

Prayerful Reflections

A Lent and Easter Devotional



Edited by Julia Styles

Spring 2022

Prayerful Reflections: A Lent & Easter 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.

We invite you to join us during the season of Lent (March 2, 2022-April 17) for daily reflections on scripture. Inspired by the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina*, or sacred listening, we will **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 2022*.

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 and community leaders. We range in age, ethnicity, race, denominational background, political and theological stances, and are from varied locations across North America and Europe. 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.

Your sister in Christ, Julia Styles

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A Lent Reflection for Ash Wednesday

By Mary Rodriguez

Lectionary reading for 3/2/2022: [Psalm 51:1-17; Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 and Isaiah 58:1-12

Read

Joel 2:1-2, 12-13 (NRSV)

Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near--a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Isaiah 58:6-9, 11 (NRSV)

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

Reflect

It has been roughly two years to the day that the world began grappling with the Coronavirus Pandemic. As I write this, we are over 5.8 million people less than we were two years ago. In the USA alone, over 940,000 people have died prematurely from this virus, especially in communities with poorer social determinants of health.

And as I mourn for those I have known who have died, and weep for the many more to whom death has climbed up and entered through windows like a thief (Joel 2:9), I have much angst and sorrow, as indeed it has felt like a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!

I know that from dust we have come, and to dust we will all return.

But how do I keep my heart from becoming cold as the winter's ice? Is not this anger toward systems of inequity that have so burdened the poor justified? Is it possible to not be consumed with disgust at injustices - like a thick darkness? How do I rend my heart, and not my clothing?

Turn to the LORD, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Yes, our reaction to great gloom should be to respond and to restore. Our fast should be to loose the bonds of injustice, undo the cords, free the oppressed, and then break every last yoke. We ought feed the hungry, clothe the naked, satisfy the needs of the afflicted, and not hide our eyes from our own humankind.

Then, our light shall break forth like the dawn. Healing will come, and we'll realize God is with all of us still. Even when we are feeling parched and burnt out, the LORD will guide and satisfy our needs, fortifying our bones and helping us continue to stand with each one of our neighbors, near and far.

Respond

From dust each of us has come, and to dust each of us will return. Same dust. God creates and breathes into us all. Let us draw near to the God who steadfastly loves each one of us. Let us help each other breathe and thrive.

Go now, in peace, to effect change, promote justice and share kindness. Fast from injustice. Fast from resignation. Fast from apathy. Fast from blindness to your neighbor. Shine forth in the darkness and gloom with God's great love. For our time here is finite. We will return to dust. Be lovely dust.

Rest

Almighty God, who is able to make all things new and to restore life anew every morning, help me never to be conformed to the world but to be transformed by the constant renewing of my mind. Help me today, my LORD, to discover your good, perfect, and acceptable will, and to focus all of my desire and energy upon doing it. Amen.

(prayer from *A Guide to Prayer for All God's People*)

About the Author



Mary Rodriguez works in Chicago in case management services, trying to help people struggling with mental illness, homelessness, and other injustices related to racism, ageism, and ableism. Mary has often been amazed at people's resilience, and she keeps perspective and passion by remembering we are all kin.

Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 3, 2022

By Elizabeth McColl

Lectionary reading for 3/3/2022: [Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 5:10-23; Acts 7:30-34](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Exodus 5:10-23 (NRSV)

Read

Exodus 5:10-23 (NRSV)

So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw. Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.'" So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw." And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, "Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?"

Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, "Why do you treat your servants like this? No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people." He said, "You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.' Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks." The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, "You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks." As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. They said to them, "The Lord look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

Then Moses turned again to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people."

Reflect

It has been two full years since most of us became aware that an unknown virus, which started in a place geographically far removed from our home, would soon dramatically alter pretty much every aspect of our lives. No matter who we were, or in what demography we lived, every one of us would be affected. Every piece of our lives needed to change to accommodate the unknown of what lay ahead. We learned that scientists had been predicting such a scenario and it was only a matter of time, given the way in which we humans continued to use (and abuse)

creation's resources. Environmentalists had long warned governments and change makers of the consequences of human made disturbances and natural ecological processes that would disturb the intricate balance of our environment. Various factors, such as natural disasters, human interferences, or animal interaction could not continue to go unchecked for much longer without calamitous repercussions.

So what has all this got to do with our Scripture passage for today? While I was reading these words from Exodus, I thought of our fellow humans who were (and still are) on the front lines in health care, not only our physicians and clinical staff, but those employed in cleaning and waste disposal services, operations and schedule makers dealing with deaths and crises trying to keep everything going. Delivery drivers and care home workers earning minimum wages, on whom so many fully relied for their survival doing crucial work and grocery store staff who were subjected to abuse if shelves were empty or products not available in what we consumers have come to expect as "normal." There was so much unknown 2 years ago, and not a huge amount of certainty about what will be known in the future.

The Israelites had been enslaved by the Egyptians, and their leader, Pharaoh, a man with so much power and control, frustrated by this unknown and apparently all powerful LORD the enslaved people worshiped. So Pharaoh proceeded to wield his absolute power and considerable control over the Israelites using brutal tactics to mask his fear of the unknown.

Operating out of fear and vulnerability can lead us to act in ways we would never have considered when life rolls along, seemingly predictable and sure. When fear overrides us and takes our thinking captive, we leave ourselves open to real trouble. We start to blame others for our distress and while there might be a fragment of truth in their actions taking their toll on us, the reality is most likely to do with our choices we made along the way, however individually or collectively.

Make their work harder, Pharaoh says, but demand the same output with fewer resources. This led to lots of defensiveness and blame; to Moses and Aaron, and ultimately to God. Moses' fear was real. So was Pharaoh's, and the people thought they were lost. Fear had seemingly won. And yet, Yahweh was still the LORD, God Almighty.

Respond

I know when I am feeling diminished by fear, I tend to react in unwell and defensive ways. Think of a recent situation where you have realized fear is leading your responses. Can you settle your mind and take a few minutes to settle your body and spirit through long, slow inhales and even longer exhales? Can you invite the Spirit into your whole self and offer your fear to Her? Ask if fear has something to say to you? Try sitting with that emotion and listen to what she may be saying to you. If fear of the unknown is speaking loudly, ask the Great Spirit to sit close to you and stay with you to explore what might be triggering your responses. Can you feel a change in your body - a physical change? Say the words out loud; " I feel in fear, I feel afraid." Once spoken, can you feel a change in your body?

Rest

Great Spirit, you know me and you know where fear takes over in me. Infiltrate those spaces. Remind me I am not alone in my emotions. You are always with me, always beside me to watch over me, within me to remind me I need not be afraid whatever calamities threaten to take over my thinking. Help me relax into You.

About the Author



Elizabeth is an ordained pastor and vocationally a musician and educator, working with under-resourced young people using music as a way to social change and educational justice. Based in the beautiful city of Edinburgh, Scotland, she is never known to live a day without a good mug of coffee and lemon infused water.

A Lenten Reflection for Friday, March 4, 2022

By Jessie Best Chambers

Lectionary reading for 3/4/2022: [Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16](#); [Exodus 6:1-13](#); [Acts 7:35-42](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Exodus 6:1-13 (New Living Translation)

Read

Exodus 6:1-13 (New Living Translation)

6 Then the Lord told Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. When he feels the force of my strong hand, he will let the people go. In fact, he will force them to leave his land!”

2 And God said to Moses, “I am Yahweh—‘the Lord.’ **3** I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El-Shaddai—‘God Almighty’—but I did not reveal my name, Yahweh, to them. **4** And I reaffirmed my covenant with them. Under its terms, I promised to give them the land of Canaan, where they were living as foreigners. **5** You can be sure that I have heard the groans of the people of Israel, who are now slaves to the Egyptians. And I am well aware of my covenant with them.

6 “Therefore, say to the people of Israel: ‘I am the Lord. I will free you from your oppression and will rescue you from your slavery in Egypt. I will redeem you with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment. **7** I will claim you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God who has freed you from your oppression in Egypt. **8** I will bring you into the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to you as your very own possession. I am the Lord!’”

9 So Moses told the people of Israel what the Lord had said, but they refused to listen anymore. They had become too discouraged by the brutality of their slavery.

10 Then the Lord said to Moses, **11** “Go back to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and tell him to let the people of Israel leave his country.”

12 “But Lord!” Moses objected. “My own people won’t listen to me anymore. How can I expect Pharaoh to listen? I’m such a clumsy speaker!”

13 But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron and gave them orders for the Israelites and for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The Lord commanded Moses and Aaron to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt.

Reflect

Exodus is essentially the story of liberation from oppression and the forging of a new identity. In Exodus, God promises to rescue the Hebrew people (aka the Israelites) from slavery in Egypt and deliver them to a new home where they can live in freedom. In this passage, we see that their oppression has become so brutal and they are so discouraged that they don't even want to listen to Moses' message about God's promise. Moses is scared to go back and deliver this message again and who could blame him? He's already seen God show up in some amazing ways, but he's up against a huge empire that doesn't care whether or not his people live or die. But he doesn't have to go alone. He has Aaron by his side and God's promises echoing in his ears which enables him to muster up the courage to do what God has asked him. And later in the book we see God's promise come to fruition.

I love the book of Exodus. In part because despite all the crazy miracles, it is so full of human emotions - fear, doubt, despair, anger, but most of all hope. Remembering this story is a call to hope and is used as a tool for hope throughout Israel's history. When we remember the ways that God has moved to rescue and care for us in the past, it helps us to hope that God will do the same in the future and gives us something to cling to in our present despair.

The book of Exodus also says something very powerful about who God is. This story of freedom from oppression becomes a key aspect not only of Israel's identity but of God's. How do you know what God is like? God is the one who will rescue you from slavery. That is what God does. Which is why this story has long been a source of hope for oppressed people.

When we try to apply this story to our own context, we need to have an honest conversation about whether or not we should be identifying with the oppressed or the oppressor. I suspect that if you, like me, have the luxury to choose who you identify with then you're likely part of the latter group. Sure, most of us are not Pharaoh - we don't wield that kind of power and hopefully don't display that level of callousness for others. But we might be more like one of the Egyptians than the Hebrews - not an active character with lines in this story, but benefitting from an unjust system whether or not they choose to see it.

When I think about what happens next in this book, I can't help but wonder if the Egyptians might have chosen a different path and been partners with God and the Hebrews in their liberation. We might have missed out on some amazing images like the parting of the Red Sea, but I think the story would be no less powerful.

Respond

If you find yourself identifying with the oppressed Hebrews this morning, let this story give you hope. God hears you. God sees you. And God will deliver you from your oppressors so you can live free and with dignity.

If you're worried you might have more in common with the oppressors, let's lean into that uncomfortable feeling. Let's try to be better listeners, better learners, and to speak up for those who are being oppressed around us.

Rest

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(From the Book of Common Prayer)

About the Author



Jessie Best Chambers lives and works in Richmond, Virginia. Originally from North Carolina, she did her undergraduate work at Appalachian State University before obtaining a master's in Theological Studies from North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago. In her free time, you can usually find her taking a walk with her husband or reading a murder mystery. Jessie loves the outdoors, the Old Testament, and tacos.

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, March 05, 2022

By Erika Catiz Burt

Lectionary reading for 3/5/2022: [Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; John 12:27-36](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 91: 1-2; 9-16, The New King James Version (NKJV)

Read

Psalm 91: 1-2; 9-16 (NKJV)

¹ He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High

Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say of the LORD, “*He is my refuge and my fortress;*
My God, in Him I will trust.”

⁹ Because you have made the LORD, *who is my refuge,*
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,

¹⁰ No evil shall befall you,
Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;

¹¹ For He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you in all your ways.

¹² In *their* hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.

¹³ You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra,
The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.

¹⁴ “Because he has set his love upon Me,
therefore I will deliver him;
I will set him on high, because he has known My name.

¹⁵ He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;

I *will be* with him in trouble;
I will deliver him and honor him.

¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him,
And show him My salvation.

Reflect

When I was younger, I had a favorite painting hanging on my bedroom wall right across from my bed. The painting had me mesmerized, not only by the vibrant colors but because of the depiction of a majestic angel hovering over two small children, a boy and a girl, as they journeyed down a trail. Staring at this painting, I would recall the times my brother and I would walk to the store, hang out at the park, go on bike rides with our friends, or do just about anything without a care in the world or without being aware that we were surrounded by angelic protection appointed to us by our loving God. Now when I think about the painting it reminds me of Psalm 91 not only because of the assurance that God gives angels charge over us to keep us, but also because God shows Himself as our ultimate Protector.

In our present context of Covid 19, increased sickness, violence, racial and systemic oppression, emotional pain, family concerns, school, and peer pressures (and the list goes on...), there is emotional fatigue and a fear of the future that drains us perpetually. It seems that now more than ever we need to know that God has our backs! Psalm 91 verses 1 and 2 informs us that while God is always present with us. He is also aware of the threats (dangers seen and underseen) and is actively protecting those who dwell in Him. But...what does it mean to dwell in Him as a precursor to His protection?

To dwell in the Lord means that we draw our strength from God daily and habitually. It seems easier said than done unless we are in a crisis because when we are in crises, we usually cry out to God the most and pray constantly, but dwellers do more than that. Dwellers rest under God's proverbial wing and have a lifestyle of communing with God that takes place long before crises arise. This does not mean we have to be perfect to be dwellers, nor does it mean we need to pray perfectly (since perfection is impossible), but it does mean that we remain conscious of God's sovereignty and love as communicated through His word, in the fellowship of believers, and by God's very presence. This understanding of God's sovereignty and love is also what helps us to trust in God as our fortress, our shelter, and our ultimate protector from the traps of the enemy and challenges of life in general, as Psalm 9-16 highlights.

God not only covers us through life's challenges and from the attacks of the wicked one, but God gives us wisdom to navigate it all and provides us angelic protection along the journey. Charles Spurgeon said it quite poignantly when preaching on Psalm 91: he said that not only do we have the angels of God dispensed for our aid, but we have the God of all the angels coming to act on our behalf¹ no matter what the circumstances are.

Respond

Join me in praying to our Great Protecting God as we echo the prayer of composer Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)

Holy Life-Giver

Doctor of the desperate,

Healer of everyone broken past hope, Medicine for all wounds,

Fire of love, fragrant Strength,

sparkling Fountain,

Protector!

In You we see how God goes looking for those who are lost and reconciles those who are at odds with God. We praise You.

Light-giver, Sound of joy,

Wonder of being alive,

Hope of every person:

You are our strongest Good, Alleluia.

¹ [Charles H. Spurgeon Treasury of David](#)

Rest

Take a few minutes to think about the challenges you are facing and the fact that our Great Protecting God is acting on your behalf. Now...send up praise.

About the Author



Erika C. Burt, Director of Professional and Graduate Academic Programs for Illinois Tech's College of Computing, 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 leadership student with research interest in educational equity and policy creation. Erika also 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 and is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated.

A Lent Reflection for the First Sunday of Lent

By Julia Styles

Lectionary reading for 3/6/2022: [Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16](#); [Deuteronomy 26:1-11](#); [Romans 10:8b-13](#); [Luke 4:1-13](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Romans 10:8b-13 NIV

Read

Romans 10:8b-13

8 But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,”[a] that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: 9 If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. 11 As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”[b] 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”[c]

Reflect

When I read Romans 10:8-13, especially verses 9 and 10, in the New International Version, all the assumptions of the Evangelical tradition blare at me like a resounding gong. All I can hear are altar calls and the Sinner’s Prayer, and a call to evangelize others. Like many Americans, I have some baggage I’m still unloading when it comes to Evangelicalism, and that baggage can distort scripture to the point where sometimes I just want to throw it all away, and disregard scripture all together.

When my own history of religiosity deafens me from hearing the good news of God, I turn to my current go-to solution for seeing things with new eyes, and read the passage in different translations. The Message translation often helps me hear things more clearly, and allows the Holy Spirit to work in both my understanding and in my healing.

Romans 10: 8-13 The Message

8-10So what exactly was Moses saying? The word that saves is right here, as near as the tongue in your mouth, as close as the heart in your chest. It’s the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching. Say the welcoming word to God—“Jesus is my Master”—embracing, body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. That’s it. You’re not “doing” anything; you’re simply

calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That's salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between him and me!"

11-13 *Scripture reassures us, "No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it." It's exactly the same no matter what a person's religious background may be: the same God for all of us, acting the same incredibly generous way to everyone who calls out for help. "Everyone who calls, 'Help, God!' gets help."*

These verses are a clear distillation of what the Apostle Paul believes is the message of Christianity: when we decide that following in the footsteps of Jesus is worth it, all we need to do is ask Jesus to lead us, and believe that God will do the rest. We don't need to do anything. There are no hoops to jump through, no box to fit in, no religious checklist to get into heaven. God will do all of the restorative work necessary to make our relationships right—our relationship with God, others, the earth, ourselves.

In other words, when we call out to God for help, God helps. When we allow God to bring back to life that which has died, God revives. When we allow God to heal what is broken, God heals. Instead of trying to follow a list of do's and don'ts to strive for perfection, we surrender to the fact that Jesus would do it better. We don't do anything but call out to God and trust that God will do the rest. Salvation, in other words, is asking God to take over, and surrendering to that Love.

And the great news is that whoever trusts God like this, whoever surrenders to Love, will not regret it. And this salvation is for E-V-E-R-Y-O-N-E! Everyone is welcome to the generous, healing, transforming, powerful, all-reconciling love of God.

To me, this is good news, and authentically, I can't help but say it out loud. (But that might not be where everyone is at.) Perhaps, the idea of surrendering to God still doesn't sound that great. The word surrender has all sorts of negative connotations that are hard to untangle.

In Spiritual Direction training, we read a book called [Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality](#) by David Benner. In that book, the author uses a metaphor for surrender that I find very helpful. Surrendering to love is not like waving a white flag and being conquered, instead surrendering to love is like floating on water.

When we float we have to allow the water to hold us, we cannot do anything but lie back, breathe, and allow the water to hold us up. When we first try to learn to float on our backs it is nerve-racking, or even scary, because we are releasing control, which isn't natural. But when we actually let go—of control, tension and fear—and let the water do the work, we float, and it can be the most calming sensation on the planet.

Next time you find yourself gripped with anxiety, call on God for help, and believe that God will come through for you.

Respond

Scripture reassures us, “No one who trusts God like this—heart and soul—will ever regret it.”

Try a body prayer to practice releasing your worries to God:

Hold your arms out in front of you with your hands balled in fists.

Then say: *“God help me to trust in your love, to let go, and to allow you to do the work.”*

Now open your palms face up, and imagine releasing whatever you need to release to God.

Rest

Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and imagine yourself letting go of the things you cannot control and floating in the waters of God’s love. Stay there for as long as you need.



About the Author

Julia Styles is a spiritual director. 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 with her husband Derek and two kids Jakob and Zoe in Atlanta, GA.

A Lent Reflection for Monday, March 7, 2022

By Abby Walker

Lectionary reading for 3/7/2022: [Psalm 17](#); [1 Chronicles 21:1-17](#); [1 John 1:1-7](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 1 John 1:1-7

Read

1 John 1:1-7 NRSV

1 We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— **3** we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** We are writing these things so that our[a] joy may be complete.

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. **6** If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; **7** but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Reflect

It's hard enough to tell the truth, let alone embody it. In a world where different equals divided, and the slightest difference could mean the end of a relationship, it's no wonder we're lying more often.

Usually we know when we're telling a lie, but it's less apparent when we're living one. To know the truth and to speak the truth is not the same as actually living the truth. In an attempt to protect our fragile selves and connection with others, we put on our protective shield, our ego. And every time our ego is activated, Christ is deactivated.

John makes it clear that the only way to live out of truth is to live as Jesus lived. It doesn't matter what you know or speak, but what you do.

The gift of incarnation was not a gift for Jesus, but a gift for the rest of us. Both incarnation and resurrection are an invitation for us to let the ego die, so Christ can rise within us. This is the only hope of truth taking on form in our lives and bearing witness to the world.

