



**Baptism and Collaboration in the Body of Christ:
A 2024 Lenten Exploration for the Dioceses
of Vermont and Massachusetts**

The Rev. adwoa Wilson, editor

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An Invitation to a Holy Lent

IT IS OFTEN WISE, at the beginning of a journey, to look to the end. So, imagine with me the Easter Vigil, lighting the New Fire and rehearsing salvation history in the Hebrew Scripture record, being sprinkled with water, ringing of bells, the blink of adjustment to bright new sanctuary lights, and the first jubilant cry of that word of praise we have just set aside for a season.

After all this, the first words to greet us as we step into the new life of Easter are somewhat bewildering: “Do you not know,” says St. Paul, “that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death (Romans 6:3)?” As we look to the end, we are reminded of the beginning: *Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.*

Yet, one significant thing has changed along the way: Baptism.

In the waters of baptism, the pain and weakness that are constant reminders of our ultimate mortality are enfolded in Christ’s death, a death that drips with abundant life. Rising from the baptismal font, our own mortality also drips with new possibilities, “so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Romans 6:4–5).” What amazing and mysterious Good News it is that our own frailty is radiant with God’s glory through the life and death and life again of Jesus. Amazing!

Do you believe this?

Do you believe this when you recognize something has changed in your body’s capacity between last year and this one? Do you believe this as the dust settles and we discover the unfamiliar new normal of a post-COVID era? Do you believe this as the composition, size, and ‘relevance’ of your congregation changes? Where is Jesus calling you to lean in and be renewed in confidence and hope that though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, all your struggle is united in a resurrection like his?

A collaboration between the Dioceses of Vermont and Massachusetts, this devotional was created as an aid to help you on your Lenten journey to refresh and strengthen your awareness of baptismal life in Christ. In its pages, we will walk together through the various daily eucharistic readings of the season and the six vows made at baptism.¹ Our daily guides will be fellow disciples, lay and ordained, from our two dioceses (and two rogue volunteers from New Hampshire.) Over fifty of them have shared their own experience, theology, poetry, art, and grapplings in the reflections you will read. Thus, the devotional itself is a reflection of the greater life we have together in collaboration as the Body of Christ than we have as individuals, isolated parishes, or even distinct dioceses. There are many ways to engage with this volume. All that matters is that you engage!

My hope is that as you use this resource week by week, you will discover something that draws you more deeply into the sorrows from which we so often draw back and the radiant, baptismal life that always awaits us on the other side.

¹ *The vow used for Easter week was proposed for trial use at General Convention in 2018 after some years of previous deliberation. It does not appear in any current version of the Book of Common Prayer.*



HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

THIS DEVOTIONAL covers the days between Ash Wednesday and the Second Sunday of Easter. Each week is organized around one baptismal vow, which is explored in a global sense by the author. The daily reflections that follow on Monday through Saturday explore the vow through the lens of a particular scripture, picked from the daily Eucharistic readings of the season.

Every day will include several elements: a vow, the Collect of the Day from Lesser Feasts and Fasts, a Scripture reading (except on Sundays), and a reflection. The most robust engagement with the material would progress through the page in the order presented. You might read the baptismal question aloud and respond, “I will with God’s help.” Then, you are always encouraged to pray the collect of the day. These collects have a progressive character that moves from the acknowledgment of weakness to the reliance on grace and culminating in Holy Week, and then prayers for the Church in Easter season. Many of us are not aware of the daily collects of Lent. They are printed here so that you may experience the progression.

Next, read the Scripture. Through the Scripture passage, God may say something to you about the vow, your own need and hopes, or anything else. Give the Spirit an opportunity to touch you directly by reading the Scripture *before* you read the reflection. What word or phrase shimmers or stings for you? What do you see, taste, smell, touch, and hear as you enter into the reading?

Then, take in the reflection. Each one is an offering from a fellow disciple and a meditation on the theme. Notice where you are drawn in and where you draw back. Notice what causes your body to open and what causes it to contract. What is God saying to you *through your fellow disciple*?

Finally, close in prayer. Your prayer may be a confession, a petition, a gratitude, adoration, silence, or a conversation. Just take some time, perhaps with a journal, to rest in what you have received before moving to the next thing. No matter what else you do, *pray for the person who wrote the reflection, their worship context and their diocese*. Ask God to bless them throughout this day and give thanks for God’s work in their life and their generosity to us. Perhaps you might pray for them before you go to bed as well.

Throughout these pages you will also find many styles of art that are offered as visual reflections on the season and the themes of the booklet. Many artists have artist’s statements that are included (in part) in the appendix at the end. Themselves faithful disciples, their words often serve as rich reflections, worthy of meditation on their own. You may wish to take time with each image in a soft gaze, noticing what God may be saying through a less verbal part of your brain!



GRATITUDE AND A WORD ABOUT ART

THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE to thank in a resource of this scope. First, I offer overflowing gratitude to our bishops. The theme of Baptism and Collaboration in the Body of Christ emerged from the visionary leadership of our diocesan bishops — Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown (Vermont) and Bishop Alan Gates (Massachusetts)

CONTINUED

An Invitation to a Holy Lent CONTINUED

— over the last few years and the values they have hoped to instill in us. Bishop Shannon has long been encouraging us to get out of the boat and follow Jesus as we experiment with new forms of baptismal discipleship. Bishop Alan has set a vision for collaboration that was the theme of the 2023 Massachusetts convention. They, along with Assisting Bishop Carol Gallagher (Massachusetts), have all contributed Sunday articles to help frame our explorations.

I also give thanks for the over fifty authors, without whom this devotional would not exist. They have been generous with the experience and gracious in receiving feedback. Reading their work and partnering with them toward final drafts has been the greatest delight of this project. I look forward to rediscovering each of them again in the days ahead. I give thanks to each of you for your baptismal hope and the richness of your tapestry together.

I also give thanks to the many people who have supported the practical work of this project. Three people deserve particular attention. First, Ms. Martha Gardner, Missioner for Networking and Formation (Massachusetts) for her support recruiting authors and helping to put some infrastructure under this collaboration. Second, Ms. Susan Kochinskas, who has contributed countless in-kind hours of graphic design to make this booklet as beautiful as possible. Her companionship through the minutia of that process was a real treasure. Third, Dr. Jeanie Crosby, for her keen editorial eye. Thank you, all!

Finally, a word about the artwork. Many artists have been collaborators in this project. Some of them are disciples of our dioceses, from a bishop to a monk to a nurse. Others are people who make their living as artists in the world. Each one regards art as a ministry. They create it joyfully and offer it to us as sacred ministry. *At the same time*, many of them rely on its proceeds and our goodwill for their livelihood. The artists, their websites (where applicable), and the license terms all appear in the appendix at the end of this volume. There you will also find evocative artist statements, articles, and other remarks from many contributors about the work they've offered. As I progress in ministry, I become increasingly aware of how undervalued and often misused visual and audio arts are. *Please pray for the artists whose work you encounter here and please respect their offering by not reproducing their work for any other purpose.* For your covenant of respect and for their work among us, I give thanks!

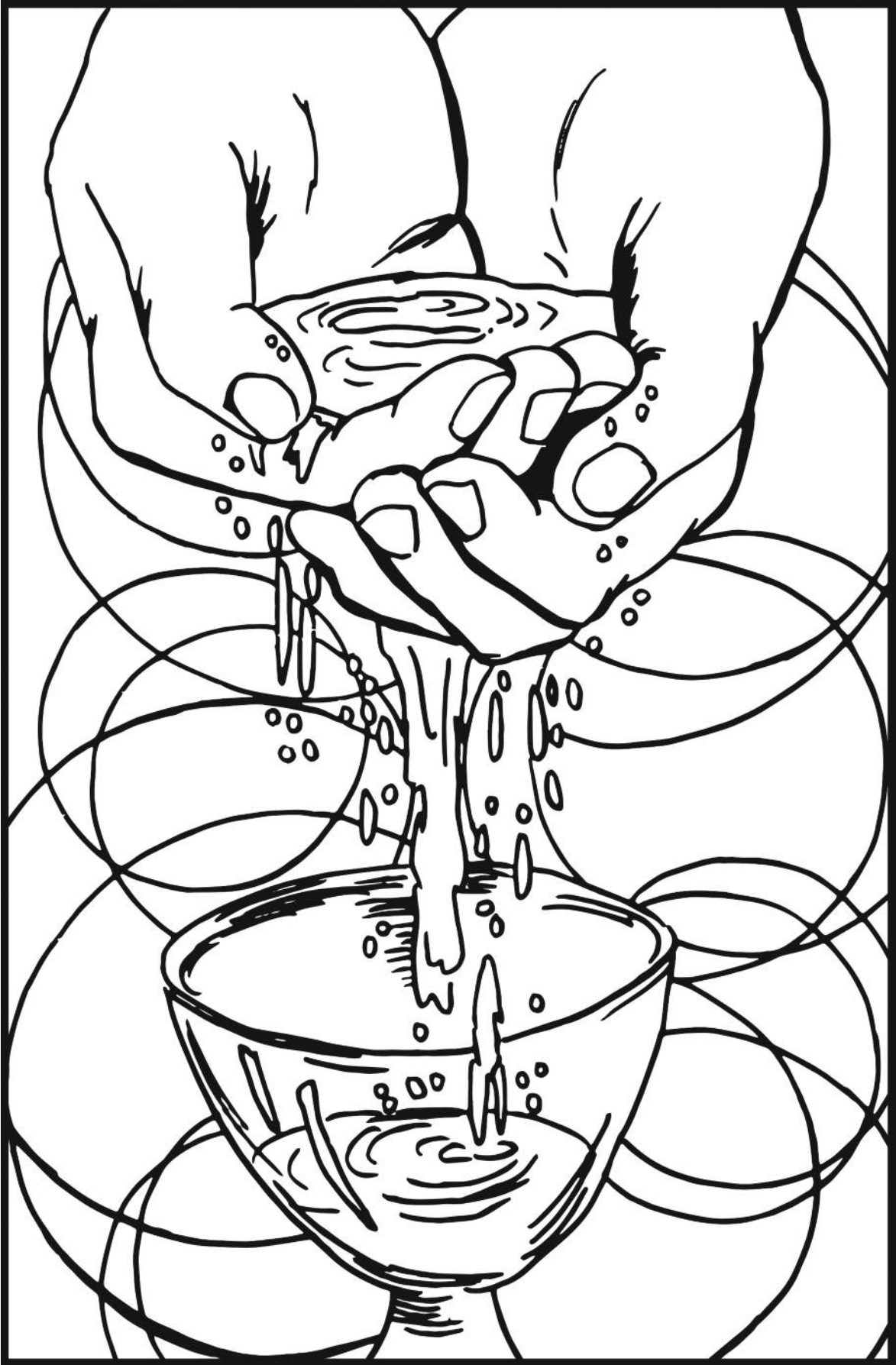
God bless and keep you in the days ahead.

The Rev. adwoa Wilson, ObJN, Volume Editor
Director of the Communities for Spiritual Vitality,
The Episcopal Diocese of Vermont
(in Collaboration with Massachusetts)
Vicar for Discipleship and Formation, Vermont

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OVERFLOWING © LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

Lent, a Baptismal Season

COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Mark 1:9–13



IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to miss the extreme contrast this year: “Happy Valentine’s Day”; “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return”! Love and death celebrated together this year as we begin the Lenten pilgrimage. But perhaps there is something for us in the incongruity.

Recently, the Rev. Canon Walter Brownridge preached a sermon on the Baptism of Jesus and noted that just as Jesus is proclaimed as the Beloved, so we who are baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection are beloved. Canon Walter said that to make this point, he addresses every candidate for baptism as “Beloved.”

In the lesson from Mark appointed for this day, that same Spirit that descends on the Beloved immediately drove him out into the wilderness for forty days. You and I as well, with ashes on our foreheads, are now driven into a wilderness, that Biblical place of preparation and renewal, for forty days. The liturgy for the day is somber and the Collect of the Day bids us worthily to lament our sins and acknowledge our wretchedness.

Yet as incongruous as it might seem, we are Beloved. Our plea this day is for God’s mercy to make in us new and contrite hearts. Here it is that we begin this pilgrimage: in the extreme contrast of our lives. A Lenten question I will ponder, and I invite you to ponder as well, is, “How am I beloved?”

The Rev. Earl Kooperkamp
Rector, The Church of the Good Shepherd
Barre, VT

Lent, a Baptismal Season

COLLECT

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 4:1–11

HISTORICALLY AND CULTURALLY, Lent is a season of contrition. It is a time when it's easy to acquiesce to what our brains always gaslight us into thinking: that we are not worthy and that we owe it to Christ to be without.

But what if we instead saw Lent as an opportunity for renewal? A season in which we simultaneously lean in closer to hear God's voice in the wilderness, while also letting the Holy Spirit reconnect us with the joy of our calling.

In Luke's story of Christ being tempted in the desert, we can easily see ourselves. How often has life rendered us so tired that we frantically start looking for the most efficient route out of the darkness?

But even in his exhaustion, Christ resists the urge to leave the discomfort of the moment. I can imagine him walking among the desert rhubarb and wormwood, his hands moving across the leaves, meditating on the sweetness of the world around him as his hunger for relief grows.

So, we too, are capable of grounding ourselves in the chaos.

How can we use this time to live into our holy humanness? For we are dust, but we are also magical, and so that makes us miraculous.

This season, I wonder what life would be like if we looked for beauty in our discipline. What if, for example, we quite literally pause in the abundance of the snowflakes and the buried bulbs and know that God is near.

For we are baptized to be joyous in our works, that each of us is chosen again and again, every time the sun rises and sets, we are called by name. Will you listen?

Rhea Rhanno
The Cathedral Church of St. Paul
Boston, MA

Lent, A Baptismal Season

COLLECT

Support us, O Lord, with your gracious favor through the fast we have begun; that as we observe it by bodily self-denial, so we may fulfill it with inner sincerity of heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Kings 5:1–15b

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I was on the phone with a few seminary classmates from years old with whom I have kept in touch. It was Advent and one of my friends (a pastor) was talking about all the things she had to do. At the end of her litany of tasks, she said, “And then I have to make Christmas happen.” After a pause in the conversation, another friend chimed in, “I think Jesus will come regardless. You don’t need to make Christmas happen.”

How often do we feel like it is up to us to “make things happen?”

Naaman is a powerful man — a wealthy warrior with a strong relationship with the king of Aram. He is used to making things happen, winning battles, fixing problems. Yet in today’s scripture, he encounters an enemy he cannot overcome by his own strength, wealth and power: leprosy.

When he makes the journey to Israel to seek the prophet who might be able to heal him, he brings silver, gold, clothing and an entourage of horses and chariots. But when the prophet Elisha does not even come out to meet him and his impressive regalia, but only asked him to wash in the Jordan seven times, he is deeply insulted. He is ready for a battle, he is ready for payment, he is ready to make the healing happen. In his fury he begins to return home defeated, until his wise servant says, “Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘Wash, and be clean?’”

Grace is not easy for us to accept. We would rather work for it, achieve it, control it. But this is not how grace works.

As you go about your life this Lent, notice times when you feel like it is all up to you to “make things happen.” Can you soften into the knowledge that all you need to do is accept God’s healing grace? Lent is a baptismal journey, almost seven weeks of being washed in the waters of grace. Can you embrace God’s grace?

