ezekiel 37, I'm afraid. I see this Thriller-esque vision of a skeletal army standing before me. Flesh and muscle cloaked on with wind from every direction giving them life; chests beginning to beat, lungs starting to expand, and eyes that were just once hollowed out caverns opening. Mouths moving, joints stretching, tongues wagging, and somehow, too, identities restored, promises reinstated.

In this valley I see things I do not believe God can fix, or heal, or tend to. I see fumbled friendships, histories I'm eager to forget, plans muddied, and pathways covered in weeds. I picture irreparable damage. Things forever broken, battles forever lost. Times which tug at the heart at dusk and prod at the mind at daybreak. Pitched plans I cannot bring myself to pray about any longer.

However, if Ezekiel 37 tells me anything it's that God is powerful.

Can you hear the rattling of bones and picture the standing of an army of hollow skeletons rising?

The tying together of sinew, muscle, and flesh I imagine sounds like a shaking in the Earth, a thousand VHS tapes sped up all at once, and the rushing of water.

Can you hear the howl of the four winds forcibly flooding into this valley? Like gusts of air hitting you on a roller coaster. Like the constant hum and force of an unbridled hurricane, not coming to destroy but to restore. Can you believe your eyes, seeing what was once dead come to life?

God has a track record of working exceptionally well with dead and overlooked things in our lives. His themes of people going into graveyard situations one way and exiting out them another are pretty consistent.

On display in Ezekiel 37 is the mighty power of God not only for the army of Israel but also for you and me. For our dead things; dashed dreams, lost hope, and the pitched plans we cannot bring ourselves to pray for any longer.

Ezekiel 37 asks us if we believe God sees and knows those things as well as He knew the intricacies of the bones in the valley. If we believe those dead things can have a life again. And truly, if we believe the power of God extends even to ourselves.

I find it helpful that in times when we honestly don't believe God will move this or that mountain, resurrect this long lost dream or ability, or change our lives in the miraculous way we drift asleep thinking about, that God believes it for us.

God asks Ezekial, do you believe these bones can live again? To which Ezekiel replies, only you know, Lord.

Thankfully we don't have to know, figure out, or make do because only God can answer the long laundry list of questions concerning our lives. Instead of replying for God, what if we followed in line with Ezekiel's obedience to see the power of God in our valley places and rest in the fact that only God knows.

What if we grabbed authority and power saying to dry bones: *This is the word of the Lord.*

Past regret: This is what the Sovereign Lord says...

Lost hope: Come out of your grave!

Untapped potential: You will come to life again.

Dreams and God-Planted Desires: Breath is coming from the four winds for you.

Peace, Joy, Rejoicing: You will rise.

Yes, the Lord has spoken perhaps so that we too may speak anticipating that He will answer with a rattling and mighty wind.

Respond

Picture for yourself The Valley in Ezekiel 37. What forgotten skeleton things; hopes, desires, and dreams lay there? What times of your life you think as mistakes unaccounted for. Decisions and ideas that seemingly went nowhere. Occurrences like strewn puzzle pieces you picture God has forgotten under a couch or behind a bookshelf so much so that you may even think, *has God forgotten me?*

Name these things and write them down. Ask the Holy Spirit to bring them to mind.

Now, picture for yourself the power of God invading this valley. Imagine these things resurrected by The word and given life by The Spirit. Imagine them going well and having good endings. Imagine them strong and fulfilled.

Out loud, as Ezekiel obediently did, re-read the words The Lord gave Ezekiel to speak over the bones over dry things on your own list.

Rest

Lord, we thank you for being the same God in Ezekiel 37 1-14 that you are today. Thank you for faithfully watching over your word in order to perform. Thank you that none of your words can return to you void. Because of these things, Lord, we pray that dried up things in our lives will live again. That you will cover them with a protective layer of hope that sustains us and proves you worthy. We call on breath to come from the four winds into all the areas we've long given up on. Come four winds and breathe into our dreams, ambitions, and hopes so that when we rise again we only have you Lord to thank for this new life. We anticipate a rattling, Lord and we look forward to the rushing of winds in Jesus' name Amen.



About the Author

You can read more of Seanna's work online at

<https://medium.com/@seannawrites>.

A Lent Reflection for Monday, March 27th

By Rev. Julie Anderson Challingsworth

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 143; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12](#)

Selected Passage: Acts 20:7- 12 (CEB)

Read

Acts 20:7- 12 (CEB)

⁷ On the first day of the week, as we gathered together for a meal, Paul was holding a discussion with them. Since he was leaving the next day, he continued talking until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we had gathered. ⁹ A young man named Eutychus was sitting in the window. He was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell from the third floor and died. ¹⁰ Paul went down, fell on him and embraced him, then said, “Don’t be alarmed. He’s alive!” ¹¹ Then Paul went back upstairs and ate. He talked for a long time—right up until daybreak—then he left. ¹² They took the young man away alive, and they were greatly comforted.

Reflect

HOPE WALKS FORWARD

I was sitting in a room in December 2017 really excited to breeze through a follow-up doctor's appointment and go have lunch with my friend Denise. Instead, the wind was knocked right out of my chest. Hearing but not really comprehending I heard my doctor say the surgery didn't work, cancer has spread to my lymph nodes, and I will need to start chemotherapy and radiation immediately. I remember everything just slowing down. Fear, shock, and confusion all just came to me at once.

In the weeks to follow I would undergo my first chemotherapy session and one day I went to brush my hair and all my hair fell out in massive clumps. I called my girlfriends, and they came over to my house on New Year's Day to shave my head. These dear friends wrote a liturgy for the evening, we prayed, we read scripture, we cried, we laughed, and we lamented. I pulled a chair into my kitchen and my three friends placed their hands on my head and prayed for me. One friend shaved the left side of my head, one friend shaved the right side of my head while the third friend stood right in front of me, and just reminded me that I was okay and I was going to be okay. I was still me. I am alive. I am loved. I am seen.

This to me, is the church Christ has welcomed us into. It is a church that runs towards the scariest moments and people who are in pain and offers love, kindness, empathy, and hope. Our scripture today shows this exactly.

This young man Eutychus is in fellowship with his friends, listening to Paul, and while reclining in the window falls to his death. It is a gruesome scene. I can only imagine the fear, confusion,

and shock felt by those in the room. It was terrifying. And yet Paul, with great faith, sees this and begins speaking words of life, truth, power, and resurrection. He doesn't run away when this young man falls, he runs toward him and Eutychus is restored and renewed.

There are times in all our lives when life is drained from our faces, the wind is knocked out of our lungs, and we are in a deep, dark place. But this is not the end of the story. There is hope we can find in the stories and kindness of our communities and friends. There is a peace that passes all understanding, even in the darkest moment. When the rest of the world throws up its hands and walks away Jesus and his church walks in and gives new life.

Respond

In this season of Lent, where are the places where you feel you have lost hope, had the wind knocked out of you, or can no longer see life anymore? Take a moment to cup your hands together, and imagine offering this suffering or pain to Jesus, asking him to take it from you and restore it with life anew- the way only he can do for you.

Rest

God of life and resurrection, In times of fear and worry, I pray I would come to you for strength, hope, and the new and abundant life you alone can give. And when I see others who are suffering, in pain, lost, or without hope- would you point me in their direction, so that I may speak words of love and comfort to them? Thank you, Jesus, for a love so immense that nothing, not even death, can separate us from your love and mercy. Amen.



About the Author

Rev. Julie Anderson Challingsworth is the Pastor of Youth and Worship Ministry at First Covenant Church in Jamestown NY. She and her husband Dan enjoy traveling and golf, which is tricky since it snows 6 months a year here. She is now 5 years cancer free and still has a pretty impressive wig collection.

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday, March 28th

By Sarah Roquemore Day

Lectionary reading for 3/28/2023: Psalm 143; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Ephesians 2:1-10

Selected passage for reflection: Ephesians 2:1-10

Read

Ephesians 2:1-10

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Reflect

For many of us who grew up in Christianity, this passage is one we’ve heard again and again. In Evangelicalism especially, verse 8, “for it is by grace you have been saved... not by works” is like the hallmark card of personal salvation or a spiritual “get out of jail free” card.

