

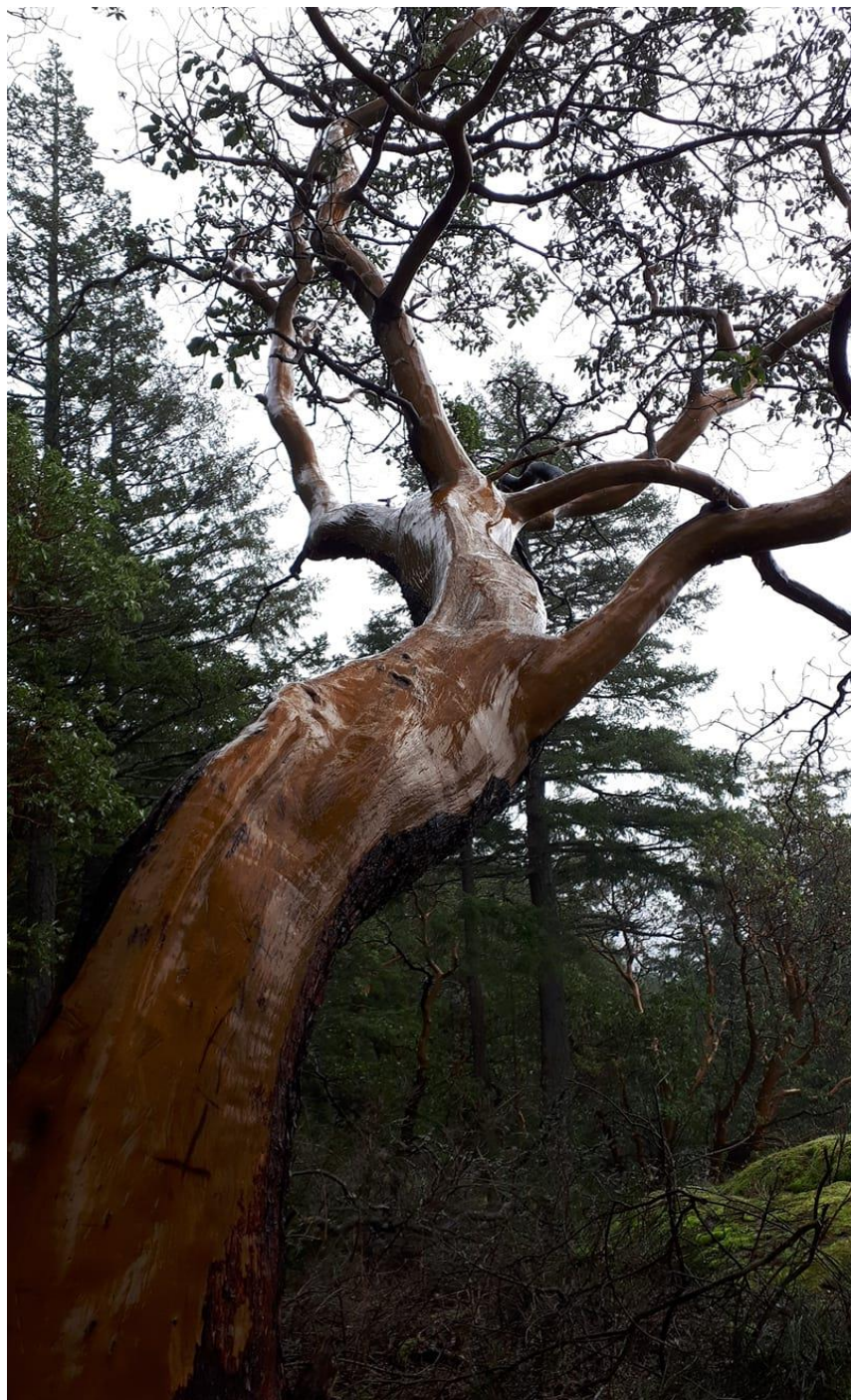
Remember You Are Dust



reflections
for Lent 2020

The Emmaus Community,
The AbbeyChurch & Friends





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Photo credits: members of Emmaus Chapter.

Reflections



February 26, 2020 - Ash Wednesday

Contributor: Matthew Humphrey

Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 103:8-18; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday.

With: **Remember. You are dust.**

Kneeling down, we are marked with the Cross of Christ. This time, not in holy oil as per our baptism, but in darkened ash, a remembrance of our death. The sober words, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” lingering over our ears and hearts, as we try and return back to life as usual. But this Lenten liturgy resists business as usual and in so doing, offers us an invitation we should not be quick to miss.

Memento Mori. Remember. your death. Such was the advice of ancient Christians, who met in catacombs and among graveyards to avoid the watch of government authorities, who built altars atop the bones of their dead Saints and founders, and who took seriously the discipleship call to lay down one's life for the sake of the world. But in the ancient world, death was woven into the warp and weft of life in ways that contemporary society has long since lost hold of. For all the technological advances we have made, we fool ourselves into thinking we've conquered this great crisis at the heart of our existence – the period at the end of our sentence. And we, as creatures of earth, are uniquely consumed by this fact. As the author of Hebrews says, we live “in slavery of the fear of death.”

Lent invites us to ponder anew this unavoidable fact of our existence, **Remember you are dust**, and to make peace with it. Christians have used Lent as a unique time for doing so by two principle means. The first, by more deeply identifying with Christ in his temptation suffering and death. And second, finding through our identification with Christ, our gaze fixed on those who even now are crucified and facing death in this world.

Isaiah instructs his readers to a strict practice of keeping the fast – and not for personal purity or bodily benefit, as we might (this was not the Whole 30!) But rather, as an act of deep and embodied solidarity with those who suffer, with those who are daily facing the threat of death due to human injustice, violence, and pain. The fast God has in mind, he writes, will “loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke...”

In other words, this fast seeks to bring life in the midst of death. This fast seeks to plant us more firmly on the side of the God of life in the midst of this culture of

death. And so doing, to discover that whatever fear death may inflict on us is not ultimate. For the same God who hung on the Cross is the one we anticipate chasing out of the empty tomb... but first, we must enter more deeply into this earthly shadow by fasting, and be embracing death. So this Lent, may we enter into solidarity with God who in Christ has come and willingly embracing the Cross, and the horrors of death, and who still stands with those who are crucified right now. Thanks be to God.

February 27, 2020

Commemoration of George Herbert, Priest and Poet,
1553-1633 Contributor: Marylin Gough
Dueteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 1; Luke 9:18-25

Love (III)

George Herbert - 1593-1633

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning
 If I lacked anything.

"A guest," I answered, "worthy to be here":
 Love said, "You shall be he."

"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,
 I cannot look on thee."

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 "Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve."

"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"
 "My dear, then I will serve."

"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."
 So I did sit and eat.