The Rev. Mary Lindquist
Rector, St. Michael’s Episcopal Church
Brattleboro, VT

Lent, Baptismal Season

COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth your right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 86:1–11

PSALM 86:1–11 GIVES VOICE to the cries of our hearts — the days and nights when we find ourselves weighed down, overwhelmed, uncertain and weary beyond words. The Psalmist is confident enough to ask for the Holy One to lean in and listen to the pain, to preserve and uphold the spirit, and even boldly asks that God might gladden the heart. The Psalm then gives some justification for why God might do this — God is good, steadfast, forgiving and abounding in love. Then In verse 11, a request is made that the ways of God might be made known so the writer can have an undivided heart.

Our prayer of confession is one that gives us the opportunity to express how “we have not loved God with our whole hearts.” The ache and longing we have to be wholehearted is at the center of Sociologist Brené Brown’s research. In her book *The Gifts of Imperfection* she writes:

“Wholehearted living is about engaging with our lives from a place of worthiness. It means cultivating the courage, compassion and connection to wake up in the morning and think, ‘No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough.’ It’s going to bed at night thinking, ‘Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn’t change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging.”

Moving through the season of Lent, we begin by remembering that we have been lovingly created of the earth and will return to it. The fullness of this circle is in itself wholehearted, an encompassing understanding that all of who we are is safely held. Our baptisms are reminders of the blessing of water and how it procures growth and cleansing and healing of the undivided heart.

Caim is a Celtic prayer practice of encircling — using the arm or imagination to create a ring of protection around the body, mind and spirit of the one for whom we pray (including ourselves). We can say or sing, “Circle me Lord, keep protection near and danger afar. Circle me, Lord, keep hope within, keep doubt without. Circle me Lord, keep peace within, keep evil out.” As we pray, we can increase the circle in our prayer to include those in our communities and in the universe, and then reverse the circles to come closer to us and to our hearts.

The Rev. Dr. Dawna Wall
Massachusetts





OPEN TABLE © LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

THE ANSWER IS ALWAYS, “I will with God’s help”. And, it is always easier said than done. We answer honestly and faithfully at the time, yet things distract us, weigh on us, and often draw us away. Jesus understood temptation and all human frailties, living just as we do in imperfect and challenged human frames. In our Indigenous traditions, we are always aware that our journey in life and faith is impossible without the community of support. Jesus surrounded himself with disciples, men and women, who added their wisdom and their challenges to his ministry. Walking the way of Jesus, walking the way of love, we are reminded we are never alone, our ancestors prayed for us to be here, our community walks with us, and we are loved and blessed even when we stumble and fall.

The bishop asks the gathering, “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?” And everyone replies, “We will!” We are invited in this season of Lent to remember we are never alone, always surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, and we can seek the support of our communities of faith. There are always people who will listen to us, pray for us, walk with us and help us on our journey of faith. Imperfect people, as we all are, can help us deepen our faith, recover from our pain, and carry us into new relationship with others and with our Creator.

We Episcopalians are people of the book or rather books. The Bible and the Prayer Book most prominently. The words we say and read are important. And we are a people of covenants both ancient and modern. When we are baptized and confirmed, we, along with everyone else present, repeat the words, the promises, the vows. We make them by ourselves, and in community. We are never alone in the responses we give. As we reflect together this Lent, we come together in preparation again to renew our promises at the Great Vigil of Easter and throughout the season. Our renewing is more than remembering, it is putting words into action.

Right Rev. Dr. Carol Gallagher
Assisting Bishop
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully increase in us your gifts of holy discipline, in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; that our lives may be directed to the fulfilling of your most gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Leviticus 19:1–2, 11–18

I'M ON HOLD with technical support. “All of our agents are currently assisting other customers. Please hold and the next available agent will be with you as soon as possible.” After hearing this message for the eighth time — and the crackly generic music that plays in between each repetition — I’m more than over it. “No thank you, I have better things to do with my life today!” I respond. The voice doesn’t answer me. Rude. I embrace that the call will take a while, so I turn to this devotional prompt with hope that something good will come of my precious time. “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people,” (Leviticus 19:18). I laugh. The Lord is testing me!

Leading impatient people must have been an arduous task for Moses. I imagine that he too longed for the waiting and the wandering to hurry up and get to the finish line already. Moses could not fix what the people yearned for him to solve. So, despite the guidance of God’s timing, Moses took the heat.

The phone call lasted 33 minutes. I spoke with two different people and they placed me on hold five times. The technicians will be here in two days. And if they come at the very end of that two-hour window like they did last time? May I remember this moment and laugh merrily along with God’s help.

How does your faith lead you through times of waiting?

The Rev. Sarah Ginolfi
Priest-in-Charge, Trinity Church
Rutland, VT

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Grant to your people, Lord, grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only true God; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matt 6:7–15

RECENTLY, AFTER A LONG DAY when each of us in my family had several sticky wickets to sort out at home, school, and work, I skipped our usual table grace at dinner and heard myself pray:

*Lord, thank you for this day, and thank you that it's over.
Give us your blessing, because we need it.
Amen.*

Not the most eloquent prayer that's ever been prayed, but definitely pithy and honest! But maybe eloquence is not the point when it comes to prayer. St. Benedict wrote in the 6th century: Prayer should be brief and pure. He meant "pure" in the sense of authentic and from the heart. Matthew says that pithy and honest, brief and pure, is all that God wants from our prayers. Jesus teaches his disciples to:

- Recognize that we already have God's attention
- Recognize that God already knows our needs
- Call on God as Parent and Source of Life
- Pray for what God wants for us and all Creation
- Ask for what we need, for forgiveness, and for deliverance

And that's the whole recipe! Combine these ingredients, and then repeat, repeat, repeat. Jesus knew his disciples were anxious about getting prayer 'right.' He wanted to assure them that prayer is not a performance to be evaluated, but a loving relationship to be savored. Prayer is a limitless source of grace that can be accessed anywhere, anytime — and simple, heartfelt prayer is indeed enough.

What would pithy and honest, brief and pure prayer look like in your daily life?

The Rev. Dr. Regina Walton
Harvard Divinity School
Massachusetts

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Bless us, O God, in this holy season, in which our hearts seek your help and healing; and so purify us by your discipline that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jonah 3:1–10

THIS FIRST OF OUR BAPTISMAL PROMISES invites us to live in community. We promise, like the first Apostles, to teach the way of Jesus' life by our example. This includes sharing the Eucharist (breaking of bread) and maintaining a relationship with God through prayer. This communication with God includes both listening and speaking; sometimes on behalf of others, and sometimes for ourselves. We promise with God's help to engage in these regular Christian practices. As we grow into maturity as members of the Body of Christ (the Church as a living organism), we discover that it is God's Spirit and desire, not our own discipline, that enable us to fulfill this vow.

In the passage from Jonah, we hear Jonah proclaiming a warning to the people of Nineveh that their city will be overthrown. Jonah's *obedience* to God's request and the inhabitants' *hearing* of the warning, "from the least to the greatest", led to a response. They made a choice to turn toward their already known practice of fasting, putting on sackcloth, and sitting in ashes. Even the King, when hearing this does the same, and then makes a proclamation to the entire city to fast, put on sackcloth and sit in ashes. God's response to the people's actions of repentance was to turn from the initial plan and not to destroy the city.

Our life in Christian community and our communal and individual practices of fellowship, worship, and prayer strengthen our relationship with God and each other, even when we may not be aware of that. It also invites others to "come and see" how and why we continue in both community and outreach.

Questions for reflection:

1. How might I strengthen my commitment to this Baptismal promise?
2. When concerned about my own behaviors or faced with fear, suffering, or despair, or an experience of joy, do I turn to my Christian practices of community, worship, and prayer for redirection, stability, and/or thanksgiving?

Mrs. Kathie Clarke, ObjN
Parishioner, St. John's Church
Walpole, NH

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Strengthen us, O Lord, by your grace, that in your might we may overcome all spiritual enemies, and with pure hearts serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matt 7:7–12

THERE ARE TWO MESSAGES in this baptismal vow and Matthew 7:7–12. One is about prayer. The vow asks us will we continue to pray, and Matthew 7:7–11 is about praying earnestly and not being insincere, because God isn't insincere. When we ask God, our parent, for something, the Deity provides. Thus, "Everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

My mother was from a letter-writing generation. She wrote many letters to family and friends. In the letters she wrote to me, she closed each one with "Pray well, Mother." All those years I didn't realize that she was imparting Matthew 7:7–11. Pray well, pray earnestly, pray sincerely, and God will provide.

The second message is about our relationship with our neighbor. The Baptismal Vow asks will we continue in fellowship. Relatedly, the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) is explicitly about our relationships with our neighbor. Howard Thurman, African American theologian who served as dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University and Marsh Chapel at Boston University, noted that in the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus defines "neighbor" and one's moral obligation to neighbor. Thurman wrote, "With artistry and power [Jesus] depicted what happens when a man responds to human need across the barriers of class, race, and condition. [We] must love [our] neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between."

The Golden Rule is a part of religions everywhere in the world. What does this say about spiritual practice? How can it shape our prayer?

Dr. Noma Anderson
The Cathedral Church of St. Paul
Burlington, VT

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Lord Christ, our eternal Redeemer, grant us such fellowship in your sufferings, that, filled with your Holy Spirit, we may subdue the flesh to the spirit, and the spirit to you, and at the last attain to the glory of your resurrection; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 4:11–16

NOT LONG AGO, we had just given our tired 6-month-old baby a bath. It was my turn to get him ready for bed, but between the lotion, my clumsy hands, and the inscrutable pattern of snaps on onesie pajamas, things got turned around and stuck to the point that he was wailing. I was so tired, and so in love with him, that I was on the verge of tears, too. Hearing the noise, my wife came in to help, and with a stern tone and steady hands, things were quickly sorted out.

In Ephesians, Paul describes the roles of ministry we might be called to as one of Christ's gifts. Gifts, yes... And... The truth is, as often as not, in ministry and in life, we find ourselves called into roles that we feel ill prepared for, whether prophet, parent or plumber. In those moments though, I am thankful when I remember that, whatever our role, each of us is called to build up the Body of Christ, to care for the Apostles' Fellowship. Among Christ's many gifts, finding oneself in the company of surprising Apostles, and finding the humility to receive their fellowship, have been among the most important to me. Who are the Apostles that God has placed in your life?

O God, thank you for the gift of fellowship. As we journey towards the cross this Lent, give us eyes to truly see our companions and give us open hearts to receive their gifts.

The Rev. Jonathan Eden
Bridge Priest, Emmanuel Church
West Roxbury, MA

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Almighty God, who in the place of Judas chose your faithful servant Matthias to be numbered among the Twelve: Grant that your Church, being delivered from false apostles, may always be guided and governed by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

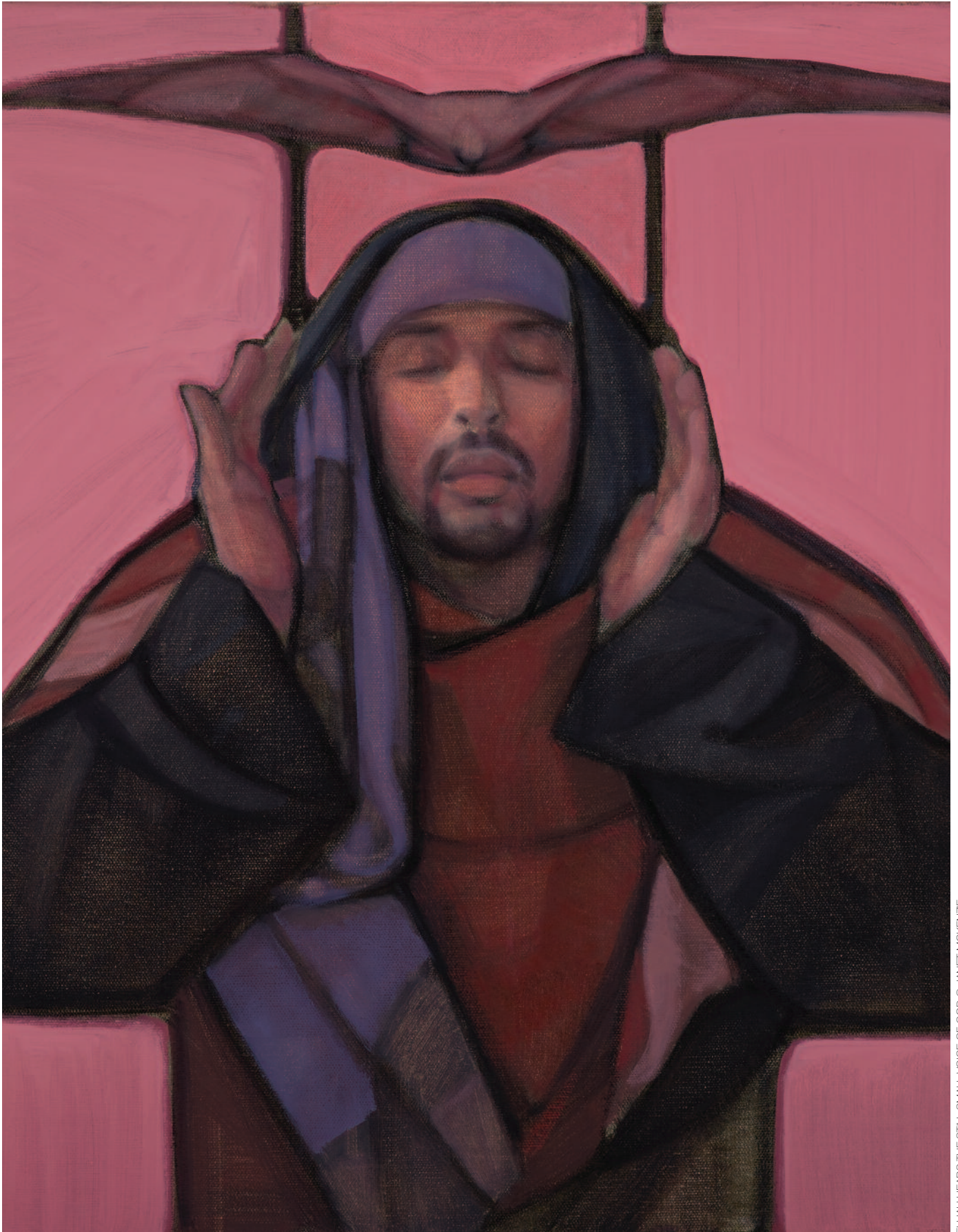
Philippians 3:13–21

TODAY'S READING AND COVENANT QUESTION make me think about my mom. The scripture refers to holding fast to what we have learned and to our citizenship in heaven. I grew up in the Episcopal church and remember many works both parents engaged in for our church. They set a wonderful example of continuing in the apostles' teaching and fellowship. In the last few years of Mom's life, whenever I visited I would join their small Wednesday group, which would have communion at 7:00 am and afterwards have breakfast together in their fellowship hall. They were faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of the bread and the prayers.

As an adult, I sometimes find myself not really feeling "the spirit." Do I give up or do I press on, knowing my faith will guide me and I will feel the spirit again? I have learned to press on because I know that even when my spirit ebbs rather than flows, God is there.

At the end of her life, Mom was calm and accepting during those days in hospice. When I asked how she was doing, she would say, "All is well." When Mom, her priest and I were planning Mom's memorial service, the priest asked if we would have communion. Mom responded, "what would be the point if we didn't?" Years ago, there were bracelets with beads spelling WWJD — "What would Jesus do?" If we ask ourselves in each interaction with others either of these questions, what would be our answer? Do I live as a disciple of Christ or???