Surely there is joy and freedom in “the incomparable riches of [God’s] grace,” but this liberty does not exempt us from working on ourselves and our communities. Quite the opposite— a genuine encounter with God’s grace should compel us to repentance, reconciliation, and inclusion, as we join in the redemptive work God is up to in the world.

In the context of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, the good work ahead was building up the church and unifying two disparate cultural groups: Jews and Gentiles. Paul was writing to a polarized church, previously separated by the “dividing wall of enmity” (2:14), now called to be “fellow citizens,” and “members of the household of God” (2:19). The family of God, once restricted to the people of Israel, was expanding, and experiencing growing pains along the way.

In many ways, the church today resembles the early church at Ephesus. Cultural clashes continue to divide us, while self-righteous gatekeepers reinforce the same sort of hierarchies

that Paul says Jesus leveled with his resurrection. We still need the same reminders about grace that the Ephesians did.

But letting grace lead is not easy. The radical inclusivity of Jesus' invitation to grace upsets rule-followers and rebels alike. I like how Brennan Manning coins it in *All is Grace: A Ragamuffin Memoir*. He calls it "Vulgar Grace":

"A grace that amazes as it offends. A grace that pays the eager beaver who works all day long the same wage as the grinning drunk who shows up at ten till five. A grace that hikes up the robe and runs breakneck toward the prodigal reeking of sin and wraps him up and decides to throw a party, no ifs, ands, or buts. A grace that raises bloodshot eyes to a dying thief's request — "Please, remember me" — and assures him, "You bet!"... This vulgar grace is indiscriminate compassion. It works without asking anything of us. It's not cheap. It's free, and as such will always be a banana peel for the orthodox foot and a fairy tale for the grown-up sensibility. Grace is sufficient even though we huff and puff with all our might to try and find something or someone that it cannot cover."

Through grace, no one is less worthy of God's love, God's presence or God's peace. Grace brings God near to everyone, no exceptions. Jew and gentile. Republican and democrat. Straight and LGBTQ+, Citizen and Immigrant, Privileged and marginalized, Believer and doubter. By God's grace, all are invited to sit with Jesus, soak in the goodness of his love, and join him in his work. And this invitation is not ours to withhold from anyone. If we get to accept God's grace for ourselves, we also have to extend it to anyone else who wants it.

Respond

The word "handiwork" at the end of this passage appears in other translations as "creative work" or "masterpiece." Like blocks of marble in the hands of a master sculptor, we must allow grace to chip away at our rough exteriors, molding and reforming us into people whose hearts are ready to welcome anyone into the family of God.

Spend some time today reflecting on God's grace and its transformational power. Begin by confessing your need for Grace and recognizing any self-righteousness or shame you may feel as you engage with the idea of radical, inclusive grace. Thank God for the unearned gift of grace and consider how it is shaping you as a piece of God's creative work. Consider what "good works" God may be calling for for you to join in doing.

Rest

Dear God,

May we allow ourselves to be shaped and scandalized by the unreasonable generosity of grace. May it strip away our arrogance, our entitlement, our belief that we somehow deserve more access to God than anyone else. May it call us to repentance, humility, and reconciliation, softening our grip on what we think we have earned, and turning our hearts towards those we have excluded. Though we do not deserve it and cannot earn it, the gift of grace is your blessing for us, and our joy to share with others.



About the Author

Sarah Roquemore Day is a middle school teacher, sometimes a writer, and always a daydreamer. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia with her husband Bob.

A Lent Reflection for Wednesday, March 29th

By Pastor Katherine Mayer

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 143](#); [Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41](#); [Matthew 22:23-33](#)

Selected passage: Jeremiah 32:36-41

Read

Jeremiah 32: 36-41 (NRSV)

You are saying about this city, 'By the sword, famine and plague it will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon'; but this is what the LORD, the God of Israel says: I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all their heart and soul'.

Reflect

As I read the passage I had three things stick out to me: God's redemption, promise and faithfulness. All three can be found in the story of Israel, but they can also be found in our story.

God is telling Jeremiah that He will bring the people of Israel back to the land He promised them. He is going to gather them from all of the places they were driven to and bring them back together again. They will no longer be in captivity. They will no longer be separated from one another. They will no longer be refugees and nomads, they will be home. They will be redeemed. This land that was taken from them will become a place of safety. It will be a place where they can dwell and make new memories. Just like Israel, there are times in our life where God brings us back and we are redeemed. What once was old is made new. New life is breathed into old dreams, past memories are redeemed and used for God's glory. We are brought back to a place where God can redeem what once was.

In this redemptive love seen in Jeremiah, we also see God's promise. God promises Israel that they will be brought back to the land that they once called home. Keep in mind that some generations here have never seen this land, yet He promises them that they will live there in safety. Every promise that God has made Israel is wrapped up in this one promise: "They shall be my people, and I will be their God". This promise holds the redemption that the people of Israel experience time and time again. It is a promise for us also. We are God's people and He is our God. He offered us the greatest act of redemptive love when He sent Jesus. As Jesus gave up His life for us, we are promised and marked just as Israel was. We are marked with the promise that we are God's people and He is our God. This promise is a redemptive love that brings about transformation. When we experience God's redemption we are transformed. The people of Israel were marked by God and they were transformed each time they experienced His redemption, and the same happens for us. We are transformed by the redemption that God gave us through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Lastly, God is consistently faithful to Israel. Throughout their story you see the same cycle repeated generation after generation. They have moments when they live in freedom communing with God and then there are moments in captivity, where the people of Israel are crying out for God to rescue them. The beauty is that God is always with them. No matter how far they turn or how far they run, God remains faithful. He never turns His back on them and instead, chases after them. He does the same with us. No matter how far we may run or what we might do, God is always there. He remains faithful. God remains steadfast and faithful. No matter how far we run or how hard we push, nothing is going to separate us from the steadfast, faithful love of God.

The redemption, promise, and faithfulness of God that we see given to Israel in Jeremiah, is the same that we experience because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. It is through the cross that we truly know the redemptive love of God. It is through the resurrection of Christ that we are promised eternity with God. It is through the birth, death and resurrection of Christ that we experience, first hand, the faithfulness of God. That is the beauty of the cross. That is what we celebrate and reflect on during this Lenten season.

Respond

During this Lenten season, take the time to reflect on the redemptive love you experience day after day. Take time to reflect on the promises that God has given you. Where does God meet you? What promises has God given you? How do you experience God's redemptive love? Where do you see God's faithfulness? Whether you are in the valley or on the mountain top, give God praise for the redemption, promise and faithfulness you have in God.

Take a moment and listen to the song "How to be yours", by Chris Renzema. Imagine the song as the people of Israel talking to God and reflect on how God responds later in the song.

Rest

May we remember God, that your love is not for us alone. May we bless others with the same grace and mercy you have shown us, even when they have wronged us. Thank you God, for your redemptive love and the promise that it brings. Thank you for your faithfulness even when we turn our face from you. May your Kingdom come and your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.



About the Author

Katherine Mayer is the Family Pastor at One Church in Louisville, KY. She is originally from Northern California but has called Louisville home for almost seven years. She is married to Jacob and they have two kids. She is in the process of becoming a Spiritual Director and is planning to start seminary in the fall.

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 30th

By Lauren Pattie

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 31:9-16](#); [1 Samuel 16:11-13](#); [Philippians 1:1-11](#)

Selected passage: 1 Samuel 16:11-13

Read

1 Samuel 16:11-13 NRSV

¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all your sons here?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.' And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.' ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, 'Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.' ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Reflect

One of the first things that struck me about this passage was all the activity. A lot happens in these few short verses. Samuel tells Jesse to summon his youngest son; he does. David arrives. The Lord commands Samuel to anoint David; he does. The spirit of the Lord descends upon David. Samuel takes his leave. One action quickly follows another and this crucial event in the history of Israel is over in a flash.

David must have had so many questions, yet we hear none of them. His brothers might have done some grumbling about being overlooked for their young whelp of a brother, but we don't hear that either. We don't see into any of the characters' hearts or minds. We simply hear what transpires.

Lent is a time for reflection. We consider our lives and think about how we can better serve God with them. We often give up things, decluttering to make space for the movement of the spirit in our hearts. All this is well and good. It's important. But it is not the endgame.

Lent is a season we pass through. As Jesus passed through the desert in order to arrive prepared for his ministry, we pass through Lent so that we are better prepared to act—to do our little part in the grander story of God's salvific work in the world.

