

A photograph of an empty tomb. The stone is rolled away to the right, revealing a bright sunrise or sunset outside. In the distance, three crosses are visible on a hill. A white cloth is draped over a stone block in the foreground.

# Lent Resource 2021

[www.discipleshomemissions.org](http://www.discipleshomemissions.org)



# Introduction

Before Christians celebrated Christmas, they centered their lives and worship in the significance of Easter. It was the first festival of the church. It was so important that the early church set Sunday, the first day of the week and the day of Jesus' resurrection, as their day of worship.

To prepare for the Easter festival, which begins on Easter and concludes on Pentecost, the Christian church in the West designated a forty-day period of penitential preparation. Beginning on Ash Wednesday and concluding with Holy Week, Lent is seen as an imitation of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness at the beginning of his earthly ministry. It is a time to fast, to reflect, to let go and prepare for the Easter festival, the Great Fifty Days. In 2021, the liturgical season of Lent begins on February 17 and concludes on Saturday April 3, which is 46 days. The forty days of the liturgical season is arrived at by not counting Sundays, days that are seen as "Little Easters," festival times rather than days of penitence.

In the early church, and in some congregations today, Lent was and is a time to prepare individuals for baptism. For baptismal candidates it is a time to focus on discipleship, what it means to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and to follow his way on a daily basis. For everyone, it is to be a time of turning and refocusing on our relationship with God and the impact of that relationship in our relationships with ourselves, with others, and with all of God's creation.

Lent is a time to practice simplicity and to foster the discipline of spiritual practices. It is a call to prepare and to refocus on what the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus means for us as individuals and communities of faith. We refocus to better understand the meaning of the Cosmic Christ in our lives and world.

There is not one "right" way to keep Lent. For some individuals keeping Lent means giving something up so that one's sacrifice can make room to grow in one's relationship with God. For instance, one forgoes chocolate or the expensive coffee drink and donates the money saved to care for the poor (almsgiving). Or, one fasts and uses that time that one would have spent eating in prayer and study of scripture. For others, Lent is not a period of giving something up as a time of letting go, letting go of the beliefs, attitudes and actions that are the obstacles for a genuine relationship with God, with self and others as children of God, and with God's creation. As individuals engage in contemplation and self-reflection, they come to know God and themselves in deeper ways and are transformed so that they can be agents of transformation in a broken and fragmented world.

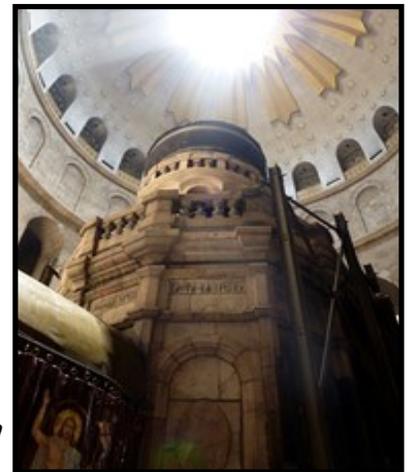
Lent is a time for the Resurrection to take root in our lives. Through these roots, nourishment flows that allows the fruit of the Resurrection to mature in our lives. We connect and are connected.

# Connecting in a Disconnected and Over-connected World

The theme for this year's Lenten devotional is *Connecting in a Disconnected and Over-connected World*. It comes from the experience of living through 2020.

In the midst of Lent last year, the world became aware of the developing coronavirus pandemic that disrupted and disoriented people around the world. Congregations were forced to examine how they worshipped and did ministry. Easter was celebrated in homes and living rooms in small social bubbles rather than in sanctuaries with families, friends, acquaintances and strangers. Families were forced to watch loved ones die over social media streams, if at all, as the highly contagious virus called for social distancing and isolation. And following these deaths, we were unable to engage in our familiar rituals of mourning and grief. Individuals lost jobs or were forced to learn new ways to function on the job as work from home became the preferred business model. New concepts like Zoom fatigue emerged as for seemingly endless hours we met for meetings and social gatherings. Older issues like the financial concerns of many and racism as the disease disproportionately impacted people of color were cast in new light. Extroverts experienced intense feelings of isolation and even many introverts began to say "enough of this alone time." Questions were raised about what connects us and how we are to connect to one another and the world around us.

As I write this, we are experiencing both the concern of surging cases of Covid-19 across the United States and the hope of the first deliveries of a vaccine. We are told that the majority of us will not be able to obtain a vaccine until late spring or early summer of 2021, if then. We are experiencing the impact of ideological differences that show up in many ways including the words and actions of opponents or proponents of wearing a mask. All around us we have evidence of the deep fragmentation, the tribalism, of our society and our world. We experience the consequences of the fear and anxiety, the perceived need for power and control that seems like another pandemic in the world today. And yet, despite this as people of faith we are called to hold and to live a different truth. We are called to hope, to know with our whole being that "*God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish*" (John 3: 16, CEB). We are called to faith, to know with our whole being that God understands the joys and traumas of human life because the Incarnate One experienced the heights and depths of human experiences in the person of Jesus. We are called to love, to know that it is not the end until, "*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away*" (Revelation 4:6, CEB). We are called to life shaped and formed in the shadow of Resurrection.



And so, we enter Lent 2021. May it be a time of reflection and contemplation; may it be a time of letting go of the attitudes, the beliefs, the actions that separate us from God, from ourselves and others, and all of creation as we take up the attitudes and the habits that allow for genuine connection and relationship. May we prepare for the transformation that comes from life lived as Resurrection truth.



# Connecting in a Disconnected and Over-connected World

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Inside the Edicule at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, candles are lit by visiting pilgrims – taken June 2011

**Note** – Each day I have included a scripture for your reflection. The key verse(s) for the day is in bold print. The Common English Bible is the translation used unless otherwise noted.

## **February 17 – February 21** **Connecting to God Through Nature**

### **Introduction**

Richard Rohr in *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For and Believe* suggests that the first incarnation occurs “when God joined in unity with the physical universe and became the light inside of everything.” For Rohr, God permeates the physical world and thus all of creation is sacred, revealing God to those who seek. Dietrich Bonhoeffer refers to seeking, to seeing and finding God in the ordinary and in the subsequent approach to life because we have done this as “this worldliness.” Celtic spirituality suggests a deep connection between God and the physical world. Nothing is outside of God’s love and so we experience God through our five senses. Nothing is outside of God and so our vocation is to be concerned with and to care for creation. And, Psalm 19:1 states, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the work of his hands.” For the next, four days we will pause, breathe and attend as God is revealed through the world around us.



Taken in Florida December 2020

“But God loves things by becoming them.  
God loves things by uniting with them and not excluding them.”

Richard Rohr



While ice and snow weigh down the branches of this river birch, the brightly colored birdbath orients us toward spring. Look carefully, be reminded that the wintering season can be a time to dream of what might be as the things that weigh down our spirits and the world will thaw and melt away.



Welcome to the  
Season of Lent.

**February 17**  
**Ash Wednesday**  
*Scripture*  
**Isaiah 58: 1 – 12**

Shout loudly; don't hold back; raise your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their crime, to the house of Jacob their sins.

<sup>2</sup> They seek me day after day, desiring knowledge of my ways like a nation that acted righteously, that didn't abandon their God. They ask me for righteous judgments, wanting to be close to God.

<sup>3</sup> "Why do we fast and you don't see; why afflict ourselves and you don't notice?" Yet on your fast day you do whatever you want, and oppress all your workers.

<sup>4</sup> You quarrel and brawl, and then you fast; you hit each other violently with your fists. You shouldn't fast as you are doing today if you want to make your voice heard on high.

<sup>5</sup> Is this the kind of fast I choose, a day of self-affliction, of bending one's head like a reed and of lying down in mourning clothing and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?

<sup>6</sup> Isn't this the fast I choose: releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke?

<sup>7</sup> **Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family?**

<sup>8</sup> Then your light will break out like the dawn, and you will be healed quickly. Your own righteousness will walk before you, and the Lord's glory will be your rear guard.

<sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and God will say, "I'm here." If you remove the yoke from among you, the finger-pointing, the wicked speech;

<sup>10</sup> if you open your heart to the hungry, and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted, your light will shine in the darkness, and your gloom will be like the noon.

<sup>11</sup> The Lord will guide you continually and provide for you, even in parched places. He will rescue your bones.

You will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water that won't run dry.

<sup>12</sup> They will rebuild ancient ruins on your account; the foundations of generations past you will restore. You will be called Mender of Broken Walls, Restorer of Livable Streets.

**Note:** The Isaiah passage is a traditional lectionary reading for Ash Wednesday

## *Reflection*

It is estimated that earth is inhabited by a million species or more. The number is not definitive as scientists continue to find more species. These species share and at times compete for the same resources to survive and thrive. Symbiosis is a form of interaction of species which promotes obtaining these resources. There are different types of symbiotic relationships, one type is mutualism. Mutualism is a relationship between organisms that is beneficial to all involved. Mutualistic organisms cooperate with each other and occur in every aquatic and terrestrial habitat on earth. While mutualistic organisms help one another, each organism does not necessarily receive equal benefits or pay equal costs. By definition each organism receives what it needs.





Pollinators and plants have mutualistic relationships. Scientists suggest that nearly three-quarters of all flowers are pollinated by insects such as bees, butterflies, wasps, flies, moths, beetles, et cetera. Concerns have been raised as scientists have identified that bees are dying from a variety of factors including pesticides, drought, habitat destruction, pollution, global warming and more. A decline in bees, and other pollinators, mean a decline in the plants that depend on the pollinators to survive and flourish. A decline in the plants means a decline in food sources as pollinators are needed for the seed production of many, many plant species as diverse as alfalfa, carrots, and roses. A decline in plants means a decline in the building blocks of many of our pharmaceuticals and in the production of the oxygen we need for our atmosphere. And, so it goes

Pollinators, these mutualistic insects, remind us of the balance and fragility of life. They suggest that perhaps to a degree we are all mutualistic species – dependent on one another for our health and well-being. The importance and the impact of their decline is a vivid reminder of our participation in the web of life of which we are all a part.



In part, our scripture from Isaiah underscores the mutuality that exists between the members of the human species. Like mutualism in the plant and animal world, Isaiah reminds us that we need to provide for the needs and welfare of others – this is a sign of our true worship.



Today, consider your web of life. Consider your place in that web. Remember that mutuality is not about “fairness” or “equal distribution” it is about living in ways so that all have their needs adequately met. Mutuality is undergirded by our understanding of the abundance of God and on the belief that we are indeed all connected and responsible for the well-being and welfare of one another. As we begin this Lenten journey may we come to understand more deeply our mutuality and our place in the fragile balance of life.

## ***Closing Prayer***

As I enter this season of reflection and letting go, O Lord, I confess that I have not always loved you with my whole heart and mind and soul. I have failed to love my neighbors as myself, and in fact, at times I have not even loved myself. I ask that you would lift the yolk of separation and alienation from me, lighten my spirits of the urge of individualism, and lead me to discover that which connects me to others in You, O Lord. May I come to understand what it means to live with mutuality and concern. May I act with kindness and compassion, may I seek justice and shalom, may I walk gently with You, O God, and with others. Amen.



February 18

Scripture

Psalm 1

The truly happy person doesn't follow wicked advice, doesn't stand on the road of sinners, and doesn't sit with the disrespectful.

<sup>2</sup> Instead of doing those things, these persons love the Lord's Instruction, and they recite God's Instruction day and night!

<sup>3</sup> **They are like a tree replanted by streams of water, which bears fruit at just the right time and whose leaves don't fade. Whatever they do succeeds.**

<sup>4</sup> That's not true for the wicked!

They are like dust that the wind blows away.

<sup>5</sup> And that's why the wicked will have no standing in the court of justice—neither will sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

<sup>6</sup> The Lord is intimately acquainted with the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked is destroyed.

## Reflection

I first saw a baobab tree while riding on Kilimanjaro Safaris at Walt Disney World in Florida. These giant trees had been transported from Africa to create an authentic-looking savannah where one can observe the wildlife that are also natives of the African continent.

Without leaves, the branches of the tree look as if the tree has been uprooted and planted



upside down, its roots sticking up into the air. I had never seen anything like the baobab tree, also called the upside-down tree, and I was interested in finding out more about it. At home consulting the internet, I found a fable saying that when God planted the baobab tree, it refused to stay where it had been planted. And so, God pulled it up and planted it upside down so that it would stay in one place. As I read on and came to learn how the baobab tree had flourished and bloomed in its upside-down state, I chuckled thinking of the "Bloom where you are planted," sign in my backyard.

I learned that the tree is highly valued by the African people because every part can be used. The trunk is used to build homes and to hold water or grain, as well as for burial sites. The bark is used to make fishnets, cords, sacks, and clothing, as well as being ground and used as a spice to flavor food. The leaves are used as a leavening agent and along with the fruit and the seeds are edible. Finally, the valuable baobab tree provides the raw materials for soap, necklaces, glue, rubber and medicine. I found that the baobab tree is a prehistoric succulent that predates humanity and grows the way it does so that it can better absorb water which it stores in its trunk as it has adapted to survive the long and arid dry season of its habitat.

The tree can hold up to 1189 gallons of water in its trunk. I learned that the baobab tree can live for up to 5000 years and grow up to 98 feet tall and 164 feet in diameter. The oldest identified baobab tree is over a thousand years old. The tree is sometimes called the "Tree of Life." And, finally I learned that this valuable tree that provides shelter and food to humanity and animals is a threatened species.

So, what are the Lenten lessons that we can take from the baobab tree? In the season of reflection as we come to know ourselves more deeply, we are called to bloom where we are and



A baobab tree in Animal kingdom in Florida

as the person we are. Our differences and differences allow us to flourish and make a difference as we identify and make available the unique resources inside of us. Consider the talents and resources that

you possess. How are you being called to use them for the kingdom of God today? Like the baobab tree, we need to fill ourselves so that we can be nourished from internal wells when the dry seasons of life occur. What will you do today to refresh your spirit? And, finally the endangerment of this "Tree of Life" can remind us of our unique call to steward and care as we interact with all of God's creation, it is part of our place in creation. It can call us to reflect on how living our life can enrich or endanger the lives of creation. How are you living out your place as a steward of God's creation?

## Closing Prayer

The earth declares the wonder of your handiwork, O God and the heavens reflect the light of your glory. I bow before you, O Lord, and praise you for the vastness and the diversity of your creation. I claim my place within that creation, O God, humbly claiming that I am made in your image and accepting the limits of being a part of your creation. Draw near me, O God, so that I may find you and in doing so find my true self. Help me to understand the abundance of your creation, so that I may generously give myself holding nothing back out of fear or anxiety of what tomorrow may bring. Send me out today, O Lord, and in my comings and goings may I bring glory to your name. Amen.

February 19

Scripture

Philippians 4: 4 – 8

<sup>4</sup> Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. <sup>7</sup> Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> **From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise.**

<sup>9</sup> Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.

### Reflection

Wolves are fascinating creatures. They are caring, playful and devoted to their families caring for both the young and the old among them. Pack animals, "lone wolves" are the exception rather than the norm for these social creatures.

Naturalists who study and observe wolves say that they form friendships and mourn and grief at the loss of one of their family members. Wolves thrive in groups and struggle when they are alone.



At the same time these social animals who nurture one another are fierce predators whose seemingly voracious appetites are driven by the reality of a life of feast or famine. To survive the uncertainty of finding the next meal, wolves have adapted to kill more than they can eat, thus earning them the reputation of killing for sport. In literature, they are associated with destruction and danger in fables such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Boy who Cried Wolf* and as the harbinger of the coming of winter in the *Game of Thrones*.

Katharine May in *Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times*, relates her own inner restlessness and hunger for love, beauty and comfort to the voracious hunger of the wolf. She writes, "I walk in the late January frost, and I realise that I am a wolf today. I'm overcome by the need to prowl, to go outside and stalk about my territory. There is an unrest in my gut that feels like hunger. I am a seething mess of uncertainty, my mind so full of forked paths that I worry it could spill. I want to be everything, but I am nothing. I am an empty bowl, concave, an absence in space."

Wolves are both intelligent, playful, nurturing family members and snarling beasts ready to kill their prey in order to survive. May states that they are a model of ourselves "without the comforts and constraints of civilization." There is a Cherokee parable that tells of a grandfather speaking to his grandson about the inner life. He states that inside of each of us lives two wolves. One is filled with anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, resentment, inferiority, and false pride - all those traits and emotions that we try to keep hidden, closed off from ourselves and others.

The other is filled with joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, empathy, truth, compassion, and faith – the traits and the characteristics that scriptures identify as the fruit of the Spirit. The boy asks which wolf will win the battle and the grandfather responds, “The one you feed.” May points us to a voracious hunger that is a part of all of us. The Cherokee parable reminds us that we have a choice in the diet that we seek and provide to feed that hunger. Lent invites us to empty ourselves to be the empty bowl, to reflect on our hunger for beauty, for love, for justice, for peace. It encourages us to seek to feed that hunger through our participation in the spiritual disciplines that stills the restlessness of our souls and feeds the hunger of our Spirits as we rest and find sustenance in feast of our God. Today, consider your inner hunger and longings. With what have you filled your bowl? How satisfying and healthy is your spiritual diet?

### ***Closing Prayer***

Lord God, I confess that I have fed to the wolf of

\_\_\_\_\_ (anger, envy, impatience, jealousy, fear, apathy, et cetera). Forgive me, O Lord and help me release and move beyond the attitudes and emotions which ensnare me. Guide me to seek that which is lovely and loving, help me to practice compassion and mercy. Help me to nurture the wolf of justice and peace that resides deep in my spirit. Help me to nurture the spirit of play and gentleness, inclusion and hospitality. Today, may I be a harbinger of joy, may I seek to invite all whom I encounter into my circle of care as I claim the promises of new and renewed life that is your kingdom. Amen.

**February 20**

***Scripture***

**Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.<sup>2</sup> He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters;<sup>3</sup> he keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.<sup>4</sup> Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me. Your rod and your staff—they protect me.<sup>5</sup> You set a table for me right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over!

**<sup>6</sup>Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the Lord's house as long as I live.**

### ***Reflection***

Early in January, we experienced an ice storm that resulted in over an inch of ice encasing the young river birch in our backyard. This ice storm was quickly followed by about 3 inches of snow. As the weight increased the three trunks of the tree swayed, bent, and bowed. Eventually, the top branches were bent low and the tips touched the snow on the ground. The tree was beautiful, the three trunks bent in three different directions encased in glistening snow and ice. And yet, I was concerned.

We had planted the tree two years earlier and were looking forward to the shade that it would provide for our patio and backyard. We had worked hard to assure the survival of the tree providing it with nutrients to stimulate the development of new roots.

We had watered the tree weekly and sometime daily during the hot, dry summer months and provided fertilizers each fall so the tree had the best environment in which to develop. We had planted ground cover around the tree so the soil would retain the needed water. We had pruned non-productive branches so they would not draw resources from those that were working to grow and produce leaves.

I watched the tree from our dining room and wondered if I should I go and try to shake the snow off to lessen the weight. Should I just leave it alone and not potentially stress the tree even further? The tree remained bent to the ground for several days. Then while the weather remained cold the sun came out. Under the brightly shining sun, the ice and snow on the branches began to melt. The melting ice and snow dripped slowly, the droplets creating little craters in the snow upon the ground. Slowly the tree lifted, the branches released from the weight again reaching up to the sky. The trunks coming back together, no longer separated by outside forces. I am hopeful as I look out at the tree this morning and see that its trunks and branches reach about 18 feet into the air. I am in awe of the flexibility and the apparent resilience of the tree branches slowly swaying in the winter winds of Illinois.

Psychologists define human resilience as the ability to adapt in the face of adversity and stress. We might consider it as the ability to bounce back from difficult and/ or trying times. Studies show that resilience is not a personality trait that some people have and others do not. People can develop and strengthen their resilience.



We develop resilience by focusing on relations by connecting in empathic and genuine ways, by participating in groups that connect us to something bigger than ourselves and allow us to give back, and by taking care of ourselves, physically and emotionally. Studies of children show that resiliency is enhanced by the presence of a supportive person in the child's life.

It is still too early to know what scars will be left and what impact this winter storm will have on the survival and life of our river birch. We will need to wait for the changing of the seasons. We will need to continue care for the tree. We will need to consider what is needed in light of the stress that the tree experienced.

2020 was a difficult year. We have been stressed and challenged by outside forces. It is still too early to know the full impact of those challenges and stress. We are just beginning the process of bouncing back. Lent is a time that we are intentional in doing the very things that help us to be more resilient. It is a time to connect to God and to those around us. It is a time to connect to something that is bigger than ourselves and to give back to others. It is a time to take care of ourselves, focusing on the habits that will strengthen us physically and emotionally, growing as the persons God intends us to be. Today, is the day to begin to consider how you might do this.

## Closing Prayer

I rise today, knowing that whatever the day may bring you will be there with me, O God. This is my hope and this is my source of comfort. I know, O God, that this does not mean that my day will be stress free or problem free. And yet, I know, O God, that there may be moments when I need to bite my tongue or when I feel overwhelmed and wonder what I must do to move forward. I rise today, O Lord, confident that you will be there for me. You will travel with me through the valleys of shadows and you will invite me to feast at your table even in the presence of my enemies. God, may I hold the reality of this promise closely and live from the depth of it in all that I say and do today. Amen.

**February 21 – February 27**  
**Connecting to God Through Prayer**

*Bis orat qui bene cantat*  
 "Who sings well prays twice"  
 Anonymous

### Introduction

Prayer can be thought of as a form of communication. At times, it involves speaking and listening, and at times it does not. Prayer like other ways of communicating can take different forms and have a variety of purposes. Sometimes we communicate to exchange information or to make a request. Sometimes we communicate to get to know our conversation partner better. And, sometimes, we communicate without words through facial expressions, body language, and even with our silence. Howard Thurman in *The Inward Journey* wrote,

*"We do not know each other yet. We have not been silent together." For the next week, we will focus on communicating with God as we explore different forms and language of prayer.*



*Slips of paper with prayers in the cracks of the Western Wall in Jerusalem – taken July 2011*



**February 21**

***The Lorica (The Breastplate of Patrick)***  
**Patrick, Fifth Century, Ireland**

***I arise today  
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,  
Through a belief in the Threeness,  
Through confession of the Oneness  
Of the Creator of creation.***

***I arise today  
Through the strength of Christ's birth and His baptism, Through the strength of His crucifixion and His burial,  
Through the strength of His resurrection and His ascension,  
Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of doom.***

***I arise today  
Through the strength of the love of cherubim,  
In obedience of angels,  
In service of archangels,  
In the hope of resurrection to meet with reward,  
In the prayers of patriarchs,  
In preaching of the apostles,  
In faiths of confessors,  
In innocence of virgins,  
In deeds of righteous men.***

***I arise today  
Through the strength of heaven;  
Light of the sun,  
Splendor of fire,  
Speed of lightning,  
Swiftness of the wind,  
Depth of the sea,  
Stability of the earth,  
Firmness of the rock.***

***I arise today  
Through God's strength to pilot me;  
God's might to uphold me,  
God's wisdom to guide me,  
God's eye to look before me,  
God's ear to hear me,  
God's word to speak for me,  
God's hand to guard me,  
God's way to lie before me,  
God's shield to protect me,  
God's hosts to save me  
From snares of the devil,  
From temptations of vices,  
From everyone who desires me ill,  
Afar and anear,  
Alone or in a multitude.***

***I summon today all these powers between me and evil,  
Against every cruel merciless power that opposes my body and soul,  
Against incantations of false prophets,  
Against black laws of pagandom, I summon today all these powers between me and evil,  
Against every cruel merciless power that opposes my body and soul,***

***Against incantations of false prophets,  
Against black laws of pagandom,  
Against false laws of heretics,  
Against craft of idolatry,  
Against spells of women and smiths and wizards,  
Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul.  
Christ shield me today  
Against poison, against burning,  
Against drowning, against wounding,  
So that reward may come to me in abundance.***

***Christ with me, Christ before me,  
Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me,  
Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,  
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,  
Christ in the eye that sees me,  
Christ in the ear that hears me.***

***I arise today  
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,  
Through a belief in the Threeness,  
Through a confession of the Oneness  
Of the Creator of creation***

## Reflection

Loricas are Celtic prayers for protection. The name was derived from the lorica, the leather corselet worn by soldiers in ancient Rome. These prayers express a deep understanding that God surrounds and protects us even in the most difficult and hostile circumstances of our life. Scholars suggest that this understanding of prayer draws on Ephesians 6: 14, "So stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate." Loricas are prayers of hope.