Follow this link to hear John Shirley Quirk sing Ralph Vaughn Willams' profoundly beautiful setting of this poem. The choir joins in with the wordless melody of the chant *O Sacrum Convivum*:

“O sacred banquet in which Christ is received, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace and a pledge of future glory to us is given.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn9vo82lXh4>

February 28, 2020

Contributor: Sue Patterson

Isaiah 58:1-9. Psalm 51: 1-4,17-18. Matthew 9: 14-17

In Psalm 51 God assures us that he hears our cry for mercy and forgives us - wiping away all our sin. David's amazing repentance - full expression and honesty about his sin God does not reject. He reestablishes David so completely for his heart returned to a place of submission to God. The following part of this psalm lays out so beautifully our call from Jesus: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

In the Isaiah passage the whole subject of fasting is addressed. "Raise your voice like a trumpet" God says through Isaiah. He is not pleased with physical or mental outward signs. God goes right to the heart of the matter. He rejects what Israel has defiled as fasting. God sees the inner workings that blow forth into evil encounters with one another, and empty rituals they engage in and expect to be heard and rewarded for. No! The fast that is acceptable to God is beautifully laid out in this passage. Caring for the most destitute of individuals - the hungry, the homeless, the oppressed - all those in need - is the fast

God calls us to. "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I."

In the Gospel we are told that Jesus epitomizes true fasting. He pours out to us his very life blood. While he lived in this world, his authenticity - namely the true Saviour of the world - pulsed and spread to all who came to him. Now that Jesus has suffered death, risen and ascended and is seated at the throne of his kingdom, we are called to live out the true fasting - sacrifice, repentance and honest meditating on the Word made flesh and having the true love of God for all - being transformed into transparent witnesses of Jesus, lived out in humility and the experience of the reality of suffering that is included in God's path as we put our words into action.

February 29, 2020

Contributor: Melanie Ihmels

Isaiah 58:9b-14; Psalm 86:1-6; Luke 5:27-32

There are those that call out in supplication, begging for relief, for help, for support. They reach outwards, hands and voices grasping...hoping and praying that they will be seen. These voices have cried through the centuries, they are not new, not unique, they are our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, children, family, friends; they are those that we walk side by side with everyday, some we choose to hear and some we do not.

Yet when we choose to hear, when we choose to listen to the calls of those desperate for help, those yearning for hope, we choose to follow an ancient tradition of fellowship and guidance. When we make our own world, our own community, one that feeds food to the hungry, supports the drug addicted, lifts up the abused, shines light in the darkness of those blind,

deaf, and mute, we choose to answer a call placed on us thousands of years ago.

We choose to hear Jesus say to each of us: “Follow Me.” And we choose to leave all behind, our doubts, our fears, our sins, our struggles. We choose to put aside our earthly joys and pleasures, our successes, and our wins. We choose to stand up and walk into a world completely different from the one we begin with. In it, it does not matter who we are or who we have been, it does not matter if we are a follower or a leader, a doer or a wait-er, rich or poor. It does not matter if we think we are useless in God’s eyes...GOD CALLS. And it is our choice to hear that call.

Imagine, you walk down the crowded downtown street. The light is red and a bedraggled, women with cheap, dirty clothes calls out to you...help me. What is your answer?

March 1, 2020

Contributor: Meagan Crosby-Shearer

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Matthew 4:1-11

The Unbroken

*There is a brokenness
out of which comes the unbroken,
a shatteredness
out of which blooms the unshatterable.
There is a sorrow
beyond all grief which leads to joy
and a fragility
out of whose depths emerges strength.*

*There is a hollow space
too vast for words
through which we pass with each loss,*

*out of whose darkness
we are sanctioned into being.*

*There is a cry deeper than all sound
whose serrated edges cut the heart
as we break open to the place inside
which is unbreakable and whole,
while learning to sing.*

- by Rashani Réa

Enter the wilderness.

Risk the grief, the longing, the hope, the serrated
edges that cut our hearts.

Face the temptation.

Draw back in worship and service to the Word that is
the food of our life. The One who binds our broken
hearts and teaches us to sing.

March 2, 2020

Contributor: Roxy Humphrey

Lev 19:1-2, 11-18; Psalm 19:7-14; Matthew
25:31-46

“But who can discern their own errors?

Forgive my hidden faults.”

- Psalm 19:12

*“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did
for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine,
you did for me.’*

- Matthew 25:40

*You who continue to create goodness,
even when we are unable to hold ourselves to your good
decrees,
decrees which maintain and support the goodness of
your
tenderly crafted world.*

*We lie, steal, curse, slander, and scorn,
And try very hard at hiding it.*

*Help us to know your tender, sheperding love for us
so that we can offer tender, sheperding love for our
neighbours,
even and especially when we see these neighbours lie,
steal, curse, slander and scorn.*

*Because we know what it is like to recieve when we
have not earned it.
Because we know that unearned love is precisely what
enables transformation.
Because we have been so transformed by that same
love.
Amen.*

March 3, 2020

Rev Katherine Brittain

Sylvan United Church and Camp Pringle

Isaiah 55:10-11; Psalm 34:1-8 (15-22); Matthew
6:7-15

Isaiah 55:10-11

*10 For as the rain and the snow come down from
heaven,*

*and do not return there until they have watered the
earth,*

making it bring forth and sprout,

giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

*11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

Matthew 6:7

7 “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

We live in a world, in a time, when words are everywhere. We are bombarded by words that are piling up all around us. Words are thrown around recklessly. Words are used to mock, to threaten, to boast, to wound the vulnerable. Twitter. The comments section on any website or social media. Talk radio. Big media. Words, words, words.

Usually these words are separated responsibility or accountability – hurled anonymously like shrapnel. Often these words are used as a shield to avoid showing our vulnerable hearts.

We are called to a different way. To value words. To respect words. To weigh the impact of our words on the world around us. To trust the Word of God. Logos. Who was there in the beginning, with our Creating God, speaking the world into being. We are called to show

restraint with our words – not use “many words” as a shield. We are called to trust that the Word of God sows goodness, life, abundance. Not instantly, not cheaply, but deep in the soil of

our hearts, our minds, our souls if we can clear away the clutter of empty phrases. To choose our words slowly and carefully. To listen deeply to the words that others share with us.

Many people use Lent as a time to take a break from social media – the source of many empty words. Maybe this Lent is a time to take a more intentional Sabbath break from empty phrases

and many words, and make space instead to be attentive to the Word that comes from God’s mouth and help “accomplish that which God purposes, and succeed in the thing for which God sent it”.