Respond

As you walk toward the cross this season, take time to allow for God to reveal the lies you believe, speak, and embody regularly. Where are you attempting to keep the peace at the expense of truth? What lies have you gotten comfortable with?

How might you begin to let go of the lies, and make room for truth?

Rest

God of Truth,

Fill us with your wisdom. We repent of our inauthenticity, and ask that you reveal to us your truth, so that when we are able to reflect Christ to creation. May Christ be revealed in me.

About the Author



Abby Walker is an ordained Covenant pastor and certified Enneagram Coach. She's a coffee-loving bookworm, dreaming of new expressions of spiritual community, and mom of four powerful women who will be leading the world soon: Stella, Lucy, Mabel, and Harper. Abby would love to facilitate the Enneagram at your next meeting or retreat, and is available for 1:1 coaching at Integrative Enneagram.

<http://integrativeenneagramcoaching.com/>

A Lent Reflection For Tuesday, March 8, 2022

By Tamara Fore-Ravelo

Lectionary reading for 3/8/2022: [Psalm 17; Zechariah 3:1-10; 2 Peter 2:4-21](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 17:4-5

Read

Psalm 17:4-5 The Message

I'm staying on your trail; I'm putting one foot in front of the other. I'm not giving up.



Reflect

Keep Putting One Foot in Front of the Other

Beloved, the world is weeping. Our communities are weeping. Families are weeping, and if we are honest, personally, many of us have tears resting in our hearts also. The tears are like a weighted traveling companion. That feeling is there, and it lingers like an invited house visitor who overstays their welcome. For many, in recent times, loved ones have passed away, jobs have ceased to exist, families have become fractured, neighbors have been at a divide and our places of worship seem different than before because they are trying to grapple with these changes as well. These days the songs of the church are being sung through weary throats. It appears the more we push for change, the more things seem to stay the same.

When we are in tough situations it feels like they last forever. The good news is, they don't. Jesus knew of this experience and David the author of Psalm 17 knew it too. We are not alone. When we land in this text David is crying out to the Lord. In this chapter he emotes agony, expresses overwhelm and echoes the sentiments of a person who is consumed with the pressures of life. By the end however, he is encouraged that he will rise again.

As we embark upon the Lent season that details Jesus' wilderness experience before the resurrection, we are enlightened to the reality that after the hard place comes the life-giving space. In both instances, David and Jesus, keep putting one foot in front of the other. They kept the faith, believed the promise, that soon, there would be better days. That same truth holds for us. It won't be this way forever. If you are here or someone you love is facing difficulty, today be encouraged. You will get there. Keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Respond

Today, you are invited to hold on to hope and encourage someone to hold on to hope too.

Rest

God, the giver of good and perfect gifts, like the Psalmist David our heart is turned toward you. Give your children the strength to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Amen.

About the Author



Tamara Ravelo from New Haven, CT

My favorite things include laughter, travel, and having fun with those I love. Currently, I live on the East Coast with my husband and daughter, but originally, I am from the West Coast, where I love sunny beach days. Home is the Quechuan Indian Reservation (pronounced Kwuh-tsan), where I spent many of my formative years unaware that my family and I lived on a reservation. I'm out here in the world proudly reppin' my Indigenous people. Life by far hasn't been easy, but by God's grace, I've obtained my master's degree in business (MBA) and currently attend Yale University as an MDiv candidate slated to graduate in 2023'. At Yale, I also serve in Marquand Chapel as a minister. On other days you can find me leading as Assistant Pastor at Salem Covenant Church in Washington Depot, CT, where I love prayer and creating spaces for others to heal; however, that may come. You can find me on facebook, twitter and Instagram @thetamaravelo

A Lent Reflection for Wednesday, March 9, 2022

By Rachel Douglas Swanson

Lectionary reading for 3/9/2022: [Psalm 17](#); [Job 1:1-22](#); [Luke 21:34-22:6](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Job 1:1-22

Read

Job 1:13-21 NIV

¹³One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁴a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁶While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁷While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

¹⁸While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁹when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!"

²⁰At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹and said:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.^[a]
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
may the name of the Lord be praised."

Reflect

When my friend got the phone call telling him that his brother had been killed in an accident, while his friends gathered around him, he began to sing.

"Great is thy faithfulness oh God my father. There is no shadow of turning with thee..."

I think about that moment with some frequency. I think about the utter despair that fills those moments after "the call". That feeling of losing your balance, the buzzing in your ears. The future, opening like a bottomless pit.

The last few years have been a long dance with fear and loss. We have lost our jobs; we have lost our way of life. We have lost our sense of community. We have lost people that we cannot live without.

There have been many days when my voice isn't strong enough to sing, let alone to sing the words, "Great is thy faithfulness." There have been many days when getting out of bed in the morning is the bravest thing I can do.

Last fall, during a walk with my friend in the freezing rain, I looked up at one of the trees. It was positively radiant. The colors were fire in the sky, crackling with beauty. My friend turned to me and said, "Did you know that the color that leaves change in the fall is their true color? When all the chlorophyll is gone, the leaf is the color that is left behind."

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will return."

When the phone rings, when the world is brought to its knees, what is left?

When everything is stripped away, what is my true color?

Because the last few years have also been an invitation to surrender. To let go. Seeing plans so carefully made change in an instant. Releasing my death grip on control, because I have so very little control over so many things.

The last few years have been an invitation to hold on to what crackles with beauty when everything else is stripped away.

The pockets of kindness. The presence of friends who will not be pushed away. The joy that leaks out between the tears. The hope that stands at the door, knocking to be let in.

The faithfulness. Whether our voice can sing the words or not.

"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Respond

What are the things that you want to hold onto even when everything else is stripped away?
What pockets of crackling beauty stubbornly peek through?

Rest

May the God who gives and takes away shelter you in their wings. May your days be filled with trees crackling with beauty. May you be reminded again and again of the faithfulness of the one who created you. May all love surround you, in grief and in joy.

About the Author



Rachel has over 16 years of experience in education and works as a Creativity Coach, bringing creative, equitable learning opportunities to schools around the country, and providing one on one coaching to people in transition periods of their lives. Rachel has written for And Sons Magazine, The Huffington Post, and multiple online blogs. Rachel has a master's degree in education and is a former Teach Plus Policy Fellow, a Gate's Foundation Redesign Challenge Innovator, and a Google for Education Educator, Innovator, Trainer, and Coach. She is the co-creator of the Create Brave card deck. In her free time Rachel spends as much time as possible with her partner and two sons.

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 10, 2022

By Melanie Marie Myatt

Lectionary reading for 3/10/2022: [Psalm 27](#); [Genesis 13:1-7](#); [Philippians 3:2-12](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 27

Read

Psalm 27

A psalm of David.

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation—
so why should I be afraid?
The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from
danger,
so why should I tremble?
2 When evil people come to devour me,
when my enemies and foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.
3 Though a mighty army surrounds me,
my heart will not be afraid.
Even if I am attacked,
I will remain confident.
4 The one thing I ask of the Lord—
the thing I seek most—
is to live in the house of the Lord all the
days of my life,
delighting in the Lord's perfections
and meditating in his Temple.
5 For he will conceal me there when
troubles come;
he will hide me in his sanctuary.
He will place me out of reach on a high
rock.
6 Then I will hold my head high
above my enemies who surround me.
At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with
shouts of joy,
singing and praising the Lord with music.

7 Hear me as I pray, O Lord.
Be merciful and answer me!
8 My heart has heard you say, "Come and
talk with me."
And my heart responds, "Lord, I am
coming."
9 Do not turn your back on me.
Do not reject your servant in anger.
You have always been my helper.
Don't leave me now; don't abandon me,
O God of my salvation!
10 Even if my father and mother abandon
me,
the Lord will hold me close.
11 Teach me how to live, O Lord.
Lead me along the right path,
for my enemies are waiting for me.
12 Do not let me fall into their hands.
For they accuse me of things I've never
done;
with every breath they threaten me with
violence.
13 Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's
goodness
while I am here in the land of the living.
14 Wait patiently for the Lord.
Be brave and courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.

Reflect

When I picture the people of the United States, I picture a lot of people who look like this. Everyone seems so angry these days. The Republicans are total racists who care only about staying in power. The Democrats want to turn us into a bunch of communists, and they will manipulate any laws they can to make it happen. Anti-vaxxers are selfish people who believe a bunch of propaganda that isn't based on science. Pro-vaxxers and their mandates are trying to infringe on the freedoms that our country was built on.

So many angry people.

How can we as believers stay set apart? How can we be a people characterized by love instead of anger?

I believe this Psalm gives us some good advice. The first three verses focus on trust. We can choose to have fear, or we can choose to have faith. Fear is often at the root of anger. But if we choose faith, we don't need to have to get self-righteously angry at people who disagree with us. We have confidence because our identity is in God, not in a political party.

When our identity is in God, we find God's presence to be a sanctuary of grace and peace (vv. 4-6). The raucous clamor of the angry people will quiet as we find rest and wisdom in our time with God. Imagine if a wave of grace and peace were spreading out from us and spreading to others who are seeking a sea of calm away from the chaos of our country?

Maybe the angry people seem like they are everywhere you turn. Do you struggle to hear God's voice when everyone else is so loud? We can pray the words of verses 7-10 along with the Psalmist. We ask for God's presence to protect us and be a shield around us, even if the people we disagree with are our own family members.

Finally, we join with the Psalmist to request direction (vv. 11-14). We don't want to chime in with the angry people; instead, we ask God to teach us how to live with integrity in the midst of angry people. We want to learn to live God's way instead of the world's way.

Lent is a time for us to turn our hearts toward God. Whether we give up something for Lent, or choose to do an act of kindness every day, we are showing ourselves to be a people who are set apart; we look different from the rest of the world. When we show grace and peace even to people we (strongly!) disagree with, we spread God's love and do our part to bring God's kingdom to earth.



Respond

Are you feeling angry? Bring your anger to God. Just like the Psalmist, ask God to change your heart to trust that God can deal with the angry people in God's perfect timing. Ask God for courage and bravery to stand apart and demonstrate God's love and peace even to angry people.

Rest

God, like the Psalmist, we have a choice set before us: we can choose fear or faith.

If we are fearful, we respond with anger to anger. Give us a desire to enter your sanctuary, to experience your love, and learn to walk in your path. Then we can be people of peace who share your love with others. Help us be brave and courageous, even as we wait for you to work and bring healing to our world. Amen.

About the Author



Melanie Myatt lives in Chicago, Illinois. She is a Writer, Teacher, Mom, Preacher, Spiritual Director, Learner, and Chaplain Resident in no particular order. She is currently journeying through 1 Samuel [if you would like to join her](#). Now that Spring is beginning, you can find Melanie with her face turned toward the sun, dreaming of summer beach days.

A Lent Reflection for Friday, March 11, 2022

By Ruth Jensen Zschoche

Lectionary reading for 3/11/2022: [Psalm 27](#); [Genesis 14:17-24](#); [Philippians 3:17-20](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Philippians 3:17-21

Read

Philippians 3:17-21 (New Testament for Everyone)

(17) So, my dear family, I want you, all together, to watch what I do and copy me. You've got us as a pattern of behaviour; pay careful attention to people who follow it.

(18) You see, there are several people who behave as enemies of the cross of the Messiah. I told you about them often enough, and now I'm weeping as I say it again. (19) They are on the road to destruction; their stomach is their god, and they find glory in their own shame. All they ever think about is what's on the earth.

(20) We are citizens of heaven, you see, and we're eagerly waiting for the saviour, the Lord, King Jesus, who is going to come from there. (21) Our present body is a shabby old thing, but he's going to transform it so that it's just like his glorious body. And he's going to do this by the power which makes him able to bring everything into line under his authority.

Reflect

Do you have someone you want to imitate? When you ask a young child who they want to be like when they grow up, they often answer they want to be like their mother or father. Ask a teen and the answer will likely be some sports star or music star. But as we get older might there still be someone we want to model our lives after?

In this passage Paul is telling the Philippians to watch what he is doing and copy him. He is telling them that they have a pattern of behaviour they can follow.

My mother died a little over three years ago. She was almost 95 years old. She is someone who imitated Jesus for most of her adult life. She spent time in the Word daily, she knew Him intimately. As she aged, she suffered from dementia. But, she never changed into someone we didn't know. I believe that she knew deeply, Jesus so well, and had imitated Him for so long that her spirit remembered who she wanted to be like even if she didn't always remember my name. She wanted to be like her Savior! We described her as being stuck on sweet. Everyone who knew her wanted to be around her. Even with dementia she was still a witness for Jesus.

In our world, it is so easy to look to those who are popular or well-known. We find ourselves imitating the wrong people! But Paul tells us that these are people who are enemies of the

Messiah. They are on roads that lead to destruction, they follow anything that appeals to them and this becomes their gods.

Our future citizenship with God isn't here on earth, it's in heaven. However, even here on earth, we should want to live a life that points to our citizenship in heaven. My mother eagerly waited for heaven even though she lived many years on earth. She knew her final citizenship was in heaven and she lived her life as an example of the transformation that comes when we imitate the One who came to save us. I want to be an imitator of Jesus like my mother was. I want to be known as someone who knows Jesus well. What about you?

Respond

Is there someone in your life who is an imitator of Jesus? As you reflect on this passage, how might someone describe you? Are you a person that others want to imitate, one who is imitating Jesus? Is there someone who you want to imitate, someone who clearly imitates Jesus? Ask God to show you deep within your soul, who you are imitating.

Rest

Lord, life on earth is not easy. We are surrounded by so many people and things trying to get our attention and our focus. Keep our eyes on you and those we know who are following you. Show us how to be imitators of You so that those who see us want to know You and follow you better. Amen.



About the Author

Ruth has recently retired from a position in church ministry. She is a Spiritual Director and Certified Enneagram Coach. She is mom to one son, a daughter-in-law and Omi to two beautiful granddaughters. She loves to run, bike, swim, read and spend time mentoring women.

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, March 12, 2022

By Aisha Cox

Lectionary reading for 3/12/2022: [Psalm 27](#); [Psalm 118:26-29](#); [Matthew 23:37-39](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 11:26-29

Read

Psalm 118:26-29 NLT

Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, shining upon us. Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar. You are my God, and I will praise you! You are my God, and I will exalt you! Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.

Reflect

You know the worship songs we sing at church that talk about the power of praise? How often do we live out the songs we sing when we are not at church? Are we intentionally choosing a posture of praise? The Psalmist in this passage is modeling that exact posture for us. Psalm 118 is the last of what is known as the Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113-118). Hallel in Hebrew literally means praise. The Psalmist wrote praises of God that were sung in community during the Passover and other Jewish festivals.

Many times we think of praise as something to do only when something good happens to us. We got the opportunity we were praying for. We closed on a home in the midst of an extremely competitive market. We reached out to someone we admire for coffee and made an authentic deep connection. God you are so good! Praise oozes from our lips when we are experiencing the mountain top experiences of life. But what happens when we are in a valley season? How do we offer praise when our circumstances are less than ideal, heartbreak is our reality, and we are blindsided by grief? The secret is that we don't limit our praise to merely good things happening to us. Just like the psalmist, we can offer praise simply to the One who is good. This helps us differentiate between happiness and joy. The source of happiness is temporary and based on external circumstances. Joy on the other hand, is a long lasting state of being rooted in the unchanging character of God. The book of Psalms teaches us that God inhabits the praises of His people (Ps 22:3) and in His presence there is fullness of joy (Ps 16:11). We can lay down our circumstances to God at the altar of prayer and receive the fullness of joy that comes with His presence.

Imagine the last entry of your gratitude journal being composed into a worship song for your community. This psalm was written to reflect on God's steadfast love and redemptive

deliverance from Egypt. Praise for the one who comes in the name of the Lord is referencing a king who comes in God's authority, which is a foreshadow of Jesus' triumphant entry in Jerusalem. God so loved us that he sent Jesus to the earth to pay the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. It was love that led Jesus to the cross to lay down his life for us. This love is unconditional, unending, and unlike anything we've ever experienced. Jesus is the greatest evidence of God's love. As we pause to remember and reflect on God's faithful covenantal love, how could we not burst out in praise?

Respond

Intentionally start your day with a posture of praise while you reflect on God's love for you. How have you experienced God's love this week? We often give those we love nicknames and there are many names of God listed in the Bible. What is your name for Him in this season?

Rest

God, I praise you simply for who you are. You are a good Father who loves me unconditionally. I thank you that nothing can separate me from your love and that there is nothing I can do to make you love me any less. Help me to have a posture of praise that is rooted in your goodness and your faithful love.

About the Author



Aisha Cox is a Leader, Mentor, and Pastor. She serves as the Prayer Pastor and Teaching Pastor at Ascent Community Church in Louisville, CO. She is passionate about helping people grow in their intimacy with God and develop soul care practices. She is the founder of the movement Authentically Arise which creates authentic spaces for women to arise into their God-given identity, purpose, and build community along the journey.

www.authenticallyarise.com

A Lent Reflection for the Second Sunday of Lent

By Pamela Hogewoning

Lectionary reading for 3/13/2022: [Psalm 27](#); [Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18](#); [Philippians 3:17-4:1](#); [Luke 13:31-35](#); [Luke 9:28-36, \(37-43a\)](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Genesis 15.1-12,17-18a

Read

Genesis 15.1-12,17-18a

After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a special dream, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your safe place. Your reward will be very great." Then Abram said, "O Lord God, what will You give me? For I have no child. And the one who is to receive what belongs to me is Eliezer of Damascus." Abram said, "Because You have not given me a child, one born in my house will be given all I have." Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This man will not be given what is yours. But he who will come from your own body will be given what is yours." He took him outside and said, "Now look up into the heavens and add up the stars, if you are able to number them." Then He said to him, "Your children and your children's children will be as many as the stars." Then Abram believed in the Lord, and that made him right with God.

God said to him, "I am the Lord Who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land for your own." And Abram said, "O Lord GOd, how may I know that it will be mind?" So the Lord said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old cow, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon." Then Abram brough all these to Hlm, and cut them in two. And he laid each half beside the other. But he did not cut the birds. When the meat-eating birds came down upon the dead animals, Abram made them go away. When the sun was going down, Abram went into a sleep as if he were dead. And much fear and darkness came upon him.

When the sun had gone down and it was very dark, a fire pot of smoke and a burning fire passed between these parts of animals. The Lord made an agreement with Abram on that day. He said, "I have given this land to your children and to their children's children..."

Reflect

Like many, I often fall prey to the temptation to believe that if I produce then I am valuable. The belief is that I should and need to physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually produce in the areas of work, family, community, and society. If I do this, then I am deserving of love, affection, recognition, and value. The daily temptation to produce, in order to be of worth,

creates a build up of expectation, assumption, and self-preservation. Lent is a time to step back and strip away these layers which have built up over the past weeks, months, and year. During Lent, we eliminate and let go of some of the coping mechanisms we've developed (i.e., food, drink, social media, shopping, etc.) in order to embrace the true nature of our worth. A worth that is not ours to produce or grab hold of, but worth given to us by God. This is an uncomfortable process and leaves us vulnerable. However, it's through the process that we find our value is anchored in something more certain than my attempts to produce my way to worth.

The story of Abram (later to be named Abraham) gives us a sobering as well as an empowering truth. It is God who does the work and in that work reveals our value. There is nothing I can do outside of God which will have everlasting value. I find this aspect of Abraham's story speaking to me during Lent. Yes, Abraham has faith in God, but it is God who does something great in and through Abraham. It is not Abraham who works to achieve the favour of God. In fact, when Abraham takes matters into his own hands, things fall apart and become burdensome. This is why I find Abraham's story to be sobering. It is a reminder to beware not to take on the burden of being productive for the sake of finding and justifying my worth. However, Abraham's story is an empowering reminder, to keep focused on the One who is doing the work in and through me. Lent invites us to strip off all the futile attempts we have been making to validate our existence and value and embrace the worth that God has already determined. This worth is not seen in what we can produce, but in the reality that God was willing to make this promise with Abraham and thousands of years later give up everything in order to fulfill this promise through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. During this Lent season, may we be reminded that Jesus was willing to walk this difficult journey because God had determined us worthy of the sacrifice.