According to tradition, loricas were prayed while chopping wood. While this may seem strange to us, Celtic spiritual is rooted in seeking to find God in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary moments of life as the potential for the sacredness of all time and space is recognized. Celtic prayers are often tied to common everyday tasks such as setting the fire at night or caring for the family's livestock. In a cold, wet land, the fire was essential for the life and well-being of the family. Thus, the ancient Celts asked for God's protection as they gathered the wood essential for the protection of the family.

Perhaps the most famous lorica is *The Breastplate of St. Patrick*, a fifth century hymn. Whether this is an authentic prayer of Patrick, Bishop of Ireland is open to debate. Legend states that the prayer was written when Patrick feared ambush while seeking to convert King Leoghaire from paganism to Christianity.

More recent scholarship states that the prayer was written by an anonymous author and based on a lyric form of druidic poetry. The prayer appears in fragmentary state in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and was included in complete form in a collection of prayers in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Slowly read *The Lorica*. What words or phrases hold significant meaning for you? What feelings are invoked as you pray this prayer? What are the challenges that you are facing at this time? What brings you hope and a sense of well-being?

## Closing Prayer

*Write your own lorica or pray this prayer*

Christ above,  
Christ below,  
Christ beside.  
Christ in my staying in.  
Christ in my going out.  
May the Spirit guide me this day.  
May the Spirit speak through my words.  
May the Spirit touch with my hands.  
May the love of God surround me.  
May the peace of God flow in me.  
May the hope of God overshadow us.  
May the justice of God ignite me.  
May the mercy of God pour from me.  
May my heart be God's throne,  
as the earth is God's dwelling place.  
Amen.

February 22

*A Call to Prayer*  
Hildegard of Bingen, circa 1098 -  
1179, Germany

*The earth is at the same time mother, She is mother of all that is natural, mother of all that is human. She is the mother of all, for contained in her are the seeds of all. The earth of humankind contains all moistness, all verdancy, all germinating power. It is in so many ways fruitful. All creation comes from it. Yet it forms not only the basic raw material for humankind, but also the substance of the incarnation of God's son.*

## Reflection

Born in Germany in 1098, at the age of eight Hildegard was pledged by her family as an ancho-rite to the Benedictine monastery at Rupertsburg. An anchorite is one who devotes life to prayer and ascetic acts secluding oneself from the outside world by living as a hermit or in a closed community. Hildegard formally entered the monastery around 1115 upon taking her vows. She lived under the tutelage of Jutta of Sponheim for the next twenty-one years. Following Jutta's death in 1136, Hildegard became the leader of her community. Five years later, Hildegard received a vision that would remain at the center of her understanding of God for the rest of her life. For Hildegard, the "Living Light" revealed in her vision was the divine energy that is the source of all living things and the source of her spiritual authority.



Under the leadership of Hildegard, the number of anchorites grew and the need for room to facilitate the new members increased. Hildegard received permission to move the sisters to their own monastery which was completed in 1152. Throughout her life, Hildegard continued to reveal the teachings of the Living Light in her writings, compositions, and preaching. She lived these revelations through acts of healing and with her relationship and leadership of the anchorites in her care, encouraging them to grow in love and follow the Benedictine Rule.

For hundreds of years, the writings, compositions and art of Hildegard were not well known. They were rediscovered in the mid-twentieth century. Her ecological message offers us a helpful theological framework as we face the crisis of global warming today. Her concept of *veriditas*, "greening power," the force that animates the entire world provides a framework for healing and wholeness. Hildegard was canonized and named as a Doctor of the Church by Pope Benedict in 2012.



Hildegard writes

The Breath of the Spirit of God says: God covers the tree. He loves it in the wintertime and He brings forth an abundance of flowers from it in the summer, taking away every disease that might cause it to wither. The pollution characteristic of other waters is cleansed by the river water that springs out of the rock in the East. This river runs swiftly, and it is more salutary than other waters since it is free from filth. This applies to those people whom God grants the day of prosperity and the glowing dawn of honor.

Letter from Hildegard to Bertha, Queen of the Greeks.

Slowly read *A Call to Prayer*. What words or phrases hold significant meaning for you? What feelings are invoked as you pray this prayer? What surprises you in this prayer? What questions are raised from your prayers? How is God speaking to you in Hildegard's words?

## Closing Prayer

The earth is yours, O Lord and all that is within it springs from your imagination and is brought forth by your love. I am in awe of your intricate design, of the web of life into which I have been woven. May I live gently and thoughtfully, mindful of that which connects me to you and to all that is around me. May I accept the responsibility of my place in the web of life and not attempt to take up more space than that which is rightfully mine. O God, I praise you and rejoice in all that you are doing in the ongoing act of creation. May I live today with eyes to see and ears to hear. Amen.

*Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon*

Francis of Assisi, 1181 - 1226, Italy

*Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord, All praise is Yours, all glory, all honor and all blessings.*

*To you alone, Most High, do they belong, and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.*

*Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, Who is the day through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, And fair and stormy, all weather's moods, by which You cherish all that You have made.*



February 23





*Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,*

*So useful, humble, precious and pure.*

*Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,*

*through whom You light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.*

*Praised be You my Lord through our Sister,*

*Mother Earth*

*who sustains and governs us, producing varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.*

*Praise be You my Lord through those who grant pardon for love of You and bear sickness and trial.*

*Blessed are those who endure in peace, By You Most High, they will be crowned.*

*Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Death, from whom no-one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Blessed are they She finds doing Your Will.*

*No second death can do them harm. Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks, And serve Him with great humility.*

## **Reflection**

Today, we will spend some time with Francis of Assisi. Born in Italy in 1181, Francis was raised in the midst of affluence. As a young man, he was known for his self-indulgence, care-free, and at times frivolous approach to life.

In 1202 serving as a page, he joined a military expedition against Perugia. Captured he spent a year as a prisoner and became seriously ill. Hagiographers attribute this illness as the motivating factor for Francis to re-evaluate his life. In 1205, Francis enlisted in the army of Walter III, Count of Brienne. During his time of service, a vision moved him to return to Assisi. Upon return to his hometown, Francis was a changed man.

Rather than returning to his family's business or pursuing a military career, Francis went on a pilgrimage to Rome. There, he joined beggars begging at St. Peter's Basilica and isolated himself praying and seeking spiritual enlightenment. It was during this time that in a vision he heard God calling him to repair God's house. Following this vision, Francis completely turned his back on his family's wealth and business living the rest of his life in voluntary poverty and in the companionship of his disciples who were bound together by Francis' Primitive Rule drawn from scripture and written in 1209.

Francis was not a systematic theologian or a scholar. His writings were generally in the form of an occasional poem or prayer. Francis taught with his life, with the words he said and the actions he took. He demanded a life of voluntary poverty for himself and for his spiritual companions. Today, the Franciscans are found in schools, hospitals as they attempt to live out their core values of service, humility, peacemaking, contemplation and hospitality.

Protestants and Catholics alike find inspiration in the simplicity, humility and devotion seen in acts of mercy, compassion, and hospitality towards all creation that are all at the center of Francis' life.

Mystics are individuals who draw their strength from time spent in contemplation – prayer and inner reflection. They are masters of listening for God and encouraging others to listen for God. Francis heard God in all of creation and in hearing God he came to see himself deeply connected to all that was of God.

Listening is not always an easy task in our culture. The silence that is required is often something that makes us uncomfortable. It is a space that we try to fill rather than a space in which we attempt to dwell. And yet we know that God says, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46: 10). Note that this scripture is not an admonition about beliefs, it is an invitation into relationship. It is about knowing God rather than merely knowing about God.

Slowly read the **Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon**. What words or phrases hold significant meaning for you? What feelings are invoked as you pray this prayer? "Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary use words." are words famously attributed to Francis. He did not say this. His actual words were "It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching." It is a more nuanced statement and one that is worth pondering. What does this mean to you? How are you walking the gospel today?



## Closing Prayer

We arise this day to the light of Brother Sun to accept the gift of this day which you have opened for us O God. We join the song of all creation singing your praise and declaring the glory of your handiwork. We rejoice in your handiwork and dance to the music of your love and grace in the world around us. We dedicate this day, to your service as we give ourselves to You. Amen.

February 24  
Scripture  
Psalms 100

*"If the only prayer you said was thank you, that would be enough."*

**Meister Eckhart, circa 1260 – 1348,  
Germany**

Shout triumphantly to the Lord, all the earth!

<sup>2</sup> Serve the Lord with celebration!  
Come before him with shouts of joy!

<sup>3</sup> Know that the Lord is God—  
he made us; we belong to him.<sup>[a]</sup>  
We are his people,  
the sheep of his own pasture.

<sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanks;  
enter his courtyards with praise!  
Thank him! Bless his name!

<sup>5</sup> Because the Lord is good,  
his loyal love lasts forever;  
his faithfulness lasts generation  
after generation.

## Reflection

I am the extremely proud grandmother of eight-year-old Chloe and five-year-old Emilia. Very early in their lives, the girls were taught the importance of saying please and thank you. After repeated prompting of "what do you say," and numerous opportunities to say "thank you" when the girls handed us something, we were eventually rewarded with a spontaneous "Thank you" when they received a peanut butter sandwich at snack time or when a glass of milk was placed in front of them at lunch. I treasured the notes printed in pencil or crayon with misspelled words that their Papa and I received thanking us for birthday or Christmas gifts.

It may seem that the act of teaching a child to say thank you is a simple thing. It may seem as simple as teaching them to be polite, to be civilized human beings. But in reality it is a much more complex act.

Learning to say thank you helps us to realize how we are connected with other people. It teaches us to move beyond a sense of entitlement to a sense of gratitude and appreciation. Hopefully what starts as a rote response develops into the abstract and complex concept of gratitude and abundance that allows us to live generous lives.

The word thanksgiving dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and combines an Old English word that means "grateful thought" with the verb "give" that comes from the Old English that means to bestow or grant. According to Richard Foster writing on spiritual disciplines, thanksgiving refers to "an extension of the hand." An online dictionary defines thanksgiving as "The act of rendering thanks or of expressing gratitude for favors, benefits, or mercies; and acknowledgement of benefits received." When we say thank you we extend the verbal hand of friendship, we acknowledge that the action of the other person or persons have benefited us, have bestowed mercy upon us. David Steindl-Rast states: "Everything is a gift. The degree to which we are awake to this truth is a measure of our gratefulness, and gratefulness is a measure of our aliveness."

Saying thank you is the response to feeling gratitude, appreciation. It is more complex than happiness as it weaves together a range of emotions including relief, appreciation, surprise, wonder, awe, gladness, and joy. Spiritually, prayers of thanksgiving are the acknowledgement of a gracious and giving God who is the source and giver of all things. The chorus from the song *All Good Things in Godspell* states: "All good gifts around us, are sent from Heaven above. So thank the Lord, oh, thank the Lord for all His love."





## February 25

Meister Eckhart suggests that extending our hand to God, responding in awe and wonder, gladness and joy to God because we are the beneficiaries of God's mercy, grace and love

is enough. And maybe it is if we practice it, over and over again, Slowly read the **Meister Eckhart's prayer and Psalm**



**100.** What words or phrases hold significant meaning for you? What feelings are invoked as you pray this prayer? For what are you grateful?

### Closing Prayer

*Write your own prayer of gratitude or pray the following prayer*

I wake this morning by the grace of God and accept the gift of this day with open hands. May I receive your gift gently and have wisdom to know what is my portion and what has been given to me so that I can give back. I thank you for the blessing of your Spirit that is with me and for what this day will hold for me. May I meet it with awe and wonder, ready to be delighted and surprised. May I step into it with courage and trust. And, now O God, I extend my hand to you with a grateful heart for what you have done, with a grateful heart for what you are doing, with a grateful heart for what you will do in my life this day and all the days of my life. Amen.

In you, Father, all-mighty, we have our preservation and our bliss.

In you, Christ we have our restoring and our saving.

You are our mother, brother, and Savior. In you, our Lord, the Holy Spirit is marvelous and plenteous grace.

You are our clothing: for love, you wrap us and embrace us.

You are our maker, our lover, our keeper. Teach us to believe by your grace all shall be well,

and all matters of things shall be well. Amen.

### Julian of Norwich, 1342 – 1429, England

Julian of Norwich lived her most of her life in the midst of a pandemic, the Black Plague that arrived in England in 1349. Historical records tell us that the mortality rate during this pandemic was fifty percent of the population of Europe. In London, the death rate was so horrific that at times corpses were buried five to a grave. All the street cleaners succumbed to the plague, as they worked to remove corpses. Two out of three clergy died, as they attempted to minister to the sick and dying among them. In addition to a worldwide health crisis, Julian witnessed the turmoil of civil unrest with the Peasant's Revolt in 1381 and religious unrest and persecution with the suppression of the Lollards, a Proto-Protestant religious group.

Living in Norwich the second largest city in England, Julian was an ancho-rite. She lived her life in a sealed cell attached to a cathedral that is now known as St. Julian's Church. At the age of 30, Julian had a series of vi-sions which she wrote in "Showings." As her understanding changed and grew, she would edit and re-edit this book the rest of her life. In her two books, *Revelation of Divine Love* and *Showings*, Julian wrote of the sacred-ness of creation and the presence of God.

Her focus on goodness, does not mean that Julian did not experience the pain and trauma of her age. She wrote, "Sometimes we experience such darkness that we lose all our energy." In spite of that pain, at the heart of Julian's writings is hope. De-spite the circumstances of the world around her, the depth of her faith and hope is reflected in her words, "by your grace all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all matters of things shall be well."

Julian believed that God loves us intensely and that because of that love we are a source of joy for God. She wrote:



*God rejoices that he is our Father. God rejoices that he is our Mother. God rejoices that he is our Beloved and we are his true lover. Christ rejoices that he is our Brother. Je-sus rejoices that he is our Savior. These are five supreme joys and he wants us to rejoice in them, too, and praise him, thanking and loving and endlessly blessing him.*



Slowly read Julian's prayer at the beginning of the day's reflection. What words or phrases hold significant meaning for you? What feelings are invoked as you pray this prayer? What is your bliss? What brings hope to your life? What does it mean to you to be a source of God's joy?

If you are comfortable close your eyes, breathe in and breathe out. Allow yourself to focus on your breathing for a few minutes, breathe deeply from your diaphragm. Remember that God has breathed the breath of life into you. Remember and that God is as close as the air you breathe.

## ***Closing Prayer***

*Holy One, today may I wrap myself in the assurance that you love me and delight in my being. May I draw strength from knowing that nothing can separate me from this love. Today, I rejoice in you, in your Son Jesus Christ and in your Spirit. I ask O Lord, that like Julian my words and my actions today invite others to see your love and know that by your grace all will be well, all will be well. Amen.*

**February 26**

We thank you for your church, founded upon your Word, that challenges us to do more than sing and pray, but go out and work as though the very answer to our prayers depended on us and not upon you. Help us to realize that humanity was created to shine like the stars and live on through all eternity. Keep us, we pray, in perfect peace.

Help us to walk together, pray together, sing together, and live together until that day when all God's children -- Black, White, Red, Brown and Yellow -- will rejoice in one common band of humanity in the reign of our Lord and of our God, we pray. Amen.

**Martin Luther King Jr., 1929 – 1968,  
United States**

## ***Reflection***

While many individuals, well known and anonymous, contributed to the victories of the Civil Rights movement, no one can think of the Civil Rights Movement without Martin Luther King, Jr. coming to mind. His leadership was grounded in his understanding of who he was as a child of God. It grew from early childhood experiences as the second child of three children growing up in Atlanta, Georgia where he was taught that prayer was an essential part of daily life as prayers were said at meals and before bedtime. As an adult, King would say that he learned to pray by imitating his parents. It was formed from Sundays at Ebenezer Baptist Church and the heritage of the black church. It was an extension and living out of his education and training at Morehouse College, Crozer Theological Seminary and Boston University.

King refers to prayer as communicating with God, sharing in the presence of God. He also refers to it as "response to God," as 'one of the elemental functions of life', as 'indigenous to the human spirit,' and 'the native and deepest impulse of the soul' of humanity." As essential as breath, King saw prayer as the heart of our spiritual and devotional life. For him, it was essential for prophetic leadership.

When we read King's prayers, we find that nothing is out of bounds or beyond God's concern. Lewis Baldwin states, "King prayed for health, strength, shelter, jobs, better race relations, peace and other basic necessities of life, and also for wisdom, and guidance in seeking God's kingdom. and God's righteousness in facing death and in achieving salvation in the next world."

In King's prayers, we find ourselves washed in the language of deliverance and liberation, of hope and dignity, of worth and value as one of the children of God. King lead us into confession, adoration, supplication and thanksgiving. In his prayers, we are reminded that we are called to bring everything to God in prayer.

With prayer at the heart of his spiritual life, King was empowered to stand up to the powers and principalities, the people and the systems that sought to diminish and dismiss him. He was empowered to live and to proclaim that the kingdom of God was at hand, as he dreamed the dreams of what that kingdom looks like. This is a powerful reminder for us. As we journey with Jesus towards and through Holy Week, we are reminded that God enters into all of life, draws near and withholds nothing. The disciplines of Lent teach us to pay attention, to seek the presence of God who longs to reveal God-self to us so that we to might also proclaim and live the reality of God's kingdom. The disciplines help us form the essential habit of taking everything to God in prayer.

February 27

Prayer Activity

Slowly read King's prayer. What words or phrases hold significant meaning for you? What feelings are invoked as you pray this prayer? What does it mean for you when King says that the response to our prayers depend on us as much as it depends on God? Has anyone been the answer to your prayer? In what ways have you been the answer to someone else's prayer? Where are you seeing signs of God's kingdom? What action are you willing to take to embody God's kingdom today?

## Closing Prayer

God give me the courage to look at myself, to remove the mask of who I want to be and how I want others to see me. Help me to see where I need your healing. Help me to seek reconciliation where I am alienated from my brothers and sisters.

God give me the courage to claim my worth, neither dismissing or overvaluing who I am, your child made in your image. Thank you that through your grace I am free to be who you have made me to be.

I ask, O Lord, that you would give me eyes to see my brothers and sisters as you see them. I ask, O Lord, that you would open my heart so that your love may flow through me. I ask, O Lord that I may seek the common good.

To you be all glory, praise, and honor, today and forevermore. Amen.

**Step 1** Sing, listen to the song that you can find on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihJAJA4ibEs>, or read the lyrics of the song at least once.

### *Be Thou My Vision*

*Song Writer Eleanor Hull*

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night;  
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.  
Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;  
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord.  
Thou my great Father; thine own may I be,  
Thou in me dwelling and I one with thee.  
Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise;  
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;  
Thou and thou only first in my heart,  
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.  
High King of heaven, my victory won,  
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun!  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

**Step 2** What words, phrases speak to you? How do you feel as you hear these words? How do they speak to your understanding of who you are before God? How do they challenge your imagination?

**Step 3** Choose a phrase that holds particular meaning to you.

Close your eyes and attend to your breathing, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, breathing deeply from your diaphragm. Be filled with oxygen as you breath and slowly, fully exhale as you breath out. Silently begin to repeat the phrase that has drawn your attention. Match the rhythm of the words to the rhythm of your breathing. Do this for three to five minutes, more if you are comfortable with the process.

Attend to the images, thoughts, feelings that occur as you are praying your words. Do not try to hold onto or push the thought out of your mind. Merely, notice them and then release them.

**Step 4** Respond to your words by drawing, journaling or making an action plan on what you have experienced as you pray.

**Step 5** Go into your day taking your words with you.

**February 28 – March 6**  
**Connecting to Myself**

*Paradoxically as we become more and more like Christ, we become more uniquely our own true self.*

David G. Benner in *The*

*There is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him, I will find myself and if I find my true self, I will find Him.*

Thomas Merton in *New Seeds of Contemplation*



<sup>5</sup>You've made them only slightly less than divine, crowning them with glory and grandeur.  
<sup>6</sup>You've let them rule over your handiwork, putting everything under their feet—  
<sup>7</sup>all sheep and all cattle, the wild animals too,  
<sup>8</sup>the birds in the sky, the fish of the ocean, everything that travels the pathways of the sea.  
<sup>9</sup>Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth!

**Reflection**

As a child, my mother, older sister and I lived with my grandparents. As an elementary school student, I remember rising early to share peanut butter and onion sandwiches with my grandfather before he left for work at the International Harvester factory that was located three blocks from our home. I remember evenings spent together in the back yard working in the vegetable or flower gardens or sitting next to him on the swing enjoying evening breezes and looking up at the stars on a clear summer night. My grandfather, Russell was a quiet man and a hard worker. He was the stabilizing factor in my family.

When I was ten, Grandpa was diagnosed with emphysema. Over the next three years his condition would worsen as the disease progressed and eventually as lung cancer racked his body. Our early morning breakfasts ended when he was forced to retire; our moments of working in the garden ended when he became confined to a chair or his bed.

When I was thirteen, my whole world seemed to fall apart. For that was the year that the parochial school that I attended closed and I went from being one in a class of sixteen to one in a class of over three hundred. It was the year that my mother's mental health deteriorated and my grandmother began her struggle with loss, grief and uncertainty on how to be the head of the family. It was the year I gained a stepfather who struggled with his own physical health and mental illness. It was the year I lost seventy-five pounds in four months without anyone in my family noticing or seeming to care. It was the year that my Grandfather died.

As my world fell apart, I felt alone and lost.

In time, I found myself seeking the comfort of the backyard swing. As I sat and looked up at the sky, conversations with my Grandfather filled my head and heart. The rhythm of the swing, the smell of the roses and the earth of the vegetable garden, the twinkling of the stars and constancy of their location in the night sky provided a consistency and a connection with life as it was.

Over the next few years, the swing became my sanctuary when life in the house became too chaotic. It was my place of escape when I wanted to clear my head and breath. On the swing in my backyard, I looked to the skies and was grounded in remembering the stories of God and Jesus, of the saints and living as a person of faith that my Irish great-grandmother had shared with me before I was six.

**February 28**  
**Scripture**  
 Psalm 8

<sup>1</sup>Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name throughout the earth  
 You made your glory higher than heaven!  
<sup>2</sup>From the mouths of nursing babies you have laid a strong foundation because of your foes,  
 in order to stop vengeful enemies.  
<sup>3</sup>**When I look up at your skies,  
 at what your fingers made—  
 the moon and the stars  
 that you set firmly in place—**  
<sup>4</sup>**what are human beings  
 that you think about them;  
 what are human beings  
 that you pay attention to  
 them?**



I remembered the love, the validation and acceptance that I had been given by Grandpa. I prayed the prayers taught to me by the nuns and the priests of the parochial school that I had attended. The rhythm of these prayers slowing my breathing and opening my heart.



The swing in the backyard of my current home.

May I discover the nature of who I am beyond my fears and my insecurities, my vanities and grandiosity. May the stillness of your voice, quiet competing voices that distort and speak falsehoods of who I am, your child, your beloved, your partner in the co-creation of your kingdom. Today, may I rest in you and may I live from the truth that I find there. Amen.

