



## Lenten Lectionary Reflections - Year B

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### Lent 1, Feb. 21

**Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15**

In Gen. 9:8-17

The writer of Genesis highlights God's Covenant with Noah and family several times in this passage offering a bow in the sky as a reminder of God's promise of life after the story of the devastating floods that engulfed the earth. The ark, a floating adventure park, was a practice ground for compassion and care. Noah did not limit his care for only his own livelihood or his family's, if so he would have quickly found himself bobbing aimlessly in a tomb of creatures hopelessly clawing for survival. Noah's work and relationship must have extended to the animals. The ark was less an escape vehicle and more of a school of compassion. Dr. Norman Wirzba wisely writes "The ark represents much more than an escape vessel. It is a laboratory of sorts, a messy, exhausting and illuminating experiment in which Noah learns the lessons of care and compassion, attention and responsibility."

The covenant offered by God that followed the grieving and the flood highlighted the extended circle of care and compassion. The covenant and relationship ripples well beyond Noah or immediate family into all of creation, *every living creature*, birds, domestic animals, every animal. This relationship is repeated a total of 6 times in this short pericope.

in verse 12, between me, you and every living creature",

verse 13 "between me and the earth",

verse 15 "between me, you and every living creature",

verse 16 "between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" and finally in verse 17 "between me and all flesh that is on the earth"

The emphasis suggests that God's presence and faithfulness in this story extends to creation and invites us, the Church and God's people to respond and honor our relationship with one another, with God and all of Creation.

As we explore Lent and God's grace in the midst of a wilderness of H2O or sand may we be reminded of the expansive nature of God's compassion inclusive of self, our family as well as all of creation.

In Mark 1:9-15

Preachers and teachers may want to highlight that the Spirit of God appeared like a bird of creation or that Jesus was with the wild beasts when the angels waited on him. As we as humans are better able to hear our name as beloved of God we are more able to care for others, particularly those most vulnerable to disaster, ill health, poverty or oppression.

### Action

This may be an opportunity to offer socially distanced group hikes or awe experiences.

### Resources

Norman Wirzba, "Caring and working: An agrarian perspective: Lessons in creatureliness," *The Christian Century* (Sept. 22, 1999), <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-07/caring-and-working>

## Lent 2, Feb 28

**Genesis 17:1-7,15-16; Psalm 22:23-31; Rom 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38**

Mark 8:31-38

During the second Sunday of Lent, like Peter, we are invited to explore what it means to follow Jesus. The passage in Mark reads as an affront to the consumeristic and on-demand culture in which Christianity is complicit. Jesus describes the pathway to discipleship with self denial, with selfless pursuit of the characteristics and Gospel of Jesus Christ. This difficult path following Jesus offers a glimpse into some of the most challenging questions of human existence. What is the meaning of life and death? What is a good life? How do humans retain their soul?

When considering creation care, climate change and faithful living alongside this text it may be helpful to offer reminders of practices of simplicity, contemplative prayer and discipleship. Inviting one another into self awareness and the soul work of a life examined and well lived. For what are we as individuals, congregations or nations exchanging for our souls? Honest conversations about mortality, mental health and prayerful action may be appropriate when facing this text. You may also consider how parts of our communities have “gained the whole world” and ask “at what cost”. The depletion of finite resources of our planet, rapid extinction rates of non human species, the devastation of Covid-19, racial oppression and climate change are looming large in hearts and minds. What does it mean to face the present and future hardships with integrity, wisdom, compassion and courage? What does it mean to retain our soul in the midst of not only crisis, but in the midst of a crisis *while following Jesus*?

How can we foster a resilient soul while supporting resilient congregations and communities?

### Action

Invite community to explore the prayer of examen as a way to notice ways that God’s Spirit is flourishing in your life and where Spirit may be inhibited.

This same prayer can be explored when looking at a community, meeting, or worship service. It can also be shared as a way to pray in a particular place (urban, forested or rural).

### Resources

A version of the Prayer of Examen

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/how-can-i-pray/>

Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).

Ray Waddle “African American churches offer lessons in resilience,” *The Tennessean* (June 25, 2015), <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2015/06/26/african-american-churches-offer-lessons-resilience/29303801/>

## Lent 3, March 7

### Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

The covenant between God and God's people (represented here by the foundational laws of the 10 commandments) is about right relationships between people, God, and creation. When Jesus drives out the moneychangers from the temple, he rebukes the ways institutionalism and greed work to harm people and disrupt faithful worship. Jesus disrupts standard practices at the Temple complex, suggesting that something about these transactions represents a barrier to the ways of righteousness, preventing the recollection of the people's Holy covenant as was intended at the Temple. Perhaps the barrier was extortionist practices in which sellers and money changers gouging people at the Temple for Passover. Perhaps it was a prevailing attitude prioritizing commerce over covenant.