May the words of this page and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable to you, O God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

March 4, 2020 - Ember Day

Contributor: Margot Spence

Isaiah 44:1-8; Psalm 87; 1 Peter 2:4-10; John 17:6-19

John 17:6 - 19

The Prayer of Jesus for his disciples (paraphrase)

They are yours, they belong to you

They believe you sent me

Now I am departing the world

Take care of them

Let them be united

Keep them safe

I am coming to you

I have told them about you so they might be filled with my joy

The world hates them

They do not belong to the world

I do not belong to the world

Don't take them out of the world

Keep them safe from the evil one

Make them pure and holy

~~~~~

Even as Jesus prays for them, he teaches them again how much He and God are united and working

together. How much He and God care about their friends committed to following the Way. Jesus

intensity in this prayer can be felt. He seems in anguish, longing for his own to know him intimately and

to trust him. Indeed, He prays knowing they will suffer like he himself will soon suffer.

V 20 says he prays for all who will ever believe – consider that he prayed for you too:

How has God kept you united with other disciples? Is there some way he is calling you to be

united with other disciples now? Why do you think it is so important to Jesus that we be united

with each other?

How and from what has God kept you safe? How might he continue to keep you safe even as

the world seems to be on the brink of climate and political upheaval?

How has God rescued you from the evil one? What in Jesus's teaching is helping you to become

pure and holy? Why does He want us to be pure and holy?

Spend some time now to pray for the body of Christ – just as we are in him and he is in us.

Pray for unity, for safety of the body, protection from the evil one, and for perseverance and hope when

the way before us is unknown and uneven. Know that Jesus is in you and with you today.



**March 5, 2020**

Contributor: Rob Crosby-Shearer

Psalm 138; Matthew 7:7-12

It's pretty common to quote the 'nice' part of today's gospel passage; you know - ask, seek, knock and then you'll receive, find - and a door will be open to you.

The danger of reading something like that notion, out of context, is that it can lead to a strange sense of consumerist entitlement; that we deserve what we get - or even lead us to some variety of a 'name it and claim it' faith; where God becomes our genie in a bottle to invoke our every need. I remember reading this passage as a kid and wondering why I never did get that red bike I kept asking God (and my parents) for.

This passage is couched in anything but niceties which promise our material self-fulfillment. Before this passage we read a warning against hypocrisy as well as advice to not put sacred things before dogs or pigs.

And after it, included in today's reading, Jesus goes so far as to call his listeners evil, to make a point about how much better God's gifting to us is - right before saying the way to life is narrow (which is after the assigned reading).

Whoever said they prefer Jesus to the God of the Old Testament (as if the two were separate) might not have considered just how tough this Jesus can be. No, this isn't for the timid and fragile. This certainly isn't Jesus at his meekest or mildest.

And then Jesus keeps going – yet another call to discipleship – giving us the so-called golden rule – to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. For this summarizes the law and the prophets.

It all seems just a wee bit heavy and hard.

Perhaps part of the grace to this passage is even a few verses before the stuff about hypocrisy and verses back - before where our reading today begins; when Jesus encourages his readers to seek God's reign first, and other things (food, drink and clothing) will be added. Maybe this ask seek knock stuff is a commentary on that. That's part of that beautiful passage to consider the lilies (apprentice the lilies, as one commentator noted that 'consider' term means). Put together, it feels a bit more spacious.

So perhaps the asking, seeking, finding is not about seeking or being rewarded in our own desires (good or bad as they might be) – but in about posturing toward God's reign of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit in our intentions and desires.

But however you read it, taken together, the Way of Jesus is not for the timid. It is indeed difficult. This is the Lenten path.

But the path is one of deep liberation, salvation and healing. And so it is that we ask. We seek, We knock... and we find grace in the challenges.

**March 6, 2020**

Contributor: Rev. Elaine Julian,  
Companion of the Emmaus Community  
Ezekial 18:21-28; Psalm 130; Matthew 5:20-26

**Psalm 130 (from *The Inclusive Bible*)**

Out of the depths I cry to you, YHWH!  
God, hear my voice!  
Let your ears be attentive  
to my voice, my cries for mercy!  
If you kept track of our sins, YHWH,  
who could stand before you?  
But with you is forgiveness,  
and for this we revere you.  
So I wait for you, YHWH –  
my soul waits,  
and in your word I place my trust.  
My soul longs for you, YHWH,  
more than sentinels long for the dawn,  
more than sentinels long for the dawn.  
Israel, put your hope in YHWH,  
for with YHWH is abundant love  
and the fullness of deliverance;  
God will deliver Israel  
from all its failings.

Usually I prefer The Inclusive Bible that seeks to be the “first egalitarian translation” but today I find myself drawn back to the more familiar language of the New Revised Standard Version:

“...my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.”

That haunting repetition draws me in, draws us all in  
– not just the sentry fighting sleep but alert to the  
ever-present possibility of the thief in the night, but all  
of us who are only too familiar with the anxiety of the  
early morning.

Wakeful God of the 5 am watch,

The soldier imagining the sudden, silent gun at his  
back,

The sleep-deprived new father walking the floor with  
the colicky baby,

The bereaved wife in the too-big bed,

The mother waiting for the teenage child to call or  
show up at the door, preferably without a police  
escort,

The keyboard warriors searching for love, or a cure for  
cancer, or peace on earth,

The unemployed worker at the end of his savings,

The women waiting at the tomb,

Those who pray and those who curse, knowing that  
sleep is now an impossibility and all that is left to us is  
to wait for the dawn and the first cup of coffee,

Whisper love to us,

Whisper forgiveness,

Whisper hope,

Until the light returns and we know again, in our  
deepest being,

that “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

Amen.

### **March 7, 2020**

Contributor: The Rev. Aneeta D. Saroop, St. Mary if the Incarnation Anglican Church, Metchosin.

Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Psalm 119:1-8; Matthew 5:43-48

Matthew 5:43-48: ‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Are Jesus’ words of resisting harm to others and ourselves really so difficult for us to

understand? I’d say so. In fact, they’re a little offensive! Pray for the very people that wish us

harm? C’mon Jesus....I can’t do that. Pray for those causing harm and oppression to the

vulnerable? To animals? To the earth? Lord, I can't even seem to remember to pray for that

neighbour who keeps calling the city on us when our hedge wanders centimetres over the

sidewalk. I mean...I can and have resisted anger towards him. Showed kindness to this man

who has shown me the opposite with his threats and finger wagging. But have I ever prayed for the guy? It's never even crossed my mind. I'm just too human, it seems.

God knows quite well that we are human. Human beings make up the systems of the world,