Knowing oneself in relationship with God includes claiming our identity as a child of God. It means accepting that while we are made in God's image, we are not God. It is claiming and celebrating that we are uniquely made, fully human with strengths and talents, weaknesses and vulnerabilities. It involves being our genuine self rather than con-torting ourselves and putting on a mask of who we think others want us to be. Knowing ourselves is a life long journey. Living organisms are constantly changing as new experience and new information is encountered and incorporated into our consciousnesses.

And slowly, gradually, I began to find myself. I began to remember – to know - that I was loved by the One who had placed the stars in the sky and sent the breezes filled with the scent of roses or snow swirling around me. Grounded in this knowledge, overtime I began to consider not only who I was but who I was becoming.

**March 1**  
**Scripture**  
Ephesians 4: 1 – 2

Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, **I encourage you to live as people worthy of the call you received from God.**<sup>2</sup> Conduct yourselves with all humility, gentleness, and patience.

Benner states. "Genuine self-knowledge begins by looking at God and noticing how God is looking at us. Grounding our knowing of our self in God knowing of us anchors us in reality. It anchors us in God." He concludes that this self-knowledge is grounded in self-acceptance which includes embracing both strengths and vulnerabilities. Self-deception can include either an underestimation or an overvaluing of oneself. It can be manifest as unbridled pride or a rejection of the self.

It is a journey that I am still taking.

**Reflection**

Today consider how you came to understand that you are a beloved child of God. Consider how this shapes who you are becoming.

In his book *The Gift of Being Yourself*, David Benner states that while many understand that knowing God is central to one's spiritual journey fewer understand that knowing oneself is equally important. He suggests that spiritual transformation can only take place when we know God and know ourselves. The dual focus is important because a singular focus on God can lead to an external piety that is incongruent with the inner reality of who we are. Singular focus on ourselves without grounding the search in who we are in relationship to God can lead to self-grandiosity.

The Ignatian Examen is a spiritual practice that helps us to focus on the presence of God in our lives and to consider the blessed moments and the difficult, painful, and/or broken moments of our lives in light of that presence. As we consider the day, we reflect on what grace we need for the next day asking God for patience, wisdom, fortitude, wisdom, optimism, et cetera

**Closing Prayer**

Today, Dear God may I rest in you. May I draw close to the source of my being and be wrapped in the blanket of your love and grace. May I find succor in the moments of my distress so that I may know the consolation of your mercy. May I see myself as you see me.





**The steps of the Ignatian Examen are as follows;**

1. Give thanks for the gift of the day that you have received.
2. Ask for openness so that the Spirit may guide in you the process of self-reflection.
3. Review the day and give thanks for the moments when you felt connected to God and others.
4. Review the day and ask God to lead you to consider the moments when you have fallen short of the mark. Consider when you felt distant from God and others.
5. Ask for forgiveness and insights into what may be different.
6. Ask God for what you need for tomorrow.

### *Closing Prayer*

*At the end of your day go through the steps of the Ignatian Examen.*

**March 2**  
**Scripture**  
 Revelation 3: 14 - 22

<sup>14</sup> “Write this to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. <sup>15</sup> I know your works. You are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I’m about to spit you out of my mouth.

<sup>17</sup> After all, you say, ‘I’m rich, and I’ve grown wealthy, and I don’t need a thing.’ You don’t realize that you are miserable, pathetic, poor, blind, and naked. <sup>18</sup> My advice is that you buy gold from me that has been purified by fire so that you may be rich, and white clothing to wear so that your nakedness won’t be shamefully exposed, and ointment to put on your eyes so that you may see. <sup>19</sup> I correct and discipline those whom I love. So be earnest and change your hearts and lives. <sup>20</sup> **Look! I’m standing at the door and knocking. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to be with them, and will have dinner with them, and they will have dinner with me.** <sup>21</sup> As for those who emerge victorious, I will allow them to sit with me on my throne, just as I emerged victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> If you can hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”



*The Light of the World*  
William Holden Hunt  
1853

### **Reflection**

In the late nineteenth century, English artist William Holden Hunt painted the canvas oil, *The Light of the World*. Drawing inspiration from Revelation 3:20, *Look! I’m standing at the door and knocking. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to be with them, and will have dinner with them, and they will have dinner with me.*

Hunt’s painting has been the inspiration for other artists that come after him. Notably, the door in the painting that Jesus is knocking on has no handle. It is shut and Jesus will receive no entrance unless those who inhabit the structure with the door opens it. In the late twentieth century, J.K. Rowlings in *Harry Potter and The Sorcerer’s Stone* writes, “Then there were doors that wouldn’t open unless you ask politely, or tickled them in the right place and doors that weren’t really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending.”

We can think of our spiritual formation to connect to God and to ourselves, as a structure that has many types of doors. Some of these doors are like the ones that J.K. Rowlings describes. Some appear to be doors but in fact are illusions of doors. They are walls that stand between us and our genuine self. When we knock on the door of people pleasing, we are knocking on the door of illusion, false self. When we knock on the door of false humility and denial of ability, we are knocking on the door of illusion, false self. When we knock of the door of worldly power and false control, we are knocking on the door of illusion, the false self

Some doors are mere illusions, these doors will not lead to our true self. While some are really walls, some of the doors in our lives need to be tickled in the right place. Doubt can be a door that needs to be tickled. When we acknowledge our doubts and fears and are able to have the courage to move forward with what we know is right, we have tickled the door in the right place and the door opens to our true self.



When we own our prejudices, repent and challenge them so that we may respond in different ways, we have tickled the door in the right place and the door opens to our true self.

Hunt's image provides us with the powerful insight that while Christ is waiting for us, and invites us on the spiritual journey, we must open the door. We must be intentional in creating time and space to seek God. We must be willing to push through the difficult moments, knowing that God is waiting for us. We must do the hard work of looking at the false self that we have projected so that the true self may be revealed. Christ waits for us and invites us to dine with him, will we open the door?

### *Closing Prayer*

I hear you, at the door O Lord, and invite you into those areas of my life that I have kept closed. Walk with me through the hallways and corridors, helping me to identify the doors that I need to open and the wisdom to differentiate between the true doors and the illusory doors. Help me to know the adjustments that I need to make in my beliefs, my attitudes, and my actions so that I may find my true self. I hear you at the door, O Lord, and am ready to follow you out into the world. Amen.

**March 3**

**Scripture**

I Samuel 3: 1 – 10

Now the boy Samuel was serving the Lord under Eli. The Lord's word was rare at that time, and visions weren't widely known.<sup>2</sup> One day Eli, whose eyes had grown so weak he was unable to see, was lying down in his room.<sup>3</sup> God's lamp hadn't gone out yet, and Samuel was lying down in the Lord's temple, where God's chest<sup>[a]</sup> was.

<sup>4</sup>The Lord called to Samuel. "I'm here," he said.

<sup>5</sup>Samuel hurried to Eli and said, "I'm here. You called me?"

"I didn't call you," Eli replied. "Go lie down." So he did.

<sup>6</sup>Again the Lord called Samuel, so Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, "I'm here. You called me?"

"I didn't call, my son," Eli replied. "Go and lie down."

(<sup>7</sup>Now Samuel didn't yet know the Lord, and the Lord's word hadn't yet been revealed to him.)

<sup>8</sup>A third time the Lord called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "I'm here. You called me?"

Then Eli realized that it was the Lord who was calling the boy.<sup>9</sup> So Eli said to Samuel, "Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down where he'd been.

<sup>10</sup>Then the Lord came and stood there, calling just as before, "Samuel, Samuel!"

**Samuel said, "Speak. Your servant is listening."**

### *Reflection*

In the Bible we find numerous "call stories." We read of Abraham who was called by God to leave his homeland and to journey to the promised land. We read of Moses who was called by God to leave the secure life that he had established for himself and return to the land of Egypt from which he had fled in fear of his life. We read of David called from his father's fields and the care of his father's sheep to establish a dynasty. We read of the call of the prophets, the disciples, and the apostles. And, here we read of the call of Samuel.

From these stories we learn that God wants to communicate with us. In burning bushes, in silence that surpasses the storm and the whirlwind, from clouds, God speaks. Here, Samuel is instructed by his spiritual parent and mentor that the appropriate response when God speaks is to listen.

Now that may seem pretty simple; a "duh" moment where one is inclined to say "what else would I do." However, the reality is that in our culture, listening is not easy. We are conditioned to speak, to put forth our opinions and our views. We are conditioned to debate and to defend our positions. We plan our responses in our minds while others are still speaking. And yet, good communication starts with listening. It is essential if we are to obtain information, if we are to understand, if we are to learn. And, when we are addressing the process of spiritual growth it is essential that we listen for God if we are to be transformed.



Transformative prayer involves listening. Ron Roth in *The Path of Healing Prayer: A Modern Mystic's Guide To Spiritual Power* writes, "Christ's conception of prayer was the opposite of what prayer has come to mean: begging God for help or special favors. The attitude Jesus advocated in prayer was one of being completely open to whatever thoughts, feelings, or desires God wants to convey for us." In Habbakuk 2: 20 we read, "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!"

Meditation teaches us to be still, silent in the presence of God. According to Carl McColman in *The Big Book of Christian Mysticism: The Essential Guide to Contemplative Spirituality* Christian contemplative prayer, meditation, "is a way to relax and open your mind, to ponder gently and expansively the stories and doctrines of the Christian faith." McColman warns that because silence is hard and that when we meditate the temptation is to fill the space that we are attempting to create with words. We ponder thoughts, we praise God, or bring petitions out of concern for others.

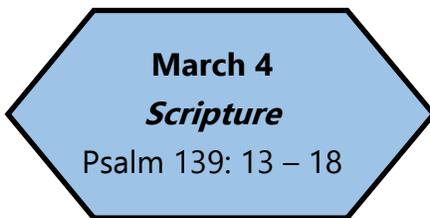
Centering prayer is a form of contemplation that can help us fight the urge to fill our prayer time with "stuff." Centering prayer allows us to relax and settle into our breathing as we repeat a single prayer word over and over slowly and silently in our head. Once centered one can set the word aside and rest in the silent center, returning to the word if one becomes distracted or if one's mind wanders.

Recently, it has become popular to choose a word of the year.

This purpose of this is to establish a focus as one goes about one's daily living. Year words can point toward what we need more of or less of in life. They can point to a feeling or a value that one wants to experience or embody in daily living. One can go through a similar process in selecting one's prayer word, mantra, for centering prayer. What is the characteristic of God that you want to focus on? What is the value, characteristic, emotion that you want to experience more of in your life. Peace, wholeness, love, grace, forgiveness, patience, balance, compassion, all of these are possible prayer words.

## Closing Prayer

For our closing prayer today, choose a prayer word. Find a comfortable, quiet spot where you are free from distractions. Sit, breathe, and begin to repeat your prayer word. Practice for three to five minutes and build from there.



You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb. <sup>14</sup>I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart. Your works are wonderful—I know that very well. <sup>15</sup>My bones weren't hidden from you when I was being put together in a secret place, when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the earth.

<sup>16</sup>Your eyes saw my embryo, and on your scroll every day was written that was being formed for me, before any one of them had yet happened <sup>17</sup>God, your plans are incomprehensible to me! Their total number is countless! <sup>18</sup>If I tried to count them—they outnumber grains of sand! If I came to the very end—I'd still be with you

## Reflection

In the second century in the infancy of Christianity, there were other competing teachings that were circulating. One of these, Gnosticism drew sharp distinction between the body and the spirit and understood that salvation required some esoteric knowledge that was accessible only to the select. The body was devalued as the spirit was elevated.

This understanding was declared a heresy, a false doctrine that had no place within Christianity. In part, the rejection of Gnostic teaching was an affirmation of more traditional Judeo-Christian teachings that affirm that dignity and worth of the body and the spirit, the whole person, created in the image of God. It affirmed an understanding that in the person, the body of Jesus, God drew near showing us the depth of God's love, grace and compassion. It affirmed that Christians are called, commanded, to love God with one's whole heart, soul, and mind. We are called to an embodied faith.

While Gnostic teachings were condemned as heresy, the tendency for some Christians to identify the importance of spiritual practices over bodily practices continues into the twenty-first century.



Similarly, teachings of the church have been spiritualized rather than addressing the importance of very real body need such as healthcare, nutrition, shelter, and the importance of valuing all people regardless of their skin color.

More and more, we are remembering that Christianity is an incarnational faith, an embodied faith. We are remembering that we can connect with God through our bodies as we pray, as we fast, as we engage in self-care. We remember that we can connect with others as we honor and value their bodies and advocate that their bodily needs are important and that loving God means loving them and meeting those needs.

In her book, *The Body Is Not An Apology, The Power of Self-Love*, Sonya Renee Taylor writes:

*Radical self-love demands that we see ourselves and others in the fullness of our complexities and intersections and that we work to create a space for those intersections.... Radical self-love is about the self because the self is a part of the whole, And therefore, radical self-love is the foundation of radical human love. Our relationships with our bodies inform our relationships with others.*

Stephanie Paulsell in her book, *Honoring the Body: Meditations on a Christian Practice*, frames capacities for pleasure and pain and rhythms of work and rest as sacred acts as she advocates for us to honor our bodies as we consider self-care and physical care of others a spiritual discipline in which we are called to engage. She argues, “that it is possible to discover in scripture, history, and contemporary life the contours of a distinctively Christian practice of honoring the body that has a wisdom to offer our culture. The practice of honoring the body reflects the ways Christians have responded to the needs that all human beings share – the need to be sheltered, nourished, protected and love – in a way that bears witness to God.”

Today, take a moment and consider what your relationship is like with your body? Commit to honoring your body. You might:

1. Practice mindfulness as you eat by attending to when you are hungry and when you are full. When you are hungry, set the table for your meal and minimizing distractions during your mealtime. As you eat notice the colors, the smells, the textures of your food. What is most pleasurable as you eat? Do you experience anxiety or guilt about your food choices? Express appreciation and gratitude for your food and those associated with its production.

And the body what about the body? Sometimes it is my favorite child, uncivilized as those spider monkeys loose in the trees overhead.

They leap, and cling with their strong tails, they steal food from the cages— little bandits.

If Chaucer could see them, he would change “lecherous as sparrow” to “lecherous as monkey.”

And sometimes my body disgusts me. Filling it and emptying it disgusts me. And when I feel this way

I treat it like a goose with its legs tied together, stuffing it until the live is fat enough to make a tin of pate.

Then I have to agree that the body is a cloud before the soul’s eyes.

This long struggle to be at home in the body, this difficult friendship.

From Cages

Jane Kenyon

From Room to Room: Poems by Jane Kenyon  
Farmington, MA: Alice James Books, 2016.

2. Engage and care for your body by practicing yoga, going for a walk, or getting a massage.
3. Tired – take a nap, sit and do nothing allowing your body to rest.
4. Take time to look at your body – consider the intricacies of how you are made. Think about the miracle of the opposable thumb and what is made possible by this action. What do you like about your body? What is beautiful about your body? What makes you marvelously made?

## Closing Prayer

God, I come before you in awe and wonder knowing that I am a part of your grand design, knowing that you have breathed the breath of life into me. I come before you carrying the marks and scars of my uniqueness and my life on and in my body. I am sorry for the times when I have neglected to care for my body. May I live in ways that honors and respects my body. May I be formed by an understanding of radical self-love claiming my place in relationship with you and with others. Amen.

### March 5 Scripture

Psalm 139: 1 – 6, 23 – 24

Lord, you have examined me. You know me.

<sup>2</sup>You know when I sit down and when I stand up. Even from far away, you comprehend my plans.

<sup>3</sup>You study my traveling and resting. You are thoroughly familiar with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup>There isn't a word on my tongue, Lord, that you don't already know completely.

<sup>5</sup>You surround me—front and back. You put your hand on me.

<sup>6</sup>That kind of knowledge is too much for me; it's so high above me that I can't reach it.

<sup>23</sup>Examine me, God! Look at my heart! Put me to the test! Know my anxious thoughts!

<sup>24</sup>Look to see if there is any idolatrous way<sup>[1]</sup> in me, then lead me on the eternal path!

## Reflection

I am a sister, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a friend, an ordained minister, a counselor, a citizen, a consumer, an advocate, a Christian, an elder, et cetera. Each of these roles carry different expectations, different responsibilities, and different ways of relating to the people around me. Each of these roles will manifest themselves at different times and in different ways throughout my life.

Consider the fact that I am a mother. I have been a mother for forty-two years. My role as a mother of my middle-age children is significantly different than my role of my children when they were infants, toddlers, children, and adolescents. And, while I am always a mother my role is relationally bound. I may interact with other children in a way that I interacted with my children when they were the same age. I may engage in mothering behavior. However, I am only the mother of my children and not of every child that I meet.

The same may be said of all of us. Each of us have many different roles in life. Each of these roles is defined in part by our relationships with others. Shakespeare wrote: "all the world's a stage and all the men and women are merely players. And one man in his time plays many parts, His acts being seven ages." And, yet, we are not merely the roles we play. We are more than sum of our roles. There is something that transcends the roles and at the same time binds the roles in a way that is at our core.

Each of us fulfill different roles in life. Having different roles that we carry out in different ways and that reveal different aspects of who we are is not an indication of being disingenuous. Living genuine and authentic lives mean that how we view and fulfill the responsibilities of our roles reflect our values and character.

Inner reflection and deeper self-awareness can help us be more effective and creative in the variety of roles that we are called to fulfill in our lives. Knowing ourselves can assist us in faithfully living out who we are uniquely called to be. It can assist us in knowing what roles are ours to fulfill and what roles we need to not try to fulfill as we make better decisions, build authentic relationship and engage in honest communication. Thomas Merton writes:

*In order to become myself, I must cease to be what I always thought I wanted to be, and in order to find myself I must go out of myself, and in order to live I have to die.*

Take a few minutes and list the roles that you have. What are your needs in each of these roles? What are expectations that come with each of these roles? How often do you find yourself in each of these roles? How do these roles bring joy to your life? What are the commonalities of the roles of your life? What do these roles say about the values of your life? How are your strengths utilized as you engage in the variety of roles in your life?



## Closing Prayer

Go with me, O Lord, in all that I do. As I fulfill the various roles in my life may there be integrity and wholeness in how I live and present myself. May your love be the energy that binds everything together. Guide my thoughts and inform my words and actions so that I may be a conduit of your love. May others see my true self today in (her/him/them) may your glory be reflected. Amen.

**March 6**  
**Scripture**  
Ecclesiastes : 1 - 8

There's a season for everything  
and a time for every matter under the heavens:  
<sup>2</sup> a time for giving birth and a time for dying,  
a time for planting and a time for uprooting what was planted,  
<sup>3</sup> a time for killing and a time for healing, a time for tearing down and a time for building up,  
<sup>4</sup> a time for crying and a time for laughing, a time for mourning and a time for dancing,  
<sup>5</sup> a time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones,  
a time for embracing and a time for avoiding embraces,  
<sup>6</sup> a time for searching and a time for losing, a time for keeping and a time for throwing away,  
<sup>7</sup> a time for tearing and a time for repairing, a time for keeping silent and a time for speaking,  
<sup>8</sup> a time for loving and a time for hating, a time for war and a time for peace.

## Reflection

In his book *The Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*, Richard Rohr states that each of us have a true self and a false self. He defines the true self as who we are in God and who God is in us. The true self is our embodied soul, our absolute identity that is satisfied, content and immortal. The false self is the identity that we create for ourselves. Fragile, needy, and mortal the false self is constantly remaking itself.

Our true self knows our true identity as a child of God, loved and welcomed unconditionally. It carries the DNA of the *Imago Dei*. It recognizes that we were made for transcendence, for Resurrection life. The true self welcome growth and change while the false self tries to hold on to the status quo and fears anything that challenges that status quo. The true self welcomes and dwells in the both/ and of creation while the false self dwells in dichotomies and frames the world as a place of only either/or.

The true self seeks connection and recognizes interdependence while the false self feels separate and apart. Rohr goes as far as to state that the separate self is the false self. Having said all of this, it is essential to say that Rohr emphasizes that the true self is not about moral perfection or psychological wholeness for the true self recognizes that one is moving toward holiness and wholeness rather than having obtained holiness and wholeness. Thus, the true self is humble and extends grace to others recognizing one's own need for grace.

To cultivate the true self, we seek to unite and find ourselves in God. Rohr speaks of "praying from the clay" and states that complete prayer includes including both our minds and our bodies. According to Rohr mental prayer, praying with our minds, is about transcendence and God filling us. Praying from the clay, body prayer, comes from within us and is a knowing of God and being united with God, as God prays through us. Body prayer can include yoga, tai chi, walking prayer, making pilgrimage, praying the labyrinth, praying with prayer beads, chanting, praying with music, praying with art.

We conclude with Richard Rohr's words, *The Song of the True Self*

*Withing us there is an inner natural dignity. (You often see it in older folks.) An inherent worthiness that already knows and enjoys. (You see it in children.) It is an immortal diamond waiting to be mined and is never discovered undesired. It is a reverence humming within you that must be honored. Call it the soul, the unconscious, deep consciousness, or the indwelling Holy Spirit. Call it nothing. It does not need the right name or right religion to show itself. It does not even need to be understood. It is usually wordless. It just is, and shows itself best when we are silent, or in love, or both.*

*I will call it the True Self here. It is a God-in- All-Things yet not circumscribed by any one thing. It is enjoyed only when each part is in union with all other parts, because only then does it stand in the full truth.*

*Once in a while, this True Self becomes radiant and highly visible in one lovely place or person.*

*Superbly so, and for all to see, in the body of the Risen Christ.*

*And note I note I did say "body." It begins here and now in our embodied state in this world.*

*Thus the Christ Mystery travels the roads of time.*

*Once you have encountered this True Self- and once is more than enough – the False Self will*

*begin to fall away on its own.*

*This will take most of your life, however, just as it did in Jesus.*

## ***Closing Prayer***

Stand and breathe deeply from your diaphragm as you pray.

**Await** – cup your hands and extend them in front of your body at waist level as you wait to receive the presence of God.

**Allow** – straighten your arms and lift them up as you open yourself up to the coming of the presence of God.

**Accept** – lower your hand cupping them before your heart knowing that God desires to come to you.

**Attend** – extend your arms and hands in front of you with palms up and open ready to act on what you have been given.

**March 7 – March 13**  
**Connecting to Myself**

**March 7**

**Scripture**

Luke 18: 35 – 43

<sup>35</sup> As Jesus came to Jericho, a certain blind man was sitting beside the road begging. <sup>36</sup> When the man heard the crowd passing by, he asked what was happening. <sup>37</sup> They told him, "Jesus the Nazarene is passing by."

<sup>38</sup> The blind man shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, show me mercy." <sup>39</sup> Those leading the procession scolded him, telling him to be quiet, but he shouted even louder, "Son of David, show me mercy."

<sup>40</sup> Jesus stopped and called for the man to be brought to him. When he was present Jesus asked, <sup>41</sup> "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, I want to see."

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight! Your faith has healed you." <sup>43</sup> At once he was able to see, and he began to follow Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they praised God too.

## ***Reflection***

"We must transcend ourselves altogether and give ourselves entirely to God for it is better to belong to God, and not to ourselves. It is thus that divine things are bestowed on those who have attained fellowship with God." These words penned by Gregory of Palamas in the fourteenth century summarizes his understanding of the goal of the life of all believers. Gregory was a Byzantine Greek theologian and archbishop of Thessalonica and Doctor of the Orthodox church.

For Gregory, every Christian is called to transcend the sinful state, the broken state, and to experience the presence of God. For Gregory of Palamas, "quietude," an integration of repetitive, breath and body prayer, is the path that leads to knowledge of God. Grounded in the teachings of the desert fathers and mothers, "prayer of the mind" dates back to the fourth century and the teachings of Evagrius of Pontus. The first intellectual to adopt the desert lifestyle, Evagrius understood prayer to be the highest state of mind and constant prayer was the goal by which "[man] becomes truly [himself] by reestablishing the right and natural relationship with God." It was this understanding of the importance and transformative nature of prayer that formed the foundation of the spirituality of the Jesus Prayer, which had its origins in the desert monastic movements of the fourth and fifth centuries. The classical form of the Jesus Prayer is, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." At times it is shortened to "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me."