Ms. Becky Collette
St. Luke's Episcopal Church
Fair Haven, VT



ELIJAH HEARS THE STILL, SMALL VOICE OF GOD © JANET MCKENZIE

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

THE ORDER OF SAINT ANNE daily seeks to live into our baptismal promises, and we know that to follow the Apostle's teachings — breaking bread and praying in community — is not always easy.

Where two or three are gathered, there is vulnerability and brokenness, frustration, fear and weariness. But where two or three are gathered there is also healing, laughter, understanding and possibility.

Our community was established in the spirit of communal prayer, where we work to make room for all God's beloveds and to add our voices to the symphony of prayer that is liturgy. The word liturgy means work of the people and we are so grateful for the ways that our routines help us shape and engage with God in this work.

In Call the Midwife, Sr. Monica Joan says of daily prayer:

*“The liturgy is of comfort to the disarrayed mind.
We need not choose our thoughts,
the words are aligned
like a rope for us to cling to.”*

We move through our days of work and prayer pausing to mark the transitions so that we might put some things down to pick other things up. It is a great comfort to the disarrayed mind to find the order, repetition and stories of others who have lived into their vows and have gone before us. There is deep reassurance remembering and celebrating that there are those who will continue this practice, holding onto the rope of words in psalms and prayers, laments and praises, in scripture and in their own lived stories.

Showing up is one of the most important ways we Sisters continue in the Apostle's teaching, in breaking bread and praying together daily, both when we are disarrayed, and when we are arrayed with joy. Always, in all circumstances, we continue to pray, to trust, to work, to celebrate God showing up in us, in our work, our prayers and our witness.

What are some of the ways you experience God showing up for you in the liturgy and in the people with whom you break bread and pray? Is there a prayer, hymn or scripture you've come to know by heart? These touchstones can hold us steady in the unsettling moments that inevitably arrive. Many have memorized the 23rd Psalm

CONTINUED

and find the words, phrases and images companions in joy and sorrow. There are so many sacred words that help bring us back to center — what are some of your favourites?

Marking transitions is also a prayer practice — consciously noting and giving thanks for our movement through the days and all the ways we are nourished and held in God’s love each moment. Outside our small chapel in the convent is a small container of holy water, where we remember our baptismal vows entering and leaving our prayer space. What are the reminders of grace you encounter through your day as you continue in the teaching, the breaking of bread and the prayers?

Sr. Ana Clara, OSR, in collaboration with Dawna Wall
Mother Superior, Order of St. Anne Bethany
Arlington, MA



SERENA © RICHMOND BARTHE

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Let your Spirit, O Lord, come into the midst of us to wash us with the pure water of repentance, and prepare us to be always a living sacrifice to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 6:27–38

ARE YOU, LIKE ME, SOMEONE who listens but does not always *hear*? The first words of this gospel reading, “But I say to you who are willing to hear,” got my attention long before I continued reading Jesus’ teaching about how we are to live as God’s people. Jesus’ message is of such great significance that extra attention is needed not only to listen but to hear it!

Today, as we hear these powerful words, we must allow them to penetrate our traditions, our comfort zones, our stalling, our instinctive response of “I can’t do this”, or whatever has, to this point, hindered us from:

- Loving our enemies
- Doing good to those who hate us
- Blessing those who curse us/forgiving
- Praying for those who mistreat us
- Turning the other cheek
- Giving to those who ask without expecting anything in return
- Treating others like you would like to be treated
- Refusing to judge or condemn

And to better equip us to live this way...

We **will** continue in the apostles’ teaching...not just listening but doing.

We **will** continue in fellowship with our fellow-believers, listening and supporting; being heard and supported.

We **will** continue to participate in the holy feast spread before us in the bread and wine, Jesus’ gift, Jesus’ life, nourished and enriched for holy work.

We **will** continue to pray alone, with one another, sure that the Holy One hears, loves and often sends **us** to be the answers to our prayers!

Today, with God’s help, I choose to listen to and to hear the challenge Jesus presents in the Gospel to “treat others as I would like to be treated” and to find practical ways to actually live it. What about you? Which challenge will you choose?

Diane Montague
St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church
St. Johnsbury, VT

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

O God, you willed to redeem us from all iniquity by your Son: Deliver us when we are tempted to regard sin without abhorrence, and let the virtue of his passion come between us and our mortal enemy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 1

THIS QUESTION from our baptismal covenant is drawn from Acts 2:42–47, a period shortly after Pentecost when a multitude of new believers joined the community. In Jerusalem, homes were transformed into places of worship, marked by the celebration of the Lord's Supper and a sense of unity through the sharing of food and resources.

The early disciples listened attentively to the apostles, the eyewitnesses to Jesus's ministry, death, and resurrection. Their dedication to the breaking of bread and prayer stemmed from their devotion to Jesus, aspiring to follow Him and embody His love and compassion.

Our baptismal covenant beckons us again and again to deepen our prayer life, foster communal connections with God and one another, and enhance our service to the community. By doing so, we are like trees planted by streams of water, flourishing and yielding fruit in due season (Psalm 1).

Beloved of God, amidst the uncertainties and anxieties about the future, the baptismal covenant calls us to embrace the gospel, prayer, fellowship, communion, and community service instead of fear and suspicions.

Therefore, during this Lenten season, pause and take a moment, asking yourself: how is the commitment to the apostles' teachings, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers manifesting in your life and context? How is the Holy Spirit helping you to grow as a disciple of Christ?

Blessed Lent!

The Rev. Dr. Derrick Muwina
Rector, St. Peter's Church
Cambridge, MA

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

O God, you so loved the world that you gave your only begotten Son to reconcile earth with heaven: Grant that we, loving you above all things, may love our friends in you, and our enemies for your sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matthew 20:17–28

THE MOTHER OF ZEBEDEE'S SONS asks Jesus to bring her children with him to His Kingdom. Does she realize what would be asked of them? When we agree to the baptismal vow to continue the work of the apostles, do we know what God asks of us? Do we know how to follow Jesus?

The practices of Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina have helped me to learn how I might follow Jesus, how I might assist God in Her work. In Centering Prayer meditation, God speaks to me, nudges me. In this way I can learn to co-labor with God to bring all Her children to The Kingdom, that is, to be in Unity with God.

Like the mother of Zebedee's sons, God, our Mother, wants us all to follow Jesus. This is the Divine plan — unity with God. God asks for our collaboration to help with this Divine plan. God needs us to open our hearts to hear how we can help bring ourselves and one another to God. In silence we may hear what God is asking of us.

Do you ever find yourself doing something you had no intention of doing? Have you ever followed a path and wondered how on earth you got to it? Perhaps God was asking for your assistance in the Divine plan. We are God's voice, feet, hands on this earth. God needs us and we need one another to continue this work toward unity. May you hear God's desires for you whispered in your silence.

We sit in silence in Centering Prayer — a receptive meditation which deepens our relationship with God. As we begin to experience God's presence in us, we eagerly sit twice a day for at least 20 minutes, gently letting go of anything we notice that distracts from our receptivity to God. I invite you to sit in receptivity to God's presence. 20 minutes. Today.

Ms. Mary McGuinness
St. Peter's Church,
Arlington, VT

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

O Lord, strong and mighty, Lord of hosts and King of glory: Cleanse our hearts from sin, keep our hands pure, and turn our minds from what is passing away; so that at the last we may stand in your holy place and receive your blessing; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 5:27–32

THE PART OF THIS BAPTISMAL VOW that stands out to me the most at this moment is the breaking of bread. Table fellowship was an essential part of Jesus's earthly ministry. In Luke 5:27–32 Jesus radically reframes the concept of table fellowship by dining with those considered traitors, sinners and outcasts. The church I grew up in would simply call them heathens, outsiders with whom God's people should not associate. Jesus, however, has no problem associating with such people. At the core of his ministry is inviting the stranger in, welcoming the outsider to come closer and be in relationship with him. May we learn to welcome others the same way Christ has welcomed us.

LITANY OF WELCOME

Welcome,

Welcome to you who are weary.

Welcome to you who are well rested.

Welcome to you who are returning home.

Welcome to you who have never been here before.

Welcome to you who believe.

Welcome to you who do not believe.

Welcome to the extraverted and the introverted,

The shy and the brash;

The young and old;

The cradle Episcopalian and the eternal skeptic.

Welcome to you in need of healing.

Welcome to you who come with healing hands to help hold our brokenness.

Welcome to you who rejoice.

Welcome to you who grieve.

Welcome to you who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning and every other shade in the rainbow.

Welcome to you from all kinds of faith traditions or no faith tradition at all.

Welcome to the doubter and the questioner,
The urban prophet and the contemplative mystic,
The outcasts on the margins and all the social misfits

No matter who you are, who you love, how you identify,
Or where you are on your spiritual journey,
You are welcome to come and take a seat at the table.

You can return to this litany throughout the weeks ahead. Jesus constantly extends radical welcome to those on the margins of society. In what ways is the Spirit calling you to do the same this Lenten season? Who are the outsiders in your circles?

The Rev. Kevin Vetiac
Episcopal Chaplain at MIT and Northeastern University
Massachusetts



LAST SUPPER © OHN AUGUST SWANSON

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Grant, O Lord, that as your Son Jesus Christ prayed for his enemies on the cross, so we may have grace to forgive those who wrongfully or scornfully use us, that we ourselves may be able to receive your forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jeremiah 31:31–34

DURING A TIME of rampant social injustice in Jeremiah's time, God describes a new covenant, one written on the hearts of man. During this modern time of social injustice and unrest in the world, there is great solace in remembering the promise of the new covenant.

How do I look into my heart for God's good grace in the world? Am I able to love my neighbor, even when I am "justifiably" angry with an action or words I don't agree with? Am I fearful of the coming elections and think there is nothing I can do? The New covenant from God says the answers are on my heart, so in this Lenten time of reflection, I can look internally to find the love of my fellow man.

For me, the good habit of attending service and receiving grace through the sacraments gives me the strength and courage to look inward and place my faith in the Lord, I will be able to find God's will in my heart and pass the love to myself and those I encounter.

This Lent, take just a little bit of time to journal or reflect before you head to coffee hour: *What did I hear today that can help me rest in faith rather than fear during the week ahead?*

Ms. Elizabeth McEwen
St. Mary's in the Mountains
Wilmington, VT

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

COLLECT

Grant, most merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 10:16–25

“LET US CONSIDER how to provoke one another to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:25)

“But she seriously dropped the ball!” I told my colleague in frustration one morning, in the little office we shared working in young adult ministry. “I have to tell her that it just wasn’t acceptable. If this were a job, her boss might fire her over something like this.”

My colleague looked steadily at me, then calmly replied, “Yes, but we aren’t that kind of community. Why don’t you ask her what happened? Remind her that you’re here to help, but you can’t help her if she doesn’t ask for it.”

I didn’t end up firing the person I went to confront later that day, far from it. Grounded in my colleague’s provocative insight and our shared commitment to relationship, the conversation actually led us to mutual understanding and deeper trust.

Our culture encourages us to abandon community, to give up on one another when challenges arise. The church romanticizes “authenticity,” but being authentic with each other is unsettling. So we neglect practices that cultivate true community. Rather than risk someone provoking us to grow, we disconnect or keep our engagement on the surface. Yet the Jesus Way invites us to something different: to speak provocative truths to one another in love and to commit to “the breaking of the bread and...the prayers” with people whose identities and life experiences are very different from our own. When we lean into the challenges and joys of such relationships, such communities, God can transform us and our world.

Are there people in your life that you find frustrating or challenging? How might changing your perspective open the door to a different kind of relationship? To deeper community?

Ms. Kelsey Rice Bogdan
Executive Director, Life Together, Episcopal Service Corps
Massachusetts



PRAYING AT GETHEMANE © HE OI

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin,
repent and return to the Lord?

COLLECT

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

AS THIS VOW has been working silently in the background of my heart, one image came repeatedly to mind though I haven't thought of it in years. It is the climactic scene at the end of the movie *The Return of the King* in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The Fellowship and their battalion draw lines opposite the orcs and ringwraiths of Sauron's army. At Aragon's cry, the Fellowship charges into battle against the legion.

Ah, but the real action is up on Mount Doom. There Frodo pulls the deadly ring out from around his neck; it dangles from the chain he holds in his hand. His friend Sam has carried his frail body through the doorway of the volcano, but he must drop the evil into the fire. With the conflict visible in Frodo's eyes, Sam's words are poignant:

What are you waiting for? Just let it go.

Frodo is overcome; he does not let go. Instead, he clutches and claims the ring for his own. In the end, the ring is destroyed not because Frodo triumphs but by another twist of fate. In fact, Frodo nearly falls into the fires with it and, as it is now him who dangles, Sam cries out again:

Don't you let go. Don't let go. Reach!

Frodo does not let go. He reaches up to Sam's outstretched hand and is saved.

The scene reveals at least two aspects of this vow we have taken in baptism.

First, the real evil that we resist is not the legion we perceive around us. The crux of the matter is through the doorway into the volcanic tensions that occupy our own hearts. It is here that we struggle against the evils that would soak into our bodies like water and into our bones like oil (Psalm 109:16). Any fight against the woes of the world that comes from rancor flooding our own hearts is a delusion...at best. Matthew's Gospel exposes the situation plainly in one of the most poignant lines of all Scripture: *Because of the [outward] increase of lawlessness, the [inward] love of many will grow cold* (Matthew 24:12).

CONTINUED

MARCH 3 THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT CONTINUED

Second, though Frodo did not overcome evil in the movie, neither did he let go of the struggle. Even after defeat, he had the tenacity to turn his eyes upward to grace, to strain upward, and let himself be grasped. As Matthew continues: *but the one who endures to the end will be saved* (Matthew 24:13).

This is what it means to persevere in resisting evil. When we see our own wretchedness, brokenness, and defeat, it is the childlike love of, and humble trust in, the grace of God that saves us. And somehow, God's grace saving us is an icon of how God has caused good to triumph in the world around us as well. In letting grace grasp us, *this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony...* (Matthew 24:14).

Where has evil, sin, or the death-dealing shame that they inspire seeped into your heart? What concrete thing can you do to reach out for the hand of grace and restore the pulse of love in your engagement with the world?

The Rev. adwoa Wilson, ObjN
Vicar of Discipleship and Formation,
Director of the Communities for Spiritual Vitality
— Episcopal Diocese of Vermont
(in Collaboration with the Diocese of Massachusetts)

MARCH 4 MONDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

COLLECT

Look upon the heart-felt desires of your humble servants, Almighty God, and stretch forth the right hand of your majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Mark 1:1–8, 14–15

IN THE BEGINNING OF MARK'S GOSPEL, there is no long genealogy or detailed birth narrative or cosmic history. Instead, the author paraphrases a text from Isaiah 40 as an eye-catching reference for his audience. By doing so Mark sets the upcoming scene of John the baptizer out in the wilderness busily baptizing so many folks it seems like all of the people of Judea are there at the Jordan river. John proclaims the coming of someone who will baptize them completely with the Holy Spirit. After Jesus is baptized by John, the Spirit sends him out into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for forty days. Mark doesn't give us any details of this temptation; he moves the action along to Jesus beginning his ministry in Galilee. This movement shows that those details aren't important to Mark. What matters is that Jesus is tempted by evil, he perseveres in resisting evil and begins proclaiming the good news that the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe!