whether it is the neighbourhood, the church, the country the global community. Wherever

there are humans there is going to be discord and sometimes conflict, oppression and

exploitation. If we live with the misguided notion that in order to live means that at all costs we

cannot die, then we will keep our focus on our own survival, our own needs and our own self.

This is the very nature of sin...to be inward looking. To be curved in on ourselves so much that

our gaze turns away from God and away from others and rests firmly on our own sense of self

and survival.

We humans do this as individuals, as families, as church bodies trying to stay alive and relevant; as society choosing our own economic comfort over the comfort of the third world; as opportunistic survivalists grabbing what we can now at the expense of the health of the

planet...As human centric people oblivious to all sentient life. Why do we keep doing this?

What are we afraid of? What or who can possibly threaten to take from us all that God has

already deemed sufficient for all our needs and has secured it for us? Let us hear the psalmist's cry "Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways. God turn us from our sin because we sure can't manage to get it right all the time or even most of the time. We're going to need help with this "be perfect" command of yours...Being around other humans is way too hard and it doesn't help that we're also way too human.

And this is where God who is God, meets us who is not God, in our failure and our weakness

and our vulnerabilities knowing that we are fully human, washing us in the waters of our

baptism; feeding us with God's Divine presence, forgiving us, we die with Christ to our ways of looking inward and raises us with Christ to a new way of being that cannot be unseen as our eyes open.... as we live into our wholeness through God and for each other.

My daughter and I walked together to our home in our neighbourhood. She stopped and pointed to a man a few blocks down on the other side of the street; “is that the guy, mom? The hedge guy?” I looked in the direction of her pointing and said “yeah, that is him, please don’t point.” I realized in that moment that I didn’t even know my neighbour’s name. We had lived here together in the same neighbourhood for years and I didn’t know his name. I grabbed my daughter’s arm and I motioned to her that we were crossing the street. We approached each other closer and closer, our faces came into focus for the other. I didn’t smile, but I didn’t frown either; I thought a smile might be too much for some reason. “Hello” I said. “Hello” he replied. “I just want to say that I’m sorry that our hedge hasn’t been trimmed back yet.” He looked at me squarely and said “it’s a nuisance for me when I walk my dog”. I looked at his dog; “what’s his name?” “Ralph”.... “hey Ralph” I said giving him a tentative and quick pat. I looked back at my neighbour; “My name is Aneeta and I’m embarrassed to say that in all these years, I never got your name”. “Bob” he said. He wasn’t smiling. “Well, we hope to get that hedge trimmed very soon. The weather is starting to turn.” “Ok” he said and then he looked at us for a few seconds and continued walking down the sidewalk with Ralph. No goodbye, no hey, I’m sorry for being a complainer – nothing. “Well, that was sufficiently awkward” my daughter said.



What if I told you that God loves him just as much as God loves the both of us? She makes the hand gestures and sound for “mind blowing” and we both laugh. Maybe this is what Jesus

meant by a call to a quiet resistance to non-cooperation with harm and all its forms. Maybe

even us humans can get it right once in a while. At the foot of the cross we are all beggars on

our knees, hands outstretched for grace that God never withholds. Receive who we are and go and become what we have received for the sake of God’s love in the world.

Amen.

## **March 8, 2020**

Contributor: Jesse Robertson

Daniel 9:3-10; Psalm 79; Luke 6:36-38

### **How Long?**

Today we find Daniel and the psalmist supplicating God to end the trials and suffering of their people. The two recount Israel's wrongdoings, remind God of their punishments, and suggest different redemptive remedies. Daniel, exiled to Babylon, proposes the path of penitence: fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. The psalmist, mourning the desecration of Jerusalem, pleads for vengeance, and promises eternal praise in turn.

God's voice is conspicuously silent in these passages. Can we read Christ's words in Luke 6 as a response? Here is no litany of sins, no demands for penitence or praise. Only a simple formula: "Forgive, and you will

be forgiven." In other words, "Don't look at me. Examine your heart."

The familiarity of these commands might hide the profound reversal they contain. Daniel and the psalmist look to God to deliver them from the sorrows of the world. Jesus looks to us to deliver the world from its sorrows, beginning with our own hearts.

God's answer inverts the theology of his supplicants. God is not a distant sovereign meting out justice, but a servant waiting to follow our lead. The world is not the instrument of our suffering, but the very possibility of our redemption. The psalmist looks to God and asks 'How long?' God looks at the suffering world, and asks us the same question.

**March 10, 2020**

Contributor: Christopher McDonald

Isaiah 1:10-20; Psalm 50:7-15; Matthew 23:1-12

We are comfortable with these teachings of Jesus. They are near to us and our theology of Protestant grace. They have become common for most of us, perhaps even tame and tired: cliché. And yet, we still have to “argue it out” with the Lord (*NRSV* Isa. 1:18).

Why is that? Why are these teachings not sufficient for us? Why do we still wrestle with hypocrisy when sacrifices no longer plague our consciences?

Perhaps the land of promise evades us because we do not actually practice what the Pharisees teach (Matt. 23:3). We understand the lesson that ritual is not sufficient for salvation, and so we have thrown out worship in our public spaces. We know clericalism so easily turns into the abuse of power, and so we have thrown out the priests and questioned their authority.

We find authenticity in freedom from religious Law, and so we have thrown out spiritual restrictions and opened the faith to anyone, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (Gal. 3:28). And yet, these actions of social purgation are not really what Jesus counsels.

What Jesus counsels is to do what the Pharisees teach, to live in an upside-down world always constantly connecting us personally to the political and social injustices of the world. The problem is, the trope of the upside-down has become culturally common and the powerless have usurped back the throne only to fall prey to new masters and oppressors. Now, secular consumerism reigns only to lock us in new cycles of debt and sacrifice, new barriers to concrete action for the widow and the orphan.

When old lessons have become comfortable or cliché, the problem is not just in our social structures, but also in our collective imaginations and hearts. When Jesus calls us to humility and when Isaiah and David call us to sacrifices of thanksgiving, we are called to heed political responsibilities, to wrestle with them as we wrestle with salvation.

So let us “argue it out” with God once more. Do we really believe that the land does not belong to us, but to God? Imagine if we did. Would we still be able to consume and work on the land without some feeling of guilt, some sense of responsibility?

I imagine not, but let’s argue at least.

**March 11, 2020**

Contributor: Cornelia Van Voorst

Jer 18:18-20; Psalm 31:1-5, 13-16; Matthew 20:17-28