This short passage in 1 Samuel reminds me that my time of reflection is *toward* something. This passage is not concerned with people's inner monologues or motivations. Instead, it shows their faithful actions. Samuel, risking his life to anoint God's chosen; Jesse, giving his son for God's

plan; David, receiving the Lord's spirit and following it wherever it leads. We don't see what prepared them to act. All we see is the action.

In this season, what do we do to prepare ourselves for faithful action? How do we draw closer to God? How do we develop our relationship with God—our trust, understanding, and love—so that when God asks something of us, we are ready to respond, ready to act? Perhaps we develop a habit of thankfulness, taking time to recognize all the good things God has put in our lives. Perhaps we make a list of all the things we're worried about and, one by one, commit them to God. Maybe we try something new, a new sport or hobby that gets us out of our comfort zone and allows us to practice trusting God.

This is my hope for us: that whatever we do to mark this season of Lent, those practices will prepare us to respond to God's voice. That even if we don't understand God's plan, the relationships we develop with God will enable us to hear the voice of the Lord, to trust it, and to act upon it.

Respond

How are your lenten practices preparing you to act? Is there something you can do to develop trust so that you are ready to respond to God's call? Consider adding or subtracting something from your daily or weekly routine so that you have more space to connect with God.

Rest

Dear God, thank you that each of us gets to be part of your story. In this season of Lent, draw us closer to you. Show us your love. Encourage us so that we are better prepared to act for you. Even when we don't understand your plan, help us to trust. Amen.

About the Author

Lauren is executive assistant to the president of The Seattle School of Theology & Psychology. She is also the managing editor of the theology and culture journal [Christ & Cascadia](#) and preaches at her church, First Covenant Church Seattle. Lauren has a Master of Arts in Theology from Fuller Theological Seminary.



A Lent Reflection for Friday, March 31st

By Rev. Anna Maloney

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 31:9-16](#); [Job 13:13-19](#); [Philippians 1:21-30](#)

Selected passage: Job 13:13-19

Read

Job 13:13-19 *NIV*

Keep silent and let me speak;
then let come to me what may.
Why do I put myself in jeopardy
and take my life in my hands?
Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;
I will surely defend my ways to his face.
Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance,
for no godless person would dare come
before him!

Listen carefully to what I say;
let my words ring in your ears.
Now that I have prepared my case,
I know I will be vindicated.
Can anyone bring charges against me?
If so, I will be silent and die.

Reflect

These words from Job are directed to his well-intentioned, but painfully misguided friends. As they attempt to companion Job in his grief and desolation, they try to diagnose him. They are convinced that they know the cause of his suffering, and what he can do to fix it.

A little earlier in the chapter, after enduring their speeches and assumptions and a barrage of unsolicited advice, an exasperated Job lets them have it– he says, *“You are worthless physicians, all of you! If only you would be altogether silent! For you, that would be wisdom.”* (Job 13:4-5).

How many times have you wanted to shout something similar to a friend or loved one who was trying to fix instead of truly listen?

When I am in deep pain, I want to be understood and seen– and yet, it is very rarely the words of my friends that meet that need. Instead, it is their presence, their touch, their listening, and their willingness to not run away or dismiss my suffering that helps me know I am not alone. I wonder– what is it you need when you are feeling sad, hurt, or hopeless?

It strikes me that here in the depths of Job’s despair, what he needs from his friends is silence and presence (which, to their credit, they enact beautifully for the first seven days– it’s when they open their mouths that it all goes wrong!).

If anyone is to speak a word, let it be from God and God alone. Here at the end of himself, that is what he most deeply desires: a face-to-face encounter with the God who created him and knows the truth about his life.

“Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.”

I love the boldness and intimacy we hear in these words; Job is no stranger to God. Like in any honest, real relationship, talking to other people about the issue won't do. Job wants to speak directly to God, and to hear what God might say to him.

If you've read to the end of Job, you know that God does indeed speak. God's answer to Job is a litany of questions—some of them quite snarky!— that reveal God's infinite wisdom and power in comparison to our limited understanding and place in the universe.

At the end of it all, Job says, *“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 41:5-6).*

God is God and we are not. God invites us to lean into this humbling reality. But here's the beautiful thing— Job's boldness and honesty is honored by God through it all. Job's friends get a strong rebuke from God, but Job's words and prayers are held up as an example of faithfulness. God *wants* us to seek him boldly and directly. God welcomes our honest words, including our anger and our grief. God's deep desire is to know and be known by us— even, and maybe especially, when we are at the very end of ourselves and cannot see a way out.

Respond

What honest words do you need to say to God, face-to-face? Will you have the courage to hear what God might say to you in return?

And, how might you be a supportive, loving presence for one in your life who is suffering?

Consider the challenge to simply be a listener, expressing your love and support in an embodied way.

Rest

*God who speaks out of the whirlwind,
You are God and I am not. Thank you for seeing me and knowing me. I release my need for explanations and control.
Thank you for showing me that my suffering matters to you, and that I am not alone. In your mercy, hear my prayer.*

About the Author

Rev. Anna Maloney is a pastor and spiritual director-in-training. She and her husband live in the Twin Cities with their golden retriever pup and their 3 chickens, Angelica, Eliza, and Peggy! Anna is passionate about creating safe space for honest questions and dialogue. She dabbles in poetry, and is a big fan of live music, road trips, and belly laughs with friends.



A Lent Reflection for Saturday, April 1, 2023

By The Rev. Lauren Scott

Lectionary reading: [Psalm 31:9-16](#); [Lamentations 3:55-66](#); [Mark 10:32-34](#)

Selected passage: Lamentations 3:55-66

Read

Lamentations 3:55-66 (NRSV)

55 I called on your name, O Lord,
from the depths of the pit;
56 you heard my plea, "Do not close your
ear
to my cry for help, but give me relief!"
57 You came near when I called on you;
you said, "Do not fear!"
58 You have taken up my cause, O Lord;
you have redeemed my life.
59 You have seen the wrong done to me, O
Lord;
judge my cause.
60 You have seen all their malice,
all their plots against me.

61 You have heard their taunts, O Lord,
all their plots against me.
62 The whispers and murmurs of my
assailants
are against me all day long.
63 Whether they sit or rise—see,
I am the object of their taunt songs.
64 Pay them back for their deeds, O Lord,
according to the work of their hands!
65 Give them anguish of heart;
your curse be on them!
66 Pursue them in anger and destroy them
from under the Lord's heavens.

Reflect

Can I Get A Witness?

Imagine this. You walk into a hospital as a chaplain intern completing Clinical Pastoral Education. It is the Summer of 2021. Because of the recent spike of COVID cases, there are signs throughout the hospital that read "No visitors." Although visitation is limited, you see the ICU and the Emergency Department overflowing with patients. Hospital staff members tell you that waiting rooms are going to be converted into patient rooms because every bed in the hospital is taken. You then hear the chaplain phone ring. You answer it. It is a nurse. "Will you come to this room?", she asks with a trembling voice. And so you go. You find yourself in the ICU. You sanitize your hands and slowly walk in. There in the hospital bed is an older woman experiencing one labored breath after the next. The only other person there is the nurse whose voice you heard on the other end of the phone. She's crying. Her mask is wet from all of her tears. She has spent hours of advocating, caring, supporting, and loving this beloved child of God. You wrap your arms around her as you both turn your attention to the patient as their

breathing gets even more labored. “I needed someone to be here with me.”, she says. “I see you. I hear you. I am proud of you. I am grateful for you. I love you.”, you softly say back. And it is in that moment that you realize what you have become: a witness.

A witness is what the author of Lamentations needed as well. This text is saturated with grief, despair, and fear. The author is calling on the Lord from the depths of the pit. In the selected text we read that the author wants God to “see” (nāḇaṭ, v. 63). This word in Hebrew can also mean “pay attention”. The author needs to be reminded that they do not journey alone.

Although these texts are full of grief, despair, and fear, they also remind us of God’s assurances and promises. Lamentations (particularly the text that is found in chapter three) gives us hope and encourages us to trust that God is present with us and is at work among us, within us, and through us. As a result, we, too, can be witnesses for one another. We can see one another for who they truly are. We can show up and be present in the joys and pains of living with each other. We can pay attention to the lived experiences of another.