Respond

Take some time to identify areas and practices in your life where you struggle to find your worth. Consider if some of these areas of practices point you to God or are they offering a false or temporary sense of worth.

Rest

Lord God, forgive me of the times I have attempted to find my worth and value in something or someone other than you. I receive instead the amazing gift of your grace and I embrace the beautiful work you are doing in and through me. Amen.

About the Author



Pamela Carlson Hogewoning lives in Ontario, Canada with her husband and three kids. As an ordained minister, she served in pastoral ministry for ten years. Recently, Pamela started her role as Chaplain of a Provincial Correctional Centre where she cares for the spiritual needs of inmates. Pamela enjoys the beauty of northern Ontario and for fun, she and a friend host the [Hogs and Rope](#) podcast.

A Lent Reflection for Monday, March 14, 2022

By Rukiya Davis

Lectionary reading for 3/14/2022: [Psalm 105:1-42; Exodus 33:1-6; Romans 4:1-12](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 105:1-42

Read

Select verses from Psalm 105 (New International Version)

4 Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.

5 Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,

8 He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations,

15 “Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.”

43 He brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen ones with shouts of joy;

Reflect

The weight of the past couple of years have left a residue of uncertainty, uneasiness, for some clarity and opportunities to refocus. As Christian believers and followers we are expected to always have a positive perspective. The past two years have also been a journey of a mixture of emotions. Learning how to manage our emotions instead of the emotions leading us is a skill that requires us to first recognize where we are.

Psalm 105 takes you through a variety of emotions, a journey of ups and downs, certainties and uncertainties. The text is a reminder of difficult times and yet to remember the promises of God. The text reminds us of the struggles, heartbreak, and trauma's that generations before us have endured.

Several generations before us also learned how to live through difficulties in spite of. Verse 4 and 5 remind us to remember the promises of God. Verse 8 says that God has and will not ever forget his promises, “the promise he made, for a thousand generations”. The text goes on to remind us of the struggles of God's people, how they “were few in numbers,” feeling like strangers. I can assume they were combating the feelings of unsettledness, overwhelmed by negative thinking and emotions. The troubles of life can feel heavy at times however the promises that have been given to us will always supersede whatever we face.

God is still in control, even when our emotions are getting the best of us as we reflect on where we are right now. Our generation is still experiencing a global pandemic and the good news is that God is not surprised by all of this. “Touch not my anointed”, we are called and selected by God to fulfill our individual assignments.

He has kept generations before us and will continue to do the same. Remember what God has done. When triggered by negative thoughts of “what if”, remember what God has done and promised. In times like these, music can also be a comfort. Let the lyrics below guide you in your moments of reflection, prayer, and strength.

He’s Able—Darwin Hobbs

Exceedingly, abundantly
Above all, all you could ask or think
According to, the power
That worketh in you, you...
God is able to do just what he said he would do
He's gonna fulfill every promise to you
Don't give up on God, cause he won't give up on you
He's able

God is able to do just what he said he would do
He's gonna fulfill every promise to you
Don't give up on God, cause He won't give up on you
He's able
He's able

Respond

1. What self-care activities can I do to help manage my emotions? (Take a walk, reading, journaling, positive music, stretching, deep breathing, spending time with pets)
2. When battling worry and negative thoughts practice replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts. (What has God done for you/others? What is a blessing in this moment?)
3. If you’re consistently overwhelmed by negative emotions and thoughts, don’t suffer in silence. Seek professional therapeutic support, your mental health is just as important as your physical health. Take care of YOU.

Rest

God you are with me, you see me, my path is not hidden. Lord, I ask for your strength to endure this journey. You are good, you will carry us through and keep your promises.



About the Author

Rukiya Davis is a licensed clinical social worker and minister. She has over 15 years of experience in ministry and the mental health field. She continues to be passionate about the mental health needs of others. Rukiya currently works as a clinical social worker for Chicago Public Schools.

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday, March 15, 2022

By Emily Wickstrom

Lectionary reading for 3/15/2022: [Psalm 105:1-42; Numbers 14:10b-24; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13

Read

1 Corinthians 10: 1-13, NLT

Lessons from Israel's Idolatry

10 I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters,^[a] about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago. All of them were guided by a cloud that moved ahead of them, and all of them walked through the sea on dry ground. 2 In the cloud and in the sea, all of them were baptized as followers of Moses. 3 All of them ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all of them drank the same spiritual water. For they drank from the spiritual rock that traveled with them, and that rock was Christ. 5 Yet God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

6 These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did, 7 or worship idols as some of them did. As the Scriptures say, "The people celebrated with feasting and drinking, and they indulged in pagan revelry."^[b] 8 And we must not engage in sexual immorality as some of them did, causing 23,000 of them to die in one day.

9 Nor should we put Christ^[c] to the test, as some of them did and then died from snakebites. 10 And don't grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death. 11 These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.

12 If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. 13 The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

Reflect

This day marks 74 days in 2022. 74 days ago, I made some new year's resolutions to myself, one of which was to live more healthily (you know, the typical eat better, exercise more type of thing); perhaps you too made resolutions or named hopes for this year. But this year, I was reluctantly excited to make them - I know how helpful it is to have goals, and how disappointing

it is when you don't meet those same goals. People say that it helps to remember your "why" to stay consistent. Your "why" helps ground you, to keep you focused, especially in times when you are tempted to forget and return to the way things were. My "why" at the beginning of 2022 was centered around a desire to live into the fullest and best version of myself, and I was struggling to do so before making this resolution. So, I made a resolution in order to help set me free from things that were holding me back from being the best version of myself. Some days it's pretty easy to remember my "why". But on more days, it's really hard to remember, and I give into things that may be satisfying in the moment but don't bring me closer to the fullness and freedom I am seeking.

In this passage, Paul is reminding the church in Corinth about their "why". He asks them to remember who they are and whose they are. He emphasizes the importance of remembering their history, revealing that Israel didn't always remember their "why", even when God was right there with them. Despite God parting the waters, delivering the people from slavery in Egypt, and providing for their every need in the wilderness, Israel was tempted and forgot. And Paul is telling the Corinthians that they could fall into that same trap if they are not careful! Verses 12 and 13 say, "If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience." The enemy is always tempting people to stay and live in a life of bondage. AND GOD IS FAITHFUL! "[God] will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, [God] will show you a way out so that you can endure" (verse 13).

If I'm being honest, some days I too am like Israel - easily forgetting God, even when God is looking me full in the face (Numbers 6:26, The Message). Sometimes it's a blatant turning away from God... almost like, "Yeah, that's a hard pass today, God." *And* God remains faithful, even in my forgetting. God's faithfulness is right there for us - we can live into it at any time, if we seek it. For when we bask in God's faithfulness, turning towards it and not away from it, we can live into our fullest, freest selves.

Respond

What's your "why" with your relationship with God?

What is tempting you to forget your "why" with God?

Take some time to reflect on where you have seen God's faithfulness. How can you choose to seek God's faithfulness more in your daily life?

Rest

God of Moses, be near to us in our every step, as you were with Moses through the parting of the Red Sea and the journey through the wilderness. Help us in our forgetfulness - we are so easily tempted to forget, and yet we long to remember you with all that we are. Thank you for your faithfulness, a steadfastness that stands outside of time and our temptations. Give us the stamina and wisdom to remember our “why” for You, and to choose it day by day, moment by moment. We long to be our fullest and freest selves, found only in Your faithful love. Amen.

About the Author



Emily, a born-and-raised Midwesterner, now serves in a co-vocational role in Sacramento, CA, both as an associate pastor at Common Ground Church and with the Pacific Southwest Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church. Emily is passionate about work surrounding justice and equity, believing they are integral parts of the Gospel. Some of her favorite things include: listening to people’s stories, being with her husband Ben and their dog Rocky, and spending time in and around water (always missing Lake Michigan). You can follow along with her life, ministry, and everything in between on her Instagram (@emily.wickstrom).

A Lent Reflection for Wednesday, March 16, 2022

By Judy Howard Peterson

Lectionary reading for 3/16/2022: [Psalm 105:1-42; 2 Chronicles 20:1-22; Luke 13:22-31](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13

Read

Luke 13:22-30, NLT

Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he went, always pressing on toward Jerusalem. Someone asked him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?”

He replied, “Work hard to enter the narrow door to God’s Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail. When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Lord, open the door for us!’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ Then you will say, ‘But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ And he will reply, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you come from. Get away from me, all you who do evil.’

“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out. And people will come from all over the world—from east and west, north and south—to take their places in the Kingdom of God. And note this: Some who seem least important now will be the greatest then, and some who are the greatest now will be least important then.”

Reflect

For much of my life I would have been the one inquiring after who was going to be saved. Was it going to be the whole lot of us or just a certain few? But now I’m more interested in the fact that Jesus doesn’t answer the question, but rather shifts the conversation back towards the life of the individual who asked it. I find this interesting because this is so often what Jesus does with me.

“How about you? Are you someone who is interested in a deeper intimacy with me even if it required some additional work on your part? Would you consider putting in that effort sooner rather than later? Are you interested in pursuing an intimacy with me that is greater than the show you can so easily put on?”

I appreciate the redirect because I know from personal experience that it’s not the difficult to become so consumed by ultimate outcomes that we miss out on present invitations to enter into

deeper intimacies. It's actually not all that difficult to become so consumed with whose invited in and how narrow the door may be, that we lose sight of the fact that we ourselves have been extended an invitation that is waiting for a response. And because there are no verses that can be quoted where Jesus ever said, "tricked ya." this must mean that the door is at least wide enough for us to walk through.

And this is what I hope we will all do during our Lenten journeys, accept the ever-present invitation to walk through God's wide open door, to dive into deeper intimacy with the God who has little use for the show, but is always eager to spend some time diving into deeper intimacy with each and every one of us.

Respond

So how about you? Are you someone who is interested in establishing a deeper intimacy with God even if it requires some new work on your part? How about you? Would you consider putting in the effort to center your relationship with God sooner rather than later? How about you? Are you interested in pursuing an intimacy with God that is greater than the show that perhaps you, like me, can so easily put on?

Rest

God who holds the door open to greater intimacy, help me not become so distracted by the width of the door that I lose sight of you, the one who is holding it open.

About the Author



Judy Howard Peterson splits her time between Chicago, IL and Marinette, WI. She currently identifies as a "Pastor-at-Large", providing pastoral care and spiritual formation for countless spiritual nomads and preaching and teaching across the country. She received her MDiv from North Park Theological Seminary, once walked across the United States, is married to Jeff Peterson, and is passionate about the gospel of Jesus being good news of great joy for all people without exception. You can follow her @walkingpastor on Instagram and Judy Howard Peterson on Facebook.

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 17, 2022

By Sheli Sloterbeek

Lectionary reading for 3/17/2022: [Psalm 63:1-8](#); [Daniel 3:19-30](#); [Revelation 2:8-11](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 63:1-8

Read

Psalm 63:1-8 NLT

1 O God, you are my God;
I earnestly search for you.

My soul thirsts for you;
my whole body longs for you
in this parched and weary land
where there is no water.

2 I have seen you in your sanctuary
and gazed upon your power and glory.

3 Your unfailing love is better than life itself;
how I praise you!

4 I will praise you as long as I live,

lifting up my hands to you in prayer.

5 You satisfy me more than the richest
feast.

I will praise you with songs of joy.

6 I lie awake thinking of you,
meditating on you through the night.

7 Because you are my helper,
I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.

8 I cling to you;
your strong right hand holds me securely.

Reflect

EMBODIED LONGING FOR GOD

Do you feel these verses? Do you sense the depth of emotion?

This passage resonates deeply with me: “My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water.” I grew up in the northeast part of the US - ie. plenty of water. Sure, I might have lived through a drought or two growing up and the well might get cloudy, but it never ran dry. Then I moved to the southwest of the US. This change in scenery brought all of the passages of dryness and desert life into a new light for me. Rivers are dry until it rains a significant amount, which is hardly ever. The ground is so dry it can be



impossible to even dig a hole. It takes so much extra care to plant something and have it actually grow. And if you pour water onto the hard ground it can't even absorb at first. The outer crust of the earth must be softened before the water can begin to penetrate to the depths below. Plants begin to bend down without life-giving water. Cacti shrink as they use their water reserves. The wind gathers the dirt into walls of dust, the dried plants into large tumbleweeds that fly by. When it hasn't rained in 200 days - the ground feels desperate, life distressed. This is a land without water.

I search the skies during monsoon season for the faintest smear of cloud meaning rain, my nose seeks the smell of a wet creosote bush. I am embodied longing. What might embodied longing for God look like? The poet tells us they are an embodied longing a searching, a deep soul thirst, a whole body longing. To search and see with our eyes in the sanctuary of earth and nature around us. It is lifting hands in prayer, opening our mouths to speak of God's majesty, allowing our minds space to meditate on God's goodness. Acknowledging our own humanity, clinging to Love and allowing Love to hold us.

Respond

Imagine you're the writer of these words, the composer of the poem - and read it through again. Perhaps even take a moment and write out one or two of the verses that stands out to you. Next circle the words that draw you in. Choose one and meditate with God on that word. Perhaps you write down other words or draw images you associate with that one word or phrase. Is there an invitation or an offering in the word or images you've written down? Rest with God in gratitude for whatever has come forth.

Rest

*God of poets
And of longings,
God of sanctuary
And shadowy nights,
My lips praise you,
My arms, legs and body long
To praise you.
Let my longings be ever present,
My songs of praise endless,
My thoughts burning for You,
Always resting in Your arms.*

About the Author



Sheli Sloterbeek is a mom, wife, daughter, sister, friend, spiritual director, yoga instructor, retreat leader and most especially, beloved child of God. She is honored to be a companion of others as they discover God in their everyday life through the ministry of spiritual direction, either one-on-one, in a group, or making space through workshops and retreats. Sheli's passion is for the "whole" person – spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically – to be alive and live fully with God. www.aslowjourney.com
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A Lenten Reflection for Friday, March 18, 2022

By Kendall Smith

Lectionary reading for 3/18/2022: [Psalm 63:1-8](#); [Daniel 12:1-4](#); [Revelation 3:1-6](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Revelation 3:1-6

Read

Revelation 3:1-6 (MSG)

Write this to Sardis, to the Angel of the church. The One holding the Seven Spirits of God in one hand, a firm grip on the Seven Stars with the other, speaks:

“I see right through your work. You have a reputation for vigor and zest, but you’re dead, stone-dead. Up on your feet! Take a deep breath! Maybe there’s life in you yet. But I wouldn’t know it by looking at your busywork; nothing of *God’s* work has been completed. Your condition is desperate. Think of the gift you once had in your hands, the Message you heard with your ears—grasp it again and turn back to God. If you pull the covers back over your head and sleep on, oblivious to God, I’ll return when you least expect it, break into your life like a thief in the night. You still have a few followers of Jesus in Sardis who haven’t ruined themselves wallowing in the muck of the world’s ways. They’ll walk with me on parade! They’ve proved their worth! Conquerors will march in the victory parade, their names indelible in the Book of Life. I’ll lead them up and present them by name to my Father and his Angels. Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches.”

Reflect

Eugene Peterson, in his paraphrase of the Bible called *The Message*, translates the final words of each letter to the seven churches in Revelation (chapters 2-3), “Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches.” As I reflect on this text, I’m struck by the beautiful invitation in those words. In fact, I imagine that this is the primary call to the 1st-century church in Sardis. They, like we so often do, had burned out. Their reputation was one of energetic work, but inside, they were dead. Although they were working busily for God, the rebuke was that *nothing of God’s work had been completed*. They were not being asked to do more, but rather, to wake up, to take a deep breath, to invite God’s life and breath back.

So often, we try to show our love for God by *doing*. But the antidote to burnout and exhaustion is not adding more to our schedules, but taking away. Built into this season of Lent is the practice of waiting, listening, and repenting. We intentionally place ourselves in humility before God and ask, “What should we give up for these forty days?” Ideally, we give up those things that dull our appetite for the Divine so that we can purposefully pay attention to the work of God

around and within us. We turn off auto-pilot long enough to recognize where we have fallen asleep to the Spirit's work. Like the church in Sardis, each year we are given the opportunity to reflect on the state of our own soul in the Presence of the same God. Isn't it good to know that God isn't looking at our exterior condition—church busyness and productivity—as signs of His Presence? Like the first-century hearers, we are being called to wake up to God's already-at-work Breath—and to respond! God knows our heart and longs for us to be alive—*truly alive*—and awake to the “Message we [first] heard with our ears”.

Respond

As you journey through this Lenten season, pay attention to your body and soul. Take time to sit in reflection—in quiet, in prayer, on a slow, attentive walk outside. Listen to the Spirit's breath. Do you feel alive inside? Are your acts of service flowing from a heart that is deeply connected to the Source of Life? Or are you experiencing a slow and gradual burn-out? (Be honest in the Presence of God. This healing doesn't require *work* on your part, only the willingness to open yourself up to God's healing.)

Rest

*Good and Loving God;
We long to be found awake and alive to your Spirit,
But we confess that often, we are more like the church at Sardis—
Doing good works, but on the edge of burning out.
Show us, this season, where we have fallen asleep to your Goodness!
Help us make room to experience your Healing Presence,
Root us in your grace, your truth, your Love.
Wake us up to hear the Wind Words as your Spirit moves in and around us.*

Amen.



About the Author

Kendall Smith is an elementary science teacher who loves reading, writing, thunderstorms, and long slow 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 Saturday, March 19, 2022

By Debra R. Auger

Lectionary reading for 3/19/2022: [Psalm 63:1-8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 6:43-45](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Luke 6:43-45

Read

Luke 6: 43-45 (NRSV)

⁴³ “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.”

Reflect

Following Jesus’ instruction on judgment, this short metaphorical pericope has us imagining trees, bushes and fruit, both good and evil. While dualistic in tone, the message is clear: that which flows from a life is indicative of its essence, its core, its heart and soul. At first glance, it may be tempting to focus on the good and evil part of the text and then begin to figure out how we or others may or may not measure up. But we must keep in mind the larger narrative which surrounds this brief teaching.

Before our passage today we read,

³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you.”

That instruction seems pretty clear but maybe not that simple. In this whole section in Luke, Jesus is seeking to paint a picture of the love and mercy of God to his followers. He is doing that by using both positive and negative examples. In our passage today we have both.

But there is also a deeper message here we read in verse 44, “*each tree is known by its own fruit*”. It seems like an obvious observation to make. Of course we harvest apples from apple trees and grapes from a vineyard. The bramble bush also bears fruit like raspberries and even roses, but may be more difficult to harvest because of the thorns. There is fruit nonetheless.

Each tree is unique and *has its own fruit* to bear. Each plant bears its own fruit but harvesting takes on its own character. What is your fruit to bear? What is your unique contribution to the kingdom of God whose fruit is mercy and love? How does your story and journey impact the fruit of your ministry and life? *What is yours to do?*

If it is true that the fruit of our lives result from the essence of our soul, how can we nurture our deepest self that our fruit is good and true to who we are as God's beloved children?

In this season of Lent, still in the midst of the Covid pandemic and all the other viruses that infect us, take the time you need to discern your unique contribution to the world. What is the fruit your life has borne? How have others contributed to your discipleship with their own harvest? How can silence and contemplation help to nurture your deepest and truest self that your fruit might be nourishing to others? Ask the question-“what in mine to do?”

Respond

Try this breath prayer practice for one minute:

As you breathe in, pray: *Nurture with love*

As you breathe out, pray: *That I may give from plenty*

Rest

Loving Creator, who declared that all you have formed with your hands is good and very good, we thank you that you have made us each uniquely and yet in your own image of love. May the fruit of our lives bear witness to your love which knows no limit or boundary. Help us, in this Lenten season, to more fully grasp what is the height and depth and width of that love, as we walk with you to Jerusalem. Amen.