As I considered the scriptures for today's reading, an artwork I had made ten years ago came to mind.

Perhaps these are hands holding a cup of communion, or hands seeking to support a wound. Might the hands be the wings of an angel speaking peace to grief? It could it be an intimate detail of Gethsemane.

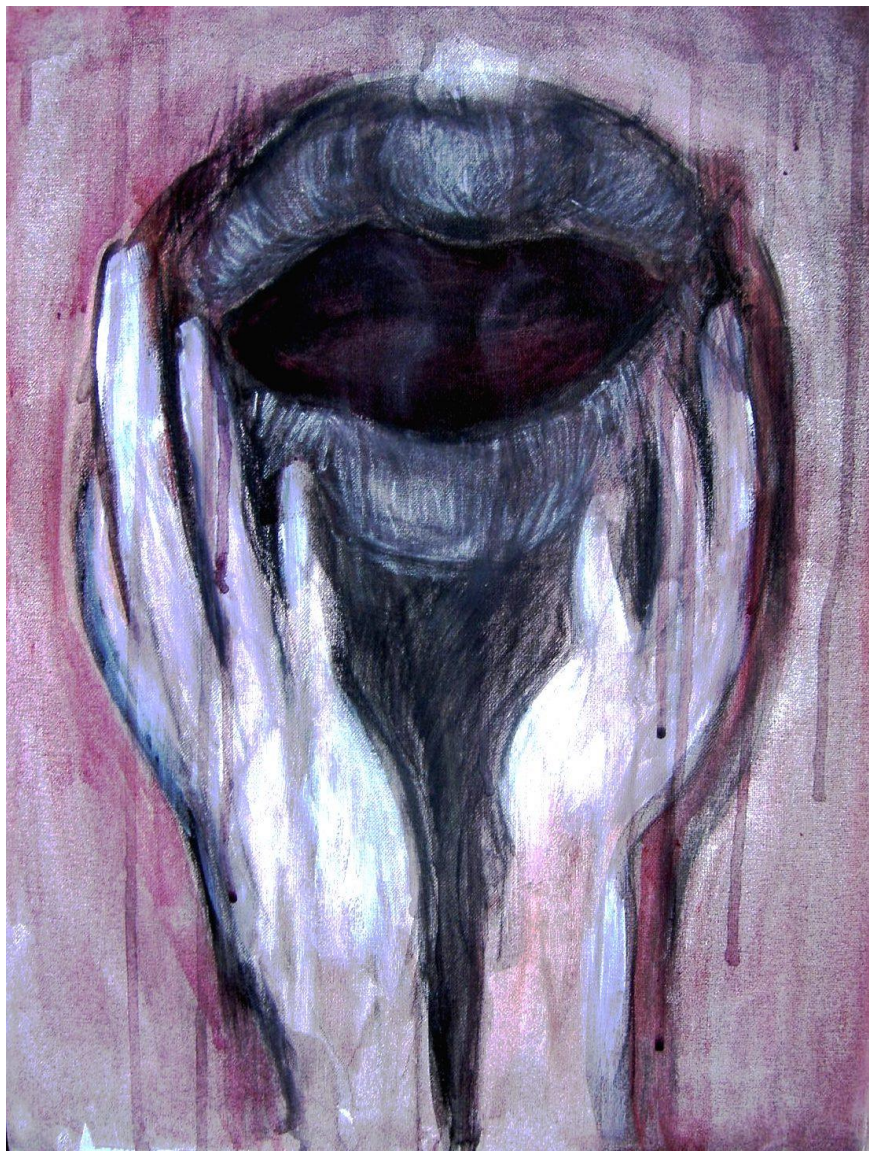
The image may be all of these things, just as it resonates with these words from each of the scriptures today:

*"Listen to me, LORD...."*

*"Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my faithful God."*

*"But I trust in you, LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands"*

*"Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"*



*"Cup" is made with conte and acrylic paint in 2010, and digitally edited in 2020.*

## March 12, 2020

Contributor: Caroline Allan

Jeremiah 17:5-10; Psalm 1; Luke 16:19-31

Lately, I mostly want to think about water. Its motion, coolness, soft power, pathways (lifeways). These passages speak to us of water: life-giving water that cools us and grows us, keeps us green, stops our withering, makes us to bear fruit. That's what Jesus promises us, right?

And yet, Lent calls us into the desert--to the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

In Lent, I think about the relationship between these places. What is the breadth of our experience on this earth that we know both places so intimately? Yes, Lent calls us into dry places, to touch and know our chaff, to be with our vulnerabilities, our smallness, our own wounds and wickedness--all that which puts within us our desire for the living stream. In Lent, we are called to dry places so we might yearn for water and know what it means when we see it.

## March 13, 2020

Contributor: Vanessa Caruso

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-28; Psalm 17:1-8; Matt 21:33-46

Today's scripture readings are bookended by stories of deceit and violence - Joseph's brothers plotting to kill him and then selling him into slavery, and Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants. In between those two is a psalmist's bold assertion of innocence, honesty and

uprightness, with lips that are “free of deceit,” and “feet that have not slipped.” It makes me wonder: is a day “free of deceit” possible as a human? What made the psalmist so different than all these other men caught up in dishonesty and violence? I recently read a tiny book on lying, and the author claimed that to lie is to “recoil from relationship” (and from reality), and posed the questions: “How would your relationships change if you resolved never to lie again? What truths about yourself might suddenly come into view?” Lent seems like a good time to find out (again).

*Bring us to our senses, O God.  
Help us to accept reality today  
and to choose relating over recoiling -  
relating to You,  
relating to ourselves,  
and relating to others,  
even if we don't know where to start,  
or where it will go.  
Forgive us for the incongruence between our lives  
and the life to which You call us.  
We give You access to us,  
to transform us into people  
who can Psalm 17  
with integrity.  
Amen.*

**March 14, 2020**

Contributor: Liz Dieleman

Micah 7:14-20; Psalm 103:1-12; Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

After the Fatted Calf

Micah 7: 18-19

18 Who is a God like you,  
who pardons sin and forgives the transgression  
of the remnant of his inheritance?

You do not stay angry forever  
but delight to show mercy.

19 You will again have compassion on us;  
you will tread our sins underfoot  
and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Psalm 103: 1a, 4a, 8-10

1a Praise the Lord, O my soul...4a who redeems your  
life from the pit;

8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.

9 He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;

10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.

Luke 15: 11-32:

A re-telling of the Prodigal Son Parable, from the  
perspective of the “Good Son”

Everyone’s gotta one of these in the family: the black  
sheep, who makes mama cry.

Chasing men and dreams, and getting chased by the  
devil, and drama well it just gets her high.

Oh look, she’s hit rock bottom - big surprise! Scrape  
her off the pavement, nurse her back to health...

But what happens after the fatted calf dies?



They're overjoyed, she's come to her senses; They hug her for heading back home.

She's saying: "I was wrong, I was bad, shoulda listened to mama. I can't do it all on my own."

Oh look, She really means it: I can see it in her eyes; picking up the pieces, making those amends,

But when happens after the fatted calf dies?

Sister Share your testimony! The angels sing redemption song!

You're free from sin, but the work begins when the wine is gone.

I'm the one everybody can count on: the scholar, the handiest man.

I gotta wife and job, and three pretty children, and I go to church when I can

I'm always up early, making coffee, chopping that wood: working my ass off, saying all my prayers,

But I never get a thing for being good.

You can theorize about forgiveness, and preach a state of grace...

But you understand when live first hand through it taking place.

I hope for the sake of the family this one-hundred-eighty is real.

And they let her live it down, and move on with her life, and that we're able to heal.

I suppose even if she relapses and leaves us today,

Father and Mother - and maybe even me - would still welcome her back this way.

- Liz Dieleman, 2020

Listen to the song! Go to: [Soundcloud.com/lizdieleman](https://soundcloud.com/lizdieleman)

(URL: [soundcloud.com/lizdieleman/after-the-fatted-calf-demo](https://soundcloud.com/lizdieleman/after-the-fatted-calf-demo))

### **March 15, 2020**

Contributor: Abi Humphrey (age 9.8)

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; John 4:5-42

The people are in a very dry desert and they get thirsty. There is no water to drink. God has given them some food called manna. They are afraid they will die but God gives water. Moses touches a rock and water flows for thirsty people. They remember.

### **March 16, 2020**

Contributor: Brendon Neilson

2 Kings 5:1-15a; Psalm 42:1-2, 11-15; Luke 4:24-30

This little story of the time Jesus was almost killed by a mob before his ministry had really begun is easy to forget or overlook. Before his many great works, and his prophetic teaching – calling God's people to inhabit the kingdom, he was nearly thrown off a cliff, by his neighbours (who knew his parents) and were offended at his questioning of how they understood themselves, and by his refusal to perform miracles on demand for their viewing pleasure and to test his validity (surely they thought him a fraud).

There is so much not included in this little story. How did he just walk through the crowd after being led all the way to the brow of the hill? How did he bypass the frenzy? Were there folks that helped him? Which part

made the crowd so angry? It seemed like everything was going along so nicely, and it was he who was intentionally stirring the pot. Why did he do that? Where did the author of this story intend to have the audience find themselves?

It seems to me that we read here some early indications of the kind of ministry Jesus was beginning. Intentionally challenging the assumed way to the point of danger, while giving preference to the unconsidered and overlooked.

This is a hard ministry to embody, a difficult witness to the kingdom that has come, and the new age being born. It is good news, somehow, and one surely that will have adverse effects for those living it. I do not do a good job at giving preference to the unconsidered and overlooked, instead I tend to focus my time on those things and people who will help with the various aims and goals of this or that agenda. I tend also to try and challenge the assumed ways in as gentle way as possible, perhaps to the point of making a challenge seem more like an affirmation – giving priority to my perceived tact and insight rather than truth. Survival (job security) and status, often takes priority over justice.