Gregory of Palamas argues that God is found in the darkness. It is in this darkness that God communicates Godself to the purified body and mind while at the same time remaining absolutely transcendent. For Palamas there is never an end to revelation – there is always more of God to know and to experience. He argues that the knowledge of God is possible through direct intervention of the Spirit because the living God made Godself accessible to personal experience by coming and dwelling with humanity.

Today, we will close by praying the Jesus Prayer.

## Closing Prayer

Sit comfortably and focus your attention on your breath, breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you relax into your breathing, close your eyes and silently begin to repeat the words, “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me.” Match the syllables of the word to the rhythm of your breathing. *Lord/ breathe in , Jes/ breathe out, us/ breathe in, Christ/ breathe out, have/ breathe in. mer/ breathe out, cy/ breath in, on/ breath out, me/ breath in, repeat the pattern.*

March 8

Scripture

Genesis 1: 28 – 31

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.” <sup>29</sup> Then God said, “I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. <sup>30</sup> To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food.” And that’s what happened. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good.

### Reflection

*We can cultivate dwellings of peace for ourselves, for others, and for the glory of the one who first made us and placed us in a garden.*

*We too can be placemakers. Yet, I cannot say that the placemaker’s life is an easy life. I cannot promise that it will not break your heart.*

Occasionally, a quiz will come across my Facebook feed promising to identify what part of the country I am from based on my food preferences or the colloquialisms that I use. These quizzes are based on the understanding that the places that we inhabit in part shape who we are and what we prefer. I was reminded of how this happens the first Thanksgiving home while attending seminary.

Having spent over forty years in a small town in Central Illinois, I left the Midwest to attend seminary in Lexington, KY. There I was introduced to the difference of sweet tea and sweetened tea, the second identified as an abominable substitute for the genuine beverage. I found that tomatoes are not only to be savored on salads and in steaming spaghetti sauces and pot roast. They are not only red and juicy when freshly picked from the vine. Tomatoes are green delicacies that you dip in egg and batter and fry. I found that horseshoes are really hot browns. And, I learned that in Illinois when you refer to your family as “all y’all” you get funny looks and hear “what did you say.”

How the geography of where we grow up and live shapes us is ways deeper than food preferences and word choices. Spanish philosopher and essayist, José Ortega y Gasset stated, “Tell me the landscape in which you live, and I will tell you who you are.” Those who have studied cultural geography has long understood the connection between physical landscape and how cultures develop. It may be as simple as what food we eat and prefer, what clothes we wear, and what words are prioritized in our speech.

The abundance or scarcity of resources impact how we look at life. The ease or difficulty in traveling across the terrain impacts our understanding of hospitality. Geography has a significant impact on interactions with those who do not share the same landscape. Geography has influenced what festivals we designate and how these festivals are celebrated. For our earliest ancestors, geography influenced how they came to see and worship God.

In Genesis, we are told that humanity has a special relationship with the earth. We are reminded that we are made of the same cosmic stuff. We are called be the stewards, the caretakers, of the earth and its creatures. In connecting with ourselves, it is beneficial to stop and consider where we come from.

Finally, our geographic location helps to shape us and we help shape our geography as we take up our vocation as steward, caretaker of creation. Christie Purifoy in *Cultivating Places of Comfort, Beauty and Peace* states that placemaking is, “deliberately sending your roots deep into a place like a tree. It means allowing yourself be nourished by a place even as you shape it for the better. It is creative work for men and women.” Placemaking can take place in solitude or in community, it can take place by staying at home or by traveling, and it can take place whether we are in our forever place or in transition.

In a recent workshop on taking care of oneself in order to engage and sustain the work of dismantling racism, Sandhya Jha asked us to consider the places we come from. She encouraged us to consider the lands on which we live and worship and to identify the original inhabitants of

those lands. She encouraged us to begin to look at our own origin stories by completing a poem. The template of that poem follows so that

## “I Am From” template -

I am from \_\_\_\_\_ From \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(specific ordinary item) (product name) (product name)

I am from the \_\_\_\_\_  
(home description)

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
(adjective) (adjective) (adjective)

I am from \_\_\_\_\_,  
(plant, flower, natural item) \_\_\_\_\_  
(description of above item)

I'm from \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(family tradition) (family trait)

From \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(name of family member) (another family name)

I'm from the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(description of family tendency) (another one)

From \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(something you were told as a child) (another)

I'm from \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
(representation of religion) (further description)

I'm from \_\_\_\_\_  
(place of birth and family ancestry)

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
(a food item that represents your family) (another one)

From the \_\_\_\_\_  
(specific family story about a specific person and detail)

The \_\_\_\_\_  
(another detail of another family member)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(location of family pictures, mementos, archives)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(line explaining the importance of family items)

## Closing Prayer

Thank you God for the beauty of (insert hometown), for the (name elements of the geography that you appreciate), for the lessons that I have learned

(\_\_\_\_\_)

Thank you God, for the beauty and lessons of other places that have contributed to my becoming the person that I am. I have learned the lessons of

(\_\_\_\_\_).

Be present as my community faces the challenges of (insert the challenges that your community faces). May we have wisdom as we seek solutions and gather resources to face these challenges. I accept the blessing that comes from the place where I live. I commit to the task of placemaking so that others may come to receive a blessing from my choices and my way of living in the world. Amen.

March 9

Scripture

Matthew 7: 1 – 5

Don't judge, so that you won't be judged. <sup>2</sup>You'll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you. <sup>3</sup>Why do you see the splinter that's in your brother's or sister's eye, but don't notice the log in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>How can you say to your brother or sister, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' when there's a log in your eye?<sup>5</sup>You deceive yourself! **First take the log out of your eye, and then you'll see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's or sister's eye.**

## Reflection

Contemplatives are individuals who seek an encounter and unity with God by spending time and creating an invitational space to reflect on God. They understand that we must be intentional in our search and our desire to pay attention to and for God. This intentionality is rooted in the understanding that God desires to reveal Godself to us. In *What The Mystics Know: Seven Pathways to Your Deeper Self*, Richard Rohr writes:

*Prayer is not primarily saying words or thinking thoughts. It is, rather, a stance. It's a way of living in the Presence, living in the awareness of the Presence, and even of enjoying the Presence. The full contemplative is not just aware of the Presence, but trusts, allows and delights in it.*

Contemplatives understand that as we become increasingly more aware of the presence of God we become increasing more aware of who we are. This discipline of journeying toward God is also a journey towards ourselves. Thomas Merton in *Seeds of Contemplation* suggests that, "My discover of my identity begins and is perfected in these missions, because it is in them that God Himself, bearing Himself the secret of who I am, begins to live in me not only as my Creator but as my other and true self. *Vivo, I am non ego, vivit vero in me Christus* (I live, now not I but Christ live in me." It is in this journey that we discover our self-worth. It is in this journey that we find our full humanity. A humanity that is not an excuse for our failings as in "well, I am only human."

In this journey we come to encounter the truth that to be fully human is to reflect the goodness of God, to claim the dignity of being made in the image of God. There is no single path, or discipline, that will lead us to God. Contemplatives through history have shown us a variety of ways to do this - some have withdrawn to the deserts, some have sat on top of poles in the middle of cities, some have entered communities living in monasteries, and others have devoted their lives to working with the poor and the destitute on the streets of New York or Calcutta.

One of the paths is cultivating the ability to detach ourselves from the false self, the passing self as we discover our true selves. Richard Rohr states,

*By contemplation we mean the deliberate seeking of God through the willingness to detach from the passing self, the tyranny of emotions, the addiction to self-image, and the false promises of the world. It is a journey into faith and nothingness. The ordinary rules of thinking managing, explaining, and fixing do not apply here.*

To cultivate this in life, we practice letting go of judgment. Spiritual teachers suggest that it is more difficult to see or understand when we start with "no." "To start with "yes," we need to be slow to label, to analyze, and to categorize things as good or bad. We need to be able to refrain from casting the world in terms of no/ but and begin to consider the possibility of yes/and. Today, our closing prayer invites you to venture down this path as you engage in the prayer activity.

## Closing Prayer

*Read through the instructions for this prayer activity to familiarize yourself with the process. After you have done this engage in the activity focusing on the experience rather than the directions.*

### A River Meditation

*Sit comfortably. Focus on your breathing, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Allow yourself to sink into a comfortable rhythm of breathing. Allow yourself to allow tension to leave your body as you settle into your chair.*

*In your mind's eye imagine that you are setting on the bank of a river or a stream watching boats sail past. As the boats sail past you, give each one a name for example, "my concerns over corona virus," "my resentment toward my coworker," or "my negativity about my performance."*

*Take time to name the judgments, giving each boat a name as it sails past you. After you name the boat, just let it sail move away from you.*

*Do not try to board the boats, just remain on the bank letting it sail past you.*

March 10

Scripture

Psalm 22: 1 – 11

My God! My God,  
why have you left me all alone?  
Why are you so far from saving  
me—

so far from my anguished  
groans?

<sup>2</sup> My God, I cry out during the day,  
but you don't answer;  
even at nighttime I don't stop.

<sup>3</sup> You are the holy one, enthroned.  
You are Israel's praise.

<sup>4</sup> Our ancestors trusted you—  
they trusted you and you rescued  
them;

<sup>5</sup> they cried out to you and they  
were saved;  
they trusted you and they were-  
n't ashamed.

<sup>6</sup> But I'm just a worm, less than hu-  
man;  
insulted by one person, despised  
by another.

<sup>7</sup> All who see me make fun of me—  
they gape, shaking their heads:

<sup>8</sup> "He committed himself to  
the Lord,  
so let God rescue him;  
let God deliver him  
because God likes him so  
much."

<sup>9</sup> But you are the one who pulled  
me from the womb,  
placing me safely at my mother's  
breasts.

<sup>10</sup> I was thrown on you from birth;  
you've been my God  
since I was in my mother's  
womb.

<sup>11</sup> **Please don't be far from me,  
because trouble is near  
and there's no one to help.**

## Reflection

As we take the journey to seek God and to find ourselves, it is not unusual that we will encounter roadblocks and circumstances that slow us down in the process. There will be days when we are tired, or busy, or just don't want to take time for prayer. There will be days when no matter what we do we do not feel the comforting presence of God. There will be days when you ask if it is worth it because the message you are hearing from God is opposed by those around you. Throughout history, individuals with deep faith and spiritual maturity have spoken of this as the Throughout history, spiritual writers have written of dark night of the soul. In the sixteenth century, a Carmelite reformer, John of the Cross wrote his poem, *The Dark Night of the Soul*. In this he outlines the journey to union with God. In it darkness represents the hardships and difficulties that the journeyer encounters on the journey. The dark night of the soul confronts us with the reality that spiritual disciplines do not inoculate us from the pain and hardships of life. Gregory of Palamas prays for an illumination of the darkness. On his own spiritual path, Gregory recognized that one often finds God in the places where one did not think that God was presence. In seeing, recognizing the presence of God the darkness is illuminated. After her death, it was revealed that Mother Teresa, founder of the Missionaries of Charity, had experienced the dark night of the soul for the majority of the last fifty years of her life.



The dark night of the soul is painful described as feeling abandoned by God, as feeling forlorn and hungry for that which cannot be found. The dark night of the soul may be characterized by the presence of doubt and questioning. It is essential to say, the dark night of the soul is not a loss of faith. Despite uncertainties and doubt, those experiencing the dark night of the soul continue to live out their understanding of their identity and their call as a child of God. Mother Teresa continued to serve the poor, care for the lonely, the sick the dying of India. She continued to do what she believed that God wanted from and for her. Thomas Merton prayed:

My Lord God,  
I have no idea where I am going.  
I do not see the road ahead of me.  
I cannot know for certain where it will end.  
nor do I really know myself,  
and the fact that I think I am following your will  
does not mean that I am actually doing so.  
But I believe that the desire to please you  
does in fact please you.  
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am  
doing.  
I hope that I will never do anything apart from  
that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the  
right road, though I may know nothing about it.  
Therefore will I trust you always though  
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me,  
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

**O God,  
I wait the unending darkness  
Like a chrysalis on a lonely limb.  
I am living in the dreadful “in between”  
If death and life, of darkness and light,  
Not coming, not going, just hanging on,  
I fight the seeming emptiness and struggle  
against required surrender.  
Teach me to wait patiently while my wings  
grow strong for my time of flying has not  
yet come.**

**Joyce Rupp**

**Little pieces of Light: Darkness and Personal Growth. Mahwah, NJ. 1994**

Obstacles and roadblocks may occur in our spiritual journeys. Doubts, fears, and concerns may arise. These may relate to temporary circumstance of life. They may be relatively minor. They may also be far more far reaching and intense, the dark night of the soul. Knowing this, we are called to persist, to move forward believing that while we may not know where the journey is taking us we can be certain that the desire to be on the journey is a sufficient starting point. As we read in Psalm 139: 11 – 12:

If I said, “The darkness will definitely hide me;  
the light will become night around me,”  
<sup>12</sup> even then the darkness isn’t too dark for you!  
Nighttime would shine bright as day,  
because darkness is the same as light to you!



## Closing Prayer

### Lectio Divina

*Invite God to speak to you through the words of scripture*

*Read Psalm 42 slowly and mindfully. Consider what words, phrases come to mind*

*Reread the Psalm. Consider what images come to mind and what feelings you experience.*

*Reread the Psalm. What is God saying to you? How do these words apply to your life today*

### Psalm 42

*Just like a deer that craves streams of water, my whole being<sup>[c]</sup> craves you, God.<sup>2</sup> My whole being thirsts for God, for the living God. When will I come and see God's face?<sup>[d]</sup>*

*<sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food both day and night, as people constantly questioned me, "Where's your God now?"*

*<sup>4</sup> But I remember these things as I bare my soul: how I made my way to the mighty one's abode, to God's own house, with joyous shouts and thanksgiving songs— a huge crowd celebrating the festival!*

*<sup>5</sup> Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed? Why are you so upset inside? Hope in God! Because I will again give him thanks, my saving presence and my God.*

*<sup>6</sup> My whole being is depressed. That's why I remember you from the land of Jordan and Hermon, from Mount Mizar.*

*<sup>7</sup> Deep called to deep at the noise of your waterfalls; all your massive waves surged over me.*

*<sup>8</sup> By day the Lord commands his faithful love; by night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life.*

*<sup>9</sup> I will say to God, my solid rock, "Why have you forgotten me?"*

*Why do I have to walk around, sad, oppressed by enemies?"*

*<sup>10</sup> With my bones crushed, my foes make fun of me,*

*constantly questioning me:*

*"Where's your God now?"*

*<sup>11</sup> Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed?*

*Why are you so upset inside?*

*Hope in God!*

*Because I will again give him*

*thanks,*

*my saving presence and my*

*God.*

**March 11**

**Scripture**

John 11: 35. Jesus wept.

### Reflection

"Don't cry over spilled milk," "Big girls don't cry," "there is no crying in baseball," "Going to have a good cry," each of us have heard these or other iterations in songs, movies, in our homes, in our heads or even our own voices, about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of tears.

The desert fathers and mothers saw value in the gift of tears and noted the connection between tears and prayer including prayers of repentance. For them, tears was connected to transformation.

Rooted in **II Corinthians 2: 19** that we are "perfected in weakness," the desert writers saw the intensity of weeping directly related to the degree of repentance that one experiences. Chryssavgis states:

It is the depth of our love that determines the intensity of our weeping. Through tears, we give up our infantile images of God and give into the living image of God. We confess our personal powerlessness and confess divine powerfulness. Tears confirm our readiness to allow our life to fall apart in the dark night of the soul, and our willingness to assume new life in the resurrection of the dead.

The desert writers understood that weeping arises from the heart and signifies an open and softened hope. Tears are sign of vulnerability. Psychologists state that crying is not absolutely necessary for good mental health. However, they have identified that people who do not cry experience less empathy, are less connected with other, and experience more anxiety and stress. Doctors tell us that we cry when we are sad.

There is a sacredness in tears.

They are not a mark of weakness, but of power.

They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues.

They are the messengers of overwhelming grief, of deep contrition, and of unspeakable love.

Washington Irving

We also cry when we are mourning and when we are joyful. We cry when angry and frustrated. We cry out of fear. We cry at injustice. Finally, we cry at the beauty of creation and the creativity of art, music, poetry and other expressions of the human imagination. Crying is a direct expression of our own emotions but crying is also an empathic act when our tears occur as we witness the pain and loss of others. Empathy is a deeply human emotion. Lord Alfred Tennyson in *The Princess: Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead* wrote, "She must weep or she will die."

Different people will cry over different things. Tears provide a way to release and express our feelings. Crying is a form of self-soothing as weeping activates the parasympathetic nervous system. Extended periods of crying results in the release of endorphins promoting a sense of calm, well-being. Physiologically, weeping helps to regulate our breathing and even lower the brain's temperature. Crying helps a new born baby clear his or her lungs and breathe and crying briefly while not being allowed to cry for a prolonged period of time may help babies sleep better at night.

As we connect with ourselves it is important that we allow ourselves to be in touch with, to express, and to release our emotions. For some of us we have been conditioned to think that some emotions are good and other emotions are bad. Connecting to our genuine self means letting go of the labels and finding ways to express the full range of human emotions so that we may experience an embodied sense of wholeness.

Big girls do cry and in fact crying should not be something that any of us outgrow. It is not the privilege of one gender but an expression of every gender's humanity.

Today, may be a day when your tears flow – it may not. Today can be a day of affirming your full humanity as you commit to not overvaluing the "positive" emotions while devaluing the so-called "negative" emotions. Today, can be the opportunity be moved to tears by engagement with the arts, with creation, with the stories of your fellow men and women.

### ***Closing Prayer***

O Lord, in this season of Lent give me the courage to look deep within myself. Teach me to be open and vulnerable, in touch with my emotions. Help me to be honest with what I am feeling and at the same time respectful and empathic of others. I know O Lord that I have nothing to fear for you are the source of my help and consolation. You are the source of comfort in my loss and despair. Your love is a constant in my life, an everlasting well-spring of compassion and mercy. O Lord, when I cry out to you, you are there. You heal my brokenness and forgiving my sins. Your grace provides me with new opportunities each day to start anew. In this season of Lent, may I turn to my Brother Jesus and so I may learn what it means to live the fully human life. Amen.

**March 12**

***Scripture***

John 15: 12 – 15

<sup>12</sup>This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known

### ***Reflection***

The spiritual journey to find oneself is not a journey into individualism. It is not about withdrawing into one's thoughts and one's relationship with God. To genuinely discover one's true self is to find out who one is in relationship including relationship with God and relationships with those who God loves.

In 1985, Robert Bellah along with others, published *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. In this book, it was stated that individualism, including biblical civic, utilitarian and expressive individualism, is at the heart of American culture. The concept of individualism is seen as sacred and anything that challenges our individualism is seen as sacrilegious. He argues that the modern concept of individualism emerged in the midst of the rejection of a monarchical rule and in the United States under the influence of philosopher John Locke.



This concept postulates that the individual comes before the community and the community exists only through the voluntary participation of the individual. Bellah rightly argues that this modern individualism conflicts with biblical faith.

In Genesis, in the second creation story we are reminded that we were made for one another. It is not good for us to be alone. We are shown how we were made to be in complimentary relationship with one another (Genesis 2). In the First Testament, we see God working through a series of covenants, the Noachic Covenant between God all of creation, the Abrahamic Covenant between God and a family that would become a nation, and the Davidic Covenant between God, David and his descendants, and the Sinaitic Covenant. We see the Children of Israel engaging in a yearly remembrance and renewal of that covenantal relationship. In Jesus' ministry, we see Jesus inviting his disciples to accompany him on a journey, into a lifestyle rather than a doctrine.



In Paul's writings, we find repeated calls and admonishments of the importance of living as a community, taking care of one another. In Revelation, we see the New Jerusalem where God dwells in the midst of the people and the nations walk in the light of God

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, English poet John Donne wrote:

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as

well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

His poem has stood the test of time speaking to the need for everyone to recognize our interdependence and connectedness with one another and with God. A similar understanding is present in the Nigerian proverb, *Oran a azu nwa*, translated "its takes a village." Native American speak of this interdependence as the web of life. Celtic spirituality is undergirded in its understanding of the deep connection between God who is ever present and all of creation. In Celtic thought, God is our dearest soul friend. The depth of that relationship is expressed by Brigid of Kildare who states, "a person without a soul friend is like a body without a head." To find ourselves is to find ourselves in God and to recognize that in God's presence we are not alone. As we rest in God, we rest with all of creation.

In *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For and Believe* Richard Rohr states, "Everything I see and know is indeed one 'uni-verse' revolving around one coherent center. The Divine Presence seeks connection and communion, not separation or division – *except for the sake of an even deeper future union.*"

Today, reflect upon who has helped formed you as the person you are. Consider the circles of your relationships. Who is a part of your village?

### ***Closing Prayer***

Today, O God I give you thanks for the gift of these people in my life '

I give thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ insert the names of those who cherished you and told you are loved

I give thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ insert the names of your teachers

I give thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ insert the name of your spiritual mentors

I give thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ insert the names of those who currently nurture you and support you

I give thanks for the opportunity to touch the lives of \_\_\_\_\_ insert names.

I give thanks for those whose names and faces I do not know but who provide me with the things needed to meet my daily needs \_\_\_\_\_ insert groups of people i.e. farmers, factory workers, healthcare workers

Today, O God I give thanks for the relationships that nurture and sustain me as I seek to nurture and sustain them in our daily lives. Amen.



March 13

**Step**

- 1** Sing, listen to the song that you can find on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBcqria2wmg>, or read the lyrics of the song at least once.

## Prayer Activity

Who Am I

Song Writer Mark Hall

Recorded by Casting Crowns

Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth  
Would care to know my name  
Would care to feel my hurt  
Who am I, that the Bright and Morning Star would choose to light the way  
For my ever wandering heart  
Not because of who I am  
But because of what You've done  
Not because of what I've done  
But because of who You are  
I am a flower quickly fading  
Here today and gone tomorrow  
A wave tossed in the ocean (ocean)  
A vapor in the wind  
Still You hear me when I'm calling  
Lord, You catch me when I'm falling  
And You've told me who I am...  
I am Yours, I am Yours  
Who am I, that the eyes that see my sin  
Would look on me with love and watch me rise again  
Who am I, that the voice that calmed the sea  
Would call out through the rain  
And calm the storm in me

Not because of who I am  
But because of what You've done  
Not because of what I've done  
But because of who You are

I am a flower quickly fading  
Here today and gone tomorrow  
A wave tossed in the ocean (ocean)  
A vapor in the wind  
Still You hear me when I'm calling  
Lord, You catch me when I'm falling  
And You've told me who I am (I am)  
I am Yours...

Not because of who I am  
But because of what You've done  
Not because of what I've done  
But because of who You are...

I am a flower quickly fading  
Here today and gone tomorrow  
A wave tossed in the ocean (ocean)  
A vapor in the wind  
Still You hear me when I'm calling

Lord, You catch me when I'm falling  
And You've told me who I am (I am)  
I am Yours, I am Yours, I am Yours

Whom shall I fear  
Whom shall I fear  
'Cause I am Yours, I am Yours

**Step**

- 2** What words, phrases speak to you? How do you feel as you hear these words? How do they speak to your understanding of who you are before God? How do they challenge your imagination?

- Step** Choose a phrase that holds particular meaning to you.

**3**

Close your eyes and attend to your breathing, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, breathing deeply from your diaphragm. Be filled with oxygen as you breathe and slowly, fully exhale as you breathe out. Silently begin to repeat the phrase that has drawn your attention. Match the rhythm of the words to the rhythm of your breathing. Do this for three to five minutes, more if you are comfortable with the process.