About the Author

Rev. Dr. Debra Auger, has served in various roles in ministry since the mid-80s and is now completing fifteen years of service as the dean of students at North Park theological Seminary. She is a trained spiritual director as well as a certified yoga instructor. Deb enjoys finding nature in the city (which is everywhere!) and taking long walks with her husband, Bob. In retirement, Deb hopes to continue “playing in clay”, teaching yoga and developing a spiritual direction practice incorporating both breath and body.



A Lent Reflection for the Third Sunday of Lent

By Rev. Julie Jane Capel

Lectionary reading for 3/20/2022: [Psalm 63:1-8](#); [Isaiah 55:1-9](#); [1 Cor. 10:1-13](#); [Luke 13:1-9](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Luke 13:1-9

Read

Luke 13:1-3, 6-9 (NIV)

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

"Sir," the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Reflect

A text that is often ignored due to asking thorny questions. Such as: Why are personal and global tragedies allowed to occur? And who is responsible? Why did this person get long Covid and not their partner? Are cracks in life caused chiefly because this person is more corrupt compared to their counterparts? Is infertility a sign of infidelity to God? Is singleness a sign of sin? Is lack of equal pay for POC and women the result of not enough effort? Is famine in post-colonial nations the mark of poor farming? Is a dying church an indictment on the current members?

Jesus gave us a twofer by pairing these two portions of the passage together. First, he orients the question to point out that if it was a matter of sin we would all be dead. Only occasionally is causation an integrous conclusion.

Instead, those who are alive are called to steward that gift of life with intention! With purpose established in compassion, mercy and justice. With tenacity rooted in love.

Second, living with intention should bear fruit. Galatians 5:22-23 fleshes out the meaning: But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (NLT) It is at this point many Christians are conditioned, in-lived-out-life theology, to believe that the parable will end with verse seven. Enter the super sneaky prosperity gospel.

Whereby we are habituated to think: figs growing from our orchards must prove our blessedness that originates from our devotion. Additionally, no fruit equals a lack of faithfulness.

However, the Bible tells us something totally different. No matter how good we are, we are not entitled to abundance from our branches. In this parable, Jesus' subversive message is that those people (ourselves included) who are not producing fruit will receive special attention and added fertilizer from our Lord.

It is precisely when our intentions are not fruitful that nourishment is most needed. When our compassion, mercy and justice muscle has atrophied. When our tenacity is tied to earthy goals instead of heavenly grace.

Favored care is granted to this fig tree precisely because it was not yet all that it was meant to be. Similarly, when our fruit count is low, may we be people who allow God to dig around in our lives and put favored fertilizer around our roots. Not due to our sinlessness or because we are so good – but because of God's grace and desire for us to be all that we were created to be.

Respond

Pictured is my painting: Tenacity. In March of 2021, I found these two plants growing in the BBQ grate in a public park divested of resources. During the year I have looked at this piece of artwork and thought of the persistence it took to live among the inert, dead and thorns. I cannot help but think of what would happen if these tenacious plants were properly planted and tended to in fertilized soil.

If you are currently living in the grate – good job at staying alive! My prayer for you is that you say yes to nourishment in needed places. If your branches feel bare – my prayer for you is that you say yes to nourishment in needed places. If you are thriving with intention, purpose and tenacity – my prayer for you is that you will allow God to help you lovingly nourish others in their needed places. That the fruits of the Spirit you are bearing, by God's grace, will be life-giving to all who encounter you.



Rest

Jesus, please nourish us – as individuals and as a community – in our places of needs. Help us to be intentional and tenacious in stewarding the gifts of life we have been given. We thank you for the opportunity to bear fruit for your glory. Amen.



About the Author

Rev. Julie Jane Capel is an ordained Covenant pastor, preacher, international impressionist painter and community organizer. In Chicago, Julie was a senior pastor, trauma chaplain, and co-creator of Urban Reformers - a non-profit dedicated to faith and proximate justice. She finished as a Transitional Pastor in Virginia. Now focusing her painting career and creating conference resources for Living Legacy congregations.

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A Lent Reflection for Monday, March 21, 2022

By Meghan Bruggeman

Lectionary reading for 3/21/2022: [Psalm 39](#); [Jeremiah 11:1-17](#); [Romans 2:1-11](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Jeremiah 11:1-7

Read

Jeremiah 11:1-7 NIV

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: “Listen to the terms of this covenant and tell them to the people of Judah and to those who live in Jerusalem. Tell them that this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Cursed is the one who does not obey the terms of this covenant—the terms I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace.’ I said, ‘Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God. Then I will fulfill the oath I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey’—the land you possess today.” I answered, “Amen, Lord.” The Lord said to me, “Proclaim all these words in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: ‘Listen to the terms of this covenant and follow them. From the time I brought your ancestors up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, “Obey me.””

Reflect

God is faithful, despite our faithlessness.

Jeremiah, for whom this book of scripture was named after, is a prophet. As a prophet, Jeremiah received a message from the LORD and shared it to the Israelite people.

The people had forgotten God’s covenant. They were living in the reality of promises fulfilled, yet they did not notice.

They were lukewarm. They selfishly dwelt in the security of God, as God had forewarned when he gave them the promised land, but they did not keep up with their end of the bargain. They had disregarded their responsibilities in their covenant relationship with God.

Notice how God speaks to Jeremiah and the commands God gives:

“Listen”

“Tell/ Proclaim”

And the instructions God gives to Jeremiah to tell the people:

“Obey me”

“Do everything I command”

“Listen”

“Follow”

Feels like the words of a parent or a teacher who knows what’s best for you. I am sure you have had imperfect examples of both of these in your life, but this is God we are talking about here. The perfect Creator, Sustainer, and Rescuer. Here, God, in God’s deep and faithful love, speaks through Jeremiah to remind the people of God’s character.

I see the heart of God so clearly in this passage. If you would allow me to extrapolate, I imagine God saying:

“I saved you.”

“I fulfilled my promise to you.”

“I followed through in my commitment to you even though I knew you would fail to keep your end of the deal”.

“So, listen to me.”

This is the character of God.

We can see this is what God continues to do in the lives of God’s people.

Let us not live in forgetfulness, but rather pay attention to the faithfulness of the Lord despite our shortcomings. What must we do when we are lukewarm and unaware of God’s presence?

When we live out of an idea that we have no belly buttons? (As my professor, Dr. Nick Bruckner so wonderfully explained to me in seminary). It is to say that we can live like we have no Creator, and therefore, we are merely beings of our own making. When we are asleep to our failings and selfish ambitions, we must be awakened. This can be done through remembrance...

Respond

Remember the Lord’s faithfulness in your life.

Write a letter to God. In it, acknowledge your first recollection of experiencing God. Highlight major milestones or moments from your relationship. Finally, note how you hope to grow in relationship with God moving forward.

Rest

Thank you God for creating, rescuing, and saving me. There is no one like you. Please help me today to live in the reality of our covenant relationship. I am forever grateful for your unconditional love for me and your commitment to lead me in your ways. May I listen, remember, and obey. Amen.

About the Author



Meghan Bruggeman serves as the Associate Pastor of Spiritual Formation at Renew Covenant Church in Carroll, IA. Meghan is a mom to Micah and a wife to Danny. She is passionate about connecting people to God through transformative prayer practices and discipleship through her church, Spiritual Direction, and chaplaincy.

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday, March 22, 2022

By Alicia Vela Anderson

Lectionary reading for 3/22/2022: [Psalm 39; Ezekiel 17:1-10; Romans 2:12-16](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 39:1-5

Read

Psalm 39:1-5 CEB

I promised I would watch my steps
so as not to sin with my tongue;
promised to keep my mouth shut
as long as the wicked were in my
presence.
So I was completely quiet, silent.
I kept my peace, but it did no good.
My pain got worse.
My heart got hot inside me;

while stewing over it, the fire burned.
Then I spoke out with my tongue:
“Let me know my end, Lord.
How many days do I have left?
I want to know how brief my time is.”
You’ve made my days so short;
my lifetime is like nothing in your eyes.
Yes, a human life is nothing but a puff
of air!

Reflect

When I read through the stories of the Gospels and the interactions that Jesus had with people, I regularly wonder how He kept himself from snapping back at his adversaries. His authority was constantly questioned, He was mocked, and He was challenged on a regular basis, even with His disciples. I read these stories and I marvel at His patience and the goodness deep inside of Him.

And of course, Jesus was perfect. His being fully human as well as fully God probably meant He felt the human reactions that we often feel in those types of moments but that His goodness kept Him from reacting negatively. His consistent life of prayer and time with God kept Him grounded and kind. He modeled this kind patience in a way that feels unattainable to me sometimes.

I deeply connect with the words of this Psalm. Especially over that last couple of years as we have seen white supremacy, patriarchy, and sin within the Evangelical institutions run rampant. When I was faced with someone who opposed me or my dignity or the dignity of other image bearers, I turned to the wisdom of, “if you have nothing nice to say, say nothing at all.” I thought that my silence meant that I had found the elusive peace, but rather it was simply self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit, but not the one I was looking for.

Prayerful Reflections: A Lent & Easter Devotional

In my quiet, when I could swallow the pain of the world around me, it simply burned deeper and longer. The shalom of God was still distant, the inner turmoil and turbulence was ever present. The thing that finally could resolve it for me was exactly what the Psalmist points out in verse 5 - "my lifetime is like nothing in your eyes. Yes, a human life is nothing but a puff of air!"

Part of the journey of Lent is wrestling with our own mortality, the briefness of life in comparison to the eternal nature of the Kingdom of God. I believe that this is the way Jesus kept perspective during his short time on Earth. He knew that everything evil would run its course and that everything Good would prevail. Remembering these things helped me to find my people here on earth - fellow Kingdom dwellers who are more focused on breathing in the life of the Spirit than the temporary joy that earthly power brings.

This shift within me is what brings peace. The reminder that my role here is to be a Kingdom dweller, to breathe in the Holy Spirit deeply, to speak truth when I open my mouth, and to honor and love every person I come in contact with.

Respond

Throughout your day, take notice of the moments where you are swallowing the evil of the world around you. Instead of pushing down those feelings of anger, injustice, fear, or bitterness, try to replace them with the eternal peace of the Holy Spirit. The below breath prayer may help you name it and claim it.

Rest

Use this breath prayer to help you remember where true Shalom comes from, inhale the presence of the Holy Spirit and exhale what you are trying to get rid of.

Inhale: *Holy Spirit, come*

Exhale: *Anger, leave*



About the Author

Alicia is a Colorado native who found her heart home in MN. She's passionate about helping young people see God at work in their lives and in the world around them. She spends her days teaching Middle School Bible in the Twin Cities. You can find her at aliciavela.com or on social media as @aliciavelaanderson

A Lent Reflection for Wednesday, March 23, 2022

By Devyn Chambers Johnson

Lectionary reading for 3/23/2022: [Psalm 39](#); [Numbers 13:17-27](#); [Luke 13:18-21](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Luke 13:18-21

Read

Luke 13:18-21, NRSV

¹⁸ He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? ¹⁹ It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

²⁰ And again he said, "To what should I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹ It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with^[a] three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

Reflect

Several years ago, I completed training as a Godly Play storyteller. In Godly Play the stories are told simply and slowly with basic props. For the parables all the props were cut out of felt and would lay two dimensional on the floor. I loved this type of storytelling because it encourages wonder. If done well the kids lean forward and hang on every word spoken by the storyteller.

One of the first stories I taught was the parable of the mustard seed. The story required that I develop some sleight of hand/magic trick skills. I had to take the piece of brown felt, that had been cut in the shape of a tree, and roll it up in the palm of my hand. And as I said "The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that a farmer planted in his garden" I was to point at a nearly invisible seed on the floor. And after a pause say: "But it grew and grew so big that birds lived in its branches." And as I said this I rolled out that brown piece of felt hidden in the palm of my hand.

At this point the children audibly gasped as the tree seemed to appear from nowhere. I then proceeded to place little felt birds in the tree. At the end of the lesson the children were asked wondering questions. One of the questions was "I wonder if these birds have names?" To which one little three-year-old responded by naming the birds after herself and every member of her family.

I've never forgotten this lesson. I've never forgotten the sheer astonishment on these kids' faces when that tree appeared. Wonder and astonishment that I envy. And I'll never forget the poignancy of the little girl's confidence that her and her family are at home in the Kingdom of God.

When the world seems overwhelming—when the world (and the church!) seems overrun with conflict—we tend to forget the power of the Kingdom of God. When churches, leaders and political parties fail us we throw our hands up in defeat. But the Kingdom of God is stronger and more pervasive than earthly challenges.

We are invited to be part of this Kingdom of God but the success of the Kingdom is not dependent on our might or our right belief or our sheer will. The Kingdom of God is God's. God who calls us to faithfulness and humility. And God who will surprise us with his power, his love, and his grace.

May we rest in the power of God and, like children, gasp in wonder when we witness the Kingdom of God at work in this world.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21, NRSV

Respond

Can you remember a time when the power of God or the goodness of God made you gasp in surprise and wonder?

Is there a time you missed the opportunity to be in awe of God because you worried it would seem childish, immature or irrational?

Rest

Creator God, open my eyes to see you at work in the world. Soften my heart to receive these gifts with wonder and awe. Amen



About the Author

Rev. Dr. Devyn Chambers Johnson currently serves as Co-Lead Pastor (with her husband Ryan) at Covenant Congregational Church in North Easton MA. She is the founder of Four More Women in Pulpit, an advocacy movement for women preachers. Devyn is the proud mother of Rosie (9) and Susanna (5). Find out more at revdevyn.com.

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 24, 2022

By Jennifer Haeusser

Lectionary reading for 3/24/2022: [Psalm 32](#); [Joshua 4:1-13](#); [2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Joshua 4:1-13

Read

Joshua 4:1-13 (NIV)

4 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, **2** “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, **3** and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, **5** and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, **6** to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ **7** tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

8 So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. **9** Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been[[a](#)] in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

10 Now the priests who carried the ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything the Lord had commanded Joshua was done by the people, just as Moses had directed Joshua. The people hurried over, **11** and as soon as all of them had crossed, the ark of the Lord and the priests came to the other side while the people watched. **12** The men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh crossed over, ready for battle, in front of the Israelites, as Moses had directed them. **13** About forty thousand armed for battle crossed over before the Lord to the plains of Jericho for war.

Reflect

For some reason I found myself carrying a small boulder over a glass bridge. “Is this really worth it?” I thought as I made my way over the bridge and to our rental car, my husband trailing

closely behind. We were in a small city in northern California, attending a church service and also meeting with an editor for the book we were in the process of writing. Deciding to go for a walk at the end of a long day; we found a beautiful local park. The trail led over a bridge, through some trees and eventually to a river. Being around nature had always been therapeutic to me but I desperately needed it now.

Ever since I could remember, I had wanted to be a mom. For the last couple decades, I watched as friend after friend got married and had children. Finally, I met my husband but getting pregnant hadn't come easy. Then suddenly, years later, it happened; we were pregnant! But tragically, we lost the baby three months and three days into the pregnancy. This was a level of pain that I had never experienced before, not even with the death of my Father.

So here I was, by the river. I watched as the water flowed over the smooth rocks. That's when a thought came to my mind, "what if I took a rock home with me as a memory of this place?" Immediately, one of my favorite stories from the Old Testament started playing out in my head. The one where Joshua and the Israelites were crossing the Jordan river into the land that God had promised them. They were to take stones from the river and place them as a reminder of God's faithfulness to them. After telling my husband the idea, he immediately found the largest rock that we were capable of carrying.

Arriving back home, I took my prized rock and with a large tipped black sharpie wrote the words "Dreams Fulfilled." This was an act to remember the good things that God had done in the past and also an act of faith that my dream of becoming a mom would be realized. Putting it by our fireplace, I began to look at the stone of remembrance and encourage myself in moments of grief to have hope. But over time the memory stone was pushed to the side of the fireplace to make room for other things and was a bit forgotten.

A couple years later, in the middle of a pandemic, my dream came true. Finding myself very pregnant in a 450 square foot apartment, I began to "nest"; getting rid of everything that wasn't needed to make space for all of the baby supplies. Since we had a "glorified" studio, the crib would be in the living room space near the unused fireplace. Moving things around I came across the large stone. Memories of our trip, grief, and hope flooded in, but mostly thoughts of God being with me through it all.

Now, months later, I still have the large rock. There really isn't any space for it since my eleven-month old son takes up most of our tiny San Francisco apartment with his gear, but it's important to remember. And who knows, maybe someday he will ask, "What does this stone mean?" and I can tell him how he was our little miracle, and most important of all, of a God who is faithful.

Respond

Many of us think of Lent as a time to get rid of something. What about adding something this year? What if we used this time to remember the things we have to be thankful for and God's faithfulness in our lives? Sometimes it's helpful to have something tangible in front of us that we

can see with our natural eyes, in order to bring about change on the inside. How about finding your own stone? Try writing on it something that you want to “add” this year, have faith for or remember. And see the way that “remembering” can bring transformation to your heart, mind and spirit during this season of Lent.

Rest

Jesus, thank you for the discipline of “remembering”. This is something you had your people practice since the beginning of time. I take my rock in my hands and remember all of the things you have done and believe you for what is yet to come. Amen

About the Author



Jennifer Haeusser has served with Youth With A Mission for over twenty years. She has done speaking and teaching throughout the world. Her love for open water swimming recently led her to swim from Alcatraz. Jen currently lives in San Francisco with her husband Markus and baby boy Caleb. <https://markus-jen-news.com/>
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A Lent Reflection for Friday, March 25, 2022

By Pastor Ieisha Hawley

Lectionary reading for 3/25/2022: [Psalm 32](#); [Joshua 4:14-24](#); [2 Corinthians 5:6-15](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Joshua 4:14-24

Read

Joshua 4:14-24 NRSV

¹⁴On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him, as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life.

¹⁵The LORD said to Joshua, ¹⁶“Command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant,^[a] to come up out of the Jordan.” ¹⁷Joshua therefore commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.” ¹⁸When the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet touched dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before.

¹⁹The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. ²⁰Those twelve stones, which they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal, ²¹saying to the Israelites, “When your children ask their parents in time to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ²²then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.’ ²³For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea,^[b] which he dried up for us until we crossed over, ²⁴so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, and so that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”

Reflect



Let It Fill You!

Let divine favor fill you. Joshua was exalted by God and promoted in front of those he led. This power dynamic catapulted the priests carrying the ark of the covenant of the Lord. If my prophetic imagination helps you to see, your ears turn into eyes to see the mighty squall wind that paved a path to usher the presence of the Holy spirit to fill the earth. This majestic mist unveils the hidden path to your next place on your journey. This memorable moment becomes edged in your mind, heart, and spirit that serves as a reminder of the omnipotent power of God when your path is not clear.

Respond

Make your contemplative practice a priority. Close your eyes, breathe, and exhale. Fall in the arms of your mother and father above. Receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

Rest

Creator of all things revive our souls to openly embrace our next place in you. God of our nowness prepare us for our next place in you. Asé.

About the Author



Pastor Leisha Hawley is an ordained Covenant Lead Pastor at Love Church Edgewater, NJ, and a Prison Staff Chaplain at Rikers Island East Elmhurst NY. A 2015 Masters of Divinity graduate of Howard University School of Divinity, Pastor Leisha is an anointed, vibrant, and powerful woman of God, called to be hands and feet in the earth. Connect at www.pastorieisha.com.

