

Week of the Laity

January 16-22, 2022

Unforeseen Glory: A Journey with Simon of Cyrene



Week of the Laity Worship Affirmation

Prelude (instrumental): "You Are So Beautiful" ¹ by Bradley Joseph

Leader: Together, we affirm God's gifts and strength in the church through lay leadership. We charge our volunteer and staff laity with the hope and instruction of Christ we find in the Beatitudes. When Jesus saw the crowd, he went up the mountain, sat down, and encouraged the disciples.

Blessed are the emptied, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the humble, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for God's justification, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are those striving in compassion, for they will see God.
Blessed are those who work for God's peace, for they will be called children of God.

Congregation: As the church, we offer gratitude for our lay leaders and pray they are committed, comforting, humble, thirsty, merciful, and compassionate laborers for God.

Leader: Lay leaders, please stand and extend your hands toward the altar at this time. For those watching at home, extend your hands toward the screen as I extend my hands toward you. (pause)

Jesus said many things to the disciples, but one of his first instructions was, "Follow me." Are you here today willing to follow Jesus with intentional service?

Lay Leaders: Yes, I will follow Jesus with intentional service.

Leader: As the hands and feet of Christ, will you be committed, comforting, humble, merciful, compassionate, and mindful of God's ever-present Spirit in your ministry to the church and community?

Lay Leaders: Yes, I will be committed, comforting, humble, merciful, compassionate, and mindful of God's ever-present Spirit in my ministry to the church and community.

Congregation: Lay Leaders of _____ Christian Church, we thank you for following Jesus in word and deed. We love you to life. You are so beautiful to us!

(If there are towels or other tangible symbols given to laity, distribute them at this time)

Leader: Let us make room for the call of God, entering a time of silent prayer while the music plays.

Song of Commitment: "Make Room," by Jonathan McReynolds²

All: **God, Our Creator and Champion, empower us in your good work on earth. Amen.**

¹ Bradley Joseph, "You Are So Beautiful (Instrumental Solo Piano)," YouTube by CDbaby, April 6, 2016, YouTube video, 4:12, <https://youtu.be/Kc0ziWAK-jl>.

² Jonathan McReynolds, "Make Room," Essential Music Publishing, February 6, 2019, YouTube video, 10:11, <https://youtu.be/SiyqcP-kCKE>.

Week of the Laity

Unforeseen Glory: A Journey with Simon of Cyrene

We celebrate with you the love and strength of laity across the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It is our hope you will gather in safe ways to affirm lay leaders and edify their ministry in the world. As you start the year, these resources will aid you in doing so thoughtfully.

Whether simple or grand, we aim to support your efforts with the following Week of the Laity 2022 resources:

- Worship Affirmation & Charge (in both written and PowerPoint format)
- Spiritual Exploration of Simon of Cyrene
- Scripture in Pictures Meditation Activity
- [45-minute Video Study with Rev. Dr. Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder on Simon of Cyrene](#)

Drawn from the Catholic Church, *laity* is a descriptor for ministers not formally ordained by their church tradition. Without pause, most of us can name a layperson or several lay people who were formative in our faith. They are the ones who create bridges between pastoral and congregational vision—teachers, camp leaders, kitchen staff, musicians, ushers, deacons, elders, worship leaders, psalmists, nurses, facility managers, nursery attendants, parking volunteers, and on and on. The laity are the circulatory system of the church. Covering each limb of the Body, lay leaders show up in every place God calls for transformative love.

The whole church is called to show up in new ways that nurture connection and prioritize communal needs. For this reason, be encouraged to “think about what we do, not about what we say we do.”³ This time, while studying for ministry, remember that Jesus and Simon of Cyrene were two lay people carrying a cross. Together, let us discover glory— “the brightness of God’s presence.”⁴

“To remember together is the highest form of communion.” – bell hooks⁵

³ Loren Mead, “Power and Ownership in the Church: Clericalism, Institutional Authority, and Lay Participation,” InTrust Magazine, Spring 1999, <https://intrust.org/Magazine/Issues/Spring-1999/Power-and-ownership-in-the-church>.

⁴Euan, Fry, “Translating ‘Glory’ in the New Testament,” The Bible Translator 27, no.4 (October 1976): 422-27, <https://doi.org/10.117/026009437602700405>.

⁵ bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 16.