Persevere is such an active word in this our baptismal promise. When we persevere we have the willingness to keep trying, to continue on through adversity. Yet it is only by and through the amazing, infinite grace of God that we will be given the perseverance to resist evil; we can't do it through our own will-power. When we do miss the mark, the good news of Jesus Christ is that we can repent, change our minds and our actions to turn away from the evil and toward the good. Sometimes we may confess through the sacramental rite of Reconciliation of a Penitent (Confession), other times we confess our sins in private. If we follow Mark's lead, the exact nature of the temptation is less important than what follows: that we persevere, keep turning and returning to God who loves us with no limit, and move as soon as we can toward doing the work God has given us to do.

Today, be bold. Ask Jesus to renew you today in God's Spirit. Ask God's Spirit to strengthen you in faith and send you in action.

The Rev. Linda Moore
Supply Priest
Vermont

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom you have given a fervent desire to pray, may, by your mighty aid, be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 25:1–10

GOD IS OUR ULTIMATE DEFENSE against all that would destroy us or keep us from God. Through utter dependence on God, we, like the psalmist, are instructed, guided, and upheld, to the point of calling to mind how merciful and loving God is. In fact, it is the love of God, or hesed, that is always unwavering, unshaken, and endures forever. “Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love (hesed), for they have been from old (Psalm 25:6).”

Despite the evil around us, we ultimately come to know that dependence on God is abundant life and the God of our life is steadfast in love. Who does not want abundant life or guidance from the Divine Creator?

The psalm reminds us that each time we struggle and persevere in resisting evil, we do so because God deserves our love. We “return to the Lord” because of love. It means that we fully embrace God’s love for us and the world because God is good and deserving of our love.

A Lenten practice to consider is to practice the daily Examen which St. Ignatius of Loyola included in his Spiritual Exercises. As you end your night, consider all the events of your day. Where was God in these events? How did you experience the hesed of God? Dig deep into your conscience and consider how God was present in each event that happened.

The five-step method begins by praying for guidance; review all the events or happenings of the day; review any feeling that surfaces; pray about one feeling; turn your mind to tomorrow. Finish the Examen with the Lord’s Prayer and let God surprise you!

The Rev. Canon Gregory Perez
Canon for the Central Region
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

CONFESSION FROM ENRICHING OUR WORSHIP

God of all mercy, we confess that we have sinned against you, opposing your will in our lives. We have denied your goodness in each other, in ourselves, and in the world you have created. We repent of the evil that enslaves us, the evil we have done, and the evil done on our behalf. Forgive, restore, and strengthen us through our Savior Jesus Christ, that we may abide in your love and serve only your will. Amen.

THIS IS THE CONFESSION from the Baltimore Catechism that I learned growing up Roman Catholic:

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended thee, and I detest all my sins because of thy just punishments but most of all because they offend thee, my God who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of thy grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

I knew it by heart...from 12 years of Catholic school. The focus of this confession is that my sins offend God who then doles out punishments. I loved its regularity, but I sometimes felt that I was making up sins just so I could receive penance, hear a blessing, and go my way until next time.

The confession we pray in *Enriching our Worship* has quite a different focus! Just like our baptismal vow, its focus is less on offending and punishing, more on turning from and turning toward. This confession gives me an alternative view of sin and repentance. It is based in the union God made between us and God, and the forgiving invitation to return to it. This partnership is a much more wholesome view of the God I know. I repent because God loves me and is deserving of all my love. Repentance means that I am invited to return to God rather than waiting for God to accept me back after penance for my sins. The new confession gives a gift — for us to always examine what it really means to “persevere in resisting evil.”

Consider:

- Our God is loving and forgiving, ever calling us to return. Forgiveness is given just as freely as grace.
- We are vulnerable to the good and the evil that is all around us, but God always walks beside us.
- When God challenges, God also welcomes — waiting with open arms to accept our sincere awareness and regret.
- God’s welcome *forgives, restores, and strengthens us* and opens our hearts to justice and compassion for the world around us.

CONTINUED

MARCH 6  WEDNESDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT CONTINUED

Sin is a part of living. It is a part of who we are in a broken world. We return, *with God's help*.

Where have you denied God's goodness in yourself, in each other, and in God's world? Repent and, with the trust of the psalmist, pray:

Give me the joy of your saving help again and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit (Psalm 51:12). Amen.

The Rev. Deacon Peggy Mathauer
All Saints Episcopal Church
South Burlington, VT



JESUS AND THE WOMAN TAKEN © KATHLEEN PETERSON

MARCH 7 THURSDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

COLLECT

Keep watch over your Church, O Lord, with your unfailing love; and, since it is grounded in human weakness and cannot maintain itself without your aid, protect it from all danger, and keep it in the way of salvation; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

1 John 1:5–7

THE TALK OF GOD’S LIGHT in this passage from 1 John attracts me. I want to walk in the light with Jesus and my sibling human beings. I want that sense of fellowship and belonging. But this passage also reminds me that a posture of humility is needed — humility that acknowledges my human failings and limited, often self-centered perspective.

More often than I like to admit, I can feel righteous and see other people’s faults in clear relief, while not noticing my own. I see this as a “fall into sin” as our baptismal covenant question of the week puts it. This passage from 1 John invites me to ask what I gain from seeing others as “wrong” and myself as righteous? Not much — except growing discontent.

Over the years wise spiritual companions have encouraged me to take a prayerful stance when stuck in this “they are wrong and I am right” spot. One of my favorite prayers along these lines is “the sick person’s prayer” that comes to us from the 12 step groups:

Dear God — this person I am struggling with, like me, is spiritually sick (sinful). Help me to show them tolerance, compassion and patience. Release me from being angry and resentful. Give me a kindly view of them. Show me how I can be helpful to them. Help me accept reality as it is. Thy will be done. Amen.

Praying this prayer daily over multiple days has brought amazing results in my life- more often than not, bringing me into holy reconnection and light. It doesn’t inoculate me from falling into that sin again, but it has strengthened my perseverance in resisting that evil. If you need it, I hope this prayer will bless you too.

The Rev. Canon Martha Hubbard
Canon for the Northern and Western Region
The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

COLLECT

Grant us, O Lord our Strength, a true love of your holy Name; so that, trusting in your grace, we may fear no earthly evil, nor fix our hearts on earthly goods, but may rejoice in your full salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

John 8:2–11

REFLECTING ON THE RECENT BAPTISM of my youngest child has prompted deep contemplation about the lessons I aim to instill in them, hoping to spare them the struggles I encountered in my own upbringing. The baptismal vow calls us to resist succumbing to sin while acknowledging our need for repentance when we falter. I've observed newly baptized individuals often approaching the altar with a sense of obligation, thinking, "I've sinned this week, I need to do it again."

During my own youth, I grappled with the belief that I must repent for every transgression, striving to maintain lengthy prayers and adhere to a narrative of perfection. This is not the relationship with repentance I hope for my child. However, maturing in faith has revealed that our human struggle isn't about the daily cleansing of sins but rather about recognizing and addressing our shortcomings.

In John 8:1–11, we find solace in the understanding that repentance isn't about erasing sins daily; it's about acknowledging them and allowing God's grace to guide us toward transformation. The woman's accusers are focused on the fault and punishment. The woman's Lord is focused on the transformation that could come next. The woman neither denies nor is defined by her mistakes. In fact, neither is the crowd, in Jesus eyes. Our journey is not about attaining perfection through self-condemnation but embracing the transformative power of God's love and mercy.

Consider repentance not as a burdensome task but as a path to growth and renewal. Each moment of repentance draws us closer to God, aligning our lives with His will and reminding us of His boundless love and forgiveness.

Who are you in the Gospel passage and what does it reveal about your own theology of sin, forgiveness and grace?

As you navigate life and faith, may you possess the courage to resist evil and the strength to repent and return to the Lord, knowing His love and mercy are unwavering, and His arms are always open wide to welcome you home.

Ms. Peta Leitermann-Long
St. Michael's Episcopal Church
Brattleboro, VT

MARCH 9 SATURDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

COLLECT

O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 18:9–14

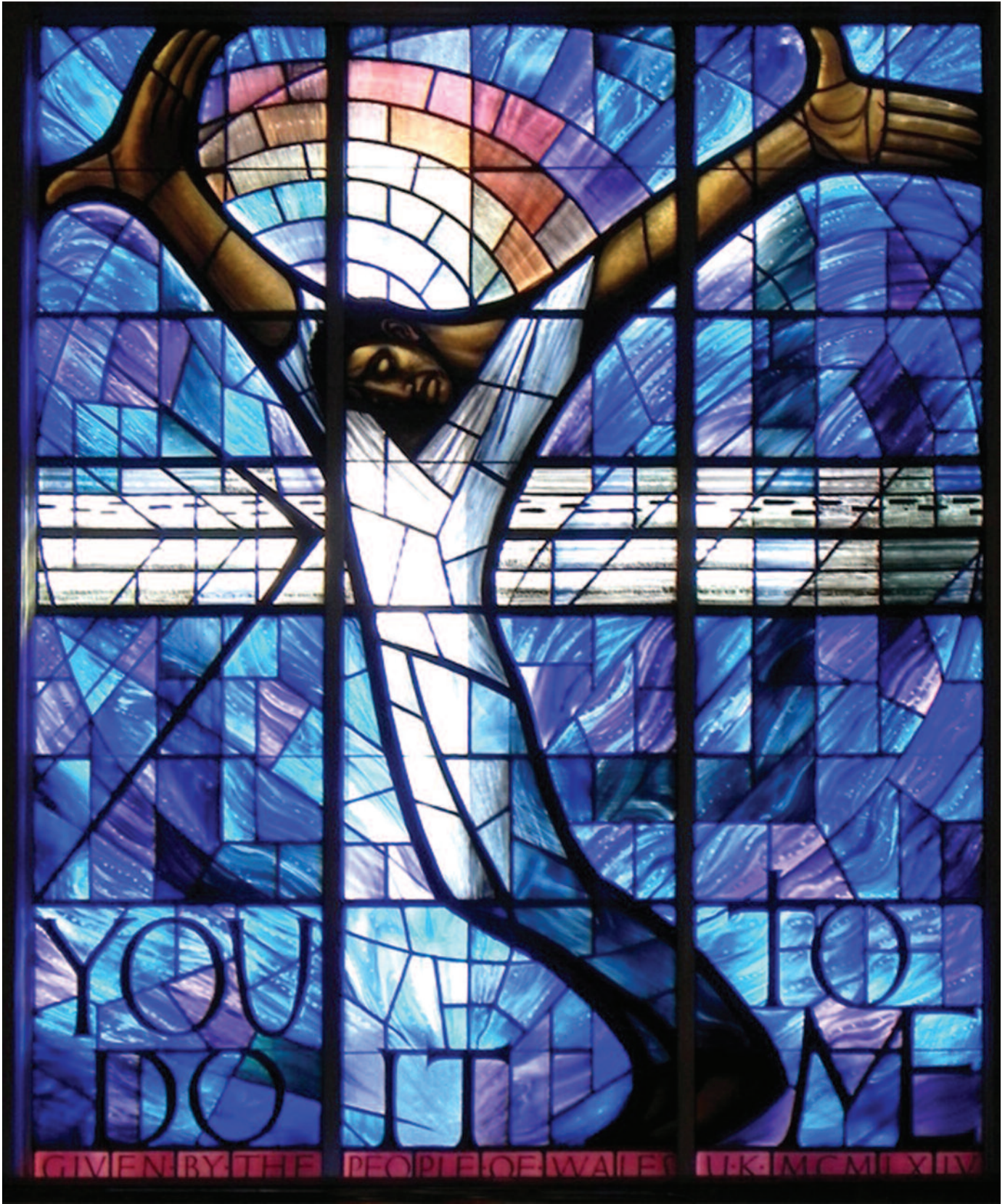
“**WILL YOU PERSEVERE** in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?” This is one of my favorite lines in the Book of Common Prayer, and my favorite word is “whenever.” With one word, it humbles and comforts me.

It humbles me because it rightly gives me the name of “sinner” — I will keep sinning no matter how hard I try. To be humbled is not to be humiliated or shamed, but to see the truth about myself clearly and neutrally. And to remember that I am a sinner is not to be released from accountability, but released from the lie that I could be perfect if I tried.

This word “whenever” also comforts me; with it the Church reminds me of what God has said from the beginning — that God’s mercy is abundant, that I can turn around from my sin and turn back to God. I cannot use up or break God’s mercy.

In this passage from Luke, the tax collector calls himself a sinner. He is a collaborator with the enemy, working with the Romans to oppress his people; he describes himself accurately. He is released from the temptation to feel contempt for others (as the disciples do). He throws himself on God’s mercy, and Jesus commends his example to us. One way we can try to follow this example is by praying the Jesus Prayer, which comes from the early Church in Egypt: “Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (I like to say “Spoken Word” instead of “only Son.”) Try saying it on rosary beads, or while doing housework. Try saying it no matter what you feel. Try saying it inside your head when you’re bored in a church meeting. Try!

The Rev. Emily Garcia
Assistant Rector, The Church of the Redeemer
Lexington, MA



WALES WINDOW FOR ALABAMA © JOHN PETTIS

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Jesus Christ?

COLLECT

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

WHAT A PERFECT BAPTISMAL VOW for a deacon to write about! Deacons in the Episcopal Church are all about proclaiming the Good News and living it out in our lives — in our words and actions. The saying: “Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary” is often ascribed to Francis of Assisi. Though, there is no record of his actually saying or writing this, he did instruct his followers to “preach by their deeds.” This is how all of us — deacon, priest, bishop, or lay — live out our vow to “proclaim by word and example the Good News in Christ Jesus.”

Part of the exhortation the Bishop speaks to deacons at our ordination is this:

You are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live, and work, and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world....At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.

Yet, these actions and words are not just for deacons, but for all of us in our baptismal life — a mandate to proclaim and act on the Good News — to bring the Beloved Community into fruition here and now, a living witness in our hurting communities. What the deacon reflects to the church, the baptized disciple then reflects to the world!

In the liturgy, the deacon's role is one of proclamation, hospitality and welcome. We speak the Good News in the midst of the people; we set the table, we invite others into prayer and confession. In all this, we prepare the way to dismiss the people, for sure the most important role deacons carry out, because it is then that we exhort everyone present to do God's work in the world — which is the true work we are called to do as church. Whatever a deacon does — and urges the people to do — it will be something that requires action and that models the life of Jesus in the world.

Notice this week: How have you been nourished in Word, prayer, confession, and Sacrament? Now, what is one way you might be called this week to use this sustenance to act in God's world. Commit to it, to *“Go in peace to do the work God has given you to do!”*

The Venerable J. Stannard Baker,
Deacon, Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Burlington, VT
Archdeacon, Episcopal Diocese of Vermont

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Jesus Christ?

COLLECT

O Lord our God, in your holy Sacraments you have given us a foretaste of the good things of your kingdom: Direct us, we pray, in the way that leads to eternal life, that we may come to appear before you in that place of light where you dwell for ever with your saints; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matt 5:13–19

WHAT “SALT” DO I BRING? What light am I called to shine?

For me, that question begins with Jesus.

