

2024 Lenten Reflections

Audacity

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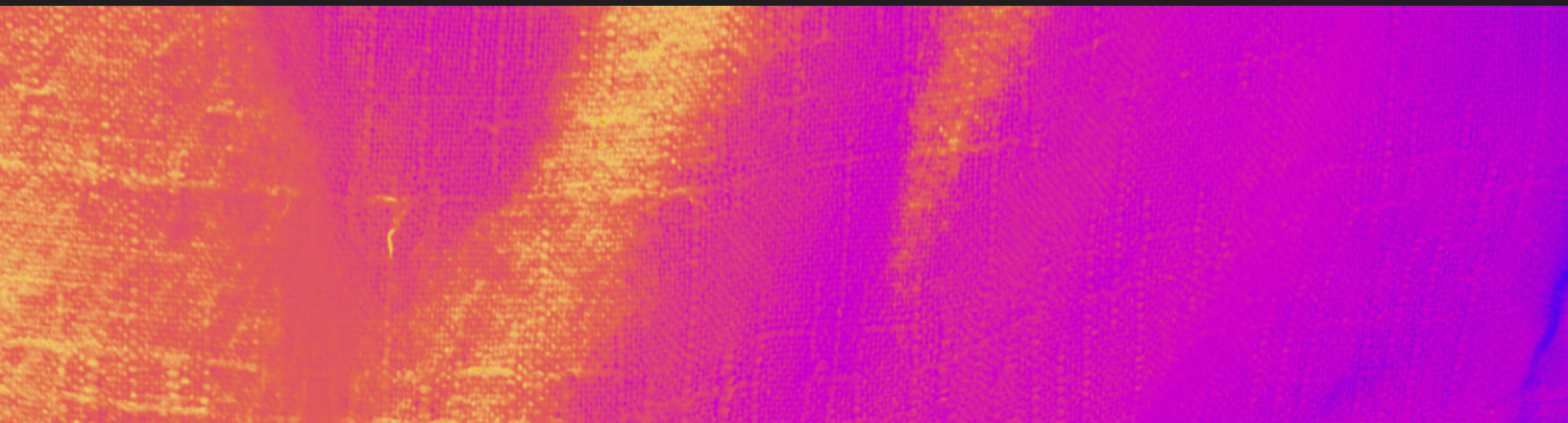
2024 Lenten Reflections **Audacity**

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),
We literally call ourselves followers of Jesus. What a bold assertion! I'm here for it, if we have the will to do it. To walk with the one whom God sent into the world to heal, justify, redeem, teach, liberate, and defy the status quo, we cannot minimize or sterilize the Jesus in our Christology. Mary's son unashamedly had a heart for people living on the margins of society.

Jesus had the audacity to be different in a world where fitting in came with real perks and delusions of peace. He spent time listening, caring, and empowering those without the hope of Glory. He preached to stir up the "it is what it is" attitudes inside and outside of temples. The boldness of Jesus changed lives and is still changing lives with the help of those who follow him today.

We hope you take time to slow down and enjoy this resource, jot down your pressing thoughts, and pray with a sincere heart. Most importantly, we hope you take away audacity as a viable attribute of Christian faith in these perilous times where hate has a megaphone.

Rev. Monique Crain Spells
Christian Education and Faith Formation
Disciples Home Missions



God of the Dust:

An Ash Wednesday Prayer

Cole Arthur Riley

God of the Dust,

We praise you for being a Maker who is capable of dreaming up glory from dirt. As we journey through this Lenten season, help us to remember our origin story and find ourselves deeply grounded in bodies made from the lowest part of creation, yet alive with gloried breath from the divine. We confess that we do not always apprehend the humility of our own beginnings. Let the memory of it not serve to demean our dignity but affirm it, as we come to see ourselves as bearing your image and breath.

And as we remember our genesis, let us hold in tenderness the reality of our own mortality, that we would be people prepared to contend with the tragedy of death and decay. Let this be a season where we become uniquely attuned to the agonies of sin, trauma, and alienation— allowing our interior burdens to be held in a holy lament. Grant us the courage to tell the truth of all that haunts us so that we might be purged of every lie that leads us into bondage. And as we face the truths of who we are, let our own frailties guide us deeper still into the hope of You, that we would believe that You who bore life from dust, can do so once again.