Attend to the images, thoughts, feelings that occur as you are praying your words. Do not try to hold onto or push the thought out of your mind. Merely, notice them and then release them

**Step**

- 4** Respond to your words by drawing, journaling or making an action plan on what you have experienced as you pray.

**Step**

- 5** Go into your day taking your words with you.



**March 14 – March 20**  
**Connecting to Others**

**March 14**  
**Scripture**  
Acts 11: 5 – 16

<sup>5</sup>“I was in the city of Joppa praying when I had a visionary experience. In my vision, I saw something like a large linen sheet being lowered from heaven by its four corners. It came all the way down to me. <sup>6</sup>As I stared at it, wondering what it was, I saw four-legged animals—including wild beasts—as well as reptiles and wild birds. <sup>7</sup>I heard a voice say, ‘Get up, Peter! Kill and eat!’ <sup>8</sup>I responded, ‘Absolutely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ <sup>9</sup>**The voice from heaven spoke a second time, ‘Never consider unclean what God has made pure.’** <sup>10</sup>This happened three times, then everything was pulled back into heaven. <sup>11</sup>At that moment three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea arrived at the house where we were staying. <sup>12</sup>The Spirit told me to go with them even though they were Gentiles. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered that man’s house. <sup>13</sup>He reported to us how he had seen an angel standing in his house and saying, ‘Send to Joppa and summon Simon, who is known as Peter.’ <sup>14</sup>He will tell you how you and your entire household can be saved.’ <sup>15</sup>When I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as the Spirit fell on us in the beginning. <sup>16</sup>I remembered the Lord’s words: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

**Reflection**

On December 28, 1895 in Paris France, the Lumière brothers presented a public showing of ten short films. This event was considered a breakthrough in film as an artistic medium. Within a decade, motion pictures moved from being a novelty to entertainment for the masses. In the 1950s, television provide a venue for even wider distribution. Today, streaming medias such as Netflix, Disney+, HBO, and many others provide us with numerous opportunities to view and review our favorite programs and movies.

From its inception, innovators in the movie and television industry have known that their productions have the power to influence how people think. Thus, they have the power to both shape and form society and what we think about society. Movies and television present the world as it is and as it can be.

Recognizing this unique lens on the world, movies and television shows have been considered for the lens the bring to the gospel. As a Trekkie, I was drawn one of these books, *The Gospel According to Star Trek*. The original show aired when I was 8 years old and went off the air when I was 11. At that time, I did not think a great deal about its worldview. I didn’t know that when Captain Kirk kissed Lieutenant Uhura it was ground breaking. I didn’t see how Spock’s struggle with his identity as half Vulcan and half human might reflect our own struggle with what it means to be fully human.

I didn’t notice how at times it reflected our society’s own sexist, racist and capitalistic ideas, and at times challenged those views showing how things might be different as humans, Romulans, Klingons and a host of other cultures encountered one another as the U.S.S. Enterprise explored the galaxy.

In 1984, when *The Next Generation* was initially premiered, I was an adult. As Picard lead his crew on new adventures and face new challenges, I studied psychology, sociology and anthropology and completed a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science. I was intrigued by how the program picked up and developed the themes of the original Enterprise crew and introduced new concerns to be explored. The crew’s interactions with Q that ultimately put humanity on trial. The encounter with the Borg and the danger of technology and a race that assimilates others based only on its own needs.

The strengths and weaknesses of the cousin races of the Romulans who developed giving primacy to emotions and the Vulcans who developed giving primacy to intellect and reason. Star Trek asked us to reflect on who are and to think about who we might be. It asked us to consider if the needs of the many truly do outweigh the needs of the few, or the one (Spock and Kirk, *The Wrath of Khan*).

“To all Mankind— may we never find space so vast, planets so cold, heart and mind so empty, that we can not fill them in love and warmth.”

Garth

“Dagger of the Mind”- 1966

In one of the newest additions to the *Star Trek* franchise *Discovery*, the following quote was attributed to Gene Roddenberry, creator of *Star Trek*, "In a very real sense, we are all aliens on a strange planet. We spend most of our lives reaching out and trying to communicate. If during our whole lifetime, we could reach out and really communicate with just two people, we are indeed very fortunate." Perhaps this is the central issue of the entire *Star Trek* universe, humans trying to reach out, to communicate, to connect.

And, isn't that the central issue for each of us. It is not good for us to be alone (Genesis 2: 18). Maybe we are on an endless journey of exploration and discovery, not resting until we rest in God (Augustine). And, maybe that is the central issue of Lent, the time of preparation as we ready ourselves for Resurrection.

## Closing Prayer

Today, O Lord as I go through my day...

May I be open and fully present.

May I not merely tolerate others but may I genuinely welcome and include others.

May I consider the perspective of others as I am vulnerable and genuine with others.

May I listen as well as speak.

May I seek to understand as well as to be understood.

May I be open to be taught something new today.

May I seek to reach out with open heart, open mind so that I may be filled.

Amen.

March 15

Scripture

Luke 10: 25 – 37

<sup>25</sup> A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?"<sup>26</sup> Jesus replied, "What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?"<sup>27</sup> He responded, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>28</sup> Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live."<sup>29</sup> **But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"**<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death."<sup>31</sup> Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way.<sup>33</sup> A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion.<sup>34</sup> The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> The next day, he took two full days' worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, 'Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.'<sup>36</sup> What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?"

<sup>37</sup> Then the legal expert said, "The one who demonstrated mercy toward him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

## Reflection

Several weeks ago, I read an online article by John McCarthy, a Professor of Counseling at the University of Pennsylvania entitled "*I Invited Mister Rogers to Dinner. Months Later I Got a Beautiful Surprise*" Dr. McCarthy writes that as a child growing up in the late 1960s



Fred Rogers

March 20, 1928 – February 27, 2003

and 1970s he found that it was not "cool" to watch Mister Rogers. Much to his surprise, as a father watching Mister Rogers with

his daughter his opinion changed. He discovered that the show integrated a working knowledge of child development, lifespan theories and brain development. It encouraged creativity and gentleness, a spirit of unconditional love and acceptance. Mister Rogers had faith in children and McCarthy and his daughter were drawn to it.

He goes on to explain that on his daughter's second birthday, inspired by Mister Rogers he decided to invite a key person to dinner each month. Setting the bar high, the first invitation was sent to Mister Rogers who only lived a few blocks away. For months there was no response. As faith in Mister Roger's genuineness began to fade, McCarthy learned that Fred Rogers was ill. He would die later that year. After Roger's death, McCarthy received a letter with an accompanying note from the program's associate producer stating that the letter had been written in the early months of Roger's illness.

McCarthy writes, “[the] letter was akin to something from an old friend: personal, gracious and caring. He apologized for not responding sooner and told us that he was honored by the invitation before saying that he couldn’t attend. He appreciated my daughter’s enjoyment of “our television visits,” mentioning her twice by name, and expressed gratitude for my comments on his program.”

McCarthy states that he has framed the letter and it hangs in his home to remind him of the importance of being a good neighbor.

Mister Roger provides us an example of what it means to be a good neighbor. On his television show he modeled loving acceptance and faith in others. Ill and dying he continued to model these qualities as he responded to the needs of a two-year-old little girl and her father.

What does it mean for you to be a good neighbor? In our scripture today, we hear Jesus expands the cultural understanding of what it means to be a good neighbor and challenges us to do the same. How is this scripture speaking to you today and what response does it call you to?

## ***Closing Prayer***

Today, O God may I be a good neighbor.

May I be welcoming and respectful.

May I be supportive and helpful.

May I consider the needs of others as well as my own.

May I see the Christ in the ones I meet, as Christ is revealed in me.

Today, O God, may I be the good Samaritan.

Amen

## **March 16 Scripture I Corinthians 12: 12 – 27**

<sup>12</sup> Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many. <sup>13</sup> We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body, whether Jew or Greek, or slave or free, and we all were given one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup> Certainly the body isn’t one part but many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot says, “I’m not part of the body because I’m not a hand,” does that mean it’s not part of the body? <sup>16</sup> If the ear says, “I’m not part of the body because I’m not an eye,” does that mean it’s not part of the body? <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, what would happen to the hearing? And if the whole body were an ear, what would happen to the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. <sup>19</sup> If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? <sup>20</sup> But as it is, there are many parts but one body. <sup>21</sup> So the eye can’t say to the hand, “I don’t need you,” or in turn, the head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you.” <sup>22</sup> Instead, the parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary.

<sup>23</sup> The parts of the body that we think are less honorable are the ones we honor the most. The private parts of our body that aren’t presentable are the ones that are given the most dignity. <sup>24</sup> The parts of our body that are presentable don’t need this. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the part with less honor. <sup>25</sup> so that there won’t be division in the body and so the parts might have mutual concern for each other. <sup>26</sup> **If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it.** <sup>27</sup> **You are the body of Christ and parts of each other.**

## ***Reflection***

Social Psychologist Stephen C. Wright, Simon Fraser University, has spent much of his professional career researching and teaching on how groups of people interact. His findings provide us with ways of understanding complex concepts like self-identification with in-groups and prejudice toward out-groups.

In his research, Wright has hypothesized that prejudice can occur at an unconscious level impacting our thoughts and feelings even if we are not aware it is happening. In turn these thoughts and feelings can influence our action. This conclusion can be disappointing and frustrating to good people who do not want to believe that they are prejudice or capable of acting on those prejudices.

Fortunately, Wright’s conclusions do not leave us without hope. Wright proposes that there is a solution to modern prejudice even if that prejudice is at an unconscious level. He concludes inclusion is the solution.

Wright defines three levels of inclusion. The first is tolerance. According to Wright, tolerance says "I allow you to be here." To tolerate someone is to minimally include them. The second level of inclusion is acceptance. This level of inclusion says differences are undeniable and inevitable. According to Wright acceptance says, "you can play our games but you cannot change the game." The third level of inclusion is ***inclusion of other into self***. This form of inclusion is developed by interacting and accepting the nature of others. It involves close personal relationships, friendships. Transformation is a part of inclusion of other into self. Developing friendships with people who are different than us allow us to include their attitudes, abilities, actions into ourselves. We connect with the other and feel very much attached to the accomplishments and struggles of that person and their group. At this level of inclusion, we recognize that the experiences of the other is significant in our own lives. Inclusion of the other into self means we are changed.

In 2020, we were called to consider who made up our social bubbles. As we were asked to stay home, we defined who was a part of our innermost circle – our family. As we began to reemerge, our hearts reached out to friends and companions as we connected from the appropriate social distance. Family, friend, acquaintance, stranger the pandemic reminded us that we relate and interact differently with different groups of people. Take a moment today and consider who is in your inner social circle – who is family? who are your friends? who are acquaintances? and who do you consider the stranger?

How inclusive are your social circles? What efforts have you made, or could you make in relating to others who are different from you?

## ***Closing Prayer***

Lord, I confess that I generally stay within my comfort zone. I seek out those who share my beliefs and will not challenge my understandings. I confess that it is easier for me to relate to others who seem to be like me. Lord, help me to take one courageous step today to move beyond the familiar so that the boundaries of this comfort zone may widen and grow. Lord, help me to genuinely and meaningfully consider ideas and thoughts that challenge the status quo of what I believe. Lord, teach me to revel in the kaleidoscope colors and diversity of creation. Teach me to open my heart to the cacophony as well as euphony of stories that speak to the experiences of your children in the world today. Lord, I confess that I generally stay within my comfort zone and so I ask O Lord for you to help to stretch the boundaries so that I may grow. Amen.

**March 17**

***Scripture***

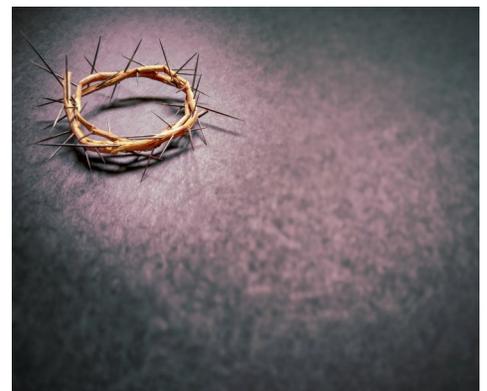
I Corinthians 11: 23 – 26

I received a tradition from the Lord, which I also handed on to you: on the night on which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread. <sup>24</sup>After giving thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me." <sup>25</sup>He did the same thing with the cup, after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do this to remember me."

<sup>26</sup>Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you broadcast the death of the Lord until he comes.

## ***Reflection***

Throughout the Bible, one of the metaphors for God's relationship with humanity is covenant. Following the flood, God made a covenant with Noah and his family and all of creation. As God called Abram, a covenant was made that would extend to the all of the patriarchs and matriarchs. As the twelve tribes of Israel were freed from slavery, Moses represented humanity as God made a covenant on Mt. Sinai. As the nation of Israel entered its golden era, God made a covenant with David and his descendants. And, through Jesus Christ a new covenant was established that us into a relationship with this God who makes covenants. There are two types of biblical covenants. Some biblical covenants are obligatory focusing on the responsibilities of God being God and the requirements of God's people being God's people. Other covenants make promises and focus on the nature of the relationship between God and God's chosen.





It is important to reflect on the nature of covenant. Covenants are formal and voluntary agreements that outline expectations for the parties entering the covenant. Through covenant, God invites humanity into a specified relationship. Covenants honor free will and emphasize that our relationship with God is invitational. In covenant relationships we see the depth of God’s love and desire to be in relationship as we receive the promise that God will not give up on humanity. Through covenant God reveals God’s vision for how God’s people are to live. Covenants describe the consequences of both obedience and



As members of congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) our shared life is

organized around the biblical concept of covenant. We voluntarily enter into relationship with one another. We agree to live in mutually beneficial relationships believing that we are stronger together as we commit to a common mission. Through our covenantal relationships we hold in tension congregational autonomy and the call of community. According to Michael Kinnamon and Jan Linn, the new covenant describes the horizontal and vertical relationship of humanity to God through Jesus Christ, a relationship in which calls us into mutually accountable. Our covenantal relationship calls us to “walk together.” The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) states “We relate to each other in a covenantal manner, to the end that all expression [of the church] will seek God’s will and be faithful to God’s mission. We are committed to mutual accountability.”

Sharon Watkins states, “I believe that three marks of covenant are particularly important for Disciples in the twenty—first century: civility in our dealings with each other, unity in our diversity, and shared commitment to our mission beyond our walls. All of these are also marks of wholeness.” Chris Hobgood identifies the following as five covenantal values for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ):

We believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and we accept him as our Lord and Savior. (Matt 16:16)

We believe the Lord’s Supper to be an open and inclusive call to radical hospitality/ 9I Cor 11:28)

We affirm the ministry of the priesthood, i.e., by our baptism we are all ministers.

The love of unity, wherein we are called to lead in the healing of a broken church and a broken world, has always been a passion for those of us called Disciples of Christ 9John 17: 21)

A passionate commitment to creating a just and human world is the kind of ethics that grows out of our love of God and God’s love for us and the whole world.

We are a covenantal people Through Jesus Christ we have entered a covenant with God. Through the waters of our baptisms, we enter we become part of a community who share this covenant. Through our membership and participation in a congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) we have entered into covenant with one another. We have promised to walk with one another, to support one another, to build one another up.

We have promised to come to the Lord’s Table where each time we are gathered we are reminded of the covenant we share.

## *Closing Prayer*

God of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, of Barton W. Stone, and of Clara Babcock and Sarah Lou Bostick, Sophia of Teresa Hord Owens, Sharon Watkins, Chris Hobgood and Richard Hamm, we come to you in the shadow of the generations of faithful who have gone before us. We thank you for the groundbreakers and the questioners, for the editors and the evangelists for those who have struggled in the midst of tumultuous and trying times, for they have provided us with an example of courageous faith and risk taking as we face our tumultuous and uncertain times.

God you have called us into covenantal relationship through Jesus Christ that binds us to you and to one another. As a body, I confess that at times we have failed to live out of that idea. We have led an insular life. We have participated in congregations that have modeled segregation rather than inclusion. We have given tacet approval as resources were withheld from others out of fear for the rainy day and denying the abundance and generosity of our God. And, O Lord, I give you thanks that while we may be covenant breakers, you, O Lord, are a covenant keeper whose mercy and forgiveness offers fresh opportunities each day. Today, O Lord I reaffirm the covenant that exists between me and others who share the name Disciple.





I reaffirm the covenant that exists between me and all of those who have been washed in the waters of baptism and share the name Christian. And most, O Lord, I reaffirm our covenant which is the heart of these covenants and which calls me into relationship with all of creation. Amen.

**March 18**  
**Scripture**  
 I John 4: 7 - 21

<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.

<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us. <sup>13</sup> This is how we know we remain in him and he remains in us, because he has given us a measure of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> If any of us confess that Jesus is God's Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. <sup>16</sup> We have known and have believed the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. <sup>17</sup> This is how love has been perfected in us, so that we can have confidence on the Judgment Day, because we are exactly the same as God is in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because God first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Those who say, "I love God" and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. After all, those who don't love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen! <sup>21</sup> This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.

**Reflection**

Desmond Tutu states,

*Ubuntu* is a concept, that in my community is one of the most fundamental aspects of living lives of courage, compassion, and connection. It is one that I cannot remember not knowing about. I understood from early on in my life that being known as a person with *ubuntu* was one of the highest accolades one could ever receive. Almost daily we were encouraged to show it in our relations with family, friends, and strangers alike. I have often said that the idea and practice of *ubuntu* is one of Africa's greatest gifts to the world. A gift with which, unfortunately, not many in the world are familiar. The lesson of *ubuntu* is best described in a proverb that is found in almost every African language, whose translation is, "A person is a person through other persons."

The fundamental meaning of the proverb is that everything we learn and experience in the world through our relationships with other people.

Tutu indicates that *ubuntu* is a way of life. It is more than a value it encompasses all of one's values, beliefs, attitudes, the habits, and customs. It is about connection and the humility of knowing that answers are found in our connections with other people rather than something individual or done in solitude. *Ubuntu* integrates both the humility of knowing that we are not where we are and we are not who we are without others and the dignity of knowing that others are not where they are and not who they are without us. It is an integration of thanksgiving and gratitude. *Ubuntu* does not attribute a person's worth based on economic status, gender, skin color, education, vocational achievements, et cetera. It values unity and knows that together we are stronger. A person with *ubuntu* shows up for others and lives in genuine relationship with others. *Ubuntu* is about empathy and being able to identify with other persons concerns and problems. It is suspending judgment, assumptions and mind reading. A person with *ubuntu* communicates in genuine ways as they ask questions that are based in seeking honest answers and they listen in ways that seek to understand. A person with *ubuntu* is not envious of others success. A person with *ubuntu* is inspired by rather than jealous of the achievements of others.

Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable.  
 Bondei Proverb



Ubuntu is about open-mindedness. It is about courage and respect. It is owning one's own dignity and recognizing the dignity of others as one engages in self-care and promotes the care and well-being of others. A person with *ubuntu* helps others without expecting anything in return and without trying to elevate oneself at the expense of another's need and/or despair.

According to Tutu, *ubuntu* leads to one living with hope. Tutu differentiates hope from optimism. He states that hope requires faith and trust. It energizes our way of living and provides a lifeline in times of trouble. Optimism on the other hand is a feeling that comes and goes in relationship to the circumstances of life. A person with *ubuntu* forgives even when it is difficult. Hope and forgiveness are both related to a future. With hope we can see the possibilities in the future. With forgiveness we can move through the past, live in the future and be ready to move into the future.

The following is a process for practicing forgiveness an important component of *ubuntu*.

1. Forgive yourself. Identify what you are angry about, how you felt about what happened and what negative emotions you that you continue to experience. Write it down, read it aloud and forgive yourself.
2. Identify the advantages to forgiving. Would there be a physical relief? Would it stop you from ruminating? Would it allow you to move on?
3. Work toward forgiveness. Practice empathy by thinking about the other person and considering their perspective in the situation. Consider what you can immediately forgive and what might require you to consider more deeply.

4. Accept that forgiveness might take time.

5. Repeat process as necessary.

## ***Closing Prayer***

Oh Lord, may I come be person with *ubuntu*.

*Lord, we confess our day-to-day failure to be human*

*Lord, we confess that we often to fail to love with all we have and are,*

*because we do not fully understand what loving means, often because we are afraid of risking ourselves.*

*Lord, we cut ourselves off from each other and erect a barrier of divisions*

*Lord, we confess that by silence and ill-considered word*

*Lord, we confess that by selfishness and lack of sympathy*

*Holy Spirit, speak to us. Help us. to listen to your word of forgiveness, for we are very deaf. Come fill this moment and free us from our sin.*

Today, O Lord, may I demonstrate loving kindness and respect in all I do. May I live with humility and acknowledge the dignity of those I encounter. May I slow down, so that I may be fully present and available in my interactions. Today, o Lord, may I be thankful and generous in all I do. May I live knowing that I am have been blessed, am being blessed, and will be blessed as I seek to move with you. Amen

**March 19**

***Scripture***

Mark 29: 29 – 31

<sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, "The most important one is *Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord,* <sup>30</sup> *and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* <sup>31</sup> The second is this, *You will love your neighbor as yourself.* No other commandment is greater than these."

## ***Reflection***

I am writing this on January 18, 2021, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. As I do this as there are 25,000 members of the National Guard stationed in Washington D.C. They are there to provide protection and security for the Inauguration of Joseph Biden and Kamala Harris. They are there in response to riots organized and led by white men and women in an attempt to stop the certification of the Electoral College votes on January 6 and because of the possible threats posed by white supremacy groups. This violence and the potential of future violence comes in the shadow of national intelligence agencies identifying that the number one threat to national security is internal threats from far-right terrorism groups. I am writing this as the Poor Peoples Campaign organized by William J. Barber II and Liz Theoharis seeks to organize the poor and the marginalized, which are disproportionately persons of color, in a grassroots call for justice, and a national ethic of love.



All of this is happening fifty-seven years after Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his *I Have A Dream* speech at the Lincoln Memorial during the March for Jobs and Freedom and fifty-two years after King announced the original Poor People's Campaign with its demands for economic justice. All of this while many continue to hope for and work for the Beloved Community.

While the expression "Beloved Community" was first used by twentieth century philosopher Josiah Royce, Martin Luther King Jr. popularized it. For King, the Beloved Community was realistic, achievable and deeply congruent with the shalom and wholeness of God's kingdom. The Beloved Community embodies Jesus' vision seen in the parable of the goats and the sheep (Matthew 25). In the Beloved Community, the least of these are seen, their needs are recognized and poverty, hunger, homelessness are eliminated as inclusion becomes the norm and all forms of discrimination, bigotry, prejudice and oppression end. This is not a utopian vision devoid of conflict but a place where conflict is acknowledged and resolved peacefully and the outcome includes reconciliation of adversaries and deepening of the commitment to nonviolence and a spirit of loyalty and goodwill.

References to the Beloved Community can be heard in King's speeches and writings as early as 1956. In one reference to the Beloved Community, Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, "The end of reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the *Beloved Community*. It is this type of spirit and type of love that can transform opponents into friends.

It is this type of spirit and type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men." Jim Lockard identifies eleven qualities of the Beloved Community including:

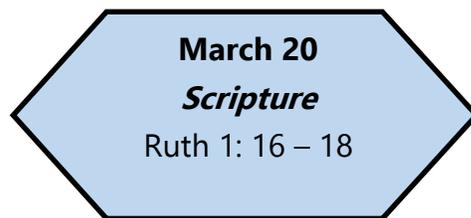
- ◆ a consciousness of compassion
- ◆ a consciousness of love and connection
- ◆ a consciousness of deep and radical self-knowledge
- ◆ a consciousness of healing
- ◆ a consciousness of vision
- ◆ a consciousness of pioneering
- ◆ consciousness of evolution and emergence
- ◆ a consciousness of mutual support
- ◆ a consciousness of contribution
- ◆ a consciousness of possibility
- ◆ a consciousness of resiliency

Consider the eleven qualities of the Beloved Community. How are these embodied in your local congregation? How are these embodied in the ministries of your Region? How are these qualities manifest in your life? What are you being called to do to live more fully into the Beloved Community?