I confess these things. I also confess that I read myself on the side of Jesus in this story, instead of being in the crowd that tries to end the hard word that challenges my assumptions. A reading to move myself to a place of innocence to maintain my self-deception.

Where are the voices that are challenging my/our assumed ways. How is our crowd responding to those voices? What are the other ways I move myself to innocence when bearing responsibility is a more faithful response.

Seeking to participate in the way of Jesus, is not an easy call, there are hardships we call upon ourselves for the good of the kingdom. The news is good but not always easy. I am thankful that we are not called to be Jesus, but to be followers in this way.

**March 17, 2020**

Contributor: Roxy Humphrey

Psalm 25:3-8; Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiveness is one of the hardest words for us to grapple with, to understand what it means and then to offer. Many of us - all of us - have been hurt and the wounds have not gone away. We feel (and perhaps are) justified in our anger, resentment and bitterness. And yet, paradoxically, forgiveness seems to be one of the most liberating things that we can offer both ourselves and those we forgive.

In the Matthew 18 passage, there is a part of me that wishes that Jesus had used a different metaphor, something far more personal than money/debt. What does it mean to talk about forgiveness in light of sexual assault or physical and/or emotional abuse? What does it mean to forgive someone who harms your personhood? These are harder questions and require much more thought and attention than a simple reflection can offer.

However, what this passage begins with, I think, is important. Jesus' encouragement to forgive not just once, or twice, but 77 times. It reminds us that forgiveness is a process. It begins with one small step and that step leads to another. Maybe it simply begins with a recognition that the desire to forgive is not even present, and an awareness of how much that might be limiting or impacting one's life. Or maybe it begins with visualizing the one who has harmed us as being

released or, alternatively, visualizing ourselves released from the harm of the other.

Beyond that, I think the story also gets to the heart of why forgiveness is so hard for us to grapple with - because we often forget about, or don't even realize, how much we have been liberated from our own debts. Perhaps it is in growing in awareness of our own darkness, and God's unending grace, that we are able to move towards a posture that can offer forgiveness, even to those who have deeply wounded us.

Lent is a helpful season in our journey towards forgiveness. It is an invitation for us to reflect honestly and gaze within ourselves and notice the ways we are in need of release, the ways we are in need of liberating ourselves. This might be the only way we can come to accept and understand the grace and mercy of God, who continually liberates and releases us. I suspect that it is God's grace (and not ourselves) that is what is able to transform our hearts to be able to offer forgiveness to others.

**March 18, 2020**

Contributor: Catherine Pate

Deut 4:1, 5-10; Psalm 147:13-21; Matthew 5:17-20

## **The Rule of Law**

“Today all of our Wet’suwet’en territory, including Unist’ot’en territory, is unceded Aboriginal territory. Our traditional indigenous legal systems remain intact and continue to govern our people and our lands. We recognize the authority of these systems.

The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs have maintained their use and occupancy of their lands and hereditary governance system. Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs are the Title Holders and maintain the authority and jurisdiction to make decisions on unceded lands. The 22,000 square km of Wet'suwet'en Territory is divided into 5 clans and 13 house groups. Each clan within the Wet'suwet'en Nation has full jurisdiction under their law to control access to their territory.”<sup>1</sup>

During the ongoing protests in support of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and their sovereign rights and title, politicians and pundits have been calling for the “rule of law” to be respected, obeyed and enforced.

These same politicians blatantly ignore, in their inflammatory rhetoric, that the courts have acknowledged repeatedly that Indigenous laws and rights are *part* of the rule of law in Canada. “Indigenous legal traditions are among Canada’s legal traditions. They form part of the law of the land,” Federal Court Justice Sébastien Grammond wrote in a 2018 decision.<sup>2</sup>

For more than 150 years in this country we now call Canada, indigenous governance structures and legal systems that were in place for millennia, have been ignored or dismantled, local knowledge and language deliberately decimated, treaties violated, and their land stolen. Where was the rule of law then? Where is the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://unistoten.camp/about/governance-structure/>. Feb 18, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> <https://decisions.fct-cf.gc.ca/fc-cf/decisions/en/item/311975/index.do?q=Dene+Tha%27+First+Nation>. Feb 18, 2020

rule of law now while these same crimes are being perpetrated?

Our readings today remind us that we Christians also have a “rule of law” that predates colonial empire. It is a law first re-membered in the rituals, teaching and practices of the Jewish people—the people of the Torah. It is a law based on a covenant between the creator and the people and fulfilled in the life and person of Jesus. And we, as the inheritors of that law are called to obey it, even when it is difficult, or painful, or inconvenient.

And that law’s first principle is love. And love doesn’t look like repeated violence, generation after generation, against the first peoples of this land.

It doesn’t look like removing grandmothers and children at gunpoint.

It doesn’t look like a highway of tears paved with the rapes and murders of women and children.

It looks like a peasant carpenter rabbi washing the feet of his followers before he is led away to his death by crucifixion.

It looks like a small group of Christians prayerfully walking together and holding space when protestors have left to rest and recover.

It looks like getting angry and saying, “no more.” It looks like speaking up and speaking out.

It looks like admitting when we are part of the problem, repenting and changing our ways.

It looks like 5 brave chiefs refusing to back down because the covenant with their creator is the first rule of law they follow.

How easily we forget...the rule of law.

### **March 19, 2020 - St. Joseph**

Contributor: Mary Wolfe

2 Samuel 7:4, 8-16; Psalm 89:1-4, 26-29; Luke 2:41-52

Today, reading Luke 2: 41-52, I came to a sudden halt when I read Mary's words. Having lost track of Jesus, she and Joseph have searched every cobbled street of Jerusalem. No doubt they've imagined every frightening possibility, every tragic outcome. After all, he's only a small-town 12 year old, lost in a huge city laced with thieves and thugs. Whatever solace Mary experienced during Passover is wiped away by three days of angst-ridden searching and terrifying, guilt-ridden 'if only'. She is exhausted. (It's been said exhaustion is one of the most crippling enemies of good parenting. As a mother myself, I know its deadly undertow.)