Week of the Laity

Unforeseen Glory: A Journey with Simon of Cyrene

“As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.” – Matthew 27:32 NRSV

“They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.” – Mark 15:21 NRSV

“As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. – Luke 23:26 NRSV

Simon of Cyrene was a North African man we find supporting the enfleshed church in Matthew 27, Mark 15, and Luke 23. We only know him because of what he did for another. Not of his convenience, but by demand, Simon literally carried out what was necessary for both his well-being and the endurance of Jesus. Simon received a task, a task some would call thankless except the one who needed his support the most. He had no impressive title. Multiple passages of scripture were not written about him. His glory was unforeseen and selfless.

Simon’s home, the city of Cyrene, was a flourishing place. Comparable to a budding Alexandria, there was no physical need for its residents to look outside of Cyrene for resources. Spiritual needs are likely what brought Simon to Jerusalem. For him to have traveled to Jerusalem would have required means and time. Scripture tells us Simon was a parent of at least two children. His freedom to travel during Passover does not discount any responsibilities he may have had. Simon’s movement, up until the time of his forced aid to Jesus, was planned. Being known today as a patron saint, by more than 1.3 billion people, was unforeseen.

We do not serve to be known, nor do we seek God’s glory for ourselves. Nonetheless, we are carriers of God’s glory in clear and mysterious ways. “To know God is to experience the acts of God in the concrete affairs and relationships of people, liberating the weak and the helpless from pain and humiliation...there is no truth about Yahweh unless it is the truth of freedom.”⁶

Our faith is a yoke to intentional care for immediate needs made visible around us. Simon lost a degree of his own agency (the capacity to act independently; free will to choose) accompanying one who had less agency than him. He likely did not know it was the incarnate glory of God.

⁶ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 57.

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Unforeseen Glory: A Journey with Simon of Cyrene

In this journey with Simon, we do see a lack of regard for his personhood. Rev. Dr. Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, New Testament scholar and author, will teach on this more in her video lesson included in this resource. When pushed by the empire to carry the cross, there were no thoughts of glory in the Roman's demands. In fact, quite the opposite was true. The exploitation of Simon was less about him and more about their making a further spectacle of Jesus. In the unfortunate instances of disregard for lay leaders and lay leaders' disregard for service, it is a spiritual crisis much more than a personal one. "All revelatory events point beyond themselves to God, the One who is ultimate, and do not claim ultimacy in themselves. No self-glorifying revelatory event would undergo the scandal of being disclosed in humiliation and crucifixion."⁷ Understanding Simon's plight is to understand the plight of Jesus.

- What does it illustrate to carry a load you did not create, and to do so with compassion?
- What of our own agency must we suspend to journey as Simon of Cyrene?
- What does it mean to lead without government or religious authority?

In no way is this reflection designed to celebrate the abuse of an African bystander. It is never right to force anyone into labor. Nonetheless, like the kidnapped and enslaved Africans brought to this country, God was with the oppressed without orchestrating or affirming their oppression. **God has no hand in abuse.** This declaration is meant to challenge problematic clichés like, "Everything happens for a reason" and "God has a purpose for everything." No, God's glory is just unforeseen. We learned from the prophet Isaiah, God's ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts.

Simon was thrust into Jesus' brokenness—the brokenness of the enfleshed church. "In his flesh, in his body, Jesus knew refugee status, occupation and colonization, social regulation and control."⁸ God's church still faces what Jesus and Simon faced. It will take every one of us to overcome these realities. We are invited to journey in Simon's vulnerability. One that takes, "not courage, but weakness to induce affirmation of ourselves as a part"⁹ in holding the cross.

⁷ Clark Williamson, *Way of Blessing Way of Life: A Christian Theology* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1999), 59.

⁸ M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 58.

⁹ Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 89.

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Critical Presence and Gifts for Ministry

We do not know how Simon of Cyrene made a living. For whatever conveniences they offer, we do not have a spiritual gift box to put him in. There is one thing we can attribute to him with confidence; he was a *critical presence* in the life of Jesus—the enfleshed church.