In the Gospels, Jesus does a lot of healing and feeding (and teaching and praying). He looks at people — and truly sees them. With every step, he repairs the world and creates the Kingdom. Religious scholar Elaine Pagels notes that what marked the early Christians was their compassionate service to others, their “lovingkindness.”

I take Jesus’s call to be the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” to be very personal. We are each called by God as beloved individuals. We each have different gifts, different “salt” to add, a different light to shine. I think it’s easy to go with conventional expectations, to hide ourselves, to put our light under a bushel and to make our “salt” tasteless and worthless, to dim our light so we don’t stand out. To be a Christian takes courage. The message of the cross is that loving service has no limits.

To light and “salt” the world also takes listening. We are now rightfully aware of the ways that so-called helpers historically acted as oppressors. Indeed, sometimes truly seeing someone can be the most loving thing we can do. Discernment of how one is called to serve takes, above all, prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit, and honest reflection on whether our actions bring “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness” (Galatians 5:22–26) or their opposites of rage, hatred, idolatry.

Finally, I believe that the “law” that Jesus is teaching about in today’s passage, the law we must fulfill, is what he taught in the Gospel of Mark: love God; love others.

So what is your witness? Your salt? Your light?

To meditate on these questions, choose a Gospel and re-read it, focusing on what Jesus does as he travels from town to town. What resonates with you? Or try Lent Madness (lentmadness.org) and join others in reflecting on how this year’s saints variously embody the love of Christ. And pray. Spend time with God — in words or silence — and listen for how the Holy Spirit calls you to proclaim God’s love.

Gaen Murphree
St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church
Middlebury, VT

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Jesus Christ?

COLLECT

O God, with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light: Quench our thirst with living water, and flood our darkened minds with heavenly light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

John 5:1–18

THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS is a long time. Thirty-eight years of waiting is longer. Thirty-eight years of chronic illness is long enough for a “new normal” to become “just the way it is.”

Jesus assumes nothing. He asks the man, “Do you want to be made well?”

Perhaps the man just stares for a moment, taken off guard, as if to say, “How is that relevant?” Although he is there specifically for healing, he gives no direct response, but rather explains why nothing has changed.

How easy it is to look at a distant hope, to consider solutions for systemic evils, to work for justice and peace, only to realize that we do not truly believe healing is within our reach — or that of anyone else. We lose heart. Racism is baked in. War is inevitable. Estrangement is simply part of life. Yes, we work — but our spirits lie in the portico amidst the detritus of our dreams for ourselves and the world.

In our baptism, we affirm that we will proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Jesus Christ. This good news tells us that death is not the last word and that the grace, power, and love of God can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

Jesus looks directly at us and asks, “Do you want to be healed?” If we begin by explaining why nothing will ever change; Jesus may still say, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.”

Envision the conversation.

Sr. Sarah Margaret, SSM
Sisters of St. Margaret,
Duxbury, MA

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Jesus Christ?

COLLECT

O Lord our God, you sustained your ancient people in the wilderness with bread from heaven: Feed now your pilgrim flock with the food that endures to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Matt 5:20–26

SO, WHAT IS THE “GOOD NEWS OF GOD IN CHRIST” THAT WE PROCLAIM?

In this question we hear the phrase “God in Christ” and we believe that it signifies a world changing moment when the divine presence — our Creator, God — broke through time and space to come among us in Jesus of Nazareth. Furthermore, we, the human race, did not cause this to happen. Our Creator, God, chose to do this on our behalf, to show us that we are all loved unconditionally and beyond our imagination. It is God’s gift to each of us and that gift grows in value to us when we pass it on to others.

So, how do we proclaim that “Good News of God in Christ”?

This Good News invites us to go beyond the letter of the law to the *spirit of gratitude* that overflows in love, even as the love of God overflowed into history through the human person of Christ. I believe that our proclaiming actions all begin with a desire that lives deep inside, in our hearts. Perhaps this is why Matthew suggests that one’s inner thoughts must be the point of origin for our actions. As we think of God’s radical presence and love, we are inspired to treat others with radical presence and love, even beyond what any law could ask or imagine.

Questions:

1. How do I believe that God is calling me to pass on or proclaim the really Good News of God’s love for all?
2. Can I recall an encounter with someone that spoke to me, and I felt that the love of God was being offered to me?

The Rev. Deacon Bill Clarke
St. John’s Episcopal Church
Walpole, NH*

*ST. JOHN’S IS A BORDERING PARISH TO VERMONT, WHICH HAS OFTEN SHARED PRIESTS OR FELLOWSHIP WITH THE NEIGHBORING VERMONT TOWNS.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Jesus Christ?

COLLECT

Almighty and most merciful God, drive from us all weakness of body, mind, and spirit; that, being restored to wholeness, we may with free hearts become what you intend us to be and accomplish what you want us to do; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 19

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord... (Psalm 19:14)

I'VE PRAYED SOME VERSION of this verse for years. As I've gotten older, I've tried, through writing, to bring more love and clarity into the world. Sometimes, however, the world's problems seem too big, and my capacity to evoke change seems too small. In my darkest moments, I question the value of my life itself:

Every time I sit down to write,
To put pen to page,
It's a prayer.
A prayer that my life matters —
That I have a place in this universe
And am not some insignificant cosmic belch.
Less than an afterthought,
A byproduct of indifferent machinations
set forth at the beginning of Time.
Please God,
Don't let me be a mistake.

I wonder if Jesus, too, was overwhelmed at the enormity of suffering in this world and sometimes felt lost. The Good News, as I understand it, is that we are never alone — not in the light, not in the dark. We are called, in this season of Lent, to go with Jesus into the darkness of the grave and trust that it is not the end. We are challenged to bring our full selves to the altar.

Practice: Write a letter to your childhood self. What are their best characteristics? What would you say to them to let them know they are loved? What wisdom might this child have to share with you now?

Dr. Melva James
QTPOC Church at Allston Abbey*
Allston, MA

*QTPOC CHURCH IS AN EXPERIMENTAL MINISTRY GATHERING AND NURTURING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AMONG QUEER AND TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR (QTPOC) IN GREATER BOSTON TO SEEK EVER GREATER LIBERATION IN JESUS CHRIST.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Jesus Christ?

COLLECT

O God, you have given us the Good News of your abounding love in your Son Jesus Christ: So fill our hearts with thankfulness that we may rejoice to proclaim the good tidings we have received; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Jeremiah 20:7–9, 13

WHO AMONGST US has not cried out to God: “Why have you done this to me? How could you, O Lord, have brought me here to this place?” We cry out to God, lamenting our struggles, maybe even ones we know God has called us to, maybe even ones we prayed would happen. “This isn’t working the way I thought it would. This isn’t easy. This isn’t how I thought it would go.”

Just as Jeremiah calls out to God from the depths of his despair, knowing that God has asked him to proclaim the truth that no one wanted to hear, we too may feel like we are alone in our struggle.

But there is hope.

In his cries to God, Jeremiah does not give in to hopelessness. Even in God’s silent response, Jeremiah does not give up on God nor the truth of God’s calling. Jeremiah knows God’s word to be trustworthy and God’s promises to be true. Despite his agony, Jeremiah also knows God is near and present with him. While in the midst of his grief, a song stirs within him. "Praise the Lord!" he calls out.

I remember once seeing a young student looking extremely dapper in a tie and vest with a classy looking hat to top it off. Wondering if he was feeling really good when he got dressed, I asked him how he felt that morning and he responded that he had been feeling down and that he dressed like that to help himself feel better.

Perhaps Jeremiah was having a similar experience, praising God while witnessing the worst in people, hoping in God, while experiencing the depths of isolation, pain, and suffering.

Jeremiah had a specific message from God to proclaim to the people. One that was not easy for them to hear and was not welcomed. Like Jeremiah’s experience, our baptismal covenant calls us to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ Jesus, which is not always welcomed by the people around us. And yet, we are reminded by our Collect to praise and pray to the Lord that our hearts might be filled with thankfulness, and we may rejoice to proclaim the good tidings we have received.

If singing has not been a part of your spiritual practice in the midst of struggle, perhaps choosing a hymn or song of praise to God to sing during those times could be a way of living into the fullness of God’s call.

The Rev. Darcey Mercier
Priest-in-Charge, Grace Church, Sheldon, VT
St. Luke’s Church, St. Albans, VT

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Jesus Christ?

COLLECT

Mercifully hear our prayers, O Lord, and spare all those who confess their sins to you; that those whose consciences are accused by sin may by your merciful pardon be absolved; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 15:11–32

“BUT IT’S NOT FAIR,” she told me at the conclusion of the capture the flag game. “Their team had more help and we should have gotten some too,” she continued, arms crossed. I have a love-hate relationship with camp capture the flag games because, as fun as they can be, inevitably, they end with claims of unfairness, of rules broken or perceived slights. I thought about last summer’s camp capture the flag game and its aftermath immediately when reading Luke’s parable of the prodigal son. “It’s not fair,” the older son told his father. “I’ve been here the whole time.”

If “fairness” is the only measure that feels suitable, then God’s Good News can be a bit uncomfortable. Because it isn’t primarily about fairness, but about abundant love and a fundamental reordering of the structures we’ve come to know and to expect. The prodigal son is celebrated alongside his stalwartly faithful brother — one does not diminish the other. There is enough of God’s love to go around and around and around.

To proclaim the Good News of God in Jesus is to proclaim this radical reorientation, to believe there is always more than enough—more than what might feel “fair” — more love, more blessing, more justice, and that it does not belong to us, exclusively, but to the whole created order.

What rules of “fairness” or “unfairness” are you holding to in your life of faith? What do you lose if you reorient them? What might you gain?

Breathe in: There is enough

Breathe out: God’s love is for all

The Rev. Spencer Hatcher
Executive Director, Barbara C. Harris Camp and Conference Center
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts



MOTHER OF MERCY © JANET MCKENZIE MARY

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

COLLECT

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise...

WE ARE WELL INTO LENT NOW. If we have been paying attention to the words of Jesus and watching his movements, his gestures, and his pace, we will understand that he is taking us where we do not naturally want to go. He is leading us into a death to self and a rising to reunion with God and all of God's creation.

What does God command that is hard to love? What does God promise that is hard to desire? Just this: that we love the commandment to love our enemies. All through his earthly ministry, Jesus breaks through the boundaries of ancient feuds, personal histories, and cultural differences to reconnect people who have given up on one another. He commands them to do the same — to risk reconciliation. Even from the cross, he demonstrates what it means to love what God commands and desire what God promises by asking for forgiveness for those who crucified him.

Before we are plunged into the waters of baptism, we promise to “love our neighbors as ourselves.” To truly die to the ways of this world, our definition of neighbor must expand to include those we consider our enemies. This week, I invite you to follow the example of Jesus in taking on the most counter-cultural spiritual practice imaginable: Pray for your enemies and those who wish you harm.

The Very Rev. Amy McCreath, Dean
The Cathedral Church of St. Paul
Boston, MA

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

COLLECT

Be gracious to your people, we entreat you, O Lord, that they, repenting day by day of the things that displease you, may be more and more filled with love of you and of your commandments; and, being supported by your grace in this life, may come to the full enjoyment of eternal life in your everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 58:2–11

THE FORMER CAPTIVES in Babylon expected comfort but received condemnation “as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness (Isaiah 58:2).” The prophet had urged repentance, predicted retribution, and eventually restoration. The prophet did not witness gratitude or change of heart. Entitlement, abuse of power, and a false sense of pride resulted in their lament that God was not responsive to their needs, their fasting, their false humility.

The prophet reiterated the words found in the song of Hannah centuries before, echoed in the song of Mary, and taught and exemplified by Jesus. In the admonitions to heal, house, liberate, feed and care for those in need, in ancient words and Jesus’ ministry, there was a directive to care for the least, the lost and the lonely.

Today, did you seek and serve Christ in those you met? How about those you will never meet? Perhaps addressing the root causes of another’s misery could be life-changing. Addressing perceptions about causes of what leads to neighbors being unhoused or addicted or incarcerated takes commitment and willingness to force change in the system. Often there is resistance or outright contempt for the process. Yet we are urged to persevere. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, if we serve Christ in one another, if our repentance is genuine, our light will shine and there will be water in the garden. Nothing thrives without both, and each of us.

What has room to grow in you to serve your neighbor?

The Rev. Deacon Lucy Pelligrini
St. Paul’s Episcopal Church
Vergennes, VT

MARCH 19 FEAST OF ST JOSEPH

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

COLLECT

Almighty God, through the incarnate Word you have caused us to be born anew of an imperishable and eternal seed: Look with compassion upon those who are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant that they may be built as living stones into a spiritual temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Luke 2:41–52

BEGINNING AT A YOUNG AGE my parents would let me go off on my own in the grocery store as they got their own shopping completed. If you read today's scripture then you can imagine where this story is headed... and you would be right. Thankfully, unlike our hero Jesus, my parents could easily go up to customer service and have me paged. Meanwhile, if Jesus had been part of the Gen-Z or Gen-Alpha generations then Joseph and Mary could have simply pinged his cell phone to find his location when they realized he wasn't there. But as our scripture illuminates, keeping track of Jesus isn't always easy.

In Joseph and Mary's case, they had neglected to make sure Jesus was with them when they set out and it took them three days to find him—Jesus never having left at all, still waiting for them back in the temple. How often are we careless and think we don't need Jesus on the journey with us? How often do we assume he's there without spending time in prayer or contemplation? Haven't the prophets' biggest laments always come at a time when God's people neglected to keep their sight on God? As we travel the journey of this life, may we always be mindful of God's presence. Our prayer book reminds us that through baptism we are brought into the family of God. May we safeguard ourselves from losing track of him just like Joseph and Mary did. And when we do, may we find comfort that just as they found him, so will we.

As a spiritual practice you are inviting into an exercise of physical mindfulness and proximity: Find for yourself a handheld cross or palm-sized polished stone or any object you can fit into your pocket. Declare for yourself that that cross or stone or whatever you chose, is your awareness of Jesus in your life. For the remainder of your Lenten season, carry that object with you wherever you go. Just like our cell phones, our wallets, and our keys, we can be mindful of bringing Jesus everywhere with us.

The Rev. Jeremy Means-Koss
Priest-in-Charge, St. James' Church, Arlington, VT and
St. Peter's Church, Bennington, VT

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

COLLECT

Almighty God our heavenly Father, renew in us the gifts of your mercy; increase our faith, strengthen our hope, enlighten our understanding, widen our charity, and make us ready to serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Mark 12:28–34

GOD IS NOT JUST UP BUT IN. God is somehow outside everything, beyond my comprehension and my power to control. But God is also inside everything, including inside me — closer to me than I am to myself. It's as God said to Teresa of Avila: "Seek me in yourself." I begin my quest to know God by turning inward, because God is at my very center.

Though God is at my center, God remains a mystery. I can't grasp God with my mind or control God with my will. But God is accessible through my heart of hearts. I can know God and move God by loving God.

As I come to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, I come to know my true self in God. It's as God also said to Teresa: "Seek yourself in me." I come to know God's love for me — the love as of an only child — through my baptism. Outside of that love I can only have a partial and distorted understanding of myself.

Knowing myself in the light of God's love, I come to know that my true nature is love, and that the love that flows in me is meant to flow to others. As I come to see my neighbor in the light of God's love, I realize that my neighbor is not separate from me; that I love myself by loving my neighbor because we are bodies of the One love; we are Christ together.