Upon finding Jesus safe in the temple, Mary blurts out, "Why have you treated us like this?" What? Did she just dump her pain onto her son? It sounds like she blames him for her suffering, imputing his motives as if he intentionally chose to hurt her and Joseph? "Why have you treated us like this?"

Parker Palmer suggests "violence is what happens when we don't know what else to do with our suffering." Exhausted and at her wits end (her suffering), Mary committed violence against her



beloved son; I suggest both shaming and blaming are forms of emotional violence.

Oh Great Awakener, in this Lenten season that invites You and me to search my soul, thank you for this snippet of the Gospel story. Thank you for using Mary's words to show me again my brokenness. Give me awareness and honesty to own my suffering. By your Spirit, may I live so fully in your love that I have no need to commit violence. For parents raising children, may they too live in your love and receive your intimate blessings of sound sleep, patient presence, and a wide wisdom. Amen

### **March 20, 2020**

Contributor: Zion Crosby-Shearer (age 9.9)

Hosea 14:1-9; Psalm 81; Mark 12:28-34

The teacher is trying to trick Jesus. They ask him what is the most important law? Jesus tells them to love your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.... And then to love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus gave them a good answer. And it says no one dared ask another question. However, later in the Bible they keep asking questions. Maybe they want to know more about the kingdom of God?

Do we love our neighbours? Do we love God? The world might be more peaceful and people would be more kind if they loved God and each other.

**March 21, 2020**

Contributor: Bill Tarter

Hosea 5:13—6:6; Psalm 51:1-2, 17-20; Luke 18:9-14

Coming home after a vacation or work trip brings about the appreciation for a comfortable bed and a place of belonging. Our homes are fashioned to reflect what is important in our lives. We are surrounded by yesterday's memories and tomorrow's challenges as well as being appreciative of the present moment of familiar sights, sounds, smells, and relationships. Being home is a reference point. I belong here. This place reflects who I am.

Lent is a time to ponder who we are and where we belong. The prophet Hosea reminds us that God is calling us home. It is not the home of our childhood family. It is more like the home that we discover as we wander through life. As our homes reflect us, the home of God reflects the divine. The path to God's home is found in the stepstones of justice, mercy, unity, hope, and love.

When we listen to the prophet's urgings to come home, we begin our authentic journey and find that what is deeply important to us is a reflection of what is important to God. We are sprung from love. Each act of kindness, mercy, justice, gentleness, and love are stepstones back home. We belong in the heart of God. We are reflected in God's eyes and God is reflected in ours. We are home together.

## March 22, 2020

Contributor: Eli Humphrey (age 7.6)

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; John 9:1-41

What is a shepherd? God takes care of sheep. Who are the sheep? We are the sheep. We get to lie down and rest. I don't need to be afraid of scary things because God is with me.

## March 23, 2020

Contributor: Evelyn Cresswell

Isaiah 65:17-21; Psalm 30; John 4:43-54

**“A new heaven and a new earth”. Is.65,17-23.**

Read those words again. Say them, it's exciting, this new vision that Isaiah gives us, that is different from the former prophetic utterance. Jesus recognizes this and affirms this vision in his own incarnating of it in his crucifixion. There are two worlds, the one we've always known that is limited to our views, our experience, our reactions to others, our pride; we're in prison to ourselves.

The other world presents us with a new dimension of life, trust of God's love of us so that we are no longer needing to justify and protect ourselves. In a twinkling we are changed, our personal hurts and resentments drop away, we see with other eyes. Joy erupts as we realize that such change is gift and comes not from ourselves. We are free. We create a new environment. Like the Psalmist (30), we rejoice and give thanks. This vision of a new reality of a heaven and earth based on reciprocal love both includes and affirms us in the necessity of our own responding trust, 'the man took Jesus at his word and departed' (Jn4:50b). We are called, we are chosen, and indentured into love.  
Evelyn.

## **Seen and Unseen.**

The sky is full of moon,  
full of giving, full of hope,  
full of living and feeling  
beyond the myopic vision

of only earth bound electric light  
blown to Stygian darkness  
by force of this gutsy wind  
sweeping across this  
great wash of sky.

Blessings be to those who keep faith  
with hope, with moon and stars,  
past dark, past despair, past  
what's only man-made, touched or seen

to wait on the moon's fullest glow and  
know that though it's light be tardy  
it is greater and more ubiquitous  
than any local mishap can quench.

**March 24, 2020**

Contributor: David Gartrell

Ezekial 47:1-9, 12; Psalm 46; John 5:1-18

“Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46, v. 10)

In the stillness of meditation I've been a river of  
pulsing pressure and flowing breath. Into the

shallows, then deeper, quieter, and deeper still, as if the entire field of awareness is flowing past.

Most of the time I take these living waters for granted, unaware of pulse, breath or other sense-doors. These gifts of God can be peaceful and life-sustaining, as in Ezekiel's vision, or tumultuous and chaotic, as in the psalm, when storms rage without or upwellings surge from within.

I'm blessed to have found a meditation practice that fosters awakening and opening the heart. At least some of the time I've been able to sit by raging rivers, watching them surge past while holding myself, others, and the world with compassion.

But despite all the practice — or perhaps because of it — when everything has fallen apart and been swept away in a torrent, I've somehow remembered to pray: "Stay with me...stay with me...please, stay with me". When a deep sense of peace and lovingkindness ensues at such times I can't help but believe that God has been there.

The Gospel story of Jesus's healing the paralyzed man at Bethesda speaks to the limits of our efforts to heal ourselves. It's been humbling for me to learn of such limits in certain of my own spiritual practices. I wonder if this man of old had any such insight.

Whether in stillness or in storm, may we may all find true refuge in our Lord Jesus Christ.

## March 25, 2020 - The Annunciation

Contributor: Rachel Burtman

Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 45; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

Today's readings highlight God's faithfulness to His people. In each reading, we see God's faithfulness through prophecy and the fulfillment of those prophecies in Jesus Christ. In Isaiah, God tells Ahaz to ask for a sign, which Ahaz refuses to do. But God is faithful anyway and provides a prophecy: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and I will call Him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) The Gospel reading is the beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy, as Mary is told of her immaculate conception. What I love about these passages is God's consistent love and promises. God makes us promises of salvation and keeps them, "For no word from God will ever fail." (Luke 1:37)

Song: Great is Thy Faithfulness (2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Acts)

Some context for the song: My mom loves 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of Acts and we used to listen to them all the time when I was younger. I love their slightly cheesy but powerful arrangements of hymns and I hope you enjoy it too!