We all need a witness. We all can be a witness. Thanks be to God.

Respond

When has someone been a witness to you and for you?

What are some experiences in your life right now in which you are seeking a witness?

How can you serve as a witness to others?

Rest

God who was and is and is yet to come - We thank you for your presence that is always with us. We also give you thanks for the people who come into our lives who witness the joys and pains of our living. Encourage us and challenge us to be witnesses to and for others. It is in your holy name we pray. Amen.



About the Author

The Reverend Lauren Scott (she/her) is the Associate Pastor for Youth and Families at Riverside Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, FL. Lauren graduated from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia with a Master of Divinity and a Master of Arts of Practical Theology. You can often find Lauren sipping coffee at local coffee shops; traveling and exploring new places; watching the dolphins from her apartment balcony; and spending time outside with her dog, Georgia.

Holy Week

April 2 - 9, 2023



A Reflection for Passion Sunday

By Sara Fisher

Lectionary reading for 4/2/2023: [Isaiah 50:4-9a](#); [Philippians 2:5-11](#); [Matthew 26:14-27:66](#); [Matthew 27:11-54](#)

Selected passage: Matthew 27:11-54

Read

Matthew 27:11-54 *NIV*

11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

12 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. 13 Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” 14 But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

15 Now it was the governor’s custom at the festival to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. 16 At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus[a] Barabbas. 17 So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” 18 For he knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him.

19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”

20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

21 “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor.

“Barabbas,” they answered.

22 “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” Pilate asked.

They all answered, “Crucify him!”

23 “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

25 All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

26 Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

27 Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After

they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

32 As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. 33 They came to a place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). 34 There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. 35 When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 36 And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. 37 Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the king of the jews.

38 Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” 41 In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42 “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” 44 In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli,[b] lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).[c]

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split 52 and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and[d] went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!

Reflect

I’m not naturally a fan of silence, at least not in large amounts of time. I’m the type of person who prefers to have most of my quiet moments in a coffee shop so I can be focused, but still surrounded by people and noise. Sometimes silence, real silence, can be so loud.

As I read our passage for today I can’t escape the silence of Jesus.

It begins with the accusations, and Jesus is silent. The chaos of the crowds— “crucify him!” — and Jesus is silent. The flogging, the thorns, the mocking— “Hail, King of the Jews!”— and still, silence.

“He saved others but he cannot save himself.”

“Let him come down from the cross and we will believe in him!”

More silence.

The truth is, I'm uncomfortable with the silence of Jesus here. I find myself wanting Jesus to speak up, to defend himself. I want to see the Jesus I've come to know in the gospels— a man who speaks with confidence and authority; who has witty comments to challenge those who speak against him.

But Jesus is different here; I guess as you'd expect someone to be at the end of their life. He is focused, even calm, in the midst of extreme humiliation, suffering, and death.

His silence is odd and uncomfortable. It's so loud.

But here's the thing about silence: it forces you to be brutally present with yourself — to be honest, and vulnerable, to step out from whatever you use in life to keep you distracted and busy. There's a groundedness in silence and we see it in Jesus here.

We shouldn't mistake His silence for giving up or being on the losing end of Jewish authority, as so many in the crowd did. Christ's silence is rooted in a kind of assurance in God's will that I can't quite grasp. Jesus, so in tune with the Father and the Spirit, doesn't utter a word in defense because none are needed. Soon enough the earth itself will speak on His behalf as it quakes and breaks open at His death.

Jesus goes to the cross steady. Focused. Intent to see God's great plan of restoration, forgiveness and healing lived out.

All Hail King of Kings, Lord of Lords. Silently taking upon Himself the punishment that brought us peace.

I'm reminded that the peace of Christ knows no end. The God who brings order and peace out of chaos can not be dragged into our worldly chaos, not even by the threat of death. The creator of the world walked assuredly into his death, silently focused on the same mission God has always had: to re-member God's people into God's family. To defeat sin, destruction and death and to give you and I boldness in approaching the throne of God as forgiven, beloved children of God.

It's been the plan all along, so why am I surprised when Christ goes forward in silent confidence?

Maybe it's because the invitation to sit with Jesus is His pain and suffering and silence is difficult— there's nothing to fix, no next step to take, no words of encouragement, no tidy ending. How badly I want to jump ahead and declare Christ the King of Kings, the one who is

victorious over sin and death! But I sense the nudging of the Spirit—don't miss the silence. Don't jump ahead. The silence leaves me brutally present with myself and with Christ. The silence leaves me longing. And maybe that's right where God wants me.

Respond

Our invitation today is to be present with Jesus in His moments before and on the cross— to sit with Jesus in his suffering and His silence.

What does that silence bring up in you? What do you notice about Christ? What do you notice about yourself? Resist the temptation to jump ahead and allow yourself to be present and silent for some moments today.

Rest

Lord, we are quick to speak, quick to act, quick to jump ahead. Today, give me boldness to sit with you in your suffering and silence. Lord, we long for you— King of Kings, Lord of Lords. Thank you that for us you went confidently to the cross.



About the Author

Sara is a wife, mother and Youth Pastor from Northern California. She loves coffee, lazy days at home with the fam and being out in nature. She experiences deep joy seeing teenagers (and all people) live into their specific calling God has given them, and walking alongside them in the process.

A Lent Reflection for Monday of Holy Week

By Kim Delp

Lectionary reading for 4/3/2023: [Isaiah 42:1-9](#); [Psalm 36:5-11](#); [Hebrews 9:11-15](#); [John 12:1-11](#)

Selected passage: John 12: 1-11

Read

John 12: 1-11 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Mary Anoints Jesus

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them^[a] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it^[b] so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Reflect

Every time I read this passage, especially in the shadow of the Cross and Lent, I am always overcome with emotion at this amazing act of anointing that takes place. It took me back to my first experience of washing feet. I was a teenager in high school youth group and had an issue with one of the girls in the youth group with me. I had hurt her and broken the trust she had in me and did not want any part of reconciling the situation, especially like this. I just thought to myself, "I hope I don't have to wash HER feet". About that moment, she walked up to me and started washing my feet. In that moment, I understood in a much clearer way the significance of this moment. When I was stubborn and wanted to avoid the situation, the girl who I had wronged, humbled herself and gave me grace when I didn't deserve it. It was a beautiful display and example to me in a small way of what our passage discusses.

Most people would likely come to the feet of Jesus like Mary, in pure reverence, but Mary engaged in a radical, significant, counter-cultural representation of extravagant worship. Mary came unashamed, almost brazen in her radical *need and urgency* to worship Jesus. She came in the middle of the meal, which was an unusual time to come. Usually washing feet was done before the meal, a chore usually reserved for slaves. As we have seen her in other passages,

she sat at the feet of Jesus to learn and fell at his feet in surrender, and so here she once again comes to his feet to anoint and honor him. Even in the face of Judas and his scolding and disapproval, she continues to lean-in to her devotion and wipes his feet, not with a towel, but with her hair which is counter-cultural as a Jewish woman who would rarely let her hair down in public.

The embarrassing silence that could-have been as Judas chastises her, Jesus fills that silence as a sacred space, a holy moment as all witnessed this anointing. Jesus raises Mary up and empowers her in her radical humility and in her foresight in view of his imminent burial that would come soon. She realized that no amount of extravagance could be less wasteful than offering Jesus her whole self as He would be doing for her and for us all.

As the gospel shows us over and over, the lowly, oppressed, maltreated, and forgotten are the ones Jesus raises up. As Mary shows us from her positional devotion, she realizes, more than the twelve disciples do, the significance of WHO Jesus is and she is bold enough to not only honor and worship Him, but to anoint Him as the King in the shadow of the cross and in view of His death. In anointing her King, she is anticipating His death.

We can all, as Judas does, minimize the acts of worship, the holy moments, the sacred spaces. We realize how pitiful it was what Judas was saying as he was worried about keeping up appearances, wanting to look holy and appear to care for the poor, even though Jesus already knew what was going to happen and his true heart. Jesus did not minimize the humility and devotion Mary showed, but celebrated and raised her up to show all of those present as well as us that true worshippers are not focused on appearance, cultural norms, what we will receive or what rules we may be breaking. Mary shows us that radical extravagance in our worship is welcome, celebrated and a precious space created in the presence of our anointed King. As the aroma of perfume permeated the house where Jesus, Lazarus, Mary, Martha and the disciples were, may the sacred space created by Mary permeate you this day. As we step into this Holy week, may you realize in a new way the gift of Jesus that He gives you and may you not miss the opportunity to truly engage in worship at His feet.