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, March 26, 2022

By Ellie VerGowe

Lectionary reading for 3/26/2022: [Psalm 32: Exodus 32:7-14: Luke 15:1-10](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 32

Read

Psalm 32, NRSV

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered
Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*
Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*
Therefore let all who are faithful
offer prayer to you;
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters

shall not reach them.
You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. *Selah*
I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
else it will not stay near you.
Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.
Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Reflect

I began to appreciate the practice of confession through singing in a choir. In college, I was part of a choir that would gather every day at noon under the tutelage of a brilliant director. This director would run us through our warm ups and take us through measures of each piece to

perfect our harmonies, unify our vowels and solidify our tempo, trusting that each of us were doing our best to learn our parts to the best of our ability on our own time.

And he trusted, too, that we would know when we weren't doing our best. Our director would not stop when someone sang a wrong note. Instead, he invited us to raise our hand when we knew we had sung a note out of place to own our mistake and tell him that we would work on it. Our choir director knew that confession was good for the whole of the choir and that confession was also good for our souls.

I've found that confession is good for souls at the hospital I work at, too. I get to meet with many veterans who have experienced the horrors and atrocities of war, and some who have also participated in committing them. I had the privilege of meeting with a veteran patient recently whose heart rate was spiking dangerously as he was having flashbacks to the worst day of his life in combat where he had followed orders and done unspeakable things. As we worked on meditative breathing together for his heart, he began telling me the stories of that day and admitted that before that moment, he hadn't told these things to another soul. Through the course of his story and as we breathed in and out, side by side in his hospital room, his heart rate lowered. Tears poured down his face. He had been heard and was not left alone to carry his burden. He said he felt that his soul pain eased...just a bit.

This veteran's vulnerable words did not change what had happened on that worst day of his life. There were still injustices that demanded to be righted. This brave man's words did, however, begin to heal the moral injury that his soul had sustained. His words made him feel more comfortable beginning a conversation with God about what had happened and he could begin to believe that perhaps, God hadn't left him, that God could love him too, that God could even offer him forgiveness. Our visit concluded with this man, my brother in Christ, thanking God for bringing him through such a horrific day and asking God to forgive him. He had been heard and he was not alone. He told me to share his story with anyone who needed it as his biggest longing was to bring peace, hope and love to people in this latter half of his life.

When we keep our moments of shame to ourselves alone and when we pretend it wasn't us who sang that wrong note in the choir, causing the harmonies of creation to be discordant...when we keep silence, our bodies and souls waste away and groan all day long. God's hand feels heavy upon us and our strength dries up (Psalm 32:3-4). When we hold our confessions in, shame begins to take over and tells us not only that we did something bad, but that we ourselves are bad at our very core.

It is terrifying to admit what we have done to God, to others and even to ourselves. It takes courage and strength. I don't think it is as simplistic or easy as Psalm 32 makes it out to be either...we don't confess and always immediately feel better. We don't immediately feel forgiven and free. But perhaps, like our brother mentioned above, confession might begin that process.

Respond

Our shame can eat us alive when we are silent. What might God be inviting you to confess in God's presence or in the presence of people who love you and will hold you tenderly?

Rest

Merciful God, would you give us courage (for that is what it takes!) to break our silence and confess the ways in which we have gone against you in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone? Allow us to see the ways that we have not loved you with our whole heart and not loved our neighbor as ourselves. Show us a safe place to share our soul wounds, our moral injuries with people who will treat us with love. Show us that you treat us with love.

May we feel your loving eye upon us and may we rejoice and sing like the forgiven people we are!

Amen.



About the Author

Ellie VerGowe is a ACPE chaplain resident at the VA Puget Sound Hospital. Ellie is ordained with the Progressive Christian Alliance and is currently studying moral injury and trauma in her residency. Ellie feels honored to hear people's stories and meet with them in moments of crisis. She lives in West Seattle on the traditional lands of the Duwamish people with her partner Aaron and their Australian shepherd puppy, 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 (Ellie is a grandmother at heart!).

A Lent Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of Lent

By Ashley Jacobson

Lectionary reading for 3/27/2022: [Psalm 32](#); [Joshua 5:9-12](#); [2 Corinthians 5:16-21](#); [Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Read

Luke 15: 1-3, 11b -32 (New Living Translation)

15 Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. 2 This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

3 So Jesus told them this story: 11 “A man had two sons. 12 The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. 13 “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. 14 About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. 15 He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. 16 The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

17 “When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”’ 20 “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. 21 His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. 22 “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. 23 And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, 24 for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, 26 and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’ 28 “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, 29 but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. 30 Yet when this son of yours comes back after

squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!

31 "His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. 32 We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'"

Reflect

I'm never surprised by who Jesus spends his time with. Maybe I'm not surprised by this because of where I feel like Jesus met me. Maybe there were religious people that felt like I was not worth the time of Jesus. But I think back to when I decided that I would let him in or in the case of the son who ran off, 'when I finally came to my senses,' I know I was unsure if the Father would want me the way that I was. I felt like I needed to clean up first before I went home. Maybe I needed to be like those religious people first, whatever that really meant, before I would be worth the Father's time.

I think about being in the room while Jesus is telling this story. Jesus is talking to the religious elite... because they are complaining about the company that he keeps. "They complained that he was associating with such sinful people— even eating with them!" Imagine being that 'company' while Jesus is telling this story. What were they feeling as Jesus was describing the younger son? Could they picture themselves? They just heard him share two other stories about being found. About heaven rejoicing for them. Maybe they knew where Jesus was going with this next story.

But the next story didn't stop with the Father throwing a party for the son coming back. Jesus went on to talk about another brother. Maybe they leaned in a little more to hear where Jesus was going to go with this story. Maybe we can lean in a little more for this part as well.

The other brother is angry and complaining about what the Father is doing for a son that doesn't seem to deserve anything. I wonder if the religious people looked at the people Jesus was hanging out with and thought to themselves, "just like this younger brother, you don't deserve anything either." Or if Jesus' friends looked across the room wondering "how good is good enough?" The Father replies to the older son with such compassion and love, "Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours."

You know me. I want good things for you. I want good things for ALL people. There are no limits to my love. Your house may be a mess. Maybe you haven't vacuumed in a while. It's okay. I want to be with you. I want to be with you always no matter what. You don't need to clean up first.

When my mom was diagnosed with cancer, I was sitting in the doctor's office with her. I remember the doctor coming in and telling us what she had, but I don't remember what else he said. I really don't even remember him getting up and leaving the room. I do remember this though. My mom grabbed my hand and said to me "Ashley, we are going to be okay. You don't have to go through this alone. The Spirit is always with you." And that has been the truth I have held onto since that day. It has been what I have experienced. God is always with us. Whether

or not we recognize it. I read this story that Jesus told a bunch of religious people, and I hear “I’m always here. I’m here for everyone. I have good things for all people. Come to me the way you are. I want to eat and celebrate with you too.”



Respond

Put yourself in the shoes of the Pharisees/Religious people that Jesus is telling this story to. Does the Spirit move you at all?

When you think about how the father responds to the older son, “Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours”... How does that make you feel? Are there places in your life that you feel like He wouldn’t want to be a part of? Is there pain or joy that you are not sure God would be in with you? Spend some time there.

Rest

Father, thank you for always being there, whether or not I recognize it. Thank you for never leaving me alone in anything. Help me to live into what you have for me. Help me to love like you love.

About the Author



Ashley Jacobson lives in Bloomington-Normal, Illinois 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 Lenten Reflection for Monday, March 28, 2022

By Jillian Evans

Lectionary reading for 3/28/2022: [Psalm 53](#); [Leviticus 23:26-41](#); [Revelation 19:1-8](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Revelation 19:1-8

Read

Revelation 19:1-8 NIV

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.” The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!”

Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!” Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

Reflect

Fictional dialogue between Jackie and her spiritual director Michelle

Jackie: Sometimes I wonder what’s the point. I keep going to protests and I am willing to shout from the rooftops about police corruption in our town. Most of my friends just turn a blind eye to everything that’s happening. Jesus was always trying to help marginalized people and I want to be like Jesus. But it’s hard when there are so many around you that don’t care. I’m ready to quit but I’m not really sure what I should do.

Michelle: Jackie it sounds like you want to continue the work of fighting for marginalized citizens but you feel you lack support. Is that correct?

Jackie: I guess I do want to continue the work because I feel like it’s what God would have me to do but it feels lonely sometimes.

Michelle: Is it possible that you are supporting marginalized communities in the way that you desire to be supported in your life?

Jackie: Wow Michelle! I do like to be supported in my endeavors. I hadn't thought about it like that. I guess I'm doing unto others as I would like done unto me. It really doesn't matter how my circle feels. God gave me the desire to support others and I will continue to do just that.

Because of social media, it is now very difficult to ignore the injustices of the world. As Christians, we are to be salt and light in the earth and show people how to treat others according to God's Holy Word. This work can seem thankless, never-ending, and at times, even futile. But in today's passage of scripture, John gives us a glimpse into the future. In this passage, we find out that the battle is already won. In the end, God will condemn the wicked and his followers will rejoice. Does this mean that we can ignore our broken world? No. But it does mean as we fight against problems like human trafficking or an unjust criminal justice system that we should not grow weary or broken hearted because God is the final judge and jury of all.

Respond

Examine your beliefs and habits. Educate yourself on a movement that speaks to your heart. Pray about what action you can take. Maybe you will call your congressperson, attend a demonstration, make a social media post, or donate to a worthy cause. As long as you remain in God's will you can't go wrong.

Rest

O God, the King of righteousness, you know the injustice that has occurred for thousands of years, in different countries, with races of color and classes of people. I ask you to help me examine my heart and cleanse me so that I may be a respectful servant in your quest for justice and peace. Please lead me and guide me according to your will. Amen



About the Author

Jillian Evans resides in Chicago, Illinois with her husband and three children. She is passionate about ministering to children, youth and their families. Jillian holds degrees from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and North Park Theological Seminary as well as a certificate in Spiritual Direction from C. John Weborg Center for Spiritual Direction at NPTS.

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday, March 29, 2022

By Christina Burrows

Lectionary reading for 3/29/2022: [Psalm 53](#); [Leviticus 25:1-19](#); [Revelation 19:9-10](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Revelation 19:9-10

Read

Revelation 19: 9-10, NIV

Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus."

Reflect

"You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:

So I did sit and eat." - George Herbert, Love (III)

I got married in my hometown of Tunbridge Wells, Kent, almost 16 years ago. Because my husband Ted is from California, only a handful of his family and friends could fly across the Pond to celebrate with us. Ted promised his friends, "If you come to the wedding, you'll be in the wedding!" British culture is more formal than Californian culture, so he also told them, "You need to wear a suit." Together with our smartly dressed family and friends, we worshiped, prayed, and declared our vows in an old Anglican church across from the village cricket green. And then we drove over to an old country house overlooking gardens, woods, and green fields and feasted, with delicious food, wine, speeches, and dancing.

In Revelation 19:9, Jesus invites us to the wedding supper of the Lamb. The initiative is from Jesus, not from us. He is the gracious host. He invites us, he gives us the right clothes to wear, fine linen, which stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people, fine linen, made righteous through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Dressed in our finery, we eat and celebrate together in community.

There is an "already, but not yet" element to this passage. At the Last Supper, Jesus invited us to a regular rhythm of celebrating the Eucharist, a foreshadowing of the

wedding supper of the Lamb. In this season of Lent, as we participate in the Eucharist, we wait and we look forward in hope. This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you. It is not super-spiritual, there's a very human element to this. As Eugene Peterson reminds us, "The snobbish cultivation of devout feelings of salvation that withdraws from mingling with unsavory people and trafficking with everyday things comes to grief at the eucharistic table."² Bread. Wine. Shared cups. Shared plates. Shared smells. Shared smiles. At the Table, we share with every other follower of Jesus, who lives, who has lived, and who will live. At the Table, we are united with Jesus, and with each other.

In verse 10, the writer tries to bow before the angel. "Don't do that!" I once heard the theologian Gordon Fee teach on this verse in Vancouver, BC. He stands over 6 ft tall. When he yelled this phrase "Don't do that!" we all jumped out of our seats! The angel must have looked impressive, glorious, someone we would instinctively want to worship. "Don't do that!" "Worship God!" As Jesus resisted the Devil's temptations in the wilderness during his 40 days of fasting, we are reminded to do the same. Jesus alone is worthy of our praise.

Respond

As Jesus invites us, we too are blessed to be able to invite others to the Table. As my husband Ted told his friends, "If you come to the wedding, you'll be in the wedding!" Who could we invite to Jesus' Table? I like the [BLESS](#)³ acronym for five missional practices that we can integrate into our everyday lives. Begin with prayer. Listen with care. Eat together. Serve in love. Share your story.

Rest

Lord Jesus, in the midst of this season of Lent, of "bright sadness," we thank you for the blessing, the joy of your invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Give us the discernment in our spirits to recognize and resist worshipping anything or anyone other than you. Be present to us in your love in the messiness of the here and now, and we look forward to the day when you make all things new in the new heavens and the new earth.

² Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), p.158.

³ <https://covchurch.org/evangelism/bless/>

About the Author

Christina Burrows is a British-Korean spiritual director, pastor, adjunct faculty at North Park Theological Seminary, and intercultural agility trainer. In her spare time, she loves going for walks 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 Lenten Reflection for Wednesday, March 30, 2022

By Cath Gebers

Lectionary reading for 3/30/2022: [Psalm 53](#); [2 Kings 4:1-7](#); [Luke 9:10-17](#)

Selected passage for reflection: 2 Kings 4:1-7

Read

2 Kings 4:1-7 (The Message)

¹ One day the wife of a man from the guild of prophets called out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead. You well know what a good man he was, devoted to God. And now the man to whom he was in debt is on his way to collect by taking my two children as slaves.”

² Elisha said, “I wonder how I can be of help. Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

“Nothing,” she said. “Well, I do have a little oil.”

³⁻⁴ “Here’s what you do,” said Elisha. “Go up and down the street and borrow jugs and bowls from all your neighbors. And not just a few—all you can get. Then come home and lock the door behind you, you and your sons. Pour oil into each container; when each is full, set it aside.”

⁵⁻⁶ She did what he said. She locked the door behind her and her sons; as they brought the containers to her, she filled them. When all the jugs and bowls were full, she said to one of her sons, “Another jug, please.”

He said, “That’s it. There are no more jugs.”

Then the oil stopped.

⁷ She went and told the story to the man of God. He said, “Go sell the oil and make good on your debts. Live, both you and your sons, on what’s left.”

Reflect

I’ve always been intrigued by the “nameless” women in the bible. Their stories are told, often simplified as allegory or metaphor, and their personhood erased. And yet, let us not discount the very basic reality that each of these women have a story and it was told. Generation after generation passed orally, until it was finally written down. Their lives amplify the sacred through each retelling. And when we come to their stories, may we approach with an open mind and open heart to see their circumstances and how each choice, action, or inaction, gave a greater understanding of our God.

Prayerful Reflections: A Lent & Easter Devotional

This nameless widow has been used to bolster the idea of “faith in action.” She must act in full confidence of God’s provision to see the miracle of the oil. Scholars and bible commentators alike point to this story as an example of what it looks like to faithfully follow even when the outcome is unseen and unknown. The widow’s complete trust in Elisha’s instruction demonstrated the care of God to meet the needs of the people.

Yes. This is a decent understanding of the story. Yet, it also seems like a skimming of the surface. And maybe if we dig a little deeper there is even more beauty underneath.

When I first read this passage, I couldn’t help but think of all this woman must be experiencing. Her husband was a faithful man, known to be a person of God. She has lost him and now finds her family in debt and her sons’ lives threatened. This is not some meek and mild woman. She boldly approaches the prophet Elisha, tells her story, and demands help. Her faith is evident in the confidence she has: her life and the lives of her children matter. She knows God is one who sees her and calls out for the Lord to act.

The miracle that unfolds is not solely about her faithfulness to obey, but how the whole community participates in God’s provision. Her neighbors must give their bowls and jugs. The community’s response is the first miracle as the people of God rally to a member in need. Think of how their faith must grow when they hear the outcome of the story. All their containers are filled and God used their generosity to provide for the widow and her family.

In the end, she has more than enough. God not only met her present need, but her future livelihood through the excess of oil. This is a magnificent picture of God’s care for humanity. It is also a portrait of communal participation. We must all see the needs of those around us and act. God moves through the faithfulness of the neighbor: to see the widow and respond with faith!

Respond

Put yourself in the shoes of the widow: imagine the weight on your shoulders, the loss in your heart, and the hope you have for God to act.

Place yourself in the community: do you see the needs of those around you? What miracles might God be inviting you to participate in? Are your eyes open? Is your heart willing?

Rest

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, help us to see You clearly when the realities of life muck up our vision. Let us be open to the pains, yearnings, and needs of those around us. Give us faithfulness to respond and act out of a kind and generous heart, reflecting Yours. May our faith grow as we see You move in places of need. May we always see the other, for you are a God who sees and responds. Amen.

About the Author



Cath Gebers is an open and affirming pastor serving college students of Lincoln, NE. With a passion for justice and a heart bent towards equity, she also works for a local non-profit serving public schools and helping all students reach their full potential through mentoring. Cath adores her family, her pup, and a perfectly brewed cup of coffee.

A Lent Reflection for Thursday, March 31, 2022

By Eileen Lundy

Lectionary reading for 3/31/2022: [Psalm 126](#); [Isaiah 43:1-7](#); [Philippians 2:19-24](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 43:1-7

Read

Isaiah 43:1-7 ESV

But now thus says the Lord
he who created you, O Jacob,
 he who formed you, O Israel:
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be
with you;
 and through the rivers, they shall not
overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be
burned,
 and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
 the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I give Egypt as your ransom,

Cush and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my eyes,
 and honored, and I love you,
I give men in return for you,
 peoples in exchange for your life.
Fear not, for I am with you;
 I will bring your offspring from the east,
 and from the west I will gather you.
I will say to the north, Give up,
 and to the south, Do not withhold;
bring my sons from afar
 and my daughters from the end of the
earth,
everyone who is called by my name,
 whom I created for my glory,
 whom I formed and made.”

Reflect

In this passage from Isaiah a picture is painted of God being intimately involved with His people. It is God who creates and forms us for His glory. God redeems and calls His people by name, claiming us as His own by saying “you are mine”. To be called by name is to be known, to be honored as having worth and value and to be precious in God’s eyes.

It is from this place of intimacy and knowing that God promises to be with us. God gives us the promise of His presence with us in the difficulty and pain of life. Promising to be with us in what may feel like an overwhelming tidal wave or an out-of-control fire. God does not promise to prevent these circumstances but rather to be with us in the circumstances of life that threaten to overwhelm or consume.

I have vivid memories of going to work in November 2008, the day after learning devastating news that would change my future. What I had feared and prayed would not happen was going to be my new reality. I remember stopping several times throughout that day feeling

overwhelmed by the “too muchness” of my circumstances. The promise of Isaiah 43:2 would then come to mind and I would say, “God, this feels like too much, too overwhelming; but you say it will not overwhelm me, that you will be with me”. And the fear would subside, for a while. When it returned, I would stop again to say “it feels like to much but you say . . .” and the fear would subside, for a while. That day and in the following days and weeks I experienced the truth of God’s promise to be with me.

I love this passage in Isaiah because of my memory of experientially knowing God’s presence with me during a difficult time in my life, But I also find myself experiencing trepidation as I read this passage. I am afraid because I know that God’s promise is not that we will be protected from experiencing pain, suffering or evil, but that God will be with us. We will get wet from the water, but we will not be overwhelmed and swept away. The fire may singe or burn us, but we will not be consumed. I am afraid because I know there will be difficult circumstances to be faced in the future. God’s promise, though to my fear, to our fears is always the same “I will be with you”. Will you join me in learning to be satisfied with this answer and rest in God alone being enough?

Respond

Where are you feeling overwhelmed or in danger?

Pause to name that place and to name your fear.

Breath out your fear and the “too muchness” of your circumstances to God.

Breathe in the promise of Isaiah 43:2 “I will be with you”.

Repeat as needed.

Rest

O God, my Creator, You have called me by name and I am your beloved creation. You know my fears. In the overwhelming waves, the flames that threaten and the “too muchness” of life, may your presence sustain me. Let me rest in knowing that you alone are enough. Amen.