Glory to the One who harnesses beauty from ash. We look to you.

Amen

“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness...”

Matthew 4:1

*I enter the wilderness of this season
and release.....*

This image shows a full page of a document template. It features a series of evenly spaced, horizontal black lines across the entire width of the page, creating a ruled effect similar to notebook paper. The background is a solid light gray color. There are no margins, text, or other markings present.

Signature

Date

Faithful Meditations

Monique Crain Spellss

Week One

*Divine
communication is
at work in me.*

Week Two

*Jesus was a
vessel of change
and so am I.*

Week Three

*My resistance to
injustice is holy. I
stand for good in
God's strength.*

Week Four

*Jesus was not afraid
of questions, not of
asking or answering
questions.*

Week Five

*Friendship covers
ground we cannot
cover alone.*

Week Six

*Jesus ministered
within healing
proximity to pain.*

What Jesus Needs from Us

Alan Dicken

Caroline Hamilton-Arnold

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

~Matthew 5:13-16 NRSV

In this familiar passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we, the collective receivers of the message, are tasked with being salt and light. This charge from Christ is recounted in hymns, Bible studies, and sermons and any Christ-follower worth their salt (pun intended) is aware of this particular passage from the book of Matthew. That familiarity can make us gloss over the power and relevance of the challenge therein.

The provocation, in this text, comes from the imperative Christ impels upon the listeners, and us as modern readers to be salt that retains its taste and light that is not hidden. This means not only being flavorful in the ways we enjoy or a lamp with the soft ambient glow of comfort. We are not asked to be the seasalt on top of a chocolate chip cookie. We are not asked to be the dimmer switch adjusting the brightness to fit a particular mood or to mask the cracks and messes. We are asked to be the fullness of the salt and the brightest of the light.

How often is our faithful engagement with the world limited by our own levels of comfort? In fact, this selective saltiness is the very risk that Jesus is trying to make us aware of. Not merely an ingredient for flavoring, in Jesus' time, salt also served as a preservative and antiseptic, preventing rot and infection. If we are salty only in ways that are expected and in recipes that are acceptable, we limit the potency of our call. The lampstand gives light to the whole house, and not just the rooms that are well decorated, cozy, and ready for guests.

Do we spend more time and resources making action statements instead of taking action? Do we shine a spotlight on the good works of the church and fail to let the light reveal what we'd rather keep hidden in the shadows? If we are honest with ourselves, we often limit our salt and limit our light. In doing so, we fall short of the very ideal to which Christ compels us.

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As the relief, refugee, and sustainable development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Week of Compassion connects Disciples, and our resources, to places of need around the world. When Week of Compassion grants and volunteers help a survivor in Western KY get back home in the wake of the tornadoes, that is some good sea salt on a caramel treat. Are we audacious enough to also be the antiseptic salt that treats the wounds of racism in this country that lead to climate disasters impacting Black, brown, and indigenous communities disproportionately?

We have seen new light shining upon the plight of refugees as Ukrainian war evacuees are looking to find safety as our new neighbors. This is a nice warm glowing lamp that we proudly display in our front window. Can we also shine the brighter light on the needs of refugee populations from Syria, Nicaragua, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other places with less news attention, less public sympathy, and more Black and brown refugees? Can we interrogate our immigration policies that align with white supremacy and lead to these problems?

Yes, through Week of Compassion, Disciples work to be salt and light in ways that empower the church to transform suffering into hope. Beyond that, if we are honest with the ways that we are called to live into these inherent identities that Christ places on our lives, then we also need to be salt that cleans us of our comfort with the systems of oppression that lead to so many of these disasters in the first place. We need to be the light that shines in the whole house, including our spare rooms filled with the clutter of our complacency in global climates that contribute to displacement, migration, and lack of security for all of God's children.

In her commentary on this passage, Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis writes, "...Our default setting leans toward comfort, conformity, and complacency when what Jesus really needs from us is to be the salt and the light—the salt that just might sting and the light that just might expose what we do not want to see."