Respond

As you take time to focus on the picture depicting our passage from today, take some time to take this in. Really imagine being a part of this photo, taking space and time to take in everything around you.

What do you see, smell, feel, sense around you? What draws you in? What stands out? What speaks to you? Take some time to journal, maybe sit in silence or with quiet music to listen to what God is trying to tell you today. As we journey together to the cross and enter Holy week, this is the day in the calendar after Palm Sunday and before Judas betrays Jesus. Imagine what Jesus might be feeling holding both the sacred and the betrayal, “Hosanna” and “Crucify”. In the midst of the chaos around him and inside him, there is the beautiful, sacred, holy moment. Stay in the space as long as you need to and



write down, draw and debrief with someone what you heard.

Some suggestions for music to listen to during this exercise would be Speak to Me by Kari Jobe, Remember by Steffany Gretzinger, Hold me Now by Jennifer Knapp, You've Already Won, Shane and Shane, This is Our God, Phil Wickham

Rest

*King Jesus, anointed one, as Mary showed extravagance in her worship and devotion, may we realize afresh today your gift to us. As we journey through your journey to the cross, may we pause to worship in extravagance at your feet. In your holy name,
AMEN*

About the Author



Kim Delp has been serving in Ecuador for almost 13 years. She is a family nurse practitioner and consecrated missionary with Serve Globally. She and her husband partner with the Evangelical Covenant Church of Ecuador in starting medical clinics, foster homes, community outreach, health and develop programs and most recently trying to make all the project in Ecuador self-sustainable through a rose plantation. You can learn more here:

<https://www.santiagopartnership.org/>

She has 3 children that keep her humble and awed. Sharing a cup of coffee or preparing a meal together with friends brings her joy and life as well as travel and encouraging others. Empowering women to see their value and worth and to live into their identity brings her pure joy! Living among the mountains and volcanos of Ecuador has shown

her beauty beyond what she ever expected.

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday of Holy Week

By Chaplain Cristina Ferri

Lectionary reading for 4/4/2023: [Isaiah 49:1-7](#); [Psalm 71:1-14](#); [1 Corinthians 1:18-31](#); [John 12:20-36](#)

Selected passage: Isaiah 49:1-7

Read

Isaiah 49:1,3,4,6,7 *The Inclusive Bible*

¹Islands, listen to me!

Pay attention, distant peoples!

YHWH called me before I was born,
and named me from my mother's womb.

³The Holy One said to me,

"You are my Servant, Israel,
in whom I will be glorified."

⁴I had been thinking, "I have toiled in vain,
I have exhausted myself for nothing!" –
yet all the while my cause was with YHWH,
and my reward was with my God.

⁶"It is not enough for you to do my bidding,

to restore the tribes of Leah, Rachel, and
Jacob and bring back the survivors of Israel;
I will make you the light of the nations,
so that my salvation may reach to the ends
of the earth."

⁷Thus says YHWH,

the Redeemer of Israel, the Holy One...

"Rulers will stand when you walk in the
room and court officials will pay homage
because of YHWH, who is faithful,
because of the Holy One of Israel, who
chose you."

Reflect

(TW: trauma, suicidal ideation)

While reading this reflection, if you feel your heart racing or discomfort in any way, return your attention to your Breath. Breathe in deeply, the name of God, YHWH. Remember you are safe and loved exactly as you are. Breathe out and release all discomfort from your body.

Thanks to a series of traumatic events in my life, I didn't feel known, important, or worthy and I ended up with a deep-seated need for control in my life. I wasn't taught about the Love, the Glory, the Redeemer, or the Faithful God. Because of this, I kept God in a very small, very secure box, so as not to have Wrath unleashed upon me. I lived in a constant state of fear and shame; an inherent, chronic pain of "knowing" that God didn't look favorably upon me. When I was a teenager, I decided that no longer existing was the only way to relieve this misery. Thankfully, the attempt failed. Soon after, I began finding unhealthy ways to numb the pain, so that I didn't feel out of control.

Years later, after coming to my senses, I began to deconstruct the box I held God in. At first, I thought, "All these wasted years," or as Isaiah states, "I have exhausted myself for nothing!" But silly me didn't realize that my heart "was with YHWH, and my reward was with my God." I couldn't see that in making God smaller, I was making myself smaller. I had to surrender my control to the One who "called me before I was born." I had to see my worth through the eyes of my Creator. This led to my heart being open to allowing God to reveal the true Character that I

had been missing all along. With this revealing came a relationship and with the relationship came abiding.

Where once the darkness overshadowed my life, God Redeemed me. Not only was I 'restored' and 'brought back' to life, I found the Light within. From a spiral of uncertainty, fear, and hopelessness, Hope brought safety, joy, and meaning to my life. YHWH is, has been, and always will be Faithful. And no matter how many times I may fall, God will always be shining the Light and guiding me, as long as I continue to allow the gift of Mercy to continue to Restore me... and leave the control to the One who "named me from my mother's womb."

Respond

Allow yourself time to listen to this song, and release all striving, and abide in God's presence. [Abide // Bradley Riddle & Abigail Smith // Kingdom Culture Worship](#)

As you move into the final moment of rest, take some time to pause, breathe, and give praise for all the ways God has Redeemed you.

Breathe in: YHWH

Breathe out: Your name is in mee

Rest

Continue to focus on your breath and give yourself the gift of rest by staying silent and listening for the Truth and Light.

*I pray that you feel you are loved and known,
that you know you matter,
that you are chosen,
that God is always moving in your life,
that you hear the Voice who called you before you were born,
that you release the striving and replace it with abiding,
that the Light shines brighter for you day by day,
that the Reward outweighs the pain,
that your life be filled with Glory and Redemption,
that you won't worry about the coming days,
and above all that all distant peoples will be moved by your story,
and know of God's salvation.*

About the Author

Cristina Ferri is a person in long-term recovery, Spiritual Director, and Chaplain at the Women's Department of Corrections in Rhode Island. She loves to create safe spaces for healing through intentional and meditative art practices. Cristina's passions are justice, recovery, mental health advocacy, breaking stigmas, and above all... love (& dogs).

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A Lent Reflection for the Wednesday of Holy Week

By Mary Chase-Ziolek

Lectionary reading for 4/5/2023: [Isaiah 50:4-9](#), [Psalm 70](#), [Hebrews 12:1-3](#), [John 13:21-32](#)

Selected passage: Hebrews 12:1-3 NRSV

Read

Hebrews 12:1-3 NRSV

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

Reflect

Reading this passage, two images jump out for me – a cloud, meaning a large number of witnesses and lightening the load in order to run. When I think about my cloud of witnesses I first think of relatives; my father and mother, a favorite aunt and grandmother, a special teacher. These familiar witnesses were part of my cheering squad and now cheer me on from beyond. Standing with them are ancestors of the faith who I never knew and cannot name. In 2017 I had the privilege of visiting the Iona community in Scotland. Worshiping daily in the large stone chapel, I was struck by the fact that people had been gathering in this space to worship for over 1000 years. I doubt that any of them were my genetic ancestors, but I imagine them as ancestors in the faith. My faith in 2023 is built upon the faith lived by people since the time of Christ. There is indeed a large crowd cheering me on for my unique race in this season of my life.

A race is a change of pace. It may, but doesn't have to, involve moving at an increased speed. A race may also be a set course or a duration of time. In any case it involves crossing a line to begin the race that could be considered a threshold – an in between place that marks a transition. I recently crossed the threshold of becoming "unencumbered by employment" (some would say retired), so I have taken off the weight of regular work responsibilities. When I think about laying aside that which could hold me back as I move into this season of life, I am reminded that not only excess possessions can weigh one down, but also activities that are no longer life giving as well as attitudes, thoughts and beliefs can be a burden. What may have served a purpose at one point in life, may now need to be thrown out, revised, or recycled.

Just as in a physical race, we run the race of life set before us at our own pace, and we do so with the knowledge that we are not alone. We stand on the shoulders of so many people who

have gone before us and we know that Christ, along with our own cloud of witnesses is cheering us on.