About the Author

Eileen Lundy is an oncology nurse, a pastor, and a spiritual director who lives in Omaha, Nebraska. She is a wife to Steve, a mother to 3 adult children and is patiently waiting for grandchildren. Eileen has a Bachelor’s in Nursing from Clarkson College, a Master’s in Spiritual Formation from Spring Arbor University and a Certificate in Spiritual Direction from North Park Seminary. Eileen loves a good story in any form; written, film or conversation.



A Lent Reflection for Friday, April 1, 2022

By Alex Macias

Lectionary reading for 4/1/2022: [Psalm 126](#); [Isaiah 43:8-15](#); [Philippians 2:25-3:1](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 126

Read

Psalm 126

A Harvest of Joy
A Song of Ascents.

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of
Zion,
 we were like those who dream.
2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
 and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
 “The Lord has done great things for
them.”
3 The Lord has done great things for us,
 and we rejoiced.

4 Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
 like the watercourses in the Negeb.
5 May those who sow in tears
 reap with shouts of joy.
6 Those who go out weeping,
 bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
 carrying their sheaves

Reflect

One of the things I miss most about living in Tucson, Arizona, my hometown, is the monsoon season. Tucson is in the Sonoran Desert where life seems to be hanging by a thread for the majority of the year—the heat is oppressive, the air dry. A gust of wind feels like someone directed a massive blow-dryer in your face. The landscape is arid and brown and the animals that live there are consequently thin and resourceful.

When the monsoons hit, the change is dramatic. There is no drizzle, no trickle of rain to warn you. Just a growing humidity and the smell of the creosote plants, and then suddenly the heavens open up and downpour. Lightning electrifies the sky and thunder cracks overhead reverberating through the mountains that encircle the city. Dry and dusty riverbeds are suddenly coursing with water catching people (and drivers) off guard by flash floods.

Psalm 126 is a song of ascents, a song for the climb, the journey to worship. Like the return of water to the barren waterways of the Negev desert, the psalmist remembers the return of the Israelite captives after the Babylonian exile. Their return was like treasure restored. The surge of joy so full and so powerful it felt more like a dream than reality. Where they had been left empty, God filled to overflowing. Their elation after such communal grief and loss was evidence of God’s presence and action not only to their own community but to those of surrounding communities as well. It is this memory that the psalmist holds on to with hope as the community pleads with God to restore once again. “May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.”

Prayerful Reflections: A Lent & Easter Devotional

Lent is a time in which we ponder our humanity with its shortcomings and limitations—our mortality. It is also a time of reevaluating how to live into the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. The psalm depicts a community that can teach us how to hope. Though they experience hardship again, this is a people who takes comfort in God's deeds in their past. They may weep as they gather seed and plant in a dry land, but to sow at all is an act of hope. They have seen the waters of restoration flow and trust that they will flow again.

After a monsoon, the dark storm clouds soon clear to reveal that burning sun once again, and if you're lucky, a rainbow stretches across the striking blue sky. The landscape is for a moment sparkling with the last drops of water before they evaporate in the rising heat, and the creosote, which to me is the smell of home, is fully awake and perfuming the air until the scent too is burnt off by the sun. The desert is briefly a different place before it returns to its typical arid state. Though it's hard to believe, desert dwellers must trust that the rains will come again.

Respond

On the Lenten journey to the death and resurrection of Christ, you may be “sowing in tears.” Perhaps you are burdened by your personal circumstances. Or perhaps you are overwhelmed by all that is not right in our world—violence, hunger, fear. Take a moment to breathe deeply and call to mind a time of God's restoration in your personal life, in history, or in nature.

Rest

God of abundance, we praise you for all that you have restored and continue to restore. Help us to hope even when all seems hopeless. Fill us to overflowing so that our joy spills over to those around us.

About the Author



Alex Hofmann Macias serves as Director of Academic Programming at North Park Theological Seminary. A native of Tucson, Arizona, she now lives just outside of Chicago with her husband and two children. Alex is a lover of foreign films, good food, novels, laughing, and singing really loud in the car.

A Lent Reflection for Saturday, April 2, 2022

By Jenny Hoskins

Lectionary reading for 4/2/2022: [Psalm 126](#); [Exodus 12:21-27](#); [John 11:45-57](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Exodus 12:21-27

Read

Exodus 12:21-27

²¹ Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb. ²² Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. ²³ For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down. ²⁴ You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. ²⁵ When you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. ²⁶ And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?' ²⁷ you shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed down and worshiped.

Reflect

I can't help but think back to watching *The Ten Commandments* as a child when I read this passage. Every year around Holy Week it seemed that our family would find ourselves piled up on the couch watching Charlton Heston and Yul Brynner battle it out for the liberation of the Hebrew people. The 1956 film lasted for over three and half hours so it's no wonder that much of what I thought (and apparently still think!) about the life of Moses was influenced by this movie. I can still see the black smoke creeping its way slowly through the scene as the Lord passes by the houses of the Hebrew families and hear the screams of the Egyptians as they encounter their first-born sons dead.

I remember watching this scene with such conflicted feelings as a child. I was all for the freedom from bondage and slavery for the Israelites and also remember wondering if it had to come at the cost of the lives of these Egyptians. I couldn't square the God of love I was learning about in Sunday school with the plagues and destruction in the story of Exodus.

I'm grateful that there seems to be a shift in some circles in the way that Sunday School is taught. In place of black and white narratives there seems to be a shift to inviting more questions and wonder and curiosity to the Scriptures and what we encounter in the text. The Bible stories we learned about (by flannel graph characters of course!) were presented as truth

but rarely were we also invited to approach the Bible as poetry or allegory or parable. It wasn't until I was much older that I was asked to consider the Bible as one continuous story of a revelation of God's love for us, from Genesis all the way through to Revelation.

When thinking on this passage over the past few weeks, I kept being drawn back to verse 26, "And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?'" and it caused me to reflect on how and what we make room for as we share the story of faith from one generation to the next. Are we actively making space to struggle together through difficult texts or questions we have? I don't remember a lot of room for queries or wondering when it came to matters of faith or the lessons we were taught in Sunday School. It felt more like storylines to memorize and facts to know rather than a beautiful narrative of remembering who God is and who we are as loved by God. Rolling verse 26 around in my mind has left me wondering about the spaces that we leave for questions and curiosities as we approach faith and as we continue to tell the story of Christ, our Passover Lamb.

Respond

As we continue to walk through this Lenten season, what would it look like for you to make more space for questions?

Are there stories from your childhood that need to be reexamined and approached with more curiosity?

May we welcome a child-like curiosity into this season as we make space to observe Lent and reflect on Christ, our Passover Lamb.

Rest

Lord, help us to invite curiosity as we live into our life of faith and as we share that life with those around us.



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 the Fifth Sunday of Lent

By Leanette P. Sunsum

Lectionary reading for 4/3/2022: [Psalm 126](#); [Isaiah 43:16-21](#); [Philippians 3:4b-14](#); [John 12:1-8](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Philippians 3:4-14

Read

Philippians 3:4-14 NRSV

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10 I want to know Christ[b] and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11 if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Reflect

In seminary this semester, I'm learning a lot about Paul's historical and cultural context. As seen in this passage and from my learnings, Paul was undoubtedly the zealous pharisee. He was the one on the streets preaching and teaching and showed such hostility toward early Christians. Then he has this incredible mystical, spiritual experience that he couldn't help but tell the world about, and it's no different in this letter. He shares his story of transformation. He shares it with such great hope and enthusiasm to a church that can't seem to find hope for itself. And rightly so! This is a time of hardship and turmoil for the church in Philippi. The intense political strife and the economic injustice against the poorest of the poor. I can understand the hopelessness, fear, chaos they must feel with the Roman Empire at its height, asserting its dominance and

power even with their subliminal messages of ideological superiority. This new church is also experiencing a lot of hostility for breaking the status quo, not living into the Roman Empire establishment.

So, it is not a surprise that Paul attempts to reassure them not to lose faith or courage we're almost to the finish line about to "press towards the goal." That's what this pandemic and this current social and political climate feel like. I feel like we are almost at the finish with this pandemic, and we've been challenged in many ways about how we see race in this country, and we are rethinking how we correctly implement public health precautions because COVID-19, which ultimately helps us best love our neighbors both near and far.

Overall, from Paul's letter, he inspires us to keep pressing towards creating the Beloved Community we wish to see in our world. I also believe that we need to grieve the things that we've lost. Like the church in Phillip, we've suffered quite a bit as a community because of the social and economic injustices of this pandemic. We can acknowledge our fears and doubts and hold all of that with compassion knowing that this was a hard couple of years. We are not alone.

Respond

Take a few moments to get in a comfortable seated position. Gently close your eyes. Inhale four seconds, hold for four seconds and exhale. Do this for a couple of times and when you are ready, name how you are feeling right now? Describe in some detail and why. Name what are the ways you can resonate with the Church of Phillip's struggle? In what ways are seeing hope both small and large?

Rest

God of hope and of breath, we thank for the times we get to slow down and breathe. To reorient ourselves in the present and to reflect on where we see hope and where we see pain. Embrace us with love and compassion in those moments. Amen.



About the Author

Leanette Pokuwaah is a Chicago native but is a first generation Ghanaian-American. She is passionate about curating communal healing spaces through faith, social justice initiatives, and community building. She is a writer, teacher, coach and musician who is pursuing her Masters of Divinity and Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She hopes to continue to bridge spirituality, mental health, and the Enneagram within LGBTQ communities and communities of color. To learn more check out her website at www.enneastories.com.

A Lent Reflection for Monday, April 4, 2022

By Rev. Dr. Erin Raffety

Lectionary reading for 4/4/2022: [Psalm 20](#); [Exodus 40:1-15](#); [Hebrews 10:19-25](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Hebrews 10:19-25

Read

Hebrews 10:19-25 NRSV

19 Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.



A photo of leaves on snow with green buds sprouting out of the ground.

Image courtesy of Rev. Dr. Erin Raffety.

Reflect

Not all that much is known about the writer or the circumstances of the book of Hebrews, but one thing scholars feel certain of is that the early Christians reading the letter were likely being persecuted for their faith so much so that they were tempted to give up on it. So, over and over throughout the book, the writer of Hebrews likens their experience to being in the wilderness, reminds them of the hope they have in Jesus, and urges them to persevere.

If you're like me or the Christians this letter was written to, maybe your first instinct is to look for a way out when you hit upon hard times. I had a job prospect going into this year that had me wild with hope. When it didn't pan out, I was not only disappointed, but I was left with the deflation and shame of having hoped for something that was not to be.

Hope is a fickle thing, isn't it? Hope aflame is other-worldly, unruly, and outlandish, but hope squelched can make us feel so alone, small, and foolish. My first instinct when this job didn't work out was to bury my hopes, alongside my faith, to retreat from love and the kinds of promises the author of Hebrews makes. But as I examined the smoke leftover from the fire of hope, as I bared my disappointment with trusted friends and family, I could see that part of the allure of the job was in its fantasy of running away from the pandemic, from uncertainty, from the challenges of my life in the here and now.

I'm humbled when I think of those early Christians, afraid for their very lives, reading these words of encouragement. With their deaths a real possibility, Jesus' triumph over death was the only hope that mattered. Faith in that Jesus really meant something. And nurturing love in those days was an act of resistance against despair.

I don't mean to romanticize these early Christians' circumstances or falsely compare them to ours. We Christians in America don't suffer persecution. But in these Coronavirus years, heavy with the threats of illness, death, and despair, we are often tempted, in our fear, insecurity, and anxiety, to manufacture our own faith, hope, and love. I think I was willing to cling to that job because it offered me a way out.

But Jesus' way out is never an escape, rather an embrace of our human circumstances. As the writer of Hebrews reminds us, Jesus can offer us hope, because it is Jesus who has known our pain in his flesh and blood. It is Jesus who offers us faith, because he loves us. It is Jesus who wants to be near to us in our time of greatest need: when we run toward Jesus, we run toward faith, hope, and love.

I would be lying to you if I said that I didn't still think about that job from time to time. But these days I also see Jesus offering me not so much a way out, but a way in. A way into being faithful in these circumstances, in these days. A way into learning how to love even when love seems near impossible. A way into a hope that doesn't need me or you, my excellence or your benevolence, to keep it burning, but rather a hope that is everlasting. And bearing that kind of hope in Jesus, in the wilderness, makes all the difference.

Respond

Write down something that you're worried about, struggling with, or even hoping for.

Now, **reread** the passage and **meditate** on what difference it makes for Jesus to offer you faith, hope, and love in those *very present circumstances*.

Trusting this, **jot down some insights** on how you might be called to live differently today.

Rest

God of abundance, help us in the wilderness not to run after faith, hope and love that are fickle and fleeting. Rather, help us to receive, in our very present circumstances, your faith, your hope, and your love. Amen.

About the Author



Rev. Dr. Erin Raffety is a Presbyterian pastor, a Cultural Anthropologist, and a Researcher at the Center of Theological Inquiry and Princeton Theological Seminary. She lives with her family in Lambertville, New Jersey, where she is a beginning bird watcher, a walker, a runner, and an advocate for disabled persons.

A Lent Reflection for Tuesday, April 5, 2022

By Vanessa Fletcher

Lectionary reading for 4/5/2022: [Psalm 20](#); [Judges 9:7-15](#); [1 John 2:18-28](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 20

Read

Psalm 20 NRSV

Prayer for Victory

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 The Lord answer you in the day of trouble!
The name of the God of Jacob protect
you!
2 May he send you help from the sanctuary,
and give you support from Zion.
3 May he remember all your offerings,
and regard with favor your burnt
sacrifices. Selah
4 May he grant you your heart's desire,
and fulfill all your plans.
5 May we shout for joy over your victory,
and in the name of our God set up our
banners.

May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.
6 Now I know that the Lord will help his
anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with mighty victories by his right hand.
7 Some take pride in chariots, and some in
horses,
but our pride is in the name of the Lord
our God.
8 They will collapse and fall,
but we shall rise and stand upright.
9 Give victory to the king, O Lord;
answer us when we call. [a]

Reflect

When I was a cheerleader in middle school (Go Lions!), we had a cheer that began:

“Victory is sweet unlike the agony of defeat...”

What a colorful vocabulary for a group of 11-13 year old girls I imagine without understanding the meaning haha! It is amazing what we can remember from adolescent years. This cheer was brought to mind as I reflected on today's scripture passage in the Book of Psalms, chapter 20.

You see, as Christians we live on this side of the sweetest victory. We get to celebrate on Easter Sunday that Jesus, the King of the world bore our sin, died on the cross and rose again so that we may have an everlasting life and relationship with Him. While we know and believe in this victory, this world is still filled with agony and defeat. It is so easy to get swallowed up in the distress of our own lives and the world.

Yet as I was considering the connection between this cheer and this passage, I was reminded how there is no agony in defeat BECAUSE of Jesus.

Through Christ's victory, we are also victorious!

This passage affirms this. Verse 6a proclaims: **"The Lord gives victory to His anointed."** Then it goes on in verse 8b that **"We rise up and stand firm!"**

To be a **victorious** person is to be:

triumphant,
undefeated,
unbeaten,
unconquered,
unvanquished.

Sometimes it is easier to believe this victory for someone else. We think in our worldly lens of people having it "more together" or being a "better Christian." For me, I can be more inclined to think of others as victorious and believe in and pray for victory over someone else's situation. It is more natural for me to live in the mindset of defeat than to view myself as victorious.

Respond

Let me encourage you and me in this Lenten season to personalize this passage, child of God!
Write it out, type it up, put it on your mirror. Insert your name in the blanks.

Proclaim the victory over your season and situation at Jesus' feet.

"May the Lord answer _____ when _____ is in distress;
may the name of the God of Jacob protect _____.
May he send _____ help from the sanctuary
and grant _____ support from Zion.
May he remember all _____'s sacrifices
and accept _____'s burnt offerings.
May he give _____ the desire of their heart
and make all _____'s plans succeed.
May _____ shout for joy over _____'s victory
and lift up _____'s banners in the name of our God.
May the Lord grant all of _____'s requests."
Psalm 20:1-6, New International Version

I love how The Message version translates the end of verse 6: "...everything's going to work out." Perhaps, we each need a taste of this assurance in this Lenten season.

To proclaim this victory over our lives, our families, our jobs, our cities, our world.

Rest

Rest in this, nothing that has been, is present or will be is too tough or far gone for Jesus to reign victory over. John 16:33 proclaims: **"In this world you will have trouble, but take heart for I have overcome the world."**

Rise up, stand firm, Daughter or Son of the King.

Jesus is our victor and you're His child deeming you victorious too!

If you have the time, listen to [Champion by Maverick City Music & Upper Room](#). May you feel the victory of Jesus wash over you in song and worship.

About the Author



Vanessa Fletcher seeks to radiate the light and love of Christ as a hospital chaplain in Georgia. She is an ordained minister through the Federation of Christian Ministries. Vanessa is married to her adventure partner, Hayden and has a spunky German Shepherd/Husky named Callie. She loves to spend time in nature and enjoys a good cup of espresso. Follow along her chaplain journey at [@chaplainness](#) on Instagram!

A Lent Reflection for Wednesday April 6, 2022

By Ramona Bamgbose

Lectionary reading for 4/6/2022: [Psalm 20](#); [Habakkuk 3:2-15](#); [Luke 18:31-34](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Luke 18:31-34

Read

Luke 18:31-34, The Message

Then Jesus took the Twelve off to the side and said, "Listen carefully. We're on our way up to Jerusalem. Everything written in the Prophets about the Son of Man will take place. He will be handed over to the Romans, jeered at, ridiculed, and spit on. Then, after giving him the third degree, they will kill him. In three days he will rise, alive." But they didn't get it, could make neither heads nor tails of what he was talking about.

Reflect

The Mystery of Calling (Vocation)

Have you ever found yourself in a season of life doing something that makes absolutely no sense but is exactly where you should be or what you should be doing? Recently, I met someone who was a former flight attendant who moved away from their hometown to live in an AirBnB to manage the property in a not so nice area making only \$50 a week outside of free housing. WHAA?!? Why would they give up their job making "good" money for what I deemed was a life of poverty? It made no sense to me. And yet, I could relate with their relentless quiet reassurance that God had called them to this place.

This passage in scripture highlights that some things that we are called to are not flattering and when communicated with those in our communities may not be understood. Sometimes vocation comes with loneliness not because we are not loved but because the work is ours alone. What God is calling us to comes with great satisfaction but sometimes getting there can be hard. Lonely. Even painful. How do we embrace calling when it is not glamorous? How do we move towards what God wants when it seems to go against what we want? How do we move forward when we feel the burden of the calling, and while surrounded by those who love us - they just don't understand us.

Friends, I do not have answers for you. Yet, I know from the story of Jesus that our pursuit of calling is not in vain. His focus and dedication to that which he was called to had the lasting impact of salvation that still endures today. Our pursuit of vocation may not be realized in our

time but what could offer us assurance is that living out our vocation has deep impact. Sometimes our vocation is not pretty but necessary.

Respond & Rest

I will end this reflection with the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his Mountaintop sermon delivered on April 3, 1968 a day before he was assassinated,

*“Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. **I just want to do God's will.** And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!*

And so I'm happy tonight.

I'm not worried about anything.

I'm not fearing any man!

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!”

Ase (Let it Be So) and Amen (So be it).



About the Author

My name is Ramona Bamgbose. I live in Chicago, IL. I am a full-time Operations Manager with House of Hope at Soul City Church and a part-time Behavioral Health Chaplain. I am Co-Head of the Bamgbose Household with my wonderful husband Anthony and three beautiful children; twins Olivia and Elias and 7 month old, Judah. I love the local church and I love being a Spiritual/Pastoral Care Provider. My hope always is that God would get the glory and am a big fan of “letting my life speak.” My motto “Preach the gospel and when necessary use words.” - St. Francis of Assisi

A Lent Devotion for Thursday, April 7, 2022

By Rebekah Bolin

Lectionary reading for 4/7/2022: [Psalm 31:9-16](#); [Isaiah 53:10-12](#); [Hebrews 2:1-9](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 31:9-16

Read

Psalm 31:9-16 NRSV

9 Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;

my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.