What Jesus Needs from Us

Alan Dicken

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And so, in this Lenten season, may we be provoked by Christ's words to be salt full of flavor and cleansing power and the brightest light of truth in all the ways that we work to transform the world. Even if it stings or we have to shield our eyes for a moment, it is better than being trampled underfoot and ultimately losing our brilliance as followers of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Caroline Hamilton-Arnold's passion is connecting people with the creative, re-creative power of the living God through stories and faithful action, and she believes a life of faith is about becoming part of God's ongoing work in the world. As the Associate Director for Domestic Disaster Response, Caroline helps Disciples in the United States and Canada prepare for and respond to natural disasters. She holds a Master of Divinity from Claremont School of Theology and a BA from Texas Christian University.



Rev. Alan Dicken has always believed that the church was much more than just a building or what happens on Sunday morning. At its best, the church is an action, bringing compassion, justice, and wholeness to those who need it most. As the Associate Director for Immigrant and Refugee Response, Alan helps equip and empower congregations for responding quickly to refugee and immigrant crises that may occur.

Intentional Preparation

Fiyori Kidane

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "The wedding attendants cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. Similarly, no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins, but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins." ~Mark 2:18-22

I have been sitting and wrestling with this passage, trying to figure out a way to approach Jesus' message concisely. I believe you could write an entire book on this passage alone. There is much to unpack in this brief exchange between Jesus and the unnamed crowd.

I will focus on two points: The intentionality of fasting and making room for transformation.

When the people asked Jesus why his disciples did not fast, Jesus answered through a series of metaphors. Fasting is an action that can connect your spiritual self with your physical body and put yourself into better alignment with God. In this moment in the text, the disciples did not need to fast to connect with Jesus; they could speak to him directly. However, Jesus alludes to his inevitable fate where he will leave the Earth, and acknowledges that the disciples and followers of Jesus will need to practice fasting again. He does not shame the Pharisees or John's disciples for fasting as a spiritual practice. Still, he is saying that the intentions or motivations behind their fast may not bring them in alignment with God.

The Pharisees and John's disciples were fasting to be closer to God and yet could not see the Messiah standing before them. What is the intention behind your fast this Lenten season? There are many different reasons why people choose to fast. Some people fast to seek clarity or understanding from God. Others use it to discipline their bodies and exercise control over themselves. Or maybe it can be an opportunity to release and renew oneself.

Intentional Preparation

Fiyori Kidane

When you fast intending to align yourself closer to God, you give yourself room to be transformed by the experience.

When you fast with a specific intention, you typically come out of that experience with a renewed sense of purpose and clarity. What happens after your fast is complete? You might feel energized, transformed, and ready to face the world. However, the world around you might not have the space for the person you have become. Verse 22 states, “Similarly, no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins, but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.” (NRSVUE). As you are fasting, praying, and aligning yourself closer to God this Lenten season, are you also preparing for the transformation you want to exist and thrive in beyond Lent? Is there room in your community and relationships for you to grow spiritually? Or will they burst? Are you prepared for the possibility that you may outgrow some aspects of your life and will need to seek something new that aligns with your transformed self?

I pray that this Lenten season, you take the time to listen to God and prepare yourself to welcome the person you are becoming.

Fiyori Kidane, People-to-People Coordinator at Global Ministries since Feb 2023, has served the Christian Church with dedication since 2018. Holding a BA in Religion and Sociology from TCU (Texas Christian University, 2019), she interned at Perichoresis post-graduation, aiding migrant, and refugee communities under the Evangelical Church of Greece. Fiyori’s present focus, via the People-to-People office, is fostering stronger connections between the global Church and local communities, continuing her commitment to meaningful engagement.



Morality, Legality, and Love

Natasha Robinson

One Sabbath, while Jesus was going through some grain fields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful[c] on the Sabbath?" Jesus answered, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? How he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?" Then he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." ~Luke 6:1-5 NRSV

When reflecting upon this passage, I am reminded of the relationship between morality and legality, in Biblical times and also in our contemporary times. Historically, what is decided as moral (arguably what is right at the time) is then infused into law, becoming the guiding legal principles of our societies. While morality can sometimes be synonymous with what is right, morality often changes with the times and with the opinions of people. It then follows that laws are created based upon the wavering morals of those who misappropriate power as opposed to those who are called to speak truth to power.