## ***Closing Prayer***

### ***Prayer written by Martin Luther King, Jr.***

God grant that the day will come when we all can live in this society as brothers and children of a common father on a non-segregated basis. It is still true that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, [black] or white, and that out of one blood God made all [humanity] to dwell on the face of the earth. Amen.



<sup>16</sup> But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to abandon you, to turn back from following after you. Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God."<sup>17</sup> Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do this to me and more so if even death separates me from you."<sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her about it.



*It is said that Buddha was asked if friends are a part of the spiritual life. He responded by saying, "They are not just a part of the spiritual life. Ananda [his best friend]. They are the whole of the spiritual life."*





The idea of spiritual direction is not uniquely Christian. In other religious traditions, we find shamans, gurus, sages and crones, among others. Likewise, the Christian tradition recognizes the importance of spiritual friendship. Two streams in the Christian tradition, the desert writers and the Celtic saints stress the importance of spiritual friendship for the Christian journey. First and foremost, God and then the companionship of men and women who support us and challenge us as they celebrate us and hold us accountable.

These companions are more than just acquaintances; they are more than just men and women with whom we share beliefs and interests. These companions are individual who we trust as we share our most intimate thoughts, our dreams, and our fears. They are individuals who accept us unconditionally as we share our doubts and inner struggles. In the Celtic tradition, these companions are called soul friends (anamchara). Brigid, an Irish saint, states, "Go forth and eat nothing until you get a soul-friend, for anyone without a soul friend is like a body without a head; it is like the water of polluted lake, neither good for drinking or washing. That is a person without a soul friend." For the desert writers, all Christians need a spiritual mentor and companion. For the Celts the understanding of the need for soul friends predated Christianity. Each Celtic chief had a counselor or druid to listen and to give wise counsel. The Celtic saints believed that everyone needs a guide and someone who will keep us honest.

The discipline of soul friendship helps us to learn to be vulnerable and transparent as we let go of our agenda and egos, our false pride. It allows us to examine the shadow and broken places of our spirits and to grow and transform. This discipline helps us to take off the masks that we wear and to let go of the persona that we project and to reveal our genuine selves with humility and dignity.

Soul friendships may be formal as one seeks out a spiritual director. At the heart of spiritual direction is the desire by both the director and the directee to seek and be led by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual direction seeks to turn the whole person in the direction of God so that there they might find themselves and the path that is to be taken in the moment. At the heart of spiritual direction is prayer as encounter with God is sought.

Soul friendships may also be informal. They develop overtime as trust deepens and connection is strengthened. They are voluntary relationship characterized by mutuality of concern to seek the Holy Spirit, to share wisdom and direction, and to hold one another accountable in the need for discernment as aids and obstacles to spiritual growth are identified and strategies for progress worked out. Conversations with one's spiritual friend are bathed in prayer before, during, and after the conversations occur. These conversations point the participants toward God.

Conversations with one's soul friend are both comforting and challenging. They call us to do something that is becoming rare in our society.

They call us to confession. To identify and honestly talk about where we have failed and where are falling short, as we accept responsibility and agree to be held accountable to move forward with faith, hope, and love. Soul friends don't brush aside concerns with superficial statements of "you're okay." They don't only focus on what we do well. Soul friends sit together as brokenness is identified so that healing may occur.

Jean Grou, eighteenth century Jesuit writes:

To direct a soul is to lead it in the ways of God, it is to teach the soul to listen for the

Divine inspiration, and to respond to it; it is to suggest to the soul the practice of all the virtues proper for its particular state; it is not only to preserve the soul in purity and innocence, but to make it advance in perfection: in a word, it is to contribute as much as possibly may be in raising that soul to the degree of sanctity which God has destined for it.

A recurring theme throughout this Lenten season was set forth in Genesis, it is not good for us to be alone. And yet, many times we are encouraged towards individualism. We are encouraged to present a socially acceptable mask rather than to be vulnerable, genuine. Soul friends help us to cultivate a way of being that counters these messages. In our lives, we belong to many groups and organizations and we have many layers of relationships. The wisdom from generations before us urge us to make sure that one of these relationships is with a soul friend.



## Closing Prayer

I thank you God, for the teachers, the mentors, and the companions who have been a part of my life. In my childhood, O Lord \_\_\_\_\_ (enter names) introduced me to your love, taught me the stories of the faith, and helped me to find my place in the ongoing story. I thank you for the gift of their presence, their love and support. As an adolescent, O Lord \_\_\_\_\_ (enter names) were with me in my time of questioning, listening, and guiding as I came to know you for myself. I thank you for the gift of their presence, their love and support. As an adult, O Lord \_\_\_\_\_ (enter names) have been my friend, loving me unconditionally, holding me up in my struggles and fears, celebrating my breakthroughs and successes, listening deeply as I have grown and discovered more and more of who I am. I thank you for their presence, love, and support.

Lord, may I always know that to connect to others is to be fully human. May I not focus on the number of friends but on the nature and the qualities of friendship. Guide me towards the one who can be the soul friend that I need. May I recognize how I can be a soul friend to someone else as others are soul friends to me. Amen.

**March 21 – March 27**  
**Connecting to Others**

### March 21 Scripture

Deuteronomy 26: 5 – 9

My father was a starving Aramean. He went down to Egypt, living as an immigrant there with few family members, but that is where he became a great nation, mighty and numerous.<sup>6</sup> The Egyptians treated us terribly, oppressing us and forcing hard labor on us.<sup>7</sup> So we cried out for help to the Lord, our ancestors' God. The Lord heard our call. God saw our misery, our trouble, and our oppression.<sup>8</sup> The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with awesome power, and with signs and wonders.<sup>9</sup> He brought us to this place and gave us this land—a land full of milk and honey.

### Reflection

At the core of Israel's self-identity was the understanding that they were strangers and wanderers, brought out of the despair of slavery by God. As the people were instructed in Deuteronomy on what to do as they entered the promised land, they were told to remember their story. A story in which this identity was at the heart. For a desert people in the ancient world, care of the stranger was a critical concern. In the world at large strangers and sojourners were at risk, lacking formal protection unless it was offered by someone they encountered in their journeys.

In the New Testament, hospitality was crucial for Jesus ministry, both the hospitality that was offered to Jesus and his disciples and the hospitality that Jesus offered to others. In the early church, Paul admonished early communities about the importance and challenge of hospitality. In the first century, deacons oversaw ministries to the poor and vulnerable, identifying those in need and seeing to those needs. In the book of Acts, we read of the selection of deacons to care for Greek widows in the community (Acts 6). Monastic communities often welcomed strangers. Francis of Assisi built his order on the need to care for and protect the weak, the vulnerable, and the stranger. And so, it goes throughout the history of the church.



The difficult environment of Israel and Palestine

A Bedouin encampment, south of Jerusalem. Taken 2011.

Today, we risk reducing hospitality to the mere act of greeting guests who join us in worship or making sure we have good food at the fellowship dinner when the new pastor begins her ministry. We risk reducing hospitality to offering a gracious welcome, to providing for the comfort and entertainment of family and friends.



While this is important, it is not what defined hospitality for the nation of Israel, Jesus’ ministry, or the teachings of the early church. Christine D. Pohl and Pamela J. Buck suggests that hospitality is a spiritual obligation not a nice extra if we have time and resources.

For hospitality to take place, attention needs to be paid to the vulnerable and their needs. Pohl and Buck state, “welcome involved identifying common ground with strangers; the stranger was never welcomed as ‘other’.... Recognizing shared human experience also provided common ground.”

While hospitality does not deny differences, it does demand that we recognized our shared humanity. Hospitality is about building relationships and offering ourselves to people who are different than us. Hospitality starts by welcoming the people who are near us. We offer hospitality to those in our neighborhoods, our communities, and we move out from there. Hospitality is predicated on our ability to see beyond ourselves and to reach out as we enter the world. We reclaim our identity as stranger so that we may build a more inclusive and welcoming community. The words hospitality, hospice, hostel, and hospital are all connected through the Latin noun *hospes* which means “guest” or “stranger.” These words suggest a relationship between host and guest.

At times hospitality can be difficult as it requires our willingness to be inconvenienced. Hospitality can tax limited resources and require that we reflect on our understanding of the abundance of God.

It requires that we live with the tensions that come when hospitality is not practiced widely in the broader community and culture in which we have a part. Hospitality requires us to reflect on if we live to meet our daily needs or live to meet our daily wants.

Pat Ennis and Lisa Tatlock write, “hospitality is a practical way to love others.... Out motivation for being hospitable women is a *response* to God’s work in our lives. Hospitality is one way we tangibly demonstrate our love for God.” It is essential that we understand this if we are to understand hospitality. Biblical hospitality weaves together what we do (the service, the reaching out, the meeting of needs) and the attitude, the love, with which we do it. Ennis and Tatlock state that hospitality models God’s love, mercy and compassion.

During Lent when we read or hear the stories of the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet with oil (John 12: 1 – 8) and Simon the Cyrene who was pressed into service to carry Jesus cross, if we participate in a Stations of the Cross and hear of Veronica wiping Jesus face of blood and sweat as he makes his way to Golgotha, we see hospitality in action. May this Lent be a time to grow from only entertaining our family and friend to offering hospitality to all of God’s family and friends.

## Closing Prayer

Glorious God, each morning you meet me with the rising sun, the gift of light. As I rise from slumber, I am confident that while I slept you have watched over me. You delight in the blessing of the new day which you offer up for me. As a host prepares the meal for the honored, the earth provides the food that nourishes my body, that tantalizes my sense. As the host decorates with small welcoming touches, the earth is bright and beautiful with the last shimmering snowflakes and the first blooms of spring, with the stark beauty of desert landscapes or the lush beauty of tropical forest, with seemingly endless oceans teeming with life or majestic mountains that reach high into skies.

I accept this gift with all that it holds and give you thanks for what is to be. O Lord, may I receive with open hands and hold this treasure gently. May I reflect your hospitality into the world around me. May I make small gestures of care and concern with great love. May my agenda and my schedule not stop me from the spontaneous acts that connect me to others. Today, O Lord, may I be a good steward of your amazing grace. Amen

**March 22**  
**Scripture**  
 Zechariah 7: 8 - 11



<sup>8</sup>The Lord's word came to Zechariah:  
<sup>9</sup>The Lord of heavenly forces pro-claims:

Make just and faithful decisions; show kindness and compassion to each other! <sup>10</sup>Don't oppress the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the poor; don't plan evil against each other! <sup>11</sup>But they refused to pay attention. They turned a cold shoulder and stopped listening.

## Reflection

*You may think of compassion as sharing another's pain.*

*But of what value is that to you or to the other?*

*If I come to you in pain and you end up with the same pain,*

*all we have done is add to the world's suffering.*

*We have done nothing to alleviate it.*

*I want you to understand my pain, to respond to it deeply,*

*but not to take it on yourself.*

*I want to help me see what you see and what I cannot see.*

*I want you to engage my pain as if I were an actor in a drama you were watching.*

*Mirror my experience, but don't embrace it as your own.*

*Rabbi Rami Shapiro*

An empathic person is one who understands and relates to what another person is experiencing. A sympathetic person is one who feels sorrow or pity for another person's misfortune. A compassionate person is one who has sympathy and concern for someone else's suffering or misfortune. Using these definitions, we might say that a compassionate person has both a cognitive and emotional understanding of what another person is experiencing. Joyce Rupp goes further stating that genuine compassion requires awareness, attitude, and action in response to another person's suffering or misfortune. Compassion is considered a virtue in many of the world's philosophy and the word itself comes from the Latin for "suffer with."

Compassion compels us to act in a way that is designed to alleviate the suffering of someone else. The compassionate person sees the dignity and respects the humanity of the person who is suffering. Compassionate people do not see themselves as better than those who are suffering. Compassion is typically not a one and done act. Compassion springs from taking time to understand the depth of the problem and the complexities of what is needed to alleviate the situation and addressing the suffering. Compassion compels us to work until the root of the suffering is being addressed rather than just engaging in superficial quick fixes. Compassion requires that we suspend judgement in favor of understanding. It requires empathy while not being limited to mere empathy. Compassion requires that we suspend the need for perfection in ourselves and others.

Brené Brown refers to the gift of imperfection as she advocates for practicing courage, compassion, and connection in our journey towards wholeness. According to Brown, self-compassion requires courage as it requires daring as we move toward things that scare us. A similar thing can be said about letting go of the need for perfection in others. Compassionate people do not blame suffering people for their suffering. Compassion is not about fixing another person or community.

Rupp states that "There is nothing wimpy or starry-eyed about this essential Christian virtue. Living compassionately is rarely convenient and often downright challenging. It requires willingness to pay the price for being aware of suffering and doing what is possible to diminish it." Knowing this, it is essential to practice self-care and cultivate resilience, to persist and hope. It is important to immerse ourselves in the stories of those who are different from us so that we gain insights and understandings.

## Kindred Spirit from Different Places

I see it in your eyes and God does too  
I feel it in your pain and God does too it  
screams past your silence yet so audible  
to God undeserved suffering, prolonged  
frustration, shattered hope have become  
your resting place

Yet in a little while God will undo the  
past and make right your future  
Live in Hope, it conquers defeat  
Pray in faith it destroys the impossible  
Love with your heart for it is pure Rest in  
God's promise for your today.

Christal M. Jackson



It is important that we cultivate the art of appreciative inquiry that includes active listening and asking meaningful probing questions as we enter into someone else's stories.

The following exercise is from Joyce Rupp's *Boundless Compassion: Creating a Way of Life*.

Draw a Tree of Compassion

Roots – your life experiences that support and nurture your acts of compassion

Trunk – personal qualities and characteristics that enable you as a conduit of compassion

Branches – situations and experiences that make it more difficult for you to be compassionate

Leaves – ways that you have received compassion

Fruit – specific ways that you have offered compassion.

### Closing Prayer

*The following prayer is often attributed to Francis of Assisi. It was more likely written in 1912 by Father Esther Bouquerel and published in La Clochette, a magazine that he published in for the religious order that he was a part of in France.*

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.



<sup>6</sup>With what should I approach the Lord and bow down before God on high?  
Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings,  
with year-old calves?  
<sup>7</sup>Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with many torrents of oil?  
Should I give my oldest child for my crime;  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?  
<sup>8</sup>He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.

I Thessalonians 1: 2 -3

<sup>2</sup>We always thank God for all of you when we mention you constantly in our prayers. <sup>3</sup>This is because we remember your work that comes from faith, <sup>[a]</sup> your effort that comes from love, and your perseverance that comes from hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.

### Reflection

*“When we were dreaming alone it is only a dream.  
When we are dreaming with others,  
it is the beginning of reality.”*

Dom Helder Câmara

Richard Dahlstrom writes, “Trusting in God’s active involvement in our daily lives, we’re invited to learn dependence on the Creator for provision, direction, and protection. Then, from this place of security we’re invited to live outwardly, finding ways to spill hope in the world.” For Dahlstrom hope is always reflected in justice, mercy, and love, what he calls the primary colors of

hope. In other words, hope deeply connects us with others and propels us into relationships that holds promise for a transformed world. Dahlstrom’s image reminds us that hope is not a naïve optimism that seeks easy answers and is satisfied

with superficial fixes. Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the good of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present. “Hope is what sustains the hard work and the concrete acts of serving the poor and the marginalized, of inviting the disenfranchised to their proper place at the table.

**King’s Son**  
Lord, Isn't your creation wasteful?  
Fruits never equal the seedling's abundance.  
Springs scatter water.  
The sun gives out enormous light. May your bounty teach me greatness of heart.  
May your magnificence stop me from being mean.  
Seeing you as prodigal and open-handed giver  
Let me give unstintingly  
Like a king's son  
Like God's own.  
  
Helder Camara  
Essential Writings,  
171





Helder Camara (1909 – 1999) was a man of joy and a man of hope who lived and led in the midst of extremely trying times. He served as an Archbishop in Recife Brazil during the Fifty Brazilian Republic, a brutal military dictatorship, a dictatorship that Câmara frequently criticized. Câmara was known internationally as a human rights advocate founding Ceará Legion of Work and Women Workers Catholic Union in the 1930s. Often referred to as Bishop of the slums, Câmara’s statement, “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist” is frequently quoted in calls of support for social change that address poverty and the underlying causes of poverty.

Câmara is known for rising at 2 AM for daily devotions during which he engaged in *Lectio Divina* and examination of the conscious. The fruit of these morning sessions were 7000 poems and other short writings. Câmara is considered a prophet, a poet, and a mystic, his writings are characterized as joy and hope filled while at the same time sternly calling for social change. He states, “Hope without risk is not hope, which is believing in risky loving, trusting others in the dark, the blind leap of letting God take over.”

Reflect upon Dahlstrom’s understanding that genuine hope is seen in acts of justice, mercy, and love. How does this challenge or support your understanding of hope? How does hope both provide us with courage and require courage? How has your experience of hope changed through your life? What helps you to be hopeful?

If possible, watch An Ensemble Performance Of "Together" By Peter CottonTale on YouTube at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOTXP\\_zQ67Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOTXP_zQ67Y). It was originally broadcasted on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* on January 20, 2021. Consider your response.

### Closing Prayer

In moments of distress and concern may the Spirit of Peace come to you.

In times of tension and conflict may the Spirit of Calm come to you.

In the midst of your despair may the Spirit of Hope come to you.

May the Light of the Resurrection shine upon you.

May the Hope of the Resurrection cast out all fear and doubt, that you may live with courage and strength.

Amen.

**March 24**  
**Scripture**  
I Corinthians 11: 17 -33

<sup>17</sup> Now I don’t praise you as I give the following instruction because when you meet together, it does more harm than good. <sup>18</sup> First of all, when you meet together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and I partly believe it. <sup>19</sup> It’s necessary that there are groups among you, to make it clear who is genuine. <sup>20</sup> So when you get together in one place, it isn’t to eat the Lord’s meal.

<sup>21</sup> Each of you goes ahead and eats a private meal. One person goes hungry while another is drunk. <sup>22</sup> Don’t you have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you look down on God’s churches and humiliate those who have nothing? What can I say to you? Will I praise you? No, I don’t praise you in this. <sup>23</sup> I received a tradition from the Lord, which I also handed on to you: on the night on which he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread. <sup>24</sup> After giving thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this to remember me.” <sup>25</sup> He did the same thing with the cup, after they had eaten, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Every time you drink it, do this to remember me.” <sup>26</sup> Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you broadcast the death of the Lord until he comes.

<sup>27</sup> This is why those who eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord inappropriately will be guilty of the Lord’s body and blood. <sup>28</sup> Each individual should test himself or herself, and eat from the bread and drink from the cup in that way. <sup>29</sup> Those who eat and drink without correctly understanding the body are eating and drinking their own judgment. <sup>30</sup> Because of this, many of you are weak and sick, and quite a few have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we had judged ourselves, we wouldn’t be judged. <sup>32</sup> However, we are disciplined by the Lord when we are judged so that we won’t be judged and condemned along with the whole world. <sup>33</sup> For these reasons, my brothers and sisters, when you get together to eat, wait for each other. <sup>34</sup> If some of you are hungry, they should eat at home so that getting together doesn’t lead to judgment. I will give directions about the other things when I come.



## Reflection

In her book, Kristen Schell tells of her love of the table and how hosting a neighborhood party led her to establish the Turquoise Table and the formation of the Front Yard People movement. Schell states that when she received an F in French, her parents decided that she needed an immersion experience. Her summer in France became the incubator for her thoughts on community gathered round the table and her quest to create a place of welcome and belonging. Other experiences of hospitality, scriptures such as, “Contribute to the needs of God’s people, and welcome strangers into your home (Romans 12: 13) and the philosophy of theologian Francis Schaeffer, founder of the L’Abri Community informed Schell’s search. Questions began to form, questions such as, “Whatever your situation, how can you be present for other? What simple ways can you let people know that they matter and create space for people to belong?” It all came together when Kristen agreed to host a neighborhood party for a friend, a party for which the family had no backyard furniture. Picnic tables were quickly ordered, delivered, and unloaded under the magnolia tree in the front yard. Seeing them there, Kristen immediately knew that a table under the magnolia tree in the front yard would be her gathering place. Kristen writes, “From the moment I say the picnic table, I knew, I believed with all my heart this ordinary, outdoor table could be the answer to the restless wandering and worry about how to offer hospitality in a meaningful and simple way.”

The table was painted turquoise so that it wouldn’t be boring and the Turquoise Table and eventually the Front Yard People movement was born.

For Schell, the turquoise table is a place of hospitality and connection. It represents an intentional effort to be present and available for neighbors, friends and strangers. On her website Thomas Daniel, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas writes “the Turquoise Table embodies the kind of movement that all congregations must embrace. It encouraged the people in our pews to leave their Christian bubbles, embrace hospitality and intentionally form friendships with their neighbors.”

Members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) often self-identify as People of the Table. The centrality of openness of the Lord’s Table is one of our core values and understanding of our mission as a movement of wholeness in a fragmented world. Each week whether we gather in the sanctuary, on Zoom meetings, Facebook Live platforms or view YouTube videos, we gather at the Lord’s Table.

So how does the ritual meal that for most of us consists of small pieces of bread and mere sips of juice relate to the way that we invite and welcome others into our lives and at our tables both in and out of our sanctuaries? How does it relate to having a turquoise picnic table on the front lawn?

As we gather at the Table, we generally hear a reference to 1 Corinthians 11: 23 – 26.

In this passage we are reminded that we are invited by Christ to the Table where we are united with all the saints and formed as the body of Christ. There, we remember God’s saving acts and look forward to God’s ultimate victory. We enter God’s story and are empowered to continue to write the story with our lives. In the pericope we have read today, we are reminded that to partake worthily is to be transformed to go out and as part of the embodiment of Christ’s ministry. We welcome others as Christ welcomes us. To partake worthily is to reflect on our relationship with Christ and others and to recognize that every table is an extension of the Lord’s Table where we are called each week. The Turquoise Table gives us as starting place for this hospitality, a place to begin to let our neighbors know we love them.

To be a part of the Turquoise Table Community take the following steps:

- ◆ get a picnic table and paint it turquoise or cover a folding table with a turquoise table cloth
- ◆ put the table in your front yard or in highly visible spot where the community can gather
- ◆ invite people to share the table – Schell’s book and website offers helpful suggestions for your first gathering
- ◆ share the story of the Turquoise Table in your community
- ◆ finally, if you would like be a part of the larger Front Yard People movement you can register your table at <https://theturquoisetable.com/register-your-table/>

## Closing Prayer

O God, may I be a part of the change that I want to see in the world. May I cling to the truth of your kingdom even when all around me this truth is challenged. In these moments, help me not to be overwhelmed. Help me not to give up fearing that I am not good enough or wise enough to make a difference. In these moments, give me the humility to know my limits as I offer my gifts as I am called to serve. May I seek to create spaces of welcome and inclusion. May I seek to create places where love can flourish and hope can grow. May I live each day in a way that I when I come to the Lord's Table, I am worthy. May I manifest the grace that I receive at the Table at all the other tables in my life. Amen.

March 26

Scripture

John 1: 35 – 51

<sup>35</sup> The next day John was standing again with two of his disciples. <sup>36</sup> When he saw Jesus walking along he said, "Look! The Lamb of God!" <sup>37</sup> The two disciples heard what he said, and they followed Jesus.

<sup>38</sup> When Jesus turned and saw them following, he asked, "What are you looking for?" They said, "Rabbi (which is translated Teacher), where are you staying?"