We would do well to reflect on what systems and relationships in our world create similar barriers, especially those that are implicitly or explicitly propped up by our religious institutions. Where are our institutions, systems, and actions preventing people from being in right relationship with God, each other, and creation. This might include the ways systemic racism manifests in marginalized communities facing greater risk from climate change and climate disasters and the perpetuation of racial and economic inequalities in our current models of disaster recovery and nonprofit assistance. As Rev. Willie D. Francois III writes: "A corporatization of faith, institutionalization of the sacred and hierarchizing the Holy work in service of commodifying the bodies of non-white and poor people."

It may seem impossible (or at least impractical) to resist unjust systems, but the epistle reading for this week reminds us that "God has made foolishness of the wisdom of the world."

#### Action

Make a "relationship web," starting from yourself and working outward, write or illustrate your connections to others, God, and creation. You can make your web as simple or elaborate as you like, with simple pencil and paper or a variety of colors and materials; make it as organized or freeform as suits you. As you chart each connection, pray for right and thriving relationships.

#### Resources

Rev. Willie D. Francois III, National Civil Rights Museum, "March 4, 2018; 3rd Sunday of Lent," *MLK50 Social Justice Lenten Lectionary*.

[https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2462/mlk50\\_social\\_justice\\_lenten\\_lectionary.pdf?1518137366584](https://assets.speakcdn.com/assets/2462/mlk50_social_justice_lenten_lectionary.pdf?1518137366584)

Somini Sengupta, "This Is Inequity at the Boiling Point," *The New York Times* (Aug. 7, 2020).

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/08/06/climate/climate-change-inequality-heat.html>

Gretchen Frazee, "How natural disasters can increase inequality," *PBS News Hour* (April 11, 2019).

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/making-sense/how-natural-disasters-can-increase-inequality>

## Lent 4, March 14

### Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

The passages for the fourth Sunday of Lent present the community of faith with a choice between two ways: a way of death and a way of life. These two ways correspond to the contrasts between sinfulness and righteousness through God's grace and to faithlessness and faithfulness.

In Numbers, the account of Moses lifting snakes in the wilderness to provide healing is one of several "grumbling" stories, in which the people are becoming disgruntled with their situation in the wilderness and begin to complain against God, idealizing their former life in Egypt, and must be reminded of their covenant with God. Besides offering a possible glimpse into the ritual practices and totemic traditions of the early Israelites, this brief incident underscores the choice between life and death. The healing that occurs recalls to mind God's faithfulness and promise of provision for the people. In the beginning of the narrative, in their grumbling, the people have forgotten the covenant God has made with them and they experience (literal) death. Yet, in reorienting themselves toward God, in the act of orienting toward the lifted snakes as God instructs, they experience (renewed) life.

In the gospel passage, Jesus references this event in the collective imagination and memory with himself in the role of the one lifted up to bring healing; in so doing, he invites people to recall the covenants of God and experience abundant life. Once again, the people are instructed to orient themselves toward God and thus choose the way of life. To wholly spiritualize this text (focusing on an eternal *afterlife*) is to cheapen the witness of the *incarnation* and the care God has for abundant, boundless life in this creation. The account in Numbers involves both bodily healing from the bites of snakes *and* spiritual restoration as the people recommit to their relationship with God. Similarly, the ministry of Jesus consistently holds in tandem bodily concerns with spiritual ones. Spiritualizing the *life* Jesus offers has dangerous consequences as it becomes a rationale for dismissing or minimizing the existential dangers of climate change and its current life-threatening impacts.

The imagery in the Psalm further reinforces the choice between the ways of death and life, as verses 33-36 contrast fertile and desert ground as a result of righteousness and wickedness.

#### Action

Consider what orients you in your surroundings--landmarks (natural and constructed), a GPS or compass in your car, the setting sun. Now consider what orients you in your faith. What people, practices, scriptures, hymns, or other resources keep the covenant of God before you and keep you turning toward Jesus? As you go through your week, let the physical markers that orient you serve to remind you to choose the way of abundant life.

#### Resources

"Environment and Climate Change: Climate change and environmental degradation undermine the rights of every child." *UNICEF* <https://www.unicef.org/environment-and-climate-change>

## **Lent 5, March 21**

### **Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33**

In John 12, we are called by Christ to a new covenant. He gives us the image of a single grain of wheat dying in order to sprout into a new plant and in so doing bear much fruit. As Americans we participate in a culture and lifestyle that is not sustainable and is not healthy, we have broken our covenant to God. We have many habits (fast food, cheap meat, driving (and flying) in excess, and wasting energy) that need regular scrutinizing. What needs to die in our lives so that we might live more closely with Christ? We have all the information and wisdom that we need, God's law is written on our hearts, to love one another as God first loved us. It is that simple, it is that hard.

In order to renew our covenant with God, we must confess our sins. Psalm 51 gives us confessional language that we can pray to a merciful God. We know the work that we must do to save our planet is beyond any one person, one community or one nation. We need the power of God, who is the God of all people and who claims us all as children (Hebrews. 5.5-10).