“Critical presence is a criteria used by our [Division of Overseas Ministries](#) in appointing missionaries. Critical presence is the act of accompanying our partners (being there, visible) who are ministering to and with people who are in life threatening situations. We read in the 10th chapter of John, verse 10, that “The thief comes only to steal and destroy; I came that they may have life and have life abundantly.” God’s mission is concerned with the fullness of human life for those who have lost it or have never had it. There is always the physical threat to life; however, there are many forces that threaten life, such as diseases, oppression of various types, including economic, political, racial, gender, and yes, even religion. These are the open wounds Christ is calling us to minister to and with as we accompany our partners around the world. *Critical presence* cannot be addressed in the abstract.”¹⁰

When we are in pain or lacking what we need, nothing short of *critical presence* will alter our experience of pain or lack. A key principle of our [Disciples’ identity](#) is that “we affirm the priesthood of all believers, rejoicing in the gifts of the Holy Spirit—which include the gift of leadership that God has given for the common good.”¹¹ We mention this for clarity around the question of whose “job” it is to lead. It is everyone’s job to lead in a particular way. Like us, Simon could have resisted the command to serve (though at a cost), but he stepped forward. Furthermore, it is inconceivable for a church to be a collective *critical presence* in their community without mobilized, competent, and empowered laity who embrace leadership.

[Take eight minutes and hear from Ronald Heifetz, Founder of the Center for Public Leadership.](#)¹² Make a note of his remarks that peaked your engagement or understanding of leadership. Now, let us continue a practical discussion of gifts for ministry. Most of us are familiar with passages [1 Corinthians 12](#), and [Romans 12](#). We have heard them recited or seen them in spiritual gift assessment tools. Look at the gifts in written form, and then think more deeply about what they may look like or feel like as a *critical presence* in our churches and communities.

¹⁰ Julia Brown Karimu, “Critical Presence,” Global Ministries Board Meeting, November 5, 2003.

¹¹ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), “Disciples of Christ Identity Statement and Principles,” 2007, <https://disciples.org/our-identity/identity-statement-and-principles/>.

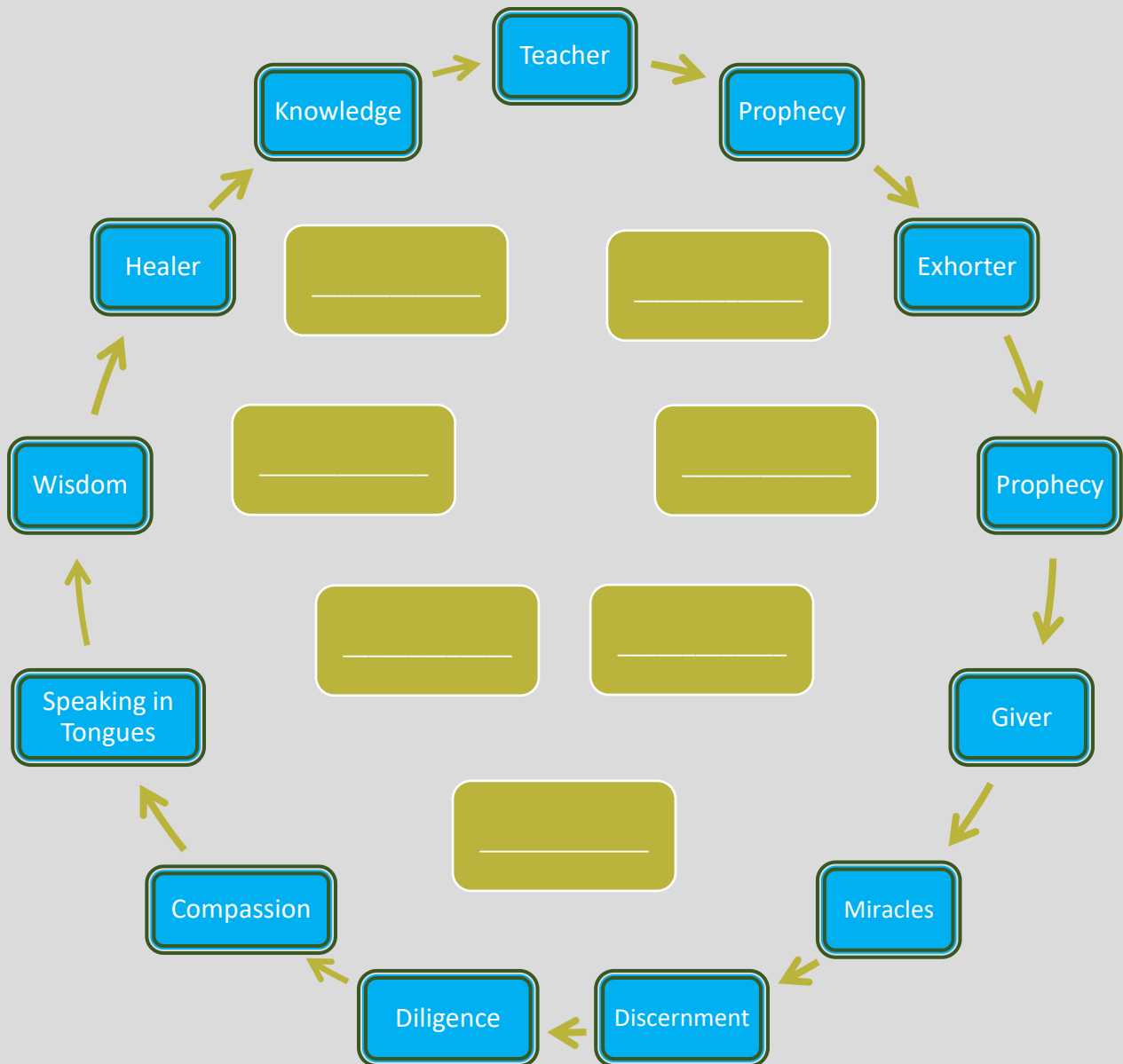
¹² Ronald Heifetz, “On Leadership,” The Brainwaves Video Anthology, April 5, 2019, YouTube video, 8:21, <https://youtu.be/ioocNc-HvTs>.