That love actively expresses itself through my whole being: my whole heart, soul, mind and strength. I live by loving the world from my inside out.

Spiritual practice: Take some time seated in a quiet place, spine upright but relaxed, eyes closed or resting, breathe easy. Bring your attention to your heart center and put all thoughts away. Fill your awareness with your love for God. Send that love like an arrow directly to God. [Based on The Cloud of Unknowing]

The Rev. Canon Steven Bonsey
Massachusetts

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

O God, you have called us to be your children, and have promised that those who suffer with Christ will be heirs with him of your glory: Arm us with such trust in him that we may ask no rest from his demands and have no fear in his service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:14–20a

WHEN I RETURNED to church after many years of being absent, it was because I needed a quiet place to think about my life and my relationship with my family, and to be with others. I knew the service, having been a life-long Episcopalian, but I had not really thought about the words we say each week. I had little patience for the long list of the Prayers for the People, wanting to get to a warm cup of coffee and enjoy the company of other parishioners at coffee hour.

Over time and with the help of others, I have come to realize that the prayers we say, especially those when we pray for others, have great meaning. I now think hard about how I can support those in need, both through my actions and through my prayers.

To find good in all people is hard work. Like my impatience with prayer, it is easy to dismiss those around us; to look beyond the person without seeking to look within. The words of Christ have helped me to look within, not beyond or around.

We all come from different ethnic and societal backgrounds. We have different needs and express different opinions. I am reminded that Christ's love compels us to do His work on earth. Because of Christ's love for us and the world, we must continue to do the hard work to look within all of those around us.

Is there someone or something you view with impatience? Try holding that person/thing with Christ. How would you respond if you regarded them from Christ's point of view?

Ms. Sarah Cowan
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Vergennes, VT
President of the Trustees, Episcopal Diocese of Vermont

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

COLLECT

O Lord, you relieve our necessity out of the abundance of your great riches: Grant that we may accept with joy the salvation you bestow, and manifest it to all the world by the quality of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Exodus 20:1–17

I GREW UP LEARNING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. The one I remember most is “Honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” Another phrase I learned: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” Luke 6:31.

As a child I was taught to respect my parents, to treat people well, to be nice, to be kind. This is living into our Baptismal Covenant, Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? I will with God’s help.

Sounds easy enough but do we do it? Do we even know our neighbors, let alone speak to them? I may have lived in a neighborhood for years and yet never have had any contact with a neighbor. Maybe because they do not speak my language or look like me. I think fear and insecurity get in the way.

I believe we need to be “Intentional”. One day I was taking my daily walk through my neighborhood, and I said to myself I would say hello and greet everyone I passed. I was being intentional. After my first encounter I had a big smile on my face. I felt confident saying to myself, “I can do this” and I continued along my way. Wow did it make a difference in my day. I pray it made a difference in theirs.

Being intentional is living up to our Baptismal Covenant. It’s saying Yes, I will with God’s help.

May I meet this new day with purpose and intention. Let me greet the stranger with a smile, with a word, with my all. Amen.

Ms. Sharyn Jordan
St. Mary’s Episcopal Church
Dorchester, MA

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

O Lord, in your goodness you bestow abundant graces on your elect: Look with favor, we entreat you, upon those who in these Lenten days are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant them the help of your protection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Galatians 3:26–29

IN 1986, St. Sylvan’s Church in Dunseith, North Dakota on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation was a wood frame building with no running water or bathroom facility. I arrived early one Sunday in July to find the church sparkling clean, and that without running water to assist in cleaning. “What is going on?” I wondered.

My answer came as a convoy of pickup trucks arrived with Irene Beston, grandmother and co-matron of St. Sylvan’s, in the lead. Irene breezed through the door carrying some water jugs, stating, “We have a baptism today, Father.” She then introduced me to her five-year old grandson, Justin Beston, and his dad, Henry, both of whom she said were to be baptized.

My internal reaction was to assert priestly authority. After all, I knew the rules and customs!! No one had contacted me about this baptism. I had not visited with or prepared the family. It was not one of the favored baptismal days of the year. I almost breathed a refusal, but the Spirit caused the intake of breath from my rule-keeper to come out instead, “May I come visit with you after the baptism?”

In the conversation that followed I learned that this was the first time Henry had been with his son, because he had been incarcerated in the State Prison from before Justin’s birth until this baptismal day. With the other faithful 50 members of Abraham’s offspring present, I invited Henry, Justin’s Dad, to bless the water with me and to help pour that water on 5-year-old Justin’s head. Tears of joy and grace flowed down Henry’s face that day as well as many others of us. We were all called to baptismal service that day. Never again did I even consider refusing baptism.

Some contact with Justin continued after those years with good news of his ability to see Christ in others. This grace-filled moment occurred with oppressed Ojibwe or Chippewa/Mischief people.

Recall a time when you received God’s grace despite expected barriers. What about a time when grace was denied to you because of a perceived barrier. Take time to speak to God about both.

The Rev. Bruce MacDuffie
Transitional Priest, St. Luke’s Episcopal Church
Chester, VT



POWERPLAY © LISLE GWYNNE GARRITY

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,
and respect the dignity of every human being?

COLLECT

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

FOLLOWING JESUS is a lifelong journey. Our baptismal covenant is not just a set of vows we take, delineating our commitment to God and one another, but it is also emblematic of the journey of faith. Cycling through each vow, we find a path to the holiness to which we are called and aspire.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

I will with God's help.

This is the culmination of the promises/vows we make in our baptism. In the baptismal Covenant, each belief supports and gives grounding to the promises. Each promise builds on the ones before and invites review and recommitment over and over again. I think the hardest part of these promises is the last.

I can wholeheartedly embrace the commitment to strive for justice and peace among all people. But as we begin the journey to Jerusalem, on this Palm Sunday, I know I struggle to respect the dignity of every human being. How can I respect the dignity of those whose fragile existence rejected Jesus' way of justice and love and caused him to be executed based on trumped up charges? How can I respect the dignity of those who attempt to create laws and policies which uphold the supremacy of one race and gender, in contrast to others? How can I respect the dignity of those who have caused me harm because they disrespect my dignity? I am so grateful there is the expectation that I will fall short, the expectation that these promises are made in community for community, and the expectation that we must rely on God's help.

Therefore, my dear friends, you who are always obedient to my urging, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, not only when I happen to be with you, but all the more now that I'm absent. It is God at work in you that creates the desire to do God's will. (Philippians 2:12–13)

With each stumble, I return to the promises that hold us together, keep us striving and keep us depending on God rather than our own abilities and understanding.

What baptismal promises cause you to struggle?

CONTINUED

MARCH 24  SUNDAY OF THE PASSION — PALM SUNDAY CONTINUED

How might you rely on the community of faith to support you in your journey?

How are you living your faith so that you remember and have a need to rely on God's help?

Why?

How is God inviting you to grow in justice, respect, and dignity for all people?

How does God's invitation to live this last vow lead you back to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of the bread and in the prayers?

The Right Rev. Dr. Shannon MacVean-Brown
Bishop, Diocesan
Episcopal Diocese of Vermont



JUSTICE © SHANNON MACVEAN BROWN

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,
and respect the dignity of every human being?

COLLECT

Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 42:1–9

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.

THE WORDS of the prophet Isaiah invite us to be servants of the Lord by proclaiming that God chooses us, calls us, delights in us, has infused us with his Spirit, takes us by the hand and gently, He makes us instruments of his love for us and for His creation, to be light for the dispossessed and the voice of those who cry out for justice, always healing the wounds of violence and iniquity, sowing peace and fighting for the dignity of every human being.

Feeling chosen, called, and filled with the Spirit of God, let us go into the world to fight for justice, for peace and the dignity of every human being.

QUESTIONS TO REFLECT:

1. At what point in your life have you felt chosen, called, or delighted in by God? How do you renew yourself in that feeling for the sake of your work for justice?
2. At what point in your life have you felt the Holy Spirit inspiring you to join the fight for justice and peace?
3. In your community of faith, have you felt that the Spirit of God is present among you and inspires you to fight for justice and the dignity of people who need a home, company, and urgent needs?

Ms. Angela Soto and The Rev. Deacon Ema Rosero-Nordalm
Lay Assistant for the Hispanic Latino Ministry and Deacon
Trinity Episcopal Church
Haverhill, MA

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,
and respect the dignity of every human being?

COLLECT

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Corinthians 1:18–31

TO GLORY in the cross of Christ invites us deeper than popular understandings. It is the power of the cross to transform us as it invites us to crucify, or accept the crucifixion of, all that blocks us from living into our Baptismal Covenant, that which blocks us from honoring the dignity of every human being — inevitably the same as that which prevents us from honestly seeking justice and peace for every human being.

Presumptions, stories, judgments, labels, fragility, defenses, self-protection, denial — the list could go on. We might notice that all these are based in fear. We might ask ourselves, what do we fear when we face the cross, which is our way to true freedom? We might become willing to crucify — or let be crucified — anything in us that is spawned in fear, that we may be drawn through that knothole in the center of the cross, to emerge into a freer and truer life.

What might you be willing to crucify or have crucified this season? Or maybe we need to ask what Our Lord would like us to crucify? Maybe we can pray: Dear Holy One, Mother-Father, Sustainer and Redeemer and End of all life: in Your mercy guide me, that I may be willing to crucify, or let be crucified, that which blocks me from truer and freer life in You and in Your service. Thank You. In Your Name I pray, and for Your sake. Amen.

Martha Holden
Christ Episcopal Church
Montpelier, VT

Baptismal promise: Will you strive for justice and peace
among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

COLLECT

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

1 John 3:16–24

GOD'S CREATION requires that we all give our lives for each other.
The stars, the elderflowers, the humpback whales, and each of us
in our own time, who will return to the soil and dust from which we came. Allowing new life to take root in us.
Let us remember
The billions of tiny lifeforms inside our bodies,
And the billions more who walk with us, commune with us, nourish us, delight us The healthcare worker, the
farmer, the grocery store clerk
The people who have cared for us, and those we have cared for, The people we have harmed, and those who
have harmed us May we hold, with deep reverence,
The many lives that make up ours.
What would it mean to feel into this miracle, to live according to the truth of it? To see each other through the
layers of disconnect and crisis
To shout tenderly,
And whisper fiercely across the false chasms:
“You are my sibling, and I love you”
What would it mean to hold our dignity, the dignity of our neighbors As something precious and remarkable?
We might learn from the monarch butterfly,
Who carries their flock just a bit closer to the migration's end with each beat of their wings, Yet who does not
see the destination with their own living eyes,
And whose descendants remember the journey, continuing where their forebears left off. May we each find our
small and irreplaceable parts in this path towards justice,
Ever sustained by The vision
Of the life of the world to come,
That unyielding hope that pulses within us.

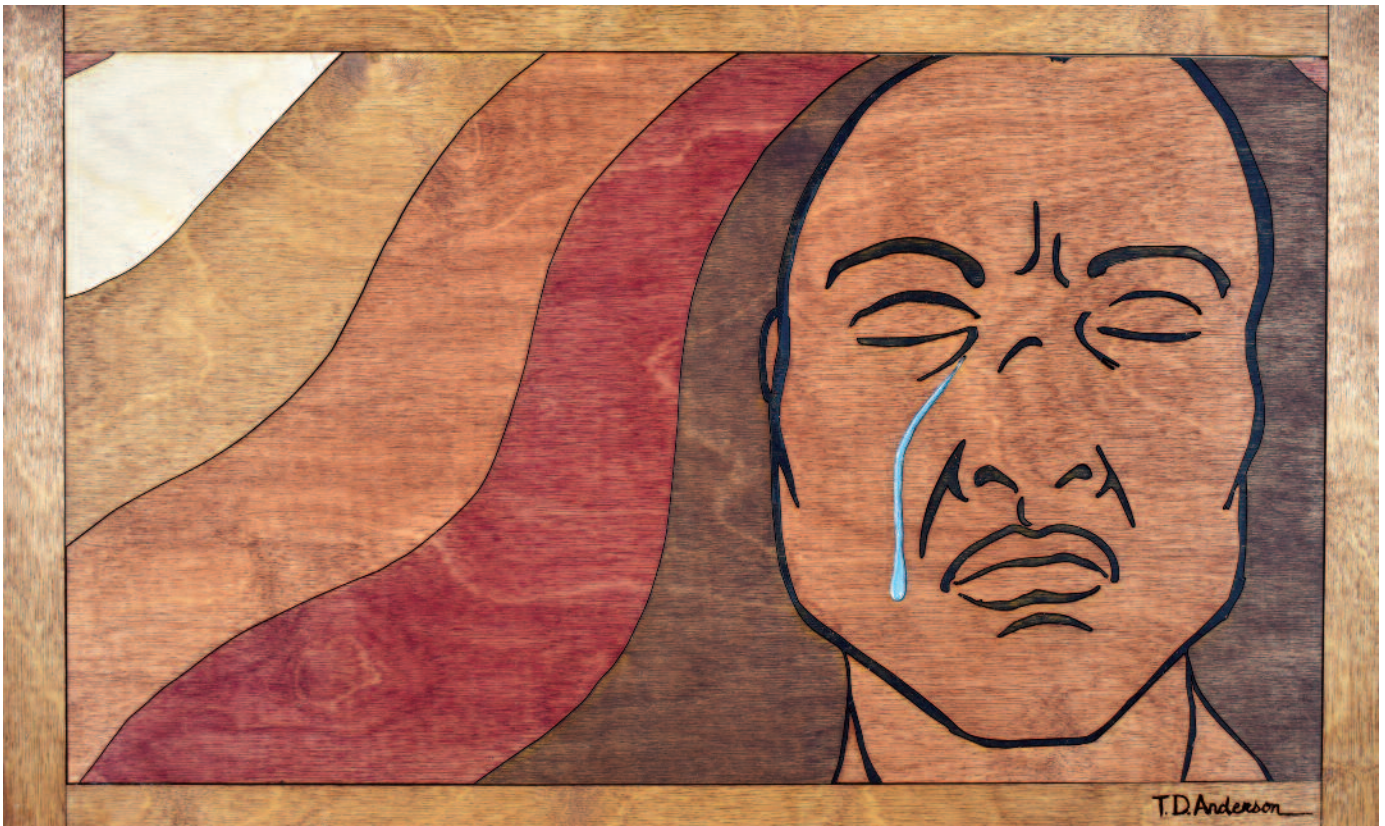
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Reflection Questions:

- Where might you face resistance in approaching yourself or others through the lens of dignity? Where might you find ease or possibility?
- When you imagine liberation/the promise of Easter, what sensations, visions, and inklings arise? What might that tell you about your sacred work in bringing us a bit closer to that future of justice and peace for all people? How might you align your actions to that vision during this season?

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:16–18)

Margaret Walker
Emmaus Fellow, Life Together
Massachusetts



ENOUGH © T. DENISE ANDERSON

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,
and respect the dignity of every human being?

COLLECT

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

John 13:1–17

ONLY IN THE GOSPEL of John is the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet at the Passover/Last Supper. Jesus, as the Passover lamb, is about to be sacrificed — and that will be justice in the words of John the Baptist who earlier proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Yet in every storm of life, Jesus brings shalom. The peace that Jesus brought in washing the disciples' feet was as quiet as water dripping into a basin from hands that would soon grasp the hard wood of the cross — as quiet as the ticking of a mantle clock that we wish we could stop. We must remember that the handmaiden of justice is mercy and here we see perhaps most clearly the mercy of Jesus in washing the feet of humanity with forgiveness, kindness, and compassion.