#### **Action**

Plant a church or community garden or expand the garden you have. Encourage your congregation to go at least one day a week or one meal a day without meat.

#### **Resources**

Arcadia Power, *Supports Wind and Solar Energy for Individuals and Houses of Worship*

[https://www.arcadia.com/lp-partner/?utm\\_source=greenchalice&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=greenchaliceacc15&promo=greenchaliceacc15](https://www.arcadia.com/lp-partner/?utm_source=greenchalice&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=greenchaliceacc15&promo=greenchaliceacc15)

Unety, a marketplace that connects congregations with both financial capital and vetted contractors for projects that reduce carbon emissions and increase energy efficiency.

<https://blessedtomorrow.org/resources/blessed-tomorrow-launches-unety-program-for-houses-of-worship/>

## **Lent 6, March 28**

**Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Mark 11:1-11; Isaiah 50:4-9a;  
Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47**

The Palm/Passion texts are well known. Invite hearers to listen with new ears and enter these texts in unexpected ways.

In Mark 11, Jesus went against the Roman power structures by riding a donkey into Jerusalem opposite from where Pilate entered behind great announcements of his arrival, riding among strong horses and soldiers with the support of the public including religious leaders. As we make personal and congregational changes to go carbon neutral, we go against the power structures, including some religious leaders. From installing and advocating for solar, wind, and geothermal energy to biking, eliminating single-use plastics, and changing how we eat, we go against the consumerist, materialistic culture.

In Mark 14, Jesus allowed the woman with the alabaster jar to care for him. Whether we are dealing with anxiety related to the pandemic, racism, eco-grief or any other suffering, self-care and self-compassion is a must. One of the most effective ways to lower stress and anxiety is to get out into the wild regularly. From taking a hike or walk in the woods, kayaking, or cycling to sitting in a quiet place under a tree regularly reduces stress and cares for our spirits. Touch, yoga, meditation, talking with a trusted friend or counselor are also important ways we care for ourselves. We cannot give what we do not have.

Judas is forever known for betraying Christ and for his greed. Our collective greed and betrayal of Christ has led to the degradation of the earth resulting in the current climate crisis. The costs of the climate catastrophe are numerous and include the deaths of entire species of plants and animals, great suffering and death of humans, and loss of the land of entire communities. We can be of the same mind as Christ (Phil.2.5-11) by preparing our congregations and communities for climate-related disasters and going carbon neutral. Our congregations can be sanctuaries and models for how to care for our neighbors and for God's good earth.

### **Action**

Start on the path to carbon neutrality. Prepare your congregation for disasters.

### **Resources**

Green Chalice Creation Care, Carbon Neutrality Resources: [www.greenchalice.org](http://www.greenchalice.org)

Carbon Calculator: <https://www.coolcongregations.org/calculators/>

Week of Compassion Disaster Preparedness Resources: [www.weekofcompassion.org/prepare](http://www.weekofcompassion.org/prepare)

# Additional Resources

Green Chalice—Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): [www.greenchalice.org](http://www.greenchalice.org)

Week of Compassion—Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): [www.weekofcompassion.org](http://www.weekofcompassion.org)

Creation Care Alliance: <https://Creationcarealliance.org>

Blessed Tomorrow (Interfaith Program):

**Guide to Carbon Neutrality for Houses of Worship:**

<https://blessedtomorrow.org/moving-forward-guide/>

**Unety Program:**

<https://blessedtomorrow.org/resources/blessed-tomorrow-launches-unety-program-for-houses-of-worship/>

**Carbon Offsets, Uganda:** This project makes and distributes cookstoves that reduce charcoal or wood use for cooking by over 50%. It cuts carbon emissions and deforestation while providing life-changing health benefits and cost savings to local families.

<https://www.cooleffect.org/content/ecoamerica#:~:text=The%20Blessed%20Tomorrow%20Carbon%20Offset,stoves%20at%20the%20same%20time.>

Interfaith Power and Light, **Carbon Calculator for Houses of Worship:**

<https://www.coolcongregations.org/calculators/>

Arcadia Power, **Supports Wind and Solar Energy for Individuals and Houses of Worship:**

[https://www.arcadia.com/lp-partner/?utm\\_source=greenchalice&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=greenchaliceacc15&promo=greenchaliceacc15](https://www.arcadia.com/lp-partner/?utm_source=greenchalice&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=greenchaliceacc15&promo=greenchaliceacc15)

Creation Justice Ministries (Ecumenical), **Advocacy Action Page:**

<https://www.creationjustice.org/action.html>

FloodFactor, Flood Risk and Mitigation Tool: [www.floodfactor.com](http://www.floodfactor.com)

Ready.Gov, Risk Assessment and Disaster Preparation Tools: [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD): [www.nvoad.org](http://www.nvoad.org)

**State/Territory Networks:** <https://www.nvoad.org/state-territory-voad/>

**Preparedness Materials Inventory:**

<https://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/Preparedness-Materials-Inventory.pdf>