Respond

Who is among your cloud of witnesses and what might they have to say to you?

As you stand solidly rooted in the present while looking forward, what is the race that is set before you?

What do you want to take with you and what do you want to leave behind as you move into this season of your life?

Rest

Gracious God, you created us to be in community linking us to living, breathing people as well as to those who have gone ahead of us. Thank you for this gift of connection that brings us together in body and in spirit. Even as we stand together, please help each of us to see the unique race that you have set before us and to continue on that course confident that you go with us. Amen.



About the Author

Mary Chase-Ziolek is a spiritual director and an emeritus professor of health ministries at North Park Theological Seminary with an interest in connecting faith and health. She lives in Chicago with her husband. Some of her life-giving activities include being in nature, gardening, cooking and spending time with grandchildren.

A Lent Reflection for Maundy Thursday

By Eileen Lundy

Lectionary reading for 4/6/2023 [Exodus 12:1-4, \(5-10\), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35](#)

Selected passage: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Read

John 13:1-17, 31b-35 NIV

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸ "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰ Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Reflect

The Thursday before Easter is traditionally referred to as Maundy Thursday. The word maundy simply means command. It is on this day that we are called to remember the new command Jesus gave his disciples at their last meal together. The command is that Jesus' disciples are to love one another.

Before Jesus gives this command to his disciples, he first models for them what this love is to look like. At this last Passover meal Jesus will share with his disciples, he gets up from the table, strips off his outer clothing, wraps a towel around his waist, kneels down and begins to wash his disciples' feet. In the ancient world foot washing was a common practice and also a necessary act of hygiene due to the combination of sandals, dirt roads and reclining at tables to eat. Foot washing, an act of welcome and hospitality, was a task done by a servant or slave. Here at this Passover meal, it is Jesus who gets up and kneels down, taking the role of a servant. In this action Jesus models for his disciples what he is calling them to do; to actively love as a servant. Jesus sets the example then instructs them to do as he has done, to get up and kneel down.

When I read this passage, it seems to me that if there was ever a time Jesus most needed the support of his disciples, most needed to be ministered to and most needed to be served it was here at this last supper. Jesus knows what is coming next after this meal. He knows that Judas who is sitting at the table with him, will soon betray him and what as a result of the betrayal will then follow. Yet Jesus still gets up and kneels down to wash the disciples' feet, which include the feet of Judas. Jesus gets up and kneels down because he knows his identity; where he came from, where he is going and what His Father has called him to do. Out of this identity he gets up and kneels down to serve.

The command to love one another Jesus gave to his disciples at that last Passover meal is the command Jesus still gives to his disciples today. We also are commanded to love one another with an active servant love. We who find our identity in being a disciple of Jesus are called to follow his example of love. A love that gets up and kneels down to serve even when it is hard, costly or maybe just inconvenient.

Respond

What it might mean or look like for you in your daily life to follow this new command Jesus gives to love others following his example? Where might that be easy? Where might it be hard? Is there someone you sense God calling you to love? Where are you being called to get up and kneel down?

Rest

Lord Jesus, we confess that we who have experienced your grace and known your love too often seek only our own comfort and do not love one another as you have loved us. We desire to be your disciples, who follow your example and are known for our love. May we become a people who get up and kneel down to serve one another. May this active servant love for one another overflow into our communities, bringing hope, healing and transformation. Amen



About the Author

Eileen Lundy lives in Omaha, Nebraska. She is a nurse, a bi-vocational pastor and a spiritual director. Eileen is married to Steve, her best friend, and they have 3 adult children. She loves a good story in any form, spoken, written or video.

A Lent Reflection for Good Friday

By Bronwyn Leigh Murphy

Lectionary reading for 4/7/2023: [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#); [Psalm 22](#); [Hebrews 10:16-25](#); [Hebrews 4:14-16](#); [5:7-9](#); [John 18:1-19:42](#)

Selected passage: John 18:1-19:42

Read

John 18:1-19:42 NIRV

Jesus Is Arrested

18 When Jesus had finished praying, he left with his disciples. They crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden. Jesus and his disciples went into it. 2 Judas knew the place. He was going to hand Jesus over to his enemies. Jesus had often met in that place with his disciples. 3 So Judas came to the garden. He was guiding a group of soldiers and some officials. The chief priests and the Pharisees had sent them. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. 4 Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him. So he went out and asked them, "Who do you want?" 5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. Judas, who was going to hand Jesus over, was standing there with them. 6 When Jesus said, "I am he," they moved back. Then they fell to the ground. 7 He asked them again, "Who do you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. 8 Jesus answered, "I told you I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." 9 This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken would come true. He had said, "I have not lost anyone God has given me." 10 Simon Peter had a sword and pulled it out. He struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. 11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shouldn't I drink the cup of suffering the Father has given me?" 12 Then the group of soldiers, their commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They tied him up 13 and brought him first to Annas. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest at that time. 14 Caiaphas had advised the Jewish

leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

Peter Says He Is Not Jesus' Disciple

15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. The high priest knew the other disciple. So that disciple went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard. 16 But Peter had to wait outside by the door. The other disciple came back. He was the one the high priest knew. He spoke to the servant woman who was on duty there. Then he brought Peter in. 17 She asked Peter, "You aren't one of Jesus' disciples too, are you?" "I am not," he replied. 18 It was cold. The slaves and officials stood around a fire. They had made it to keep warm. Peter was also standing with them. He was warming himself.

The High Priest Questions Jesus

19 Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus. He asked him about his disciples and his teaching. 20 "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I didn't say anything in secret. 21 Why question me? Ask the people who heard me. They certainly know what I said." 22 When Jesus said that, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this any way to answer the high priest?" he asked. 23 "Have I said something wrong?" Jesus replied. "If I have, then tell everyone what it was. But if I spoke the truth, why did you hit me?" 24 Annas sent him, tied up, to Caiaphas, the high priest.

Peter Again Says He Is Not Jesus' Disciple

25 Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself by the fire. So they asked him, "You aren't one of Jesus' disciples too, are you?" He said, "I am not."

26 One of the high priest's slaves was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. He said to Peter, "Didn't I see you with Jesus in the garden?" 27 Again Peter said no. At that exact moment a rooster began to crow.

Jesus Is Brought to Pilate

28 Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning. The Jewish leaders did not want to be made "unclean." They wanted to be able to eat the Passover meal. So they did not enter the palace. 29 Pilate came out to them. He asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" 30 "He has committed crimes," they replied. "If he hadn't, we would not have handed him over to you." 31 Pilate said, "Take him yourselves. Judge him by your own law." "But we don't have the right to put anyone to death," they complained. 32 This happened so that what Jesus said about how he was going to die would come true. 33 Then Pilate went back inside the palace. He ordered Jesus to be brought to him. Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" 34 "Is that your own idea?" Jesus asked. "Or did others talk to you about me?" 35 "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not from this world. If it were, those who serve me would fight. They would try to keep the Jewish leaders from arresting me. My kingdom is from another place." 37 "So you are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, that's the reason I was born. I was born and came into the world to be a witness to the truth. Everyone who is on the side of truth listens to me." 38 "What is truth?" Pilate replied. Then Pilate went out again to the Jews gathered there. He said, "I find no basis for any charge

against him. 39 But you have a practice at Passover time. At that time, you ask me to set one prisoner free for you. Do you want me to set 'the king of the Jews' free?" 40 They shouted back, "No! Not him! Give us Barabbas!" Barabbas had taken part in an armed struggle against the country's rulers.

Jesus Is Sentenced to Be Crucified

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him whipped. 2 The soldiers twisted thorns together to make a crown. They put it on Jesus' head. Then they put a purple robe on him. 3 They went up to him again and again. They kept saying, "We honor you, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face. 4 Once more Pilate came out. He said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing Jesus out to you. I want to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." 5 Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Then Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" 6 As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. I myself find no basis for a charge against him." 7 The Jewish leaders replied, "We have a law. That law says he must die. He claimed to be the Son of God." 8 When Pilate heard that, he was even more afraid. 9 He went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus. But Jesus did not answer him. 10 "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you understand? I have the power to set you free or to nail you to a cross." 11 Jesus answered, "You were given power from heaven. If you weren't, you would have no power over me. So the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." 12 From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free. But the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend! Anyone who claims to be a king is against Caesar!" 13 When Pilate heard that, he brought Jesus out. Pilate sat down on the judge's seat. It was at a place called the Stone Walkway. In the Aramaic language it was called Gabbatha. 14 It was about noon on

Preparation Day in Passover Week. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.¹⁵ But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Should I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. ¹⁶ Finally, Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be nailed to a cross.