As followers of Jesus who strive for mercy and shalom with each person we meet, you may wish to picture Lent with me as:

Sadness is as deep as a canyon,
sorrow is a sister to me;
and all the grief I have known in my life,
is like wave upon wave from the sea.

Can we know the pain of another,
as vast as the stars in the sky?
Can we dream new dreams tomorrow,
when today our dreams seem to die?

All questions really are riddles,
and answers are hard stones at our feet,
but we walk the Via Delorosa,
for there 'tis Jesus we'll meet.

Whose feet is God encouraging you to wash?

Mr. Ed Nilson
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Newport, VT

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,
and respect the dignity of every human being?

COLLECT

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 53:3–4, 7–9

OUR BAPTISMAL COVENANT ASKS US “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” The word that captured my attention in this very familiar phrase was strive. We aren’t just to work, pay attention on occasion when it is convenient to us or sit and watch others. We are asked to strive. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines strive as to devote serious effort or energy and to struggle in opposition.

Why must we strive? Because there are those among us who have no justice or peace. The prophet speaks in Isaiah 53:8 of a perversion of justice. The prophet tells us of the Suffering Servant being cut off from the community, despised and rejected because those who could have made a difference kept silent. They did not speak up for justice in the face of injustice. They did not speak up for peace.

We are called by our Baptismal Covenant to strive for justice and peace, to devote serious effort and energy towards justice and peace. This may sometimes feel overwhelming, especially with the conflict and war taking place in our world right now. It seems out of our reach to us and intractable. However, it is not. It only takes the action of one person committed to change to create that change.

Where is your heart calling you this Lent, and beyond, to strive for justice and peace? Where is God inviting you deeper into your life of faith by stepping out of your comfort zone and striving for peace and justice in your own community?

The Rev. Kelly A. O’Connell
Canon for the Southern Region
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,
and respect the dignity of every human being?

COLLECT

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Job 14:1–14; Romans 6:3–11

“For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease... its stump dies in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant... If mortals die, will they live again? All the days of my service I would wait until my release should come (Job 14:7–9, 14).”

JANE HIRSHFIELD’S POEM entitled *Three Times My Life Has Opened* was offered as a prompt in a writing meditation group I attended this winter. I reflected on it and my life, such as Job describes in chapter 14, the hope, the death, rebirth, and the very wintry question, “*yet, will mortals live again?*”

How many times do we experience rebirth into growth and transformation in our lifetimes. And how many times do we ask, “*if mortals die, will they live again?*” How many times do we seek the rebirth at the end of Lent as promised us in the BCP on Ash Wednesday? “*Lent is also a time when those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the Church.*”

So, how do we live our lives and weave our pathways of death and rebirth into a whole life so that “so we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4–5)!” Here is the poem that emerged in my heart, of those things and more, on a cold dark winter evening.

THREE TIMES

Three times my life has opened
 Birth Mother — Construction Worker — Priest
 And so many ways the openings have evolved
 Kaleidoscopic light shifting
 Loud voices of pride and love
 Sacrifice and scars
 Gifts of the silent presence
 Each opening produced threads that set a pattern
 Then were cut and rejoined to change the pattern
 Yet the threads that become soul identifiers linger
 And add the strength of whole

CONTINUED

MARCH 30  HOLY SATURDAY CONTINUED

All is well

Three times my life has opened

 Woman who births and lets go

 Woman who creates and leaves behind

Woman who pulls all the threads together to be
a presence and bring a three times opening gift to others

Body

Sounds

Silence

Presence

The Rev. Jennie Anderson
Priest-in-Partnership
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Norwich, VT and
St. John's Episcopal Church, Randolph, VT



THE LORD IS MY LIGHT © MIKE MOYERS



SOUL FRIENDS © BROTHER KEITH NELSON, S.S.J.E.

Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect
and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?

COLLECT

O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTORY ARTICLE

ONE EASTER MORNING I awoke in the pre-dawn darkness to a full, silver moon and the piercing hoots of barred owls. I had to remind myself where I was: not in my familiar cell at the monastery I call home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but in a yurt surrounded by Church of the Woods in Canterbury, New Hampshire. I was apprenticed to this outdoor worship community, with its eccentric flock of humans and other creatures of God, in my training to become an Episcopal priest.

I emerged from the yurt, walked a few feet up a gravel path under silent stars, and joined fellow disciples in kindling a sacred fire of crackling hemlock boughs. Our shadows leapt and undulated against the ever-attentive trunks of white birch and quaking aspen. As the words I ponder year by year with my Brothers emerged from my mouth, they took on entirely new meaning:

“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth...” (Gen. 1:1)

A sacred shiver ambushed my flesh.

This is the church, I thought: participating alongside and within the web of creation; answering the call of God’s creating Word; loving the world into being all over again. Another circuit of the spiral complete, and another freshly begun, bearing all beings ever deeper into the heart of God.

While the Spirit bestowed many gifts in my time with Church of the Woods, one insight has truly changed me. When worship unfolds amid wild nature, guided by humans who are humble enough to meet and name Christ in its midst, something revolutionary takes place: collaboration in its most cosmic form.

In this collaboration, the follower of Christ may see herself in a mirror both ancient and startlingly new: created according to the likeness of the Creator; rooted and grounded in love; sustained by a nourishing ethos of totality, fullness, living growth, interdependence, and diversity of witness. This is a self that is known relationally, through loving one’s neighbor as oneself. The definition of neighbor begins to extend itself naturally to all things in heaven and earth. Imagine that self, loving and serving alongside a community of selves “joined and knit together, each part working properly” (Eph. 4:16); a community enfolded by the

CONTINUED

MARCH 31 EASTER DAY CONTINUED

collective epiphany that what holds true for the body of the Church holds true for the body of the earth: we are members of one another.

This wild Word waits to speak out of God's primordial darkness in you. This wild Christ, crucified-and-risen, is poised to roll away every stone.

That we possess this hidden power means that we can take our place, confidently and in hope, in contributing to change, no matter how high the tide of despair rises around us. Our culture is awakening to the reality that, in the words of deep ecologist Arne Naess, "the requisite care flows naturally if the self is widened and deepened so that protection of free nature is felt and conceived of as protection of our very selves." The Church is awakening to its ecological vocation on an unprecedented scale. We are "being renewed in the spirit of our minds" (Eph. 4:23). As agents of Christ's regeneration, we each occupy a vital niche in this global web of greatest need. What we do matters, but what and how we love from the center of a new self matters most of all: how we love every molecule of soil, every tree, and every human life for whom Christ "descended into the lower parts of the earth" and "ascended far above all heavens, so that he might fill all things" (Eph. 4:10).

Brother Keith Nelson, SSJE
Society of St. John the Evangelist
Cambridge, MA

APRIL 1 MONDAY IN EASTER WEEK

Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?

COLLECT

Grant, we pray, Almighty God, that we who celebrate with awe the Paschal feast may be found worthy to attain to everlasting joys; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Genesis 1:1–2:4

IN GENESIS, God gave humankind dominion over Creation. In the 6th Baptismal Covenant we promise, in return, to cherish these wondrous works. We have failed.

But our God is a loving God and today is Bright Monday, the day after Easter! The Paschal mystery tells us that God has not abandoned us to the darkness of the Crucifixion or the chaos of climate change. With Christ's Resurrection, we have the hope of new life, a second chance, and the assurance that we are not alone.

God still relies on us to cherish, protect, and restore the world around us. We will continue to stumble and fall, but the Paschal mystery offers us a helping hand to get back up, and the strength and confidence to try again.

The Genesis story tells us that God created this universe one step at a time, declaring each step good. With each step we take to protect what remains and restore what is broken, we share in our Creator's joy. We receive the strength to try again.

The Genesis story also tells us that God created this goodness out of chaos. As we enter Eastertide, let us not dwell on the chaos we cannot control, but focus instead on the beauty that we can protect and the harmony we can restore. Created in God's image and given a sacred task to care for Creation, let us draw upon the joyful Paschal mystery for the strength and confidence we need for this task, taking one step at a time.

What step might you take today to protect or restore some part of God's creation?

Sue Swanson, CCJN
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Bedford, MA

APRIL 2 TUESDAY IN EASTER WEEK

Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?

COLLECT

O God, who by the glorious resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light: Grant that we, who have been raised with him, may abide in his presence and rejoice in the hope of eternal glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be dominion and praise for ever and ever. Amen.

Genesis 9:8–17

ON A BRIGHT SPRING MORNING, a porcupine sits nestled in an apple tree in an old orchard. As it nibbles on an apple, it watches me curiously. There's a mutual understanding between the creature and the apple tree. Food will be abundant. Ingested seeds will be fortified and dispersed on fertile soil. The porcupine plays a crucial role in its ecosystem, transporting food and nutrients from the tree canopy to the forest floor. There exists a pact between the porcupine and the tree, and between the creatures and the land.

Our climate emergency isn't just a scientific or technological crisis. As my former seminary professor Ellen Davis phrases it, we're facing "a crisis of the human imagination and will." At its heart, it's a disconnect in relationship — a misunderstanding of the interconnectedness and inherent covenant in our existence with God, all living creatures, and the land.

Our ancient stories remind us that we share a bond with the earth and all its inhabitants. Humans are created from the earth: Adam from Adamah, human from humerus. Our survival relies on this shared covenant — a kinship with God, the creatures, and the land. This fundamental relationship is portrayed as boundlessly diverse, symbolized by God with a rainbow — an electromagnetic spectrum refracting and reflecting in harmony with the sun and rain droplets.

How do I fit into this covenant? What role do I play in this ecosystem? What can I do to help sustain life? How am I a prism, spreading a small yet precious stream of rainbow light?

The Rev. Lisa M. Ransom
Executive Director, Mission Farm and Vicar, Church of Our Saviour
Killington, VT

APRIL 3 WEDNESDAY IN EASTER WEEK

Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect
and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?

COLLECT

*O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread:
Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives
and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Romans 8:18–27, 38–39

A WAVE OF EASTER HOPE poured like a river through the first followers of Jesus — a mighty surge of confidence that the crucified Jesus had risen from the dead. They realized that they belonged to a sacred mystery that was larger than themselves — to a love from which nothing could separate them (Romans 8:38–39). When that Easter experience eludes us — when God’s love feels far away and sorrows and worry weigh us down — many of us instinctively search for a place in nature where we find beauty: a patch of blue sky, an open field, a tree beside the road.

By taking time to gaze with eyes of wonder, we connect with the divine love that shines out in every created thing. We encounter the crucified and risen Christ, who gives himself to us in the living world around us. As Martin Luther said, “God writes the Gospel, not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and the flowers and the clouds and stars.”

Awed by the sacredness of God’s creation, we want to protect the sky that God made — the water that God made — the Earth that God made. We want to bless the trees, bless the topsoil, and bless our neighbors already suffering from the harsh effects of a changing climate. We want to bless those who come after us and to pass along as livable a world as we possibly can. How might prayerful contact with the natural world restore your soul today?

The Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas,
Creation Care Advisor, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
Missioner for Creation Care Diocese of Western Massachusetts

Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect
and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?

COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 8

AT THE BEGINNING OF PSALM 8, we have a musical instrument, the gittith, and the psalmist and musician, David, which is a joyful beginning for the beautiful words that follow.

How was David to know that pristine environment was to be shared with two girls, eight and eleven years old, some thousands of years later with music and words of their own. There were no adversaries, no restraining any enemy or avenger. There was, instead, a spoon, a tin plate, play clothes and sneakers and the adventure of the day ahead. They set out on a self-made path through the woods and the days unknown unfolded.

“When I look up at your heavens, the work of your fingers, at the moon and the stars you have set in place,” I see before me the beautiful green moss covering the ground. I take my spoon and dig up the cool, woody soil with some moss and put it in my pan as I begin the building of a dish garden.

And there is an acorn with the beginning of a root growing out of the shell as babes and infants do. Along with the soil, moss and rooted acorn there is the smallest hint of a flower to join those in the dish garden that you would almost take no notice of it. The garden is growing, as is the joy.

The feet are moving quickly now as the sound of rushing water is calling. The water having been set in place as are the moon and the stars and the heavens.

Something delightful has taken the place of sheep, oxen, wild beast. It is the delight of frogs, crayfish and minnows all for the catching with the hands as the wiggle to be returned to their thousand years past.

But now the play has really started as we swing on the wild, thick grape vines over the stream, drop down in the deep water and squeal with delight. It is time to dam up the stream to make the pool deeper. We gather stones from another era and build the dam and listen to the silence, “birds in the air and everything that moves along ocean paths.”

APRIL 4 🌿 THURSDAY IN EASTER WEEK CONTINUED

Those ocean paths that now hold fossils from millions of years ago, some of which will go into the dish garden, our Eden.

“How glorious is your name throughout the world!”

Joy gives glory to God; take time this week to play. Alleluia!

Ms. Linda Wirts
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church
Swanton, VT



SOUTHERN HEFONS © LINDA WIRTS

APRIL 5 FRIDAY IN EASTER WEEK

Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?

COLLECT

Almighty Father, who gave your only Son to die for our sins and to rise for our justification: Give us grace so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may always serve you in pureness of living and truth; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Ezekiel 47:1–9,12

IN READING THE EZEKIEL PASSAGE, the first word that comes to mind is abundance. Water is plentiful, “swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows.” The passage continues: “Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail...Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.” This passage is a perfect reading for the baptismal covenant promise we are reflecting on this week. “Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?” God’s creation is abundance but oh how we are destroying it!

In meditating on this baptismal covenant, I focused on the word “cherish.” One dictionary defines it as “protect and care for lovingly” and to “hold something dear.” Synonyms of the word cherish are “appreciate, prize, treasure, and value.” When I reflect on my personal actions and decisions, admittedly I fall short of lovingly valuing the integrity of all of creation that is around me. Taking a walk by the ocean and through the forest reminds me of the beauty God has created. My challenge to myself and to others is to be intentional in every action and thought and to do whatever possible to “protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation” for the inherent value of creation itself as well as a justice issue so that all people, this generation and future generations, may reap the benefits of God’s abundant creation. May it be so.

Reread Ezekiel’s vision of abundance flowing from the temple. How might cherishing creation be a part of your renewed worship and healing (v.12) this Easter season?

Ms. Martha Gardner
Missioner for Networking and Formation
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

APRIL 6 SATURDAY IN EASTER WEEK

Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect and restore the beauty and integrity of all creation?