This relationship of morality and legality can be seen in several of our countries' legal cases and decisions. Traditionally, laws are made as a result of what people entrenched in moral power believe to be morally true for them at the time. In 1857, the United States Supreme Court ruled that Dred Scott, a Black man who sued his slaveholder for emancipation, had no "rights which a White man was bound to respect" in the landmark case Scott v. Sandford. As a result, the legal precedent to keep slavery legalized arose from the moral belief that Blacks were not human and had no rights whatsoever for anyone to uphold, protect, and respect.

These moral truths continued through the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court case of Plessy v. Ferguson which upheld the legalization of segregation against all Blacks in the United States. It wasn't until the 1954 case of Brown v. Board of Education I that the United States Supreme Court declared racial segregation to be unconstitutional. In 1955, Brown v. Board of Education II provided the opportunities for states to implement desegregation. However, in the states that morally believed Blacks to be inferior to Whites, their implementation of the law was overridden by their moral superiority and thus their discretion of abiding by the law resulted in an exponential amount of morally and legally atrocious crimes and unconscionable behaviors.

Morality, Legality, and Love

Natasha Robinson

In today's text found in Luke 6:1-5, I submit that we find the Pharisees also engaged in weaponizing their morals as a mandate for Jesus and his disciples to follow the law. Their reliance upon and their selective adherence to the law of the Sabbath had little to do with the Sabbath itself. Rather, it had to do with launching a pre-emptive theological strike of their morals (what they believed to be right at the time) against the man named Jesus who interrogated their existing morals and their laws, challenging them instead to change their hearts.

Jesus' response to the Pharisees about the ability to fulfill a basic human need of hunger is a call to agency and a call to action. If in fact hunger is an individual and communal need that goes ignored, which is really the "sin": ignoring the need and obeying the laws of the Sabbath or being the Sabbath, ignoring the law and feeding those who are hungry?

Sometimes, during Lent, while we may have the right intentions, our rules and regulations about God get in the way of a divinely aligned relationship with God. We disproportionately focus on what we are to "give up" when we are called by Christ to instead consider what to "take on".

During the Lenten season, to whom are we aligned? A consecrated Jesus or a constructed Jesus? A Jesus who affirms the sacredness of our everyday needs, calling upon us to meet the needs of each other? Or a Jesus that fits our morals and our laws? I would submit we give up our own convenient constructions of Jesus and take on the consecrated Jesus who recognizes our needs as human and divine, even at the eradication of (im)morally infused laws and systems.

What I am inviting us to do this Lenten season is to examine our morals and their relationship to our laws. What do our morals say about us and our relationship to our individual and collective constitutions? Do we use our laws to weaponize our beliefs against particular people? Or can we instead create sustainable and accessible liberation for ourselves and the entire collective? The latter is the truest essence of the Sabbath as we rest and resist indeed and in deed.

Natasha Robinson, J.D.. (aka "Grace's Mommy") is the creator and curator of Legaleaze Please! LLC, an online legal education business dedicated to decoding, deconstructing, and demystifying legal language for lifelong learners of the law. Her twenty-five-year commitment to legal education is evidenced in her being a criminal justice professor, high school educator, and retired criminal defense attorney. Dr. Robinson's recent accomplishments include being a guest legal analyst on CourtTV and a member of the Illinois Torture and Relief Commission. Dr. Robinson has earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Iowa, Chicago State University, and the University of Wisconsin Law School. Dr. Robinson is a ministry partner of The Gathering, A Womanist Church, in Dallas, Texas.



Concluding Prayer & Music

**“I have done what was mine to
do. May the Lord teach you to do
what is yours.”**

Francis of Assisi

Worship Music by Jerry Kim

https://youtu.be/Pt-ng_103CU?si=UGe4zWk_VQQCKJ5L

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