Jesus Is Nailed to a Cross

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. ¹⁷ He had to carry his own cross. He went out to a place called the Skull. In the Aramaic language it was called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they nailed Jesus to the cross. Two other men were crucified with him. One was on each side of him. Jesus was in the middle. ¹⁹ Pilate had a notice prepared. It was fastened to the cross. It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. ²⁰ Many of the Jews read the sign. That's because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city. And the sign was written in the Aramaic, Latin and Greek languages. ²¹ The chief priests of the Jews argued with Pilate. They said, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews.' Write that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." ²² Pilate answered, "I have written what I have written."²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes. They divided them into four parts. Each soldier got one part. All that was left was Jesus' long, inner robe. It did not have any seams. It was made out of one piece of cloth from top to bottom. ²⁴ "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's cast lots to see who will get it." This happened so that Scripture would come true. It says, "They divided up my clothes among them. They cast lots for what I was wearing." So that is what the soldiers did.²⁵ Jesus' mother stood near his cross. So did his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ Jesus saw his mother there. He also saw the disciple he loved standing nearby. Jesus said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son." ²⁷ He said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, the disciple took her into his home.

Jesus Dies

²⁸ Later, Jesus knew that everything had now been finished. He also knew that what Scripture said must come true. So he said, "I am thirsty."²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there. So they soaked a sponge in it. They put the sponge on the stem of a hyssop plant. Then they lifted it up to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ After Jesus drank he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and died. ³¹ It was Preparation Day. The next day would be a special Sabbath day. The Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath day. So they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. ³² The soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus. Then they broke the legs of the other man. ³³ But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead. So they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers stuck his spear into Jesus' side. Right away, blood and water flowed out. ³⁵ The man who saw it has been a witness about it. And what he has said is true. He knows that he tells the truth. He is a witness so that you also may believe. ³⁶ These things happened in order that Scripture would come true. It says, "Not one of his bones will be broken."³⁷ Scripture also says, "They will look to the one they have pierced."

Jesus Is Buried

³⁸ Later Joseph asked Pilate for Jesus' body. Joseph was from the town of Arimathea. He was a follower of Jesus. But he followed Jesus secretly because he was afraid of the Jewish leaders. After Pilate gave him permission, Joseph came and took the body away. ³⁹ Nicodemus went with Joseph. He was the man who had earlier visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought some mixed spices that weighed about 75 pounds. ⁴⁰ The two men took Jesus' body. They wrapped it in strips of linen cloth, along with the spices. That was the way the Jews buried people. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden. A new tomb was there. No one had ever been put in it before. ⁴² That day was the Jewish Preparation Day, and the tomb was nearby. So they placed Jesus there.

Reflect

I like things that other people might not. When flying on an airplane, I select the middle seat. In the Starbucks drive through, I order a large iced water. I am totally fine sleeping five hours a night for weeks on end. As far as holidays go, Good Friday may be one of my favorites. How weird, right? With Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving on the calendar, why look forward to Good Friday? After all, there are no neatly wrapped presents under a tree, pastel dresses and ties in church, or exquisitely decorated desserts to eat with family and friends to celebrate such a holiday. Good Friday seems like just a day of lots of suffering and darkness. Hardly inspirational material for a proper celebration. Though the brutality of the Good Friday narrative may tempt us year after year to fast forward to all the joy that is Easter morning, let's not. Let's stay right here for now. It is where we see a chaotic, heartbreaking, and magnificent story unfold.

After His grand entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, after the Last Supper, Jesus's world seemingly falls apart. His beloved disciple, Peter, denies Him not once, not twice, but three times. Arrested and made to carry His own cross, Jesus' body, mercilessly beaten. His clothes, torn and stolen. Even death could not serve as a shield for violence, as blood flowed from the pierced Savior's side. And in what seems like an especially cruel detail, Jesus' mother bore witness to her son's death. The depth of tragedy takes our breath away like a suckerpunch to the stomach. We find ourselves doubled over, short of breath, our hearts shouting "it's not fair". Good Friday was not fair. A gross miscarriage of justice for the One who came to (among many things) heal the wounds of the hurting, to free the captives, to amplify the voice of the marginalized. A death so incomprehensible we try to turn away and not look back.

But if we rush past the shocking events of Good Friday, we miss our chance to come face to face with the unmatched, steadfast love of Jesus. It is here where we see both the humanity and divinity of Jesus on full display in the very moments that begin to alter the entire course of human history. Just as we cannot escape the graphic details of Jesus' death, we also cannot escape that in these details is when the symphony of God's great rescue mission builds to its eventual crescendo in the Resurrection. Without Jesus' death on Friday, there is no resurrection on Sunday. There is no stone rolled away from an empty tomb. There is no conqueror of the grave. Without the darkness of Friday, there is no light on Sunday. On Good Friday, out of His great love for us, He willingly suffered an incomparable sacrifice for the sinner. For you. For me. For the person you love most in this world. For the person you despise most in this world. For all who came before you and for all who come after. There is not one for whom He did not suffer. And for what? For love. Why else but love? Why else but a love so powerful that it transforms both the present age and the age to come? That is a love surely worth celebrating.

Respond

To understand the magnitude of Sunday, we need to immerse ourselves in the events of Friday. As we read the Passion narrative, let us resist the desire to disengage and to sanitize what transpired. Every detail of the Good Friday story tells of Jesus' great love for us. Let us not limit the celebration of Jesus' love to Easter Sunday alone, but rather celebrate His ultimate act of sacrifice on Friday also. Though the story is messy, God's love is shown clearly.

Rest

God, thank you for your incredible sacrifice that is beyond our comprehension. Thank you for your steadfast love that withstood mockery, beating and death. Give us the courage to sit with the Passion narrative and the curiosity to explore all the ways your love is on full display. And thank you that we know that Friday wasn't the end of the story. Amen



About the Author

Bronwyn is a credential pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church, serving at University Covenant Church in Davis, CA. Bronwyn is also a Consultant and Content Contributor for Ability Ministry, helping churches develop sustainable and effective disability ministries. She holds a Special Education teaching credential and tries to spend as much time as she can exploring with her husband and three children.

A Lent Reflection for Saturday of Holy Week

By Erika Catiz Burt

Lectionary reading for 4/8/2023: [Job 14:1-14; Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; 1 Peter 4:1-8; Matthew 27:57-66; John 19:38-42](#)

Selected passage: 3:1-9; 19-24

Read

Lamentations 3:1-9; 19-24, The New King James Version

vv 1-9

¹ I *am* the man *who* has seen affliction
by the rod of His wrath.

² He has led me and made *me* walk
In darkness and not *in* light.

³ Surely, He has turned His hand against me
Time and time again throughout the day.

⁴ He has aged my flesh and my skin,
And broken my bones.

⁵ He has besieged me
And surrounded *me* with bitterness and
woe.

⁶ He has set me in dark places
Like the dead of long ago.

⁷ He has hedged me in so that I cannot get
out;

He has made my chain heavy.

⁸ Even when I cry and shout,

He shuts out my prayer.

⁹ He has blocked my ways with hewn stone;
He has made my paths crooked.

vv 19-24

¹⁹ Remember my affliction and roaming,
The wormwood and the gall.

²⁰ My soul still remembers
And sinks within me.

²¹ This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.

²² *Through* the LORD's mercies we are not
consumed,

Because His compassions fail not.

²³ *They are* new every morning;
Great *is* Your faithfulness.

²⁴ "The LORD *is* my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I hope in Him!"