<sup>39</sup> He replied, "Come and see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

<sup>40</sup> One of the two disciples who heard what John said and followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter.

<sup>41</sup> He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Christ). <sup>42</sup> He led him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). <sup>43</sup> The next day Jesus wanted to go into Galilee, and he found Philip. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." <sup>44</sup> Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.

<sup>45</sup> Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph's son, from Nazareth."

<sup>46</sup> Nathanael responded, "Can anything from Nazareth be good?"

Philip said, "Come and see."

<sup>47</sup> Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, "Here is a genuine Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

<sup>48</sup> Nathanael asked him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree."

<sup>49</sup> Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are God's Son. You are the king of Israel."

<sup>50</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these! <sup>51</sup> I assure you that you will see heaven open and God's angels going up to heaven and down to earth on the Human One.

## Reflection

In the gospel of John, Philip invites Nathanael to come and meet Jesus. Philip issues his invitation stating that he has found the Messiah, the one who Moses wrote about in the Law and Prophets (Jn. 1: 45). In other words, Phillip says I have found the one for whom you are looking. Nathanael responds "Can anything from Nazareth be good?" (John 1: 46). As Jesus will later confirm, Nathanael is a man who knows his scriptures. He knows the history of his people. Nathanael has heard the story of a Messiah coming from the line of David. He had heard the story of a new prophet, a coming king. However, it seems from his answer that Nathanael has only considered this story. In the first century, Nazareth was a small village of less than 200 people that existed in the shadow of the large Roman city, Sepphoris. It was a backwater village far from the center of first century religious and political power. Nazareth was not mentioned in the Hebrew scripture nor in the writings of Josephus, who identifies many other small villages throughout Judea. In other words, Nazareth was not on the radar as the home of the Messiah. It was not a part of Nathanael's story of where to seek the Messiah. In a 2009 TED talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie addresses *The Danger of a Single Story*. Adichie is a Nigerian writer of novels and short stories that shares her story of Nigeria. Born in Enugu, Nigeria. the child of educated professionals who lost both grandfathers in the Nigerian Civil War (1967 – 1970), Adichie left Nigeria at age nineteen to study communications and political science in the United States.



She currently spends part of her time in Nigeria and part in the United States. In her TED talk, Adichie recounts how she received feedback from one of her professors that one of her short stories that rose from her experiences in Nigeria were not sufficiently “African.” Adichie eloquently addresses how our unconscious prejudices and biases influence how we see the others and the world. She reminds us of the danger of the single story and the stereotypes that rise when we are only exposed to the single story.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus will challenge the single story of the Messiah and the expectation that surrounded the coming of the Messiah. Throughout the scriptures, the disciples struggle with the new story that Jesus gives them about the Messiah. The same may be said for us. In the church in the United States today, our understanding of God, Christ, and humanity comes to us from through a single story. A story that has been written by Western, primarily European although more recently has included American, theologians. It is a story that we have seen through the cultural arts that have shown us a white, blonde hair, blue eyed Jesus. It is a story that has undergirded and rationalized religious teachings that were intended to justify slavery and teach enslaved peoples to accept their dehumanization as a part of God’s plan and religious schools intended to strip First Nations people of their identity. It is a story that has implications for how we receive and treat immigrants in the United States today.

The danger of the single story impoverishes our understanding of God, of Christ, and of ourselves.

It risks us missing the Christ as he comes out of places and goes into places that we do not expect. The danger of the single story leads to the development of stereotypes that contribute to bias and prejudices against our neighbors. The danger of the single story contributes to a lack of empathy and an alienation from those who differ from us. It risks us leading disconnected lives. It risks fracture rather than wholeness of human relationships.

There are steps that we can take to avoid the dangers of the single stories. Read books and stories by authors who bring a different ethic, cultural perspective. Listen to music and experience art by artists from around the world. Be intentional in interacting and building relationship with people who are different from you.

### *Closing Prayer*

Open me Lord,  
 Open my eyes that I may see.  
 Open my ears so that I may hear.  
 Open my mind so that I may learn.  
 Open my heart so that I may serve.  
 Open me Lord,  
 and fill me with your love,  
 and fill me with your grace,  
 and fill me with your mercy.  
 Open me Lord,  
 and create in me a longing for relationship, and create in me a longing for community, and create in me a longing for justice.  
 Open me Lord,  
 Open my clenched hands,  
 Open my crossed arms,  
 so that I may reach out to those around me as you have reached out to the world, to me.  
 Amen.

**March 26**  
*Scripture*  
 Acts 2: 42 – 47

<sup>42</sup> The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. <sup>43</sup> A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were united and shared everything. <sup>45</sup> **They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them.** <sup>46</sup> Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. <sup>47</sup> They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

### *Reflection*

In the mid-1990s, I was a part of my home congregation’s Mother-to-Mother ministry. This ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) began in the mid-twentieth century when women in a local Disciples congregation noticed the discrepancy in access to resources and services to women of color and white women. These leaders believed that women could learn from one another. They believed that everyone would be stronger if they worked in partnership. And so intentional relationships became a core value of the Mother-to-Mother. The founders of Mother-to-Mother emphasized that learning and relationship building was at the heart of the Mother-to-Mother mission.





No monetary resources were to be exchanged as intentional partnerships were formed between financially secure women and those who had more limited financial resources. What was to be exchanged was life experiences and knowledge. Relationships were designed to bring about increased understanding and empathy. Advocacy was a natural outcome of this ministry. Natural because when your friend is hurting, you want to do something to help. And, so women with power began to empower women who had been denied access for far too long. The voiceless were empowered to speak up and those who had been excluded were accompanied to their rightful places.

Dictionaries state that public support is a defining characteristic of advocacy. Advocacy is about putting ourselves out there and taking a stand as we stand in solidarity with those for whom we are advocating. At its best advocacy is not about advancing our agenda. It is about advancing a shared agenda that has been set by those for whom we are advocating. Advocacy grows from relationship. It requires listening and recognizing that we do not know what is best for someone else. They do. Advocacy is respecting what others say is hurtful. It is about respecting the solutions that others identify as the best ways of addressing their problems. Advocacy requires that we drop the expectation that we are the experts on other people's lives and that we know how to best fix other people's problems. Advocacy is rooted in recognizing our shared humanity as we acknowledge and respect the experiences, knowledge and gifts that others bring to the table.

It counters the cultural norm that an individual or a community should be able to pull oneself up by their own bootstraps. It honestly admits that systemic structures have prevented some from even having boots. And, it recognizes that no one succeeds or fails on their own. Advocacy is about being an ally.

Advocacy can occur in many ways. It begins by gaining information and educating ourselves on the issues. It can include speaking out against the injustices that we see in our workplaces or that occur in our communities as we go about our everyday business. It might take the form of writing Congresspersons or Senators. It can be seen in showing up at local city council meetings or the steps of state legislators. It can be raising your voice at a nonviolent protest. It can be joining a grassroots movement.

From up here where we live, our life is one continuous fight for food and for clothing and the struggle for hunting and snowstorms and sickness.

That is all I can tell you about the world, both the one I know and the one I don't know.

Inuit Woman

Chistal M. Jackson, *Woman of Color Pray; Voices of Strength, Faith, Feeling, and Hope, and Courage*. Woodstock, VT 2012

One of the most powerful advocacy movements for the poor today is the Poor People's Campaign. Led by a Disciples minister, William Barber II. The Poor People's Campaign is a call for a moral revival within our country. It calls for us to see the 140 million men, women, and children who live in poverty. It calls for an end to the silence that surrounds the root causes of poverty. It challenges us claim and proclaim that our God is a God of abundance and that the lie of scarcity is sinful. It calls for us to stand as moral allies as we declare that poverty can and must be abolished. William J. Barber in *The Third Reconstruction" Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics and the Rise of a New Justice Movement* connects the issue of poverty with racism, voter suppression and encourages us to give voice to the stories of those who have been ignored in the cultural arts and educational systems of our country, and more. Advocacy is not about simple answers it is about transformative work.



## Closing Prayer

This prayer is a portion of a Lenten prayer, *Catch Me in My Scurrying*

Catch me in my mindless scurrying, Lord, and hold me in the Lenten season:

hold my spirit to the beacon of your grace and grant me light enough to walk boldly to feel passionately.

to love aggressively: grant me peace enough to want more, to work for more and to submit to nothing less,

and to fear only you...only you!

Bequeath me not becalmed seas,

slack sails and premature benedictions, but breath into me a torment storm enough to make within myself

and from myself, something...

something new, something saving,

something true, a gladness of heart, a pitch for a song in the storm a word of praise lived, a gratitude shared a cross dared, a joy received.

Amen.

March 27  
Prayer Activity

**Step 1** Sing, listen [https://smile.amazon.com/Hoping-Against-Helder-Camara-1984-05-01/dp/B01FEL9HL2/](https://smile.amazon.com/Hoping-Against-Helder-Camara-1984-05-01/dp/B01FEL9HL2/ref=sr_1_4?dchild=1&keywords=helder+camara&qid=1611247637&sr=8-4#en)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO1G-o7Yj-c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO1G-o7Yj-c), or read the lyrics of the song at least once.

*God of The Poor (Beauty For Brokenness)*

By Graham Kendrick from the album *The Very Best of Graham*

Beauty for brokenness  
Hope for despair  
Lord, in the suffering  
This is our prayer  
Bread for the children  
Justice, joy, peace  
Sunrise to sunset  
Your kingdom increase!  
Shelter for fragile lives  
Cures for their ills  
Work for the craftsman  
Trade for their skills  
Land for the dispossessed  
Rights for the weak  
Voices to plead the cause  
Of those who can't speak

God of the poor  
Friend of the weak  
Give us compassion we pray  
Melt our cold hearts  
Let tears fall like rain  
Come, change our love  
From a spark to a flame  
Refuge from cruel wars  
Havens from fear  
Cities for sanctuary  
Freedoms to share  
Peace to the killing-fields  
Scorched earth to green  
Christ for the bitterness  
His cross for the pain

Rest for the ravaged earth  
Oceans and streams  
Plundered and poisoned  
Our future, our dreams  
Lord, end our madness  
Carelessness, greed  
Make us content with  
The things that we need

Lighten our darkness  
Breathe on this flame  
Until your justice  
Burns brightly again  
Until the nations  
Learn of your ways  
Seek your salvation  
And bring you their praise

**Step 2** What words, phrases speak to you? How do you feel as you hear these words? How do they speak to your understanding of who you are before God? How do they challenge your imagination?

**Step 3** Choose a phrase that holds particular meaning to you. Close your eyes and attend to your breathing, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth, breathing deeply from your diaphragm. Be filled with oxygen as you breath and slowly, fully exhale as you breath out. Silently begin to repeat the phrase that has drawn your attention. Match the rhythm of the words to the rhythm of your breathing. Do this for three to five minutes, more if you are comfortable with the process.

Attend to the images, thoughts, feelings that occur as you are praying your words. Do not try to hold onto or push the thought out of your mind. Merely, notice them and then release them.



**Step**

**4** Respond to your words by drawing, journaling or making an action plan on what you have experienced as you pray.

**Step**

**5** Go into your day taking your words with you.

**March 28 – April 3**  
**Holy Week**

**March 28**  
**Palm Sunday**  
**Scripture**  
Matthew 21: 1 – 11

<sup>1</sup> As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

<sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

<sup>5</sup> “Say to Daughter Zion, See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” <sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.

<sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!”

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

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

**Reflection**

Today, is Palm Sunday. Traditionally, the scriptures that are read on Palm Sunday have been headed, “The Triumphal Entry.” But, was the entry really triumphal?

In ancient Rome, the triumph was a civil ceremony and ancient rite that celebrated the success of a military commander. The victorious leader would wear a laurel crown and purple robes as he entered Rome in a war chariot pulled by four horses surrounded by his army, captives, and the spoils of war. The triumphs would include speeches, processions, feasting, public games and celebrations, and sacrifices being made to the gods.

Triumphs began during the Punic Wars as victory parades, the celebrations of conquering heroes. As the empire grew, the triumphs grew in scale, duration, and extravagance. Over time, triumphs were only held for the Emperors not only marking military victories but as a sign of political power and strength and as a way to intimidate enemies and keep others in line.

Lesser celebrations known as Ovations were granted for others. In these a general would enter the city dressed in a magistrate’s toga and wearing a wreath of myrtle. There would be no army and no spoils of war on display. While the Roman historian Orosius reports that 320 triumphs were held between 20 BCE and the first century CE, the majority of citizens and inhabitants of the Roman empire would have never personally witnessed a triumph. Yet, the symbolism of these victory events reached the farthest corners of the empire, reminding everyone of the power of Rome.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem had none of the pageantry and pomp that would have been expected from a triumph. Rather than armies, captives, and displays of gold and silver and other spoils of war, Jesus was surrounded by peasants, branches of trees, and the coats of his followers. Rather than war chariots and war horses, Jesus entered on a donkey and the foal of a donkey. Rather than excitement and celebration, the atmosphere in Jerusalem would have been tense. The Romans would have been on alert as pilgrims made their way into the city for the annual festivals. Desire for liberation filled the minds as families prepared to remember the Passover and God’s bringing them out of Egypt. Jesus was not entering as one who had conquered. He entered as people longed for a new Moses, the liberator, and for the one who from the line of David who would reestablish a long-gone kingdom.

As we enter Holy Week, we are reminded of the ways that Jesus failed to meet the expectations of those who were looking for the Messiah.



We are reminded that the Messiah was not found in the seats of traditional power. We are reminded that the Messiah was not found in a battle-hardened conquering hero, but in one whose vulnerability is seen as he cries for a dead friend, in one who does not want to be left alone, one whose body will bear the marks of abuse, torture and humiliation.

Knowing this, perhaps today is a good day to consider our own expectations for the Christ. Are we open to seeking God, to seeing Christ in the places of pain and vulnerability? Are we willing to acknowledge, that today Christ still rejects the power and trappings of empire as he rejecting them in the first century.

Following the death of George Floyd, the Pro-Reconciliation Anti-Racism team of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in IL/ WI held an event to provide resources for pastors in preparing sermons speaking to the difficult issue of racism. Dr. Leah Schade, Lexington Theological Seminary, and Rev. Soniyah B. Key, Parkway Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Springfield, IL were asked to lead the event. In the concluding worship, Dr. Schade preached a sermon on the Parable of the Talents. In this sermon, we were challenged to look for Christ somewhere other than in the traditional seats of power and privilege. We were asked to see Christ in the actions of the third servant, Jevonne, who rejected the appropriateness of the master's exploitive tactics of harvesting where you did not sow and gathering where you did not spread seed (Matt. 25: 26).

The story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, the events of Holy Week, the Resurrection challenges us to look for Jesus outside of the traditional seats of power. It asks us to reconsider what it means when a triumphal entry is about the hope of what might be rather than the oppressive power of what is.

## Closing Prayer

God of creation, liberation and transformation, we come to you today rejoicing in the coming of the Messiah. Help up Lord, not merely look for him in the seats of power and the houses of economic power. Help us to seek the Messiah standing with the poor and the out-cast. Help us join the Messiah in the marches that cry out for liberation, equity and the end of oppression. Help us not be fooled by a nationalism that hides in religious words and superficial piety. We know O Lord, that you continue to hear the cries of hosanna. Amen.

March 29

Scripture

Isaiah 42: 1 – 9

<sup>1</sup> But here is my servant, the one I uphold;

my chosen, who brings me delight.

I've put my spirit upon him;

he will bring justice to the nations.

<sup>2</sup> He won't cry out or shout aloud or make his voice heard in public.

<sup>3</sup> He won't break a bruised reed; he won't extinguish a faint wick, but he will surely bring justice.

<sup>4</sup> He won't be extinguished or broken until he has established justice in the land. The coastlands await his teaching.<sup>5</sup> God the Lord says—

the one who created the heavens, the one who stretched them out, the one who spread out the earth and its offspring, the one who gave breath to its people and life to those who walk on it—

<sup>6</sup> I, the Lord, have called you for a good reason. I will grasp your hand and guard you, and give you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations,

<sup>7</sup> to open blind eyes, to lead the prisoners from prison, and those who sit in darkness from the dungeon.

<sup>8</sup> I am the Lord; that is my name;

I don't hand out my glory to others or my praise to idols.

<sup>9</sup> The things announced in the past—look—they've already happened, but I'm declaring new things.

Before they even appear, I tell you about them

## Reflection

Throughout the bible, servanthood is a common metaphor for discipleship. The faithful servant is seen as humble, prepared, persevering, and obedient. Here the prophet Isaiah describes the ideal relationship between the servant and Yahweh. The servant is an instrument of God's justice. The servant's job is to demonstrate God's decisions in the way that they live. As a light to the nations, Isaiah reminds the people that the faithful servant is the servant that keeps the covenant. The gospels and the Apostle Paul will pick up this motif, speaking of Jesus as servant of God. And, Jesus will call his disciples to servanthood leadership as he washes their feet in the upper room.

The biblical understanding of servanthood was something for which to strive. Scott P. Detisch identifies three stages of vocational growth: the hero, the servant, the mystic. Each of these stages represents a deeper understanding of oneself and a maturing relationship with Christ. While written for ordained priests, Detisch insights can be helpful for all who are members of the priesthood of all believers. In the servant state, ones' actions are motivated by the desire to live with Christ. Life is about accompanying Christ and others. In the servant state, one comes to a deeper understanding of the "this-ness" of experiences, the understanding that we do are not alone, Christ is our companion in all times and all places. Nothing can separate us. Perhaps, as we come to recognize the Christ with us and the Christ in us, we can also come to see the Christ with others and the Christ in others.

During the stay-at-home orders of 2020 and into 2021, many individuals found themselves being identified in a new way. As many were working from home, laid-off as economic toll of the coronavirus intensified, many individuals were named "essential workers." Suddenly those who clerked in grocery stores and gas stations, bus-drivers and Uber drivers, custodians and garbage collectors, and other categories of workers were seen in a new light and their jobs took on new importance. They joined the ranks of nurses, doctors, healthcare workers, police, powerplant workers, and others whose jobs were identified as essential for the well-being, safety, and security of the nation. They joined the rank of those who became most vulnerable to contracting a potentially deadly virus.

It is important to remember that nothing changed in the functions of these now very important, absolutely necessary workers. Individuals who had formerly been known as untrained workers or minimum wage employees, et cetera were now being seen as heroes – essential workers.

Today, let us consider the value that we, that society, assign to those who serve others as they check out our groceries, as they clean office buildings, schools, hospitals, and churches, as they drive buses. Let us consider the value we assign to those who harvest celery, green beans, provide seasonal work cleaning the catch of local fishermen. Let us consider how our society rewards the wait-staff, line cooks, bus-people, and dishwashers who serve us in our local restaurants. May our treatment of these essential workers reveal our understanding of our relationship as servant of God.

## Closing Prayer

### *Today conclude with this Ignatian prayer practice*

- ◆ Sit comfortably, quiet yourself by focusing on your breathing.
- ◆ Invite the Holy Spirit to be with you and guide you as you pray.
- ◆ Read Isaiah 42: 1 – 9.
- ◆ Let the Holy Spirit lead you into the scripture.
- ◆ Become aware of where God and the servant in the passage is in relationship to you.
- ◆ Become aware of what you are hearing and noticing.
- ◆ Spend some time writing about your insights. Trust that God wants to speak to you.
- ◆ Listen throughout the day for echoes from your time in prayer.



**March 30**

**Scripture**

John 12: 20 – 36

<sup>20</sup> Some Greeks were among those who had come up to worship at the festival. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and made a request: “Sir, we want to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup> Philip told Andrew, and Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus replied, “The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me. Wherever I am, there my servant will also be. My Father will honor whoever serves me.

<sup>27</sup> “Now I am deeply troubled. What should I say? ‘Father, save me from this time’? No, for this is the reason I have come to this time. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

<sup>29</sup> The crowd standing there heard and said, “It’s thunder.” Others said, “An angel spoke to him.”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “This voice wasn’t for my benefit but for yours. <sup>31</sup> Now is the time for judgment of this world. Now this world’s ruler will be thrown out. <sup>32</sup> When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” (<sup>33</sup> He said this to show how he was going to die.)

<sup>34</sup> The crowd responded, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Human One must be lifted up? Who is this Human One?”

<sup>35</sup> Jesus replied, “The light is with you for only a little while. Walk while you have the light so that darkness doesn’t overtake you. Those who walk in the darkness don’t know where they are going. <sup>36</sup> As long as you have the light, believe in the light so that you might become people whose lives are determined by the light.” After Jesus said these things, he went away and hid from them.

**Reflection**

Celtic spirituality often speaks of thin places, the spaces and times where the natural and the spiritual worlds are most permeable. Thin places are places of spiritual power and possibility. They are places for encountering God and being closer to the Divine. These thin places or liminal spaces are places of becoming and transformation. In order to be spaces of transformation, liminal spaces must also be places of questions and uncertainty. In order to be spaces where we encounter the Divine, liminal spaces must be places that we enter without agendas and predetermined expectations and outcomes. Liminal spaces can be scary and disorienting. Susan Beaumont writes, “All truly great innovations are incubated in liminality. God’s greatest work occurs in liminal space.”

For many March 2020 opened the door into liminal space. The old ways of doing things were no longer possible and possibilities for new ways were still being imagined. Familiar roles broke down and individuals found themselves being asked to do things that they had never done before. The need for connection and relationship remained important and valued but ways to connect and relate were strained by stay-at-home orders and the need to social distance even when physically present with one another. The need for caring for the poor and the most vulnerable increased, as the basic needs of many in our communities went unattended or underattended as safety nets broke under the strain of growing unemployment, escalating health care needs, and other social crises. The door opened and we entered liminal time over a year ago. And, today we are still making our way through this very dense thin space.

Our scripture today also speaks of a liminal time for the church. A time when the early Christians were trying to negotiate a new understanding of who they were called to be as community of Jews and Greeks. What would it mean to include this group who had formerly been outsiders? What would it mean to incorporate the new ways and understandings that this new group brought with them? What would it mean to do things differently and not be able to fall back on old understandings of how it had always been? Alexander Wimberly states, “Being a servant of Christ, being a part of the church, is to be an honored position, but being one of his life-giving grains means inevitable to fall to the earth.”



In John, the community struggled with what it meant to become a community of both Jews and Gentiles. Today the context is different but the underlying question remains the same. What does it mean to be the church, the embodiment of Christ, in a changing world? Wimberly concludes, “at the heart of Christianity is a bunch of unsettling truths: some things we are familiar with need to die, in order for new life to arise; the work of the Spirit will not be contained in set patterns.”

Today take some time to reflect on the following: What does it mean to be the church when the former ways of doing things no longer help us achieve our mission and are no longer relevant in the context in which we find ourselves? As a living-giving grain what must die in my understanding, how will the fruit of the gospel be revealed as the grain breaks through in a new season of growth?

### ***Closing Prayer***

As the grain of wheat falls to the ground, may I let the attitudes, beliefs, actions that no longer produce the fruit of the Spirit in my life and in the world fall away. I ask that you would break open my heart, my soul as the grains of wheat split so that new growth and possibilities may come forth. I ask, O Lord, for the courage to stay in liminal time and spaces until I am formed and shaped as needed in a changing and shifting world. I pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.

## **March 31** ***Scripture*** Hebrews 12: 1 – 3

<sup>1</sup>So then, with endurance, let’s also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let’s throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, <sup>2</sup>and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith’s pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God’s throne.

<sup>3</sup>Think about the one who endured such opposition from sinners so that you won’t be discouraged and you won’t give up.

### ***Reflection***

Stories of my husband’s grandparents’ vacations are legendary in our family. Grandpa Boo went on his first cross country trip during the summer following his high school graduation in 1927. Traveling with two high school friends in a Model T ford, the trip last from late spring until mid-fall. Grandpa Boo kept a journal as a record of their adventures and misadventures. Entries telling of snows in the Rockies that resulted in delays, wires for Mom and Dad to send additional funds, stories of starting out in one direction only to end up miles away in the opposite direction, all recorded in a leather-bound journal. The tales of the changing destinations of Grandpa’s first trip would be a defining feature of future trips with Grandma Esther.