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Critical Presence & Gifts for Ministry

Fill in the empty spaces with revelations (modern-day understandings) of what it might look like to be a *critical presence*, as laity, today.

>>>> Consider these biblical gifts through a pandemic lens. <<<<



Week of the Laity

Unforeseen Glory Meditations: Scripture in Pictures

Spend five minutes with each image and passage of scripture. Note your thoughts.



Eccles 3:1-15



Prov 1:1-5



Matt 9:2-8



Matt 6:5-21



Isa 26:16-19



Rom 12:15-16



2 Tim 2:14-19



Luke 24: 22-32



1 Cor 12:4-11

Week of the Laity

Simon of Cyrene: Scholar-Practitioner Reflections



Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder

- *45-minute Video Study*
- *10-minute Segments*
- *Biblical exegesis*
- *Three (3) discussion questions*
- *[Click here & enjoy at your pace](#)*

Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder is a noted scholar, versatile speaker, and prolific author. She is the first woman and first Black person to serve as Vice President of Academic Affairs/Academic Dean at Chicago Theological Seminary. She is also the first Black woman promoted to Full Professor at CTS. Dr. Crowder earned a Bachelor of Science degree summa cum laude in Speech Pathology/Audiology from Howard University; a Master of Divinity degree from United Theological Seminary, and Master of Arts and Ph.D. degrees in Religion (New Testament) from Vanderbilt University.

Dr. Crowder was a Fund for Theological Education Dissertation Fellow, Wabash Center for Teaching Fellow, and Louisville Institute Summer Grant recipient. She contributed to *The Covenant Bible Study and Video Series*, *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, and most recently *Parenting as Spiritual Practice and Source for Theology*. She served on the Editorial Boards of *ON Scripture*, *e-Feminist Studies of Religion*, and *Feasting on the Gospels* and blogs about pop culture for *Church Anew* and formerly *The Huffington Post* and *Inside in Higher Education*. Her article on yoga can be found in the *Disciples Women* magazine. Dr. Crowder was a keynote speaker for the 2015 Festival of Faiths, 2017 Hampton University Ministers' Conference and inducted in the Morehouse College Collegium of Scholars (2017). Her published dissertation is *Simon of Cyrene: A Case of Roman Conscriptio*, and her second book is *When Momma Speaks: The Bible and Motherhood From a Womanist Perspective*. Dr. Crowder's latest writing project is *Are You for Real? Imposter Syndrome, Theology, and Society*.

Dr. Crowder is an ordained National Baptist minister with Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) standing. She is married to Rev. Dr. William E. Crowder, Jr. They have two sons who keep this #WomanistMomma in the know.

Learn more via @stepbcrowder (Twitter) or www.drsbuckhanonc.com .

Week of the Laity

Unforeseen Glory: Closing Prayer

God of Creation and Care,
YOU have given us much to learn and critical work to do.
Our neighbors are hurting and some of us are also afflicted.
We struggle to see a path ahead that is clear of eggshells and broken glass.
“What shall we then say to these things?”
YOU are for us. YOU intercede for us.
We witness your love in the meeting of needs.
This great love has persuaded us; there is nothing that can separate us from YOU.
We offer praise for your embrace we experience through laity near and far.
Your Spirit is our guide.
Your Spirit is refreshment this week and always.
We have waded in your *Living Water*.
Now, fill us with faithful resolve to be the hands and feet of Jesus.
In the name of one helped by Simon, we pray.
Amen.



For additional resources, please contact:

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