COLLECT

We thank you, heavenly Father, that you have delivered us from the dominion of sin and death and brought us into the kingdom of your Son; and we pray that, as by his death he has recalled us to life, so by his love he may raise us to eternal joys; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

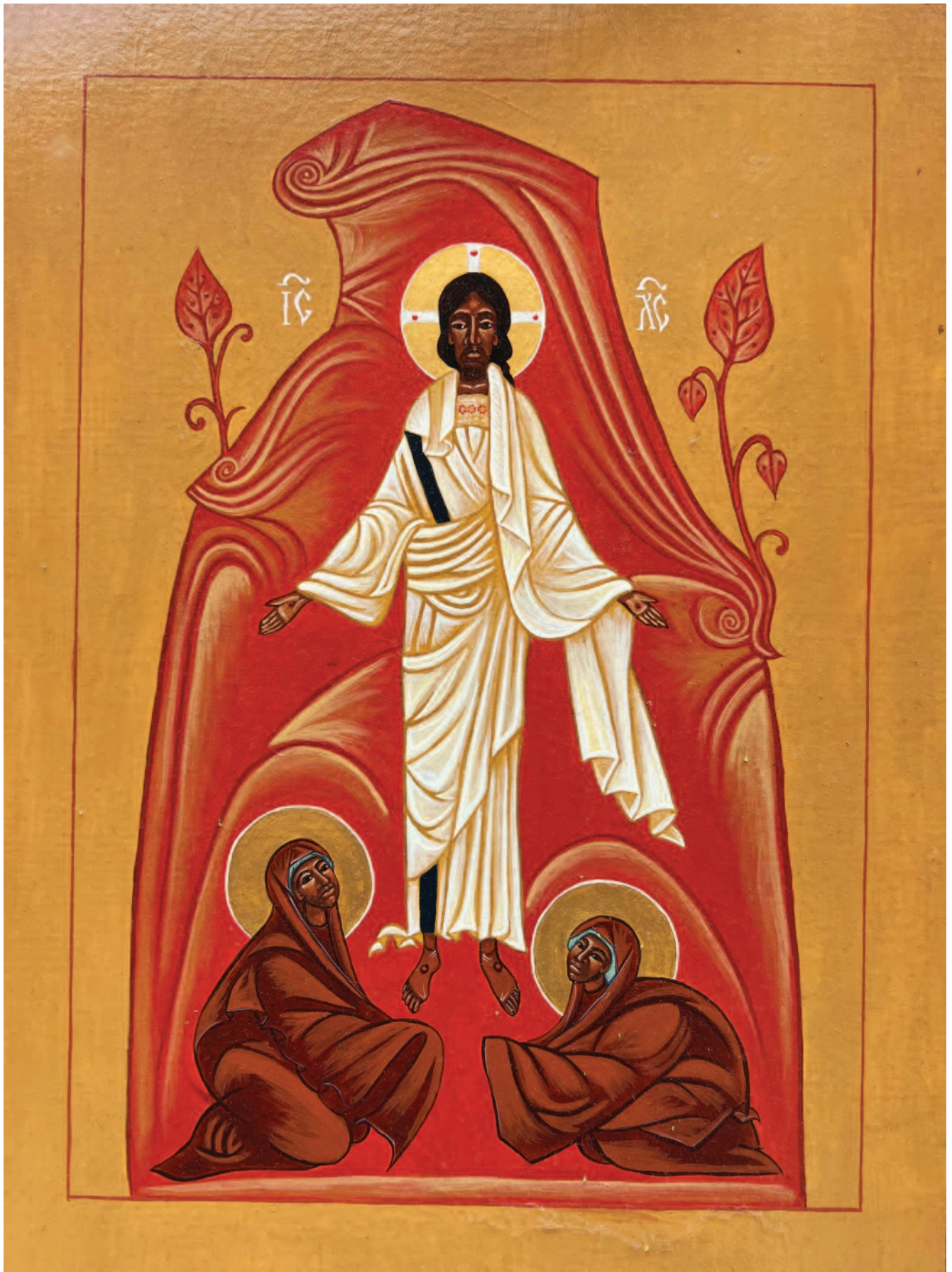
Psalm 104

IT IS EASY TO IMAGINE, from the top of a sweeping vista and the hills rolling on like infinity below, that we are observers of something wondrous beyond our imagining. From this view, the earth is perfect, unchanging, roaring with life, and grander than us by incomprehensible orders of magnitude.

I have lived in the world in this way. It brings its own delicious awe — to stop and look at each leaf, blade of grass, golden-voiced sparrow of the forest. And yet, we are earth. The earth itself flourishes or withers where our footsteps mark the forest floor. Our baptismal vows call us off the hilltop and into a dazzling relationship with God through creation. Psalm 104 weaves a visual painting of a world alive with the presence of God. The psalm is a love song of images grounded in the presence of God, and we are vibrantly invited to be participants who “protect and restore” our neighbors, the foxes, waterfalls, lichen, geese, and mountains. This calling at our baptism goes beyond the safety of being a distant observer and invites us, with humility, to roll up our sleeves and become intimate with our surroundings. The Old Testament is full of guidelines for how to glorify God by the way we live in community with creation. The seven-year jubilee where the land is allowed to rest, leaving the margins of harvest for the poor and the creatures, refraining from eating certain animals or plants. Every decision we make has an impact on our neighbors and more than human relatives.

What shape are your footprints on the ground? How does the shape of your life protect and restore the lives of your more-than-human relatives?

The Rev. Rachel Field
Priest Associate, St. Mary's, Northfield, VT
Co-Founder, Spirit Dinners at Heartberry Hollow Farm & Forest



CHRIST AND THE MYRRH BEARERS © THE RT. REV. DR. SHANNON MACVEAN-BROWN

COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

TOGETHER WE HAVE SPENT THE SEASON of Lent and the first week of Easter reflecting upon the covenant into which God has invited us in our baptism. Our focus has been the questions which the celebrant poses to us each time we renew that covenant. Will you continue in prayer and fellowship? persevere in repentance and renewal? proclaim the Good News? love your neighbor? be an agent of justice? steward the Creation? Upon each of these questions we have been invited to reflect — and, of course, to respond: “I will, with God’s help.”

There remains no baptismal covenant question to conclude our reflections. There remains, rather, the one question which follows them all: *How? How will we live out that all-encompassing covenant? How will we move forward in the new light of Easter morn?*

The Gospel reading for the Second Sunday of Easter — so crucial that it is the same in all three lectionary years — begins that first night of the Resurrection, in a locked room where the disciples are huddled in confusion and fear. The risen Christ greets them with his Peace, shows them his wounds, and conveys to them the breath of the Holy Spirit. But Thomas isn’t there. The testimony of his friends — “We have seen the Lord” — cannot assuage his fears. (Can we blame him, really?) So comes Scene Two, the following week. Same sequence: Peace, Passion, Spirit. And Thomas is there. And Thomas is broken open, his hopes fulfilled, his faith restored.

That first encounter was communal. Jesus came to the disciples gathered. Thomas could not make on his own the movement from qualm to calm, from fear to faith. That only happened in the company of his companions. Fifty days later at Pentecost, that gift of the Spirit comes definitively, powerfully, and in community.

In so many arenas of our life these days, we are the disciples huddled in confusion and fear, challenged by the pervasive anxiety in the midst of which we dwell. Economic uncertainty; toxic political polarization and paralysis; COVID fatigue; warfare beyond us, gun violence among us. How could we not be anxious? In the church, so many of our old models creak and groan, no longer serving us as they once did.

There is no way to face into these challenges and anxieties except to face them together. It is together that Christ comes to us, as he did to those disciples. There he greets us with his Peace (*insert here every promise we claim from Jesus, and every hope we derive from the wise and courageous in our midst*); he shows us his Wounds (*insert here news of the broken, forgotten, and annihilated which we read every day*); he conveys to us his Spirit (*insert here the strength of sacrament and the courage of community by which we are restored*).

This is our call to collaboration. Collaboration in the Church is not primarily the solution to a resource problem; it is, rather, the way we live fully into our identity as the Body of Christ, replete with many members whose strength together is far beyond the sum of our individual parts. It is the place where we meet the Risen Christ. Together we shout: *Alleluia!*

The Right Rev. Alan Gates
Bishop Diocesan, The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Appendix — Art, Artist Statements, and Copyrights

Front Cover: *Bayou Baptism*, Lauren Wright Pittman, www.lewpstudio.com

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Artist Statement: Jesus is stretching out of the frame inviting the viewer to celebrate their own mysterious and wonderful calling from God as he basks in his own. I chose to paint a pelican for the Holy Spirit's descent, because the scriptural texts leave some room for interpretation; the descending figure is described as "like a dove". So, I decided to paint a pelican which is native to the bayou and was also used to depict Christ's sacrifice in medieval Christian art. God the Creator is represented as the sun, with voice waves radiating from the center, expressing how pleased God is with Jesus.

Page vi: *Overflowing*, Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity, www.lislegwynngarrity.com

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Artist Statement: Paul's prayer to the growing church in Philippi is that their love may overflow more and more...into...wisdom, knowledge, understanding [which], for Paul, are rooted in the heart, in love for God and neighbor....

When I read Paul's prayer, I immediately saw the image of water overflowing into wine. Truth begins with love. It's an aging process, requiring years of effort and patience. If our actions are overflowing with grace, patience, and openness to embrace one another, then we will find our way.

Page 1: *Meu Coracao/My Heart*, Amanda Vivan

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Artist Statement: Sometimes... We must muster the courage to take an honest look at our own hearts. Much like the tree our hearts are misshapen, rough, and sometimes hollow. One's spirit can be bruised and broken caused by external forces and internal choices. Yet like our own hearts, the misshapeness of the tree yields to openness;... Like the tiny light in the hollow of this tree, God reminds us that even in our hollow places there is "God-residue" left. There is always enough left in order to give God praise. There is enough light to be fully restored into joy. The God-residue or light that resides within us reminds us of God's faithfulness, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, and unending love. — Olusola Tribble

Page 5: *Ash*, Mike Moyers, www.mikemoyersfineart.com

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Artist Statement: "A painting depicting the cross of ashes imposed on Ash Wednesday. The painting style conveys the themes of mortality, brokenness, and our need of God's grace."

I firmly believe that art is a communion with the soul. Through my art, I strive to make known the beauty and wonder of life and faith. My hope is to successfully communicate those inspirations so that you might be touched as well.

Page 6: *Open Table*, Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman, www.lewpstudio.com

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Artist Statement: "Open Table" is a meditation on what a more open, abundant table might look and feel like. At the center of the image are the elements of communion, bread and wine. The light of Christ radiates from the bread as it reaches, without barrier, the cupped hands of those ready to receive. Shining from the center are the beginnings of gluten free plants, including rice and buckwheat grains. Bursting forth from corners of the image are various plants that source gluten free ingredients for communion bread, including: buckwheat flowers, amaranth, quinoa, millet, and sorghum. This image represents Christ's ever-expanding welcome, as well as the abundance of resources that are available for us to create more open and welcome spaces for everyone to participate in worship and the sacraments.

Page 14: *Elijah Hears the Still Small Voice of God*, Janet McKenzie, janetmckenzie.com

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Artist Statement: After the wind, fire and earthquake passed, and in the quiet that followed, Elijah heard the still small voice of God who had been present all along. Over the course of my own life, it has been the same. Like Elijah, only after the fear, suffering and mourning have slowed, am I able to feel the presence of God once again, who never left me. This painting was inspired and modeled by my son Simeon whose radiant soul contributed to the essence of this work and why, I truly believe, many people are moved to tears when viewing it.

Page 16: *Serena*, Richmond Barthe

Licensing: *Barthé*, Richmond, 1901–1989. *Serena*, from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

Page 21: *The Last Supper*, John August Swanson, johnaugustswanson.com

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Artist's Statement: I am inspired by a person's ability to share food with others and the community that grows from this sharing. I see, in the Last Supper, a scene in which the sacred embraces the ordinary. Our daily bread becomes holy when it is shared. The fruit of our labor becomes the fruit of the Spirit when it is shared. "We cannot love God unless we love each other," says Dorothy Day, "and to love each other we must know each other in the breaking of bread and we are not alone anymore. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship. Love comes with community."

Page 24: *Praying at Gethsemane*, (James) He Qi, www.heqiart.com

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Page 30: *Jesus and the Woman Taken*, Kathleen Peterson, www.kathleenpetersonart.com

Licensing: This image is donated to this project and may not be reproduced without the artist's expressed permission.

Artist's Statement: In donating the work, the artist wrote: "The idea was a gift to me and I am so happy to share it with you. It illustrates my favorite NT story of the Savior reminding us of forgiveness and repentance and nonjudgement."

James Goldberg's article meditating at length on this piece in the magazine *Dialogue*.

Page 34: *Wales Window for Birmingham*, John Petts

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Statement: The 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama was bombed in 1963, killing four girls in racially motivated violence. The people of Wales commissioned and produced this window for the restored church. An article can be found at: <https://magiccityreligion.org/2020/04/01/wales-window-for-alabama/>

Page 42: *Mary, Mother of Mercy*, Janet McKenzie, janetmckenzie.com

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Artist's Statement: Beloved mother Mary protectively and lovingly holds humanity within her mantle. As she loved Jesus, so she loves each one of us. The love I have for my son and my role as a daughter undeniably thread throughout this painting as an emotional undercurrent. The subjects I asked to pose for this work were carefully and specifically selected. I am indebted to each person who agreed to join me on this journey. Each one selflessly and graciously contributed their image to this painting.

Page 50: *Powerplay*, Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity, www.lislegwynngarrity.com

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Artist Statement: In their book, *The Last Week*, theologians Marcus Borg and John Crossman assert that there were actually two parades occurring simultaneously in Jerusalem on this day. From the east, Jesus entered on a donkey. From the west, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, entered with an imperial guard.... This image is a meditation on these opposing processions and the embodiment of power.

Which parade you would join in Jerusalem has a lot to say about your definition of power. If you are quick to place yourself in Jesus' parade, I encourage you to pause and consider these questions honestly: When have you aligned yourself with systems or people who have used their power for violence or to uphold the status quo? When have you embodied power through vulnerability and love for your neighbor?

Page 52: *Justice*, from the Advent Word Series, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Shannon MacVean-Brown

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Page 56: *Enough*, T. Denise Anderson, www.facebook.com/tdandersonart

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Artist Statement: Jesus' lament over Jerusalem's intransigence is powerful because you can hear a righteous indignation and a deep anguish. He foreshadows his own execution, but his pain is for the waywardness of his people. This is one of a handful of times scripture uses feminine, specifically maternal, imagery in connection to God: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..." (Luke 13: 34b, NRSV) As a mother, I know what it feels like to watch from a relative distance as a child makes heartbreaking decisions. I wanted...to somehow capture the heartache of a parent whose children have chosen a destructive path.

Page 61: *The Lord is My Light*, Mike Moyers, www.mikemoyersfineart.com

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Page 62: *Soul Friends*, Brother Keith Nelson, SSJE

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Artist Statement: Praying with this visual motif from the *Book of Kells*, I call to heart the Celtic tradition of the *anamchara*: the "soul friend." This tradition of sacred friendship between fellow disciples of Jesus was held in great esteem as a powerful means of grace, inviting each friend to step further into the truth of who God made each to be.

But another meaning suggests itself when I gaze through Easter eyes: the union of soul and body. This holy partnership undergirds our journey through life and lasts until our last breath. It is a union that, by faith, we believe will be mysteriously transfigured in the final resurrection, when Christ "fills all in all."

This drawing itself emerged from a sacred friendship I share with the land my community stewards at Emery House in West Newbury, Massachusetts. I created the drawing inks from plants foraged from the land: pokeweed, privet berry, wild grape, black walnut, acorn caps of white oak boiled with rusty nails. Each color acquires its effect from those around it, and each will continue to metamorphose over time — like the beloved landscape itself.

Page 69: Linda Wirts shared this image as one of her various nature watercolors when submitting her reflection. She graciously allowed it to be featured as a sign of the joy she has found in creation and in Psalm 8, in particular.

Page 72: *Jesus and the Myrrh Bearers*, The Rt. Rev. Dr. Shannon MacVean-Brown

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Back Cover: *The Road to Emmaus*, (James) He Qi, www.heqiart.com

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