10 For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,[a]
and my bones waste away.

11 I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror[b] to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.

12 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;

I have become like a broken vessel.

13 For I hear the whispering of many—
terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.

14 But I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, “You are my God.”

15 My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies
and persecutors.

16 Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.

Reflect

Grief sucks. There is no other way to describe it other than to use explicit 4-letter words. It can feel as small as a pestering sad thought or feel as big as a gigantic monster attacking your core inner being while jumping on your chest like it's on a trampoline. It is a lonely, depressing place. And like the Psalmist says, the anguish can drag on for years, at which point all those around you have completely forgotten you and/or your pain. Many times, in grief, it feels as if no one else can possibly understand what you, and only you, have gone through. Like I said, it sucks.

The past few years have been full of grief for millions, if not billions. The pandemic has turned many lives upside down. And on top of a global pandemic, there are the unexpected, grief-inducing, gut-punching situations thrown at people. For me personally the last couple of years have felt like my first paragraph. I lost my beloved dad to cancer, lost my dream job due to covid, got sick with debilitating stomach nausea which took me out of work for weeks, had to

move out of my favorite apartment and out of my favorite city and move across the country twice, and have dealt with the loneliness of being far from family and friends. Similar to the Psalmist, my eyes sometimes grow weak with anguish, my soul and body fill with grief, and my strength fails, and my bones grow weak. However, when I need to remind myself I am not alone, I feel the love of God and it gives me the strength to be where I am until I can move forward. People throughout all of history, including those in the Bible (ahem, talking to you, David, writer of Psalm 31) have felt the same way—and have survived and thrived.

In the midst of his grief, David says in verse 14, “But I trust you, Lord.” This, my friends, is what I strive for in grief—to trust in God. It is sometimes easier said than done, but we come to a point where there is no other option. We must trust the Lord. The Message version of this verse says, “Desperate, I throw myself on you.” In an act of desperation, before we completely fall apart, we run to our Lord’s open arms, like a distressed child running into the arms of a loving parent. Although I have had my questions for God, have been angry with the Lord, and have even turned the other way in silence, I know deep in my soul that God is good. And like a parent, God wants the best for us—for “You are my God,” (vs 14).

Two things I have intentionally been praying for recently are: gratefulness and patience. The struggles of life can be overwhelming, but there are also many blessings and opportunities to be grateful. Sometimes I have to stop my attitude of “whoa is me,” and transform it to, “Thank you, Jesus, for XYZ.” Enduring grief requires patience and a knowledge that everything is in God’s control. The Psalmist says, “My times are in your hands.” God may not deliver us from everything, but he has promised to be with us through everything. May we have a deeper understanding of God’s orchestration, comfort, and empathy as we go through life’s struggles.

Respond

Write down 1-3 things that grieve your heart today. Ask God to show you where He is in these places and spaces. Ask for the faith to believe in God’s goodness and comfort in these areas. Ask God to give you patience as you navigate the grief. And finally, ask for a heart of gratefulness as you recognize the daily blessings the Lord pours over you.

Rest

Dear God, thank you that I am not alone in my grief, for you are always with me. I may not always recognize your presence, but I have the faith to believe you are wrapping me in your comfort and love. Please give me the patience to endure grief and the eyes to see your goodness all around me. Grant me the strength when I am weak and the faith to believe that my life is in your hands. I love you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

About the Author



Rebekah grew up in the wonderful, but way too cold, state of Wisconsin. Although she is still loyal to her WI sports teams, she was wise and moved to a warmer climate. She lived in Los Angeles for 15 years and 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, puzzle, read, host game nights, try new food, laugh around the dinner table with family and friends, and enjoy the adventures of life the Lord takes her on.

A Lent Reflection for Friday, April 8, 2022

By Reverend Corenna Hoyt

Lectionary reading for 4/8/2022: [Psalm 31:9-16](#); [Isaiah 54:9-10](#); [Hebrews 2:10-18](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Psalm 31:9-16



Abstract dark tunnel. Courtesy of Pixnio

Read

Psalm 31:9-16 (NRSV)

⁹ Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;

my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.

¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,^[a]
and my bones waste away.

¹¹ I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror^[c] to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.

¹² I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;

I have become like a broken vessel.

¹³ For I hear the whispering of many—
terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.

¹⁴ But I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, “You are my God.”

¹⁵ My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies
and persecutors.

¹⁶ Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.

Reflect

Imagine with me for a moment that in a time of distress someone asks, “How are you?” and you answer like the Psalmist does here. I can envision the stunned silence as you tell them, “My life is spent with sorrow; my strength fails; I am a horror to my neighbors...” David laid his heart bare! He poured out his deepest pain. Perhaps we hold back from this kind of raw honesty because we believe it would make us “an object of dread to our acquaintances.” So often we are afraid of or embarrassed by our emotions, or we think these difficult feelings are simply something to be overcome. Yet David *stays* with them. For five verses he presents his complaints, sorrow, fear, brokenness and rejection to the Lord.

Then comes this little word, “but.” This word, which doesn’t even appear as such in the original Hebrew, can sometimes lead us to misunderstanding. We tend to think it means these feelings are in contrast with God; that either verses 9-13 OR verses 14-16 are true at any given moment. We start to believe that somehow after verse 13, David had an “ah-ha” moment and now feels all better. We put a similar expectation on ourselves when we say things like, “This is hard *but* God is good,” “The diagnosis is devastating *but* God works all things together for good...” We use the word ‘but’ to minimize and distance ourselves from the uncomfortable. A better word (and the word used in Young’s Literal Translation of this verse) is “and.” I can be grieved AND grateful, hurt AND hopeful, sinful AND sorry. There are times I cannot see hope AND God is good.

If we do not make room for the honest cries of our hearts AND for vulnerable confession, both with God and each other, we will miss the deep transformation God has for us. Our grief, anger, hurt, fear, anxieties and sin will be pushed aside and shoved down until they leak in unpredictable ways. We need to learn to hold the ‘&s,’ AND we need to learn to make room for these in community, as we invite the ‘&s’ of others.

Respond

What ‘&s’ are you holding this season?

What adversaries scheme against you? Perhaps not enemy armies, rather enemies of your heart and soul: comparison, being minimized, shame, lies told to you or lies you’ve told, hopelessness, anxiety etc. Write them down then pour out your heart to God in writing or out loud AND move toward his steadfast love. Relieve yourself of the need to get past the uncomfortable. There is nothing you can say to surprise him or scare him off.

Now re-read today’s passage as a prayer. Highlight or underline the phrases that resonate with your heart.

Rest

Healer and Sustainer God, so often we are carrying guilt, shame, anxiety, fear and doubts while putting on a brave face to move through our days. Be gracious to us, O Lord, as we learn to hold the '&s,' moving into and out of the pain. Give us courage to create safe places where we can invite the pain of others and confess our shortcomings; for we know that you, out of your unfathomable love, have given us a spirit of power, love and right thinking. Amen.



About the Author

Coreenna has a lifetime passion for ministries of reconciliation and healing. She enjoys speaking and preaching for various ministries. Coreenna 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.
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A Lenten Reflection for Saturday, April 9, 2022

By Dawn Holt Lauber

Lectionary reading for 4/9/2022: [Psalm 31:9-16](#); [Leviticus 23:1-8](#); [Luke 22:1-13](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Luke 22:1-13

Read

Luke 22:1-13 (NIV)

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people.

Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

The Last Supper

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover."

"Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there."

They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So, they prepared the Passover.

Reflect

Jerusalem. Bustling. Full of energy. The streets teeming with families in town to observe Passover. They have come to Jerusalem with hope, seeking the Messiah. Many are already familiar with the itinerant preacher, Jesus, whose teachings have been answering these Messiah-longings.

But there are others, chief priests, scholars, notable leaders in the community who feel threatened by Jesus. His teachings undermine their authority and upset the status quo. They have been looking for ways to silence him, but Jesus' popularity with the people has left them powerless and afraid to make a move. Until Judas. Judas solves this problem for the religious leaders when he promises to quietly deliver Jesus to them, without fanfare or attention.

Judas' motivation for betraying Jesus may never be fully known, but Luke includes a clue through these words: *Then Satan entered Judas*. It is a rather chilling statement. Judas is not a robot, of course. Each one of us must take responsibility for our choices and actions, and Judas must take responsibility for his decision to go to the chief priests and consent to hand Jesus over to them. We also recognize how Satan sees in Judas an eager and willing ally in his war against Jesus. Satan - the adversary, the accuser, the tempter – is the true enemy of Jesus, not Judas.

But the outcome of their intentions does not go as expected. Satan's desire to eliminate Jesus, and the desire of Judas and the chief priests to silence Jesus, in fact, does the opposite. Seeking to defeat Jesus by putting him to death, they set in motion the very thing that Jesus has come to do. They become part of God's plan to bring us salvation and redemption through Jesus Christ. Jesus' arrest, trial, execution by crucifixion should put an end to him and his ministry forever. And yet it is his very death that leads to Jesus' victory over sin, evil, death, and Satan, and offers us new, everlasting life.

I recall the story of Joseph and his brothers from Genesis 50. The brothers fear Joseph's response to their betrayal of him, but he comforts them instead with: *"Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."* Judas, the religious elders, and Satan all enact evil against Jesus for their own purposes – but God uses their actions for the good of all His people.

As Judas' plan with the chief priests is set in motion, Jesus remains mindful of God's plan for him, even in these final days before his death. Quietly and intentionally, Jesus makes preparations for the final Passover meal with his disciples, continuing to teach them and care for them as his earthly ministry is fulfilled.

Respond

"Go and Do."

Go and make preparations to receive Jesus this Lenten season – receive him again or receive him for the first time. Take the time to do whatever is necessary to prepare the way for Jesus in your life.

Rest

Heavenly Father, teach us to do Your will and follow in Your ways, for You are our Savior and Redeemer, our comfort and our help, our trust and our hope; In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

About the Author



Rev. Dawn Holt Lauber is a Covenant Worship Pastor and a Covenant Living Chaplain. She and husband, David (a theology professor), have three children. A professional singer, Dawn first performed Duke Ellington's sacred songs at The Riverside Church of New York City and fell in love with sacred jazz. She has several jazz recordings at www.dawnholtlauber.com Join Dawn and her sister, Courtney, as they discuss, "Joy in the Journey of life" - in crisis, triumph, and ordinary days. On Instagram @joyinthejourney2022 and on Clubhouse at Joy in the Journey.

A Lent Reflection for Palm Sunday

By Rev. Sarah Robinson

Lectionary reading for 4/10/2022 [Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Luke 10:28-40

Read

Luke 19:28-40 NIV

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29 As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 30 “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

34 They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. 36 As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

Reflect

There he was. The crowd’s great hope for a better day! Jesus, finally acting how they imagined the Messiah would- symbolically riding victoriously into Jerusalem (the seat of power in Israel) like a king would. Their king: a man of the people with real power (just think of the miracles he had performed!) who could finally bring true justice and peace.

He had everything!

Only to have their hopes crushed just days later, as “the system” and “powers that be” dealt a seemingly finishing blow to their movement by unjustly crucifying him. I cannot imagine the devastation they must have felt. The desolation and loss. Actually, maybe I can, at least a little bit. I feel like recent history has played out in dramatic swings between hope and despair. Even as I write this I am experiencing a bout of despair as I am watching news clips roll in about the invasion of Ukraine.

I shout “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (vs. 38) but often the very next thing out of my mouth is “how long oh Lord?” from Habakkuk 1:2-4 (NIV):

²How long, LORD, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?

Or cry out to you, “Violence!”
but you do not save?

³Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.

⁴Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.

I cry out to God in both despair and hope, because if I do not the rocks themselves would cry out. It is moments like this we must dig deep into scripture, must lean into the Holy Spirit, must remind ourselves that in the end God’s justice can and will win the day. Nature itself declares it so!

And so this Palm Sunday I know I must cry out. Both in hope and despair, joy and sorrow. While I sit in the sorrows and pains of this moment, I must grasp tightly to the bits and pieces of light, of the Kingdom that I see rising up all around me wherever people choose peace, hope and love over power, control and violence.

Ultimately our King has come! Not just the King of Israel, but Christ the King of the Universe! His justice and peace will come. So this day I rest on God’s answer to Habakkuk’s complaint:

“Look at the nations and watch—
and be utterly amazed.

For I am going to do something in your days
that you would not believe,
even if you were told. (Habakkuk 1:5 NIV)

Respond

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Check in with yourself. At this moment, how are you feeling? How are you holding your emotions in your body and mind? Try to name them if you can. Even if you can't it's OK. Whatever you are feeling, for a few minutes just cry out to God- in joy, in thanks, in hope, in grief, in despair. After you finish declare out loud: JESUS IS KING.

Rest

On my worst days and my best God, remind me that indeed Jesus is King. Your promises do not go unfulfilled, and we can indeed put our hope and trust in you. As we enter this Holy Week, may we once again be stirred out of our complacency and paralysis into new life in your Kingdom. AMEN.

About the Author



Pastor Sarah Robinson loves living & serving in the eclectic eco-district Audubon Park in urban Orlando, FL, where she bikes all over and works in her edible/pollinator garden covering her entire front yard! She considers it a privilege and a calling to work for rights and justice for the most vulnerable. You can follow her on Instagram [@pastorfarmersarah](https://www.instagram.com/pastorfarmersarah)

A Lent Reflection for Holy Monday

By Rebekah Strobel

Lectionary reading for 4/11/2022: [Psalm 36:5-11](#); [Isaiah 42:1-9](#); [Hebrews 9:11-15](#); [John 12:1-11](#)

Selected passage for reflection: John 12:1-8

Read

John 12:1-8 (NLT)

Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him. Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance.

But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, "That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself.

Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

Reflect

I love the story told above for many reasons...the reminder of Jesus' miraculous healing of Lazarus, the dignity given to Mary as she serves the Lord, even the fear of the priests as they realize their earthly power is slipping away. But my favorite thing is the very human response of Judas... "What a waste!". We all have our issues with Judas, but sometimes I think we need to see ourselves in him- our very self-centered foolishness that can easily lead us astray. Because the thing is, Judas was right. It was a waste. That jar COULD have been sold, the money COULD have been distributed to the poor. Like so many of us, Judas sees the facts but doesn't see the truth...a lesson in missing the point.

Just because something is factually right doesn't mean it is the most right- in this case, the most right thing was the beautiful sacrifice Mary made in pouring out a very expensive jar of perfume and lovingly wiping the feet of Emmanuel. The most right thing was for Jesus, the ultimate teacher, to elevate a woman and use her as an example of faithfulness for all to learn from. The most right thing was for the group gathered to stop and pause, and remember that God was truly with them.

In a similar telling of the story in Mark, Jesus also responds with “she has done what she could”. So often we (and I mean me) get caught up in all the stuff of life- the to-do lists, the keeping up with the Joneses, even the basics like making sure your kids are decent human beings and, you know, fed. All this stuff is or can be good, but so easily becomes our sole focus and tends to pull us away from the point of it all- doing what we can to love Jesus, love ourselves, and love the world around us well. Throughout his life on earth, Jesus pointed out a lot of people’s actions as faithful- the woman who gave two her two denarii was more faithful than the man who gave his many, the woman who dared to grab Jesus’ robe as he rushed to save the very Lazarus featured in this scripture, the woman who showed up to worship even though no one wanted to look at her disease ridden body...none of them did anything particularly big (though breaking social norms is certainly nothing small). What they all have in common is that they showed up with their whole selves and offered it up- their fear, their hurt, their meager savings. In doing so they offered up the one thing that has no currency - hope. And hope is never a waste.

Maybe when Mary poured out the perfume she hoped she would one day smell it’s sweet fragrance in the world around her- a world made right, a world where sin and death had no power. Maybe she knew that her Lord was dying soon and she would be denied the privilege of preparing his body for burial. Maybe she just loved him so much that she wanted to give the most precious item she owned. Whatever her motivation, Jesus lifts up this act as the right thing, even when other “right things” shout out to be heard.

Doing what we can with what we have, not more and not less...giving ourselves a break to sit at the feet of the Lord and just pour out our precious selves- our hopes and dreams, our hurts and fears...enjoying those kids that need to be fed or the job that has to be done not because we HAVE to but because we CAN... this is the point. When we spend our time and use our resources as a gift it’s never a waste. When we dare to hope that the Lord actually is with us, delights in us, and sees us in whatever it is we live in, that is a fragrant offering so sweet to the God who receives it.

This Holy Week, may you be blessed with the time to revel in the life you lead, to sit fully in whatever you are experiencing right now, and to be brave enough to offer up your whole precious self to you and to your God. That time will never be a waste.

Respond

What precious thing can you offer to God this week? Take the time and offer it- know that it is received and treasured. Maybe you’re in a season of life where the thought of offering one more thing is just too much. Breath. In four counts, hold it, out four counts. Offering your time and love to yourself alone is enough- the divine within you recognizes the holiness of your offering. You’ve done what you can.

Rest

God of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, God who is with us in our holiness and in our foolishness, be with us today. Grant us peace of heart and mind, and the reminder that time spent with you in any form is never a waste. Take our offering, whatever it is, and be blessed by it. Give us the gift of being present in and with our own selves this week, as we remember that you were never afraid to fully inhabit your own earthly body. Would we revel in the gift of these bodies, and use them to bless ourselves and the world around us. Amen.



About the Author

Rebekah Strobel is an ordained reverend who lives in Des Moines, WA with her husband Nate, and her stepson Jack. She received a Communications degree from Azusa Pacific University in 2008, and graduated from North Park Theological Seminary with her Master of Divinity in 2013. After years of Church ministry she has transitioned to non-profit leadership, overseeing a group of people who provide social and spiritual services for low-income and affordable housing communities. Officiating weddings regularly is one of her great joys, as is building up future leaders. She loves Jesus, people, laughing, crying and nature.

A Lent Reflection for Holy Tuesday

By Jodi Mullen Fondell

Lectionary reading for 4/12/2022: [Psalm 71:1-14](#); [Isaiah 49:1-7](#); [1 Corinthians 1:18-31](#); [John 12:20-36](#)

Selected passage for reflection: John 12:20-26

Read

John 12:20-26 (The Message)

There were some Greeks in town who had come up to worship at the Feast. They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee: "Sir, we want to see Jesus. Can you help us?"

Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip together told Jesus. Jesus answered, "Time's up. The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." "Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal. If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me."

Reflect

I am struck once again by the unexpected revelation that Christ makes as he continues to reveal to us what it means to follow him. An initial observation from this passage is the expressed desire on the part of the Greeks who had come to Jerusalem for the passover to meet Jesus. Presumably these people had witnessed Jesus's triumphal entry and wanted to get close to this man who had created quite an uproar in the streets. They might be thinking that there was something in it for them, an advantage to be had if they could get close to Jesus. But then as Jesus so often does, Jesus states a paradoxical truth. He says, "Now is the time for the son of man to enter his glory", which all sounds well and good. Glory is good. That's the piece of Jesus we likely all have a desire for. But then Jesus goes on to say that death is going to be part of this road. Like the wheat kernel that only proliferates when thrust deep into the dark soil and then dies, so too it is with our lives. The more we clamor after glory as the world defines such, the more elusive the lasting glory that comes with truly yielding ourselves to Jesus becomes. To die to self is so hard. Especially when we live in a world where in so many ways, certain people are already cast aside and undervalued. And practically speaking, what does it mean to die to self? It does not mean a denial of our self as a beloved child of God, or a berating of our

self-esteem. Rather it is a calling to value the other more deeply than we value ourselves. It is a calling to embrace the way of Jesus and not the way of the world. To die to self is to consider the places in our lives where privilege lives and to ensure that we are not exploiting another for selfish gain. To die to self is to consider the costly part of discipleship that speaks out against injustices even when we stand to gain by such injustices. To die to self is to understand that all are as valued as we ourselves are and to ensure that we are motivated by a desire to love and give grace just as Christ's death on the cross is for us. To die to self means allowing God to thrust us into the dark deep soil for a time in order to emerge into the glory of Christ's light, a light that shines in the darkness of our world, a light that brings illumination to the troubled places, a light that provides hope for a better day ahead. Dying to self gives us a chance to emerge from our own dark places more fully formed in the likeness of Christ.