Reflect

Hope in the Hard Place

Having "*Hope in the Hard Place*" seems a bit oxymoronic when you think about it. How can one feel the walls closing in on her and still manage to have hope? Lamentations 3:1-9;19-24 provides insight. In this text, the prophet Jeremiah is filled with agony and despair over the trouble the people of God have gotten themselves into by their disobedience, and he feels like God is out to get him and the everyone else. Have you ever felt like that? No? Maybe you can visualize Jeremiah's anxiety this way: imagine walking down a dark street at night and hearing strange, startling noises, wondering who or what was lurking nearby. If you are like me, you're probably going to take off running. Now imagine the threat is real; there is nowhere to run, and enemies are coming at you. This is how Jeremiah felt except God was acting like an enemy (vv. 1-9). Have you been there? Maybe right now you are trying to figure out what you have done to cause the pain you are experiencing. Perhaps you are wondering why every time you think you see the light at the end of the tunnel it turns out to be an on-coming train. There have certainly been times in my life when I wondered if our loving God was trying to kill me through my circumstances. Like Jeremiah we have all rehearsed the pain of our circumstances. Sometimes

we rehearse it so much we no longer hear God's voice but only the voice of the enemy and our own depression. All of us can fall into pits of despair created by suffering, pain, grief, or even confusion. If you do fall in, the goal is to not stay there.

Jeremiah was in a pit of despair when he remembered the truth about our great God. He challenged the negative narrative playing in his mind by thinking about how merciful God is...morning by morning. Jeremiah recalled the truth to his mind, and he had hope (vs. 24)! In 2 Corinthians 10 we are told to cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. This not only addresses intellectual arguments against the existence of God, but the dreadful thoughts that play over and over in our minds—thoughts from the enemy that are diametrically opposed to God's character, His word, and His enduring active loving-kindness towards us. Many moons ago, during a wonderful time of devotion, I wrote a song about the Lord's loving-kindness and mercy towards us and even stated that I wanted to know Christ through His suffering. It seemed super holy. Years later, I joked that, clearly, I needed to write a new song about blessings. I needed any and all pain to stop, but then I remembered that I had a Great High Priest who was familiar with suffering and endured it all to pay the price for our freedom in the here and now and life everlasting with Him. This I recalled to my mind, and I had hope!

Like Jeremiah, we have to remind ourselves—and one another—that God's love and power are limitless. Even faced with troubling circumstances we have to say, "Wait a minute, because of Him, **today** I have grace and mercy, **today** I have breath in my lungs, **today** I have strength, **today** neither suffering nor my circumstances have consumed me, and I have a promise for **tomorrow** that is true for eternity". This will help us to challenge despair, and take life one day at a time, or one breathe at time, no matter what we are facing. As the old folk say, "every day above ground is a good day". May we understand that we have brand new mercies every day... morning by morning. Then we can have hope even in the hard place.

Respond

Join me in listening to the song "[You've Been so Faithful](#)" by Eddies James and the Phoenix Mass Choir, and let us make this song our collective prayer of thanksgiving.

Rest

Dear Jesus, we thank You for Your sacrifice on the cross that ensured us Your chesed, Your enduring active loving-kindness, towards us between the "now and not yet" and throughout eternity. This we recall to our minds, and we have hope: great is thy faithfulness! When we wake up every morning, regardless of our circumstances, help us to do as the lyrics of [Lift Every Voice and Sing](#) says. Help us to "sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us". As we face the rising sun that comes with each new day, help us to remember that You are the reason we have hope in this life and the life to come.

About the Author

Erika (Erie) C. Burt, higher education leader and diversity in STEM champion, is a change agent with a passion for advancing educational equity and access for across technology fields. She leads large scale projects aimed at increasing the academic success rates of underserved student populations and for helping organizations become high-tech, high-touch, high-impact centers of excellence. She is a PhD candidate with research interest in leadership, educational equity, and policy creation. Erika has a MDiv from North Park Theological Seminary & a MAT in education. She is a DEI workshop trainer and presenter and a published author with works in theological journals and magazines. Erika is from the south side of Chicago. She is a member of the South Side Cluster Leadership Team for the Illinois Poor People's Campaign and a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.



A Reflection for Resurrection Sunday

By Jessica deLinde Dyckman

Lectionary reading for 4/9/2023: [Jeremiah 31:1-6](#); [Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24](#); [Colossians 3:1-4](#); [Acts 10:34-43](#); [John 20:1-18](#); [Matthew 28:1-10](#)

Selected Passages: Matthew 28:5-6, Luke 24:1-8, Psalm 118:24 and Jeremiah 31:3

Read

Matthew 28:5-6

“The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay.”

Psalm 118:24

“This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.”

Jeremiah 31:3

“The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”

Reflect

Christ has Risen! Indeed, He has Risen!

Happy Easter Sunday! May this day be an encouragement of your faith because we have the hope of the Resurrection and serve the One true and living Messiah!

Easter Sunday is truly the basis of our faith and hope of heaven. It is a day of celebration and remembrance as we meditate on these truths: Jesus is alive and seated at the right hand of the Father, the Scriptures are true, and God can be trusted to fulfill His promises. Resurrection Sunday gives us hope for future glory with Jesus Christ!

*“The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, **just as He said**. Come and see the place where He lay.” Matthew 28:5-6 [bold is my emphasis]*

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed

*down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “**Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen! Remember how He told you, while He was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ” Then they remembered His words.**” Luke 24:1-8*

These women were some of the first witnesses to God keeping His promise of the Risen Messiah and Savior in Christ Jesus. In the midst of their mourning and dutifully respectful burial tradition, God met them in a tender and powerful way. He sent His angels to remind them of Jesus’s words and the promise of hope, and then moved them to action to tell the others.

Who can help you remember God’s faithfulness in your life?

When life is heavy and hard, we need to be reminded of God’s promises. When life is joyous and wonderful, we need to be reminded of God’s faithfulness! Mary Magdalene and the other women had the angels there to remind them. Who can help you?

Will you take time in prayer to thank God for His faithfulness, and ask Him to show you where He has kept His promises in your life? Whatever season of life you are in on this Resurrection Sunday, be encouraged that **God will meet you exactly where you are today**. He has given you hope for the future in Jesus Christ!

Next time you recite the Nicene Creed, remember God’s Promises of Resurrection Sunday.

*“I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. **And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.***

Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."

On this day of incredible remembrance, may our hearts be filled with joy as we praise God for being the God who keeps His promises.

Respond

Write down Psalm 118:24 and Jeremiah 31:3 as reminders of God's love and faithfulness. Jot them on 3x5 cards or sticky notes, or create graphics for your digital device. Put the notes or graphics in a location that you can see every day for the rest of the week - whether that's on your bathroom mirror, next to the coffee pot, or on the background of your mobile device, let it serve as a reminder of God's gracious love and the hope we have in Jesus Christ on Resurrection Sunday.

"This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118:24

"The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." Jeremiah 31:3

If your Scripture reminders serve you well, be encouraged to find a different Bible verse each week to make this practice a regular habit. Filling our hearts and minds with God's Word can give us hope, teach us, and equip us for the work ahead of us (2 Timothy 3:16-17) in this life!

Rest

Dear Lord, we thank you for this Easter Sunday! We are grateful that in your marvelous plan, as Resurrection Sunday followed Good Friday and Holy Saturday that truly left us lost and silent. Thank you for giving us hope for the future through Jesus Christ! Thank you for sending your Son to die on the cross for our sins, defeat death on our behalf, and rise again according to your Scriptures for our hope.

We thank you that we serve the One true, living God, and have a Heavenly Father that keeps His promises. Thank you for loving us with an ever-lasting kindness and mercy that will follow us all the days of our lives. We ask for your blessing of joy on this Resurrection Sunday, and to remind us of your grace and love today. May we share the hope and love of Jesus Christ with those around us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

About the Author



Jessica deLinde Dyckman is the founding editor of *“The Courageous & Kind Project”* a digital media project dedicated to empowering women to live out their God-given purpose. She and her husband live in Atlanta, Georgia, with their son who will be a big brother this July! Jessica is involved in her community with Oak Grove MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers), the Main Street Classical Christian School, and the Junior League of Atlanta.

Find Jessica on *The Courageous & Kind Project* podcast on any major streaming platform or follow C&K on social media [@TheCourageousandKindProject](https://www.instagram.com/TheCourageousandKindProject) or www.courageousandkind.org.

He is Risen!



Thank you for taking the time during this Lenten season to connect with God and to connect with yourself.

May you continue to see resurrection, or new life, in your daily life.

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If you are interested in exploring spiritual direction, please reach out to Julia Styles at www.spiritualdirectionwithjulia.com for a free introductory session.