Many summers, Grandpa Boo and Grandma Esther would start out for a two-week vacation. Frequently they would be heading west to Estes Park, CO or to Los Vegas, NV. Checking in on a regular basis, we would hear of their westward progress for the first couple of days. Then something would draw Grandma’s or Grandpa’s attention and off they would go. One day fifty miles east of where they had been the day before. Another day at the Corn Palace in South Dakota rather in Colorado at Rocky Mountain National Park. On occasions, the family would receive a phone call that Grandma and Grandpa wouldn’t be back when expected. They had driven farther than they had planned and just couldn’t make it back in the expected time frame. When they got back, we would hear stories of “well we saw this road,” or “well mom saw a sign.” Grandma’s and Grandpa’s vacations were always adventures guided by the places that caught their attention rather than the itinerary that was always carefully planned, mapped out, and recorded for posterity but infrequently followed.

Journey is often used as a motif for spiritual growth and the life of a Christian. In today’s scripture we are reminded of several things. First, the destination of the journey has already been determined. Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of the faith. Through the incarnation, the destination is declared. Through the cross the destination is assured. It is not ours to determine, it is ours to claim. Peter and Debra Samuelson write, “The writer of Hebrews, however, is not thinking so much of the end of the race.



The writer is thinking less of the progress, more of the process.” They suggest that the running of the race and the end of the race are the same place, living life with God. It is not so much about figuring out where to go but the process of going.

Second, we do not take journey alone. The writer of Hebrews states that “we have a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us.” This cloud consists of those who passed the faith on to us and those who are with us on the day in and day out adventures and misfortunes of the journey. It consists of those that we will pass the faith on to and those that they will pass the faith on to and so on. We are not alone. We are being cheered on and encouraged by those who know the joys and the difficulties of being on the race that we are now running.

Third, we are reminded that we need to persevere as the race is not always easy. In the moments of challenge, in the midst of discouragement, as hard as it gets, the writer of Hebrews wants us to remember that we are not alone. Christ has gone before us and Christ is now with us, tried and tested, victorious. We are reminded that we are not to deny that life can be difficult and that the world is not fair. We are not to hide behind some superficially piety of “it’s okay” or “God doesn’t give us more than we can handle.” We persevere acknowledging the tensions and the complications of life, we seek genuine transformation rather than temporary and quick fixes. We persevere, putting one foot in front of the other, bringing others along with us as we are brought along by others, as the great cloud of witnesses cheer us on.

At the age of 25 rights leader John Lewis was beaten and nearly died as he and his fellow marchers were met by law enforcement agents with billy clubs and bullwhips as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge going from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. The march was one of a series of civil rights protests that occurred in 1965 in effort to register Black voters. Today we continue to face the consequences of the sin of racism in our society today. Before he died, Representative John Lewis, sent an essay to the New York Times to be published on the day of his funeral. In this essay, he wrote, ““Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring.” We continue the journey in the shadow of the great cloud of witnesses.



## Closing Prayer

Again, O Lord, we offer thanks for those who have taught us how to walk and run the race of discipleship. We thank you for the examples of how to persevere in the midst of challenge, of what it means to move with courage despite opposition and obstacles placed in their paths. We thank you Lord, for the time that they have given to us, mentoring us, encouraging and empowering us, and showering us with love. While we ask O Lord, that we not be distracted and drawn down paths that are not ours to travel, we ask for the flexibility and courage to discover new roads and paths that enrich our journey as we move toward the destination. Lord, give us patience and teach us to persevere when we meet our own obstacles and challenges. May we keep our eyes on Jesus, may we know the consolation of his presence with us. May we be mindful of those who journey with us on a daily basis. May we seek to support them, encourage them as we journey together. May we be faithful as we move toward and across the finish line of our race. Amen.



**April 1**  
**Maundy Thursday**  
**Scripture**  
Matthew 26: 36 – 46

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. He said to the disciples, “Stay here while I go and pray over there.” <sup>37</sup> When he took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, he began to feel sad and anxious. <sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, “I’m very sad. It’s as if I’m dying. Stay here and keep alert with me.” <sup>39</sup> Then he went a short distance farther and fell on his face and prayed, “My Father, if it’s possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.”

<sup>40</sup> He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, “Couldn’t you stay alert one hour with me?” <sup>41</sup> Stay alert and pray so that you won’t give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak.” <sup>42</sup> A second time he went away and prayed, “My Father, if it’s not possible that this cup be taken away unless I drink it, then let it be what you want.”

<sup>43</sup> Again he came and found them sleeping. Their eyes were heavy with sleep. <sup>44</sup> But he left them and again went and prayed the same words for the third time. <sup>45</sup> Then he came to his disciples and said to them, “Will you sleep and rest all night? Look, the time has come for the Human One to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup> Get up. Let’s go. Look, here comes my betrayer.”

**Reflection**

On Maundy Thursday, much of our traditional focus happens in the context of a meal. We speak of the mandate that comes as Jesus models servant leadership by washing the feet of his disciples. We hear the words spoken at the table, words of healing and wholeness, liberation and freedom of what might be. We speak of promise and covenant.

But after the meal is over, after the mandate is given and bread is shared, after predictions of betrayal and denial are made, something else happens. Jesus moves from the upper room to a garden. And there he prays. Considering the theological perspective, Sarah Morice-Brubaker states, “Jesus evidently desires something that he suspects may not be the will of God, or at the very least he cannot be sure is the will of God.” Considering this from another angle perhaps we can ask was Jesus praying about something related to human choice as much as God’s will. Was Jesus’ agonized prayer motivated by his understanding of humanity’s potential for evil and the lengths that people will go to maintain power and control? Was Jesus’ plea that God’s will be done, a final appeal for the human heart to be transformed? Was Jesus aligning himself, knowing that God does not circumvent free will while at the same time trusting that God continues to work until our choices, our decisions, our way of relating to others and being in the world is aligned with God’s will?

Perhaps, we need to consider if this was a part of Jesus’ agony as he prayed in the garden? Perhaps, it is important for us to ponder this in light of the violence, the white supremacy, and other ways that evil shows up in our world today.

What is God’s will? Can we know for sure? Romans 11:34 states, “Who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has been his counselor?” and 1 Corinthians 2:11 says, “For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” Having acknowledged our limitations and the reality that we do not always live into God’s will perfectly, we are still compelled to desire to discern God’s will and try to live into it. And, in doing this we need to recognize that at times there is more than one way to live according to God’s will.

The heart is but a small vessel; and yet dragons and lions are there, and there likewise are poisonous creatures and all the treasures of wickedness; rough, uneven paths are there, and gaping chasms. There also is God, there are the angels, there life and the Kingdom, there light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace; all things are there.

Marcarius the Great

So how do we do that. In the words of the prophet, Micah,

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

When asked about the greatest commandments, Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands” (Matt 22: 37 – 40).

Maundy Thursday and the scriptures associated with it give us many things to consider. And, there are many angles from which we can consider and many questions we can ask to go more deeply into those considerations. We hear of the importance of serving others, we receive promises that as we move into God’s future we are not alone. We also hear of our potential to fall short of God’s perfect will as betrayal is predicted and occurs, as denial happens. We see how fear, anxiety, and sometime just plain human fatigue impede us as we attempt to engage, accompany, support others in places of hurt and pain. In the scripture that we have read from Matthew today, we hear Jesus aligning himself and giving himself over to God with complete trust. May this also be the desire of our hearts.

## Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, how great is your love and deep is your compassion that as you were about to be betrayed you prayed for the future of those you loved. Help us, O Lord, to learn the lessons of the upper room and the Garden of Gethsemane. Help us to move beyond our desires for power and control that lead to betrayal and lack of justice in the world. Help us move beyond our attempts to do it on our own and yield ourselves to your healing touch and faithful teachings. Fill us with your Spirit so that we may be counseled in your will. Lead us to discern what is truth so that we may live with hope and trust in the fulfillment of your kingdom. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.



April 2  
Good Friday  
Scripture  
Psalm 22

<sup>1</sup> My God! My God, why have you left me all alone? Why are you so far from saving me— so far from my anguished groans?

<sup>2</sup> My God, I cry out during the day, but you don’t answer; even at nighttime I don’t stop.

<sup>3</sup> You are the holy one, enthroned. You are Israel’s praise.

<sup>4</sup> Our ancestors trusted you— they trusted you and you rescued them;

<sup>5</sup> they cried out to you and they were saved; they trusted you and they weren’t ashamed.

<sup>6</sup> But I’m just a worm, less than human; insulted by one person, despised by another.

<sup>7</sup> All who see me make fun of me— they gape, shaking their heads:

<sup>8</sup> “He committed himself to the Lord, so let God rescue him; let God deliver him because God likes him so much.”

<sup>9</sup> But you are the one who pulled me from the womb, placing me safely at my mother’s breasts.

<sup>10</sup> I was thrown on you from birth; you’ve been my God since I was in my mother’s womb.

<sup>11</sup> Please don’t be far from me, because trouble is near and there’s no one to help.

<sup>12</sup> Many bulls surround me; mighty bulls from Bashan encircle me.

<sup>13</sup> They open their mouths at me like a lion ripping and roaring!

<sup>14</sup> I’m poured out like water.

All my bones have fallen apart.



My heart is like wax;  
it melts inside me.

<sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up  
like a piece of broken pottery.  
My tongue sticks to the roof of my  
mouth; you've set me down in the  
dirt of death.

<sup>16</sup> Dogs surround me;  
a pack of evil people circle me like a  
lion— oh, my poor hands and feet!

<sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones!  
Meanwhile, they just stare at me,  
watching me.

<sup>18</sup> They divvy up my garments among  
themselves;  
they cast lots for my clothes.

<sup>19</sup> But you, Lord! Don't be far away!  
You are my strength!  
Come quick and help me!

<sup>20</sup> Deliver me from the sword.  
Deliver my life from the power of  
the dog.

<sup>21</sup> Save me from the mouth of the  
lion. From the horns of the wild oxen  
you have answered me!

<sup>22</sup> I will declare your name to my  
brothers and sisters;  
I will praise you in the very center  
of the congregation!

<sup>23</sup> All of you who revere the Lord—  
praise him!  
All of you who are Jacob's descend-  
ants—honor him!  
All of you who are all Israel's off-  
spring—  
stand in awe of him!

<sup>24</sup> Because he didn't despise or detest  
the suffering of the one who  
suffered—  
he didn't hide his face from me.  
No, he listened when I cried out to  
him for help.

<sup>25</sup> I offer praise in the great congrega-  
tion because of you; I will fulfill my  
promises in the presence of those  
who honor God.



## *Reflection*

Crucifixion is one of the most horrific ways to die. It was designed not only to kill those convicted of crimes against the empire but intimidate and terrorize those who watched. It was designed to kill the individual and crush the spirit of the witnesses.

While crucifixions were carried out by the Assyrians and the Babylonians as early as the sixth century BCE, the Romans would become the masters of the practice which they were introduced to in the Punic Wars. For the next 500 years until outlawed by Constantine, crucifixion became a tool of terror for the state. In scripture, we read that only the Romans could carry out crucifixion. An extremely shameful and violent way to die, Roman crucifixions were limited to slaves, deserters from the Roman army, foreigners, political activists and eventually Christians. In the year 4 BCE, two thousand Jews were crucified in Roman-occupied Judea. Throughout the first century CE there were mass crucifixions.

Crucifixion was the culmination of hours of brutalization. Scourging was designed to weaken the body; taunting was designed to humiliate and weaken the spirit. Soldiers would sometime further mutilate the bodies of those they were scourging. On the way to the place of crucifixion, it was not uncommon for those who were to be crucified to faint or even die as they were forced to carry the crossbar of the cross tied across their wounded back and shoulders. Tied or nailed to the cross, death didn't always come easily.

<sup>26</sup> Let all those who are suffering eat and be full! Let all who seek the Lord praise him! I pray your hearts live forever!

<sup>27</sup> Every part of the earth will remember and come back to the Lord; every family among all the nations will worship you.

<sup>28</sup> Because the right to rule belongs to the Lord, he rules all nations.

<sup>29</sup> Indeed, all the earth's powerful will worship him; all who are descending to the dust will kneel before him; my being also lives for him.

<sup>30</sup> Future descendants will serve him; generations to come will be told about my Lord.

<sup>31</sup> They will proclaim God's righteousness to those not yet born, telling them what God has done.





For several hours to several days, the crucified person struggled to breathe as pulse rate rose and blood pressure plummeted. Corpses could only be taken off the cross with the permission of a Roman judge. Bodies were frequently left on the cross to further the terror.

From this place of horror and pain, we hear Jesus cry out praying the first words of Psalm 22. This lament is one of the most powerful and heart-rending prayers in the psalter. Through its words, we are invited into the doubt and despair of suffering. Repeatedly we hear cries of lament woven with pleas for deliverance as the depth of suffering is paralleled by a constant faith and hope in God.

As death neared, from the depth of pain and suffering Jesus cries out, "Where are you God."

Glenn Pemberton suggests that lament was very much a part of Jesus' earthly ministry. Citing Hebrews 5: 7, "During his days on earth, Christ offered prayers and requests with loud cries and tears as his sacrifices to the one who was able to save him from death. He was heard because of his godly devotion," Pemberton concludes that while Jesus did not hesitate to praise God, he also did not hesitate to engage God with the strongest language of complaint. He suggests that Jesus comforted others by recognizing the depth of their pain and entering into the intensity of their suffering. He faced it and he brought it to God.

I have heard that to begin to pray one of the psalms is to pray the entire psalm. If this is so it is notable that the tone of the psalm changes between verse 21 and verse 22 as the psalmists begins to praise God for the of the certainty of deliverance. Walter Brueggemann states that something dramatic happens between these verses. He believes that it was "an outward visible act by some member of the community, mediating the fresh move of Yahweh to the speaker."

Today, as we remember the passion of Jesus, let us consider Pemberton's suggestion that lament was a regular part of Jesus' ministry. What would Jesus lament today? Consider Brueggemann's suggestion that the change in tone occurring between verse 21 and 22 was related to an outward visible act by some member of the community. What tangible acts that point presence and the promise of Yahweh have you witnessed, have you been a part of?

## ***Closing Prayer***

### ***Lectio Divina***

***Invite God to speak to you through the words of scripture***

***Read Psalm 22 slowly and mindfully. Consider what words, phrases come to mind***

***Reread the Psalm. Consider what images come to mind and what feelings you experience.***

***Reread the Psalm. What is God saying to you? How do these words apply to your life today***



<sup>1</sup> I take refuge in you, Lord.

Please never let me be put to shame.

Rescue me by your righteousness!

<sup>2</sup> Listen closely to me!

Deliver me quickly;  
 be a rock that protects me;  
 be a strong fortress that saves me!

<sup>3</sup> You are definitely my rock and my fortress.

Guide me and lead me for the sake of your good name!

<sup>4</sup> Get me out of this net that's been set for me

because you are my protective fortress.

<sup>5</sup> I entrust my spirit into your hands; you, Lord, God of faithfulness—you have saved me.

<sup>6</sup> I hate those who embrace what is completely worthless.

I myself trust the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> I rejoice and celebrate in your faithful love

because you saw my suffering—you were intimately acquainted with my deep distress. <sup>8</sup>You didn't hand me over to the enemy, but set my feet in wide-open spaces.

<sup>9</sup> Have mercy on me, Lord, because I'm depressed.

My vision fails because of my grief, as do my spirit and my body.

<sup>10</sup> My life is consumed with sadness; my years are consumed with groaning.

Strength fails me because of my suffering; my bones dry up.





- <sup>11</sup> I'm a joke to all my enemies,  
still worse to my neighbors.  
I scare my friends,  
and whoever sees me in the street  
runs away!
- <sup>12</sup> I am forgotten, like I'm dead,  
completely out of mind;  
I am like a piece of pottery, de-  
stroyed.
- <sup>13</sup> Yes, I've heard all the gossiping,  
terror all around;  
so many gang up together against  
me,  
they plan to take my life!
- <sup>14</sup> But me? I trust you, Lord!  
I affirm, "You are my God."
- <sup>15</sup> My future is in your hands.  
Don't hand me over to my ene-  
mies,  
to all who are out to get me!
- <sup>16</sup> Shine your face on your servant;  
save me by your faithful love!

## Reflection

Robert Sardello, author and co-founder of the School of Spiritual Psychology, writes that silence is "not something that we do, nor is it a personal capacity. We become quiet and by doing so the door to Silence opens." He states silence takes us into the heart. In the Bible, the heart is the core of who we are as human beings. It is the seat of the will, the intellect, and the emotions. God searches the heart and see the essence, the character of who one is. God's law is written on the heart because to change the heart is to transform the person.

Sardello suggests that silence of the heart allows us to connect more deeply with the three aspects of heart spirituality.

According to Sardello these aspects, service, healing, and worship, constitute reverence and require total engagement of body, soul, and spirit. As we connect with our hearts the images, the feelings are transformed into actions. As we hold another person in the silence of the heart, the distance between us and that other person dissipates. We are with them.

As a friend, a family member, and a pastor, I have sat with families as they have accompanied a someone in the last moments of life. In being there I have learned that while grief comes in different ways, there is one common response. At some point, voices become hushed and silence descends on the room.

I can imagine a similar thing occurring on the day following the crucifixion. The disciples, numb and fearful gathered together in the upper room. Conversations of what should we do begin and then dwindle off as the stark reality of we don't know emerge. Conversations of do you remember when Jesus said that and when Jesus did this, bring a momentary laugh or perhaps a tear. Conversations quieting and the door to silence opening.

Holy Saturday invites us into that silence. It challenges us to enter our hearts to encounter Jesus there. To connect with the three aspects of the heart, service, healing, and worship.

## Closing Prayer

*Earlier, you were invited to pray using centering prayer. Today, I invite you to quiet yourself and create a space for silence by praying using this practice again. Find a comfortable, quiet spot where you are free from distractions. Sit, breathe, and begin to repeat your prayer word. Practice for three to five minutes and build from there.*



# About the Author

The Reverend Dr. Beth Rupe served congregations in Kentucky while attending Lexington Theological Seminary and in Illinois following her ordination. Prior to going to seminary, Beth was an Outpatient Therapist at a community mental health center. She received a BS with honors in Psychology from Western Illinois University (1988) and a MS in Clinical/ Community Mental Health Psychology from Western Illinois University (1990). Beth received her MDiv from Lexington Theological Seminary (2002). She was ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by the Christian Church in Illinois Wisconsin. She received her DMin from Lexington Theological Seminary (2014). Her focus of study was liturgical renewal particularly the importance of lament in Disciples Worship.

Beth is the Interim Minister for Disciples Women for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in IL and WI (CCIW). She serves as McLean Livingston Regional Elder and is a member of the CCIW Ethic's Investigation Team and the CCIW Pro-Reconciliation Anti-Racism Committee/ Team.

Beth served as the Worship Coordinator for the 2010 International Disciples Women's Ministries (IDWM) Quadrennial that was held in Greensboro, North Carolina. She has written Advent, Easter, and Week of the Laity Resources for the Office of Christian Education of the Department of Homeland Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Special Offering Resources for the Reconciliation Office of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and has published book reviews in *The Lexington Theological Seminary Quarterly*. Writing for *Just Women* the publication of the International Disciples Women's Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Beth published a bible study in 2016, provided quarterly study guides for the publication, and authored the column Prayer Stations which considered women of the church and their diverse prayer practices.

Beth is married to Mark. They have two children, Sarah (Aaron) and Benjamin, and two granddaughters Chloe and Emilia Her hobbies include reading, knitting, quilting and listening to music. She also enjoys cooking, especially for her family and friends. She finds strength in contemplative prayer and feels called by God to work for justice. She spent much of 2020 binge watching Netflix, Hulu and HBO Max, reading, and longing to travel and be with family and friends.



Beth and Mark  
and their 2-year-old labradoodle,  
Angus.

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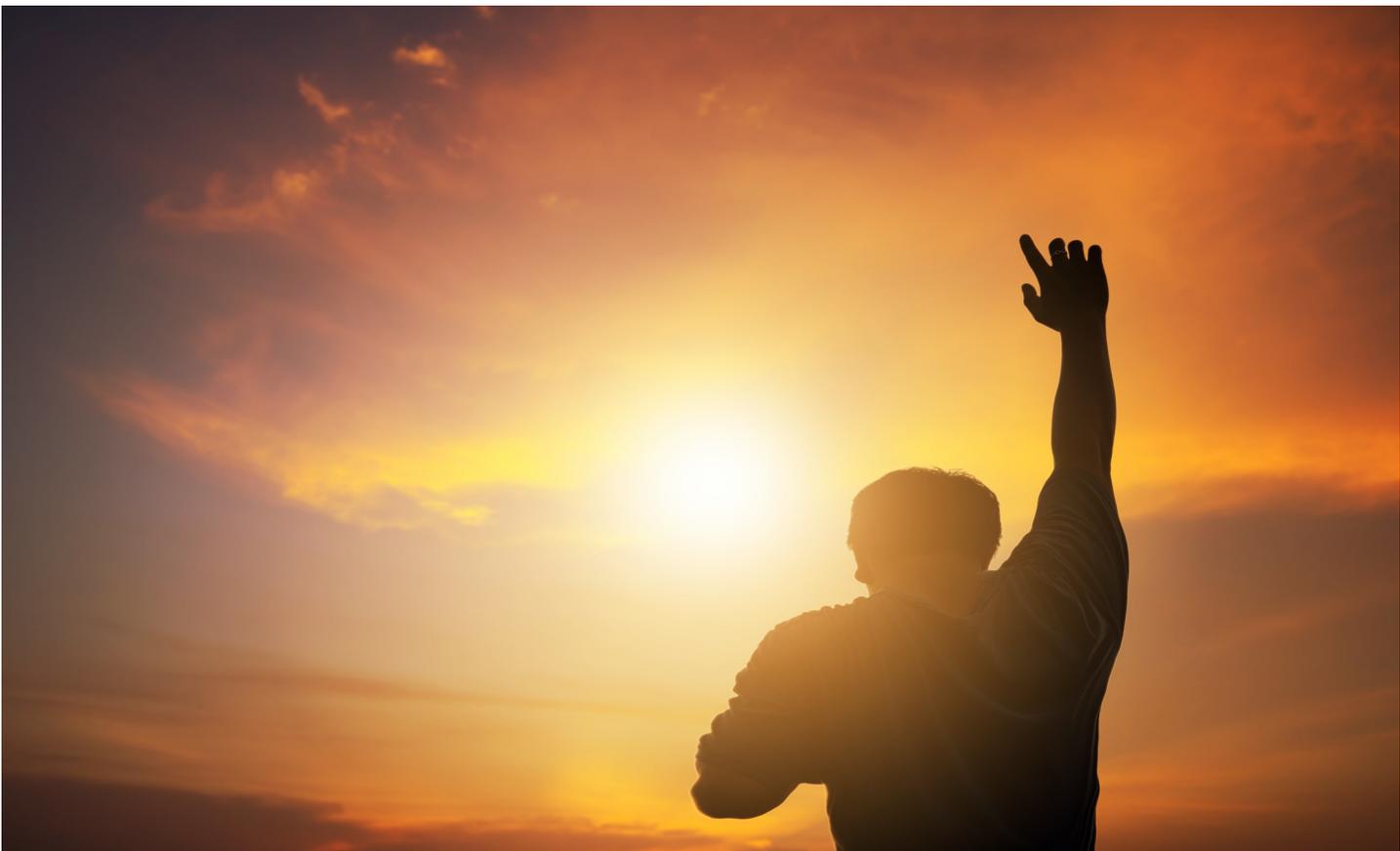
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## Holy Week

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