Respond

So here we are on Tuesday of Holy Week, a good 30 plus days into our Lenten journey. Maybe you have denied yourself something during Lent. How has that enhanced your journey toward the cross? Maybe this year you found it too hard to give up something more because you've already had to give up so much. Either way, take a moment to consider your own desire to meet Jesus. Are you ready to meet him at this cross, knowing that part of you must also die? Can you find hope or joy in knowing that being thrust into the dark earth to die will actually help you emerge more fully alive? Name something that hinders you from dying to self. Ask God to reveal to you what awaits you if you can yield this to Christ.

Rest

Loving and gracious God... The way of the cross is not filled with the glory of this world, but rather steeped in yielding ourselves to you. Draw near to us. Hold us close as we seek to give ourselves more fully over to the way of Jesus. Amen.



About the Author

Jodi Mullen Fondell is a pastor who has served international congregations in Sweden, England, Luxembourg, and France. In 2019 she published [I Was A Stranger: Encouraging the church to welcome and embrace the stranger](#). She lives in the desert near Palm Springs, CA, enjoying new adventures with her beloved husband Doug and Maddie, the wonder Labrador.

A Lenten Reflection for Holy Wednesday

By Amanda Svejda

Lectionary reading for 4/13/2022: [Psalm 70](#); [Isaiah 50:4-9a](#); [Hebrews 12:1-3](#); [John 13:21-32](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Isaiah 50:4-9a (New Revised Standard Version)

Read

Isaiah 50:4-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

“The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens— wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward.

I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near.

Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.”

Reflect

As I write this, I am weary. I feel the first line of today’s passage deep in my body, heart, and mind. I have had a strangely full and scattered week that has left me bereft of the quiet space I need to be still, reflect, and make sense of my own experience. To be held and taught by God.

In the past week, I have been to the dentist for part one of a crown placement. I started a new temporary job that requires daily back-to-back Zoom meetings, and I completed a four-part interview and accompanying writing assignment. I have also been concerned for my mom, who lives 1,000 miles away and recently suffered a fall that left her with a dislocated shoulder and broken knee (she is okay). Adding to the weariness of this week are world events, like Russia invading Ukraine.

I think about how stressed I feel and in these moments, how unsavory and cutting my words and actions can be to those closest to me. I apologize, I repent, but often find the cycle repeating itself. I am weary of myself, too, I find.

Often, I find myself asking God and thinking about the same questions:

“With all the seeming chaos in my life and in the world—how can I continue to have faith and believe so that these circumstances don’t dictate my reality? How can I go back to my life mantra – to love God with all I am, love my neighbor as myself, and actively seek to establish God’s kingdom – when the world is on fire? When it seems everyday life asks for so much and holds so many distractions from the bigger picture?”

Every morning, I take at least 10 minutes to read the Bible and pray. I usually don’t find the step-by-step playbook I’m looking for. But what I do find is the welcome presence of Holy Spirit, burning in my heart. I find the water of the Word, quenching the thirst of my soul. And I’m drawn by the gentle fingers of a loving Savior, lifting my chin, to look up to the Lord. To step away from what I think informs my reality, reminding me of what is real and true, beyond what my eyes can see.

For me, this passage in Isaiah is like refreshing lemonade on a hot summer day, or a satisfying night’s rest for a weary body and soul.

I’m inspired to think about Jesus— His life, His character, His words. His unshakeable resolve to complete the work of salvation, all the way to the cross. I imagine it’s Jesus speaking these words. He is the One who has the tongue of a teacher, who sustains the weary with a word; who set His face like flint to the unimaginable insult and pain of His own crucifixion.

And He is the One who vindicates me [and all who call on Him]--and He is near.

Respond

Spend time reflecting for a few moments on areas where you may feel weary and worn out, not up to the task. Express these in prayer, honestly and openly to God. Open your mind and heart and hands, be still, waiting for God to feed your soul.

On this Holy Wednesday, reflect on the life, words, miracles, and attitude of Jesus up to this point in the Gospels. If you’re unfamiliar with the accounts, choose one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John) and spend time witnessing with fresh eyes where Jesus sustained the weary with a word, healed the sick, raised the dead, and steadfastly set his face to the work at hand.

Thank God for this embodiment of who God is in Jesus, fully God, fully human, who experienced the same challenges and temptations, hurts and insults that we do, yet overcame.

Rest

Lord Jesus, thank You that You are the exact image of the invisible God. You show us a life filled with love and unshakeable resolve to complete the work that God called You to: the hard road of salvation that travels through death. You did it willingly. And yet even before You went to the cross, You walked the earth and graced us with more encouragement for our souls than we could have ever dreamed. Thank you for Your message and Your call that recognizes our humanity and our circumstances, yet calls us back to You, where we find rest and resolve. So we come to You, all of us who are weary and heavily burdened, and in You find rest for our souls. We bless You and love You. In Jesus Name. Amen.

About the Author



Amanda Svejda grew up in North Carolina and now lives in Evanston, Illinois with her husband Joey and her fur baby Kona. She studied journalism in college and earned her Master of Divinity degree from Northern Seminary in 2007.

She believes in the power of God's love to transform, the inherent dignity of every person (as God's image bearer), and the call for every Christ follower to love God wholeheartedly, share the Good News, and love our neighbor as ourself in compassion, mercy, service, and justice.

A Lenten Reflection for Maundy Thursday

By Laura Truax

Lectionary reading for 4/14/2022: [Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; Exodus 12:1-4, \(5-10\), 11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35](#)

Selected passage for reflection: John 13:1-5

Read

John 13:1-5 (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.

Reflect

I am on my knees before you. I am kneeling at your feet. Wash basin and towel in hand.

Despite my efforts, the front of my tunic is wet as water drips down my arms onto my chest. A dozen men have made this room crowded. The air is thick with the lingering smells of dinner and the staleness brought by closed windows and solid doors. The confusion is palpable, the arguments are baited. Each one seemingly eyeing the other with suspicion and distrust. And I am on my knees.

It was easier when you believed that I was advancing an agenda. A plan to help the down-trodden live better. When you were convinced I had come to restore the fortunes of Israel. Usher in a new kingdom. Your eyes lit up at the chance to be part of a national resurgence. I saw that enthusiasm and hoped it would carry you all the way through. Though this night and what I expected would follow. Through the disillusionment and disappointment. Through the grief and confusion. I hoped your enthusiasm would keep you committed until, perhaps, your support might turn into mutuality; into love.

But our days grow brief. There is so much more for you to learn, to understand, to integrate. There is no more time and I am on my knees at your feet. Will you remember this? Will you remember the lowliness of me? Will you recall how it felt to have me wash the dirt off your hardened soles? Will you realize that the greatest thing I can do is give up everything I have for the sake of love alone?

I am on my knees waiting to receive your feet.

Respond

Pause and reflect on how Jesus wants to love you right now. Consider how humbly Jesus works and how he makes himself so vulnerable to your decision. Today be aware of how tenderly he is seeking to be received by you.

Rest

Jesus, as we approach the final days of your earthly ministry we ask that you show us what you want us to see. As you bend low at our feet, we ask for the grace to follow you in your humility. May the love with which you served others be the love that marks us as well.

About the Author



Rev. Dr. Laura Truax is a pastor, writer and speaker who has just finished spending 35 days in a silent retreat. Laura is currently serving as a spiritual director at University of Dubuque Theological Seminary and as a facilitator of online meditation groups.

A Lenten Reflection for Good Friday

By Laura Truax

Lectionary reading for 4/15/2022: [Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42](#)

Selected passage for reflection: John 19:16-19

Read

John 19:16-19

Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). 18 There they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

Reflect

I recently spent a full week reflecting on the crucifixion of Jesus. Four of five hours of every day were spent in silent contemplation of the cross. I realize how pathetic it sounds to write, *It was exhausting*. But grief has a way of wringing you up and tossing you down like a crumpled piece of paper. Staying with Jesus as he prayed in the garden urging his disciples to stay awake; hearing the clanging metal of armed guards in the night; recoiling from the smooth words and gentle kiss of the betrayer. The sheer **physicality** of Jesus' last hours starts to sink in as you feel the weight of what is unfolding.

And what is actually unfolding? At the minimum, this is God absorbing the suffering of the world. At a time when the Roman gods prance around like impetuous children, Jesus reveals a God who draws all the sin, suffering and pain of creation into the very heart of the Divine. This is a God who chooses to embrace the very places we shun, and the people we judge and the weakness we abhor. This God will not call down angels to rescue himself from the suffering of humanity. This God feels the pain, hears the scorn, takes in the betrayal. Jesus shows us a God whose forgiveness includes everyone, those who gamble for his robe at the foot of the cross, but even his betrayer as well. For surely Judas, too, was included in his prayer of forgiveness.

This is not helpless suffering but a sharing of love. Love that says to the most forsaken that I am with you, there is no place you will go that I have not gone ahead of you. There is no label of disdain that I have not already embraced first. There is no weight of grief, no alienation you could experience that I have not already borne.

I am Emmanuel. God with you. Now and Forever. Behold your God.

Respond

Today, contemplate the crucifixion. Let yourself feel the scene as the words wash over you. Don't try to overthink or understand it all. For today, just believe what you are experiencing.

Rest

The *Anima Christi* prayer has been used in Christian worship since the 14th century. It is often associated with St. Ignatius of Loyola because he used it so frequently. May this be your prayer today.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O Good Jesus, hear me.
Within your wounds hide me.
Permit me not to be separated from you.
From the wicked foe, defend me.
At the hour of my death, call me
and bid me come to you
That with your saints I may praise you
For ever and ever. Amen.



About the Author

Rev. Dr. Laura Truax is a pastor, writer and speaker who has just finished spending 35 days in a silent retreat. Laura is currently serving as a spiritual director at University of Dubuque Theological Seminary and as a facilitator of online meditation groups.

A Lent Reflection for Holy Saturday

By Julie Raffety

Lectionary reading for 4/16/22: [Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; 1 Peter 4:1-8; Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24

Read

[Lamentations 3:1-9,19-24](#) NIV

- 3** I am the man who has seen affliction
by the rod of the LORD's wrath.
- 2** He has driven me away and made me walk
in darkness rather than light;
- 3** indeed, he has turned his hand against me
again and again, all day long.
- 4** He has made my skin and my flesh grow
old
and has broken my bones.
- 5** He has besieged me and surrounded me
with bitterness and hardship.
- 6** He has made me dwell in darkness
like those long dead.
- 7** He has walled me in so I cannot escape;
he has weighed me down with chains.
- 8** Even when I call out or cry for help,
he shuts out my prayer.

- 9** He has barred my way with blocks of
stone;
he has made my paths crooked.
- 19** I remember my affliction and my
wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.
- 20** I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.
- 21** Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:
- 22** Because of the LORD's great love we are
not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
- 23** They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
- 24** I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

Reflect

It is quite widely acknowledged that the in between is the hardest place to be – the in between knowing something is medically wrong, but not knowing what it is (a diagnosis), struggling financially in the in between place our society labels as the unemployed, the crazy hormonal age and grade levels referred to as middle school. The Bible often refers to this in between space as a valley or a desert. A valley is a low point which translates both geographically and spiritually. A desert can be a place of beauty but its hot temperatures and arid climate more often make it a place of scarcity and death. When we are in the in-between spaces, we often

feel like we are alone in a valley or a desert. These places are places of lament – where we are in deep, passionate, unresolved sadness or grief. On Holy Saturday, the disciples were in the literal in between – between Friday and Sunday – but they were in the spiritual in between too. They were in this place of unknown grief. Was Jesus truly dead? Was there reason to despair or reason to hope? What was next for these followers of Jesus who had dedicated their life to following the Son of God?

But what about Jesus? Was he in the in between too? I'm a Presbyterian minister, and it is no secret that Presbyterians are not huge fans of using language of "the devil" and a literal "hell," (though I am proud to say there is a lot of freedom of spiritual thought in our tradition as well). And yet, the traditional Apostles' Creed tells us that during this in between time, Jesus descended into hell. So where did that come from? By all accounts, the Apostles' Creed draws its statement from a combination of Ephesians 4:8-10 and 1 Peter 3:18-20, but neither verse literally labels his in-between state as hell. And yet, Jesus had died an earthly death. And ... spoiler alert: we know the *resurrection* truth of tomorrow. And so, whether you believe that Jesus descended into a literal hell or was somewhere between death and life between Friday and Sunday, Jesus is almost certainly in a literal in-between state of mortality. This perhaps the definition of the most in between a human can be.

On Good Friday as Jesus relinquishes his earthly life, he cries out to God. Even God incarnate does not go unto death easily. As much as we may want to skip ahead to the resolution of tomorrow, let us wrestle in the in between lament for this Saturday. Though many of us are tired and weary of the in-between of a global pandemic that we thought would be over by now, let us lament the in-between where we exist. Let us lament the absence of resolution for which we long for in our lives. May we join with Christ in lamenting our failure to stand with the Holy in the wrecked places of our world. May we lament and acknowledge the suffering of Jesus. As much as we may want to skip ahead, let us remain in the valley, in the desert with Christ this Saturday.

Respond

I invite you to practice lament – a passionate expression of grief and sorrow that does not require resolution - on this Holy Saturday. You can do this privately in prayer with God, in public by posting a lament on a social media platform, with family around the dinner table, or in some combination. I invite you to lament aloud using the language below.

Rest

Lord of all paths – straight and crooked, I lament [insert something in your life that you are deeply sad or in grief about]. On this Holy Saturday, I acknowledge and utter my lament in this in-between space. Amen.

About the Author



Rev. Julie Raffety is the Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Franklin, NJ and an Associate Mathematics Teacher at Sage Alliance High School, working with kids with social and emotional diagnoses. Julie writes a monthly blog for the Presbyterian Outlook and enjoys running, snowboarding, cheering for the Green Bay Packers, and eating popcorn. She is the proud aunt to three nieces and one nephew. Studying the Bible in Lent classes is her favorite part of the Lent/Resurrection season.

A Lent Reflection for Resurrection Sunday

By Julia Styles

Lectionary reading for 4/17/22: [Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Isaiah 65:17-25; 1 Corinthians 15:19-26 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12](#)

Selected passage for reflection: Acts 10:34-35; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:11-18

Read

Acts 10:34-35 NRSV

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, **35** but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Luke 24:1-12 NRSV

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. **2** They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3** but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **4** While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. **5** 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? **6** He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: **7** ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” **8** Then they remembered his words.

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. **10** It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. **11** But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. **12** Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

John 20:11-18 NRSV

11 Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look[a] into the tomb; **12** and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. **13** They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” **14** When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. **15** Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” **16** Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,[b] “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). **17** Jesus said to her, “Do not

hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" **18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Reflect

Easter is a celebration of victory of Life over Death. On Resurrection Sunday we celebrate the empty tomb and Jesus raised from the dead! After weeks of Lent, we finally get to shout "Hallelujah! He is Risen!"

The core of the Christian message is that God will do in us what God did in raising Jesus from the dead. God will set all things right between us and Him. Whatever is dying or broken, God can make it right (Romans 10). In Luke 24 and John 20, I see God starting to make things right by correcting the inequities of patriarchy—a system of society in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it. "In a world that didn't accept the word of a woman as a valid witness, Jesus chose women as witnesses for his resurrection," notes Beth Allison Barr in her book, [The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth](#).

Barr writes that "Patriarchy exists in the Bible because the Bible was written in a patriarchal world. Historically speaking, there is nothing surprising about biblical stories and passages riddled with patriarchal attitudes and actions. What is surprising is how many biblical passages and stories undermine, rather than support, patriarchy." She encourages us to seek out those surprising moments and see a true picture of Christianity that does not subjugate women, but holds all humans as equally valuable.

The story of Jesus' resurrection in Luke 24 and John 20 are two such examples where biblical scripture undermines, rather than supports, patriarchy. Luke 24 centers women as the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other unnamed women went to Jesus' tomb with spices to prepare Jesus' body for the grave. What they found instead was a tombstone rolled away and empty grave clothes. When the angels shared Jesus' message of rising on the third day, "They remembered his words (Luke 24:8)." That means that these women were taught by Jesus. Like Mary, sister of Martha, they sat at Jesus' feet and were students of the Rabbi. These women were Jesus' disciples. In a very patriarchal society, Jesus not only opened the doors for women to learn scripture, he empowered them to be the first to spread the good news of the resurrection.

The women's witness challenges the cultural norms of many of Jesus' followers, and many ignore their testimony, but there are two apostles that take up the challenge and listen to the women: Peter and John. In John 20:3 it says, "Peter and the other disciple left immediately for the tomb. They ran, neck and neck." Those two men ran to the tomb to see the grave clothes with their own eyes. Because John and Peter believed the words of Mary Magdalene and the other women, they were the first of the Eleven Apostles to see and believe Jesus' resurrection!

I feel for those followers of Jesus who couldn't break free from the prejudices of their time. They missed the chance to see the tombstone rolled away. They missed seeing the angels. They missed the opportunity to affirm that Death did not have the Last Word. How many times throughout history has the church dismissed or erased the testimony of women, and as a result people have missed out on the good news of Life defeating Death? Too many to count, I'm afraid. It's time for the church to follow in the footsteps of Peter and John and listen to women—to their wisdom, guidance and testimony to what God is doing in the world today.

In Galatians 3:28, Paul says "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Acts 10, Peter says, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, **35** but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God." If God does not show partiality in gender, then we need to do the work to make it a reality in the Church by dismantling systems of sexism, racism and classism, and all the other -isms holding people at the margins.

The first action Jesus took after his resurrection was to send women as his witnesses into the world. Jesus is still sending women into the world to proclaim the good news of resurrection. My hope is that the Church would start encouraging these women instead of dismissing them. My hope is that followers of Christ would take the steps necessary to dismantle sexist systems and practices that pervade our culture and work towards implementing egalitarian structures and ideas, where men and women have equal value, and service is based on giftedness, not gender, and leadership in the church and home is shared.

Respond

The first step to being one in Christ, as Paul proclaims, is to determine what divides us, by taking an honest look at ourselves and our religious spaces.

Below is a continuum of justice engagement developed by Rev. Dr. Devyn Chambers. Read through the descriptions and determine where you and your organization fall in the continuum. Reflect on your personal reality as well as the reality of your faith community using this model.

Tolerate ••••• Willing to recognize women in ministry and leadership in general as long as it does not affect me or require my resources.

Ally ••••• Befriend women in ministry and listen to their stories and experiences; support women in ministry on an individual or personal level; have empathy for their experiences but do not address the cause of women's experiences on a systemic level or within my organization.

Advocate ••••• Vocally support women in ministry and leadership; more than supporting an individual person, support the cause as a whole; recognize and call out systemic injustices that marginalize women in ministry.

Make Room•Understand that more than advocacy, the flourishing of women is the goal; be aware that righting injustice will cost me something; realize that their embodied advocacy will require that we get out of the way or let someone pass; surrender and share power in every area of my life.

Now Act: *What steps can you take to move yourself and your organization further along?*

Rest

On this Resurrection Sunday, we rejoice along with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women who witnessed the empty tomb. "Hallelujah! He is risen. He is risen indeed!" Jesus, continue to show us the good news of your resurrection in our daily lives. Lord, help us to rest in the promise that we are all one in Christ, and that you show no partiality for one group over another. God, help us to know that you are good and your love endures forever.

Amen.



About the Author

Julia Styles is a Spiritual Director. 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 littles, Jakob and Zoe.