**March 26, 2020**

Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 103:1-12; John 5:31-47

*“As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;  
for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.”  
- Psalm 103:13-14*

You who tenderly offer us care,  
as does a gentle father to his child,

And You who remembers always how we were formed  
from the dust,  
as a mother repeatedly retells the story of how  
her child was formed  
in the depths of her being.

You see who and what we most truly are,  
even when we act like rambunctious toddlers  
Or defiant teenagers.

Re-call us to ourselves: ground us.

That we might know our small and simple  
- yet significant -  
place in the realm of the cosmos.  
Amen.

**March 27, 2020**

Contributor: Meagan Crosby-Shearer

Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22; Psalm 34:15-22; John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Our Gospel reading this morning comes in the context of Sukkot - the festival of Booths (also known as the Ingathering or Feast of Tabernacles).

Jewish families constructed temporary dwellings to represent the fragile huts the people lived in during their 40 years in the wilderness. It was also a festival of the first fruits of the harvest. A time of rejoicing at Gods provision in the midst of the desert and a focus on the word.

It was one of the three annual pilgrimages when all Jewish men were required to go to the temple and so Jesus had sent his companions ahead in order to not to make a big stir with all the controversy that had been swirling about him and makes his way up to the festival quietly.

In the chapter before this Jesus has fed the 5000 reminding those who gathered of the very thing this festival commemorates and had offered himself as the true source of food and nourishment.

Just like today however, the people get hung up in their expectations of what the Messiah should look and act like. After all, they think they know where Jesus is from but Jesus reminds them that once again they are looking at the surface instead of what is the source. They are waving their branches and pouring water on the altar but missing the God who has pitched a tent right with them here and now.



What stands in our way of seeing? What keeps us from knowing the God in our midst?

Tabernacling One, keep us alert to your presence. Remind us of your hope and fill our hearts with rejoicing. May we keep our lives focussed on the knowledge that "The One on the Throne will pitch a tent there for them: Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"  
*Revelation 7:15-17*

**March 28, 2020**

Contributor: Matthew Humphrey

Jeremiah 11:18-20; Psalm 7:1-2, 9-12; John 7:40-53

But the Lord sits enthroned for ever,  
he has established his throne for judgement.  
He judges the world with righteousness;  
he judges the peoples with equity.

The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,  
a stronghold in times of trouble.

And those who know your name put their trust in you,  
for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek  
you.

Sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion.  
Declare his deeds among the peoples.

For he who avenges blood is mindful of them;  
he does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

We are now a full month into this long season of Lent. And perhaps life has interrupted some of our hopes and ambitions, our efforts to turn this one season into a personal improvement project. Or to prove ourselves finally able to keep the fast we have committed to. If you are in this place, fix your eyes on this ancient songbook of our faith – the Psalms, and take comfort.

The confidence of Psalm 7 is not in the wonderful deeds of you and I, but of God.

The faith of Psalm 7 is not in the judgment and righteousness of we, but of God.

Why? Because, “The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.” We turn to God not in demonstration of our goodness, or our righteousness, or our spiritual holiness, but simply because there is nowhere else to turn. So turn to God today. Turn with trust, even in the depths of sorrow and pain. Declare the deeds of God who does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

Your cry is precious and near to God’s ears.

Thanks be to God.

**March 29, 2020**

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

**Lazarus Blessing, Jan Richardson**

The secret  
of this blessing  
is that it is written  
on the back  
of what binds you.  
To read  
this blessing,

you must take hold  
of the end  
of what  
confines you,  
must begin to tug  
at the edge  
of what wraps  
you round.  
It may take long  
and long  
for its length  
to fall away,  
for the words  
of this blessing  
to unwind  
in folds  
about your feet.  
By then  
you will no longer  
need them.  
By then this blessing  
will have pressed itself  
into your waking flesh,  
will have passed  
into your bones,  
will have traveled  
every vein  
until it comes to rest  
inside the chambers  
of your heart  
that beats to  
the rhythm  
of benediction  
and the cadence  
of release.

**March 30, 2020**

Contributor: Melanie Ihmels

Sus 1:41c-62;

Psalm 23; John 8:1-11

Lent is a time of preparation, a time of understanding self and the sins that we carry into the world. Two of today's scriptures, Susanna and John, tell the story of sins committed: lies, cheating, adultery, conspiracy, murder. They explore the dark side of our humanity and remind us that each one of us carries that dark side. Sometimes those sins bring the wages of death, sometimes we carry within us sins that we think poison who we are, and sometimes our sins are exposed and we are faced with the seemingly insurmountable task of reconciliation with others, with ourselves, and with God. But, and God always offers that but, the task of exploring, exposing, and reconciling our sins is never done alone.

We explore...

*You YHWH are my Shepard; I shall not want.*

*You make me lie down in green pastures; You lead me beside still waters; You restore my soul.*

*You lead me in the right paths for Your name's sake.*

Even as we begin to recognize our sins, name them, own them, and feel the pain they have wrought in our world to ourselves and others, we do so with God at our side. We are held close, offered rest as we explore, and guidance on where to go next. And never are we alone.

We expose...

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff – they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows!*

Sometimes exposing our sins, or having them exposed by others, can feel like we are traveling through the darkest, death filled valley. We can feel alone, unprotected, embarrassed, or scared, exposed to our family, friends, and community. And even worse we are bared to ourselves, no longer can we pretend this sin does not exist, or is hidden, we must deal with it. And again, YHWH offers a path...with us always, serving us comfort, even at our darkest in the presence of those we fear our harshest judges, our Creator anoints us, overflowing with love for us. We are not alone.

We reconcile...

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of YHWH my whole life long.*

We find balance, we see the truth and accept it, we choose to move forward. We know that we do so bathed in the love of our Creator who has followed us closely, loving us, guiding us to a dwelling place that that is full of the knowledge that we are never alone.

The season of Lent is about action, it is about making choices and practicing what we choose, it is about restoring ourselves to the harmony that is our legacy

as a child of God. We are reconciled to our community, to ourselves, and to our Creator. We choose to dwell in God's house forever.

### **March 31, 2020**

Contributor: Amaya Crosby-Shearer (age 9.9)

Numbers 21:4-9; Psalm 102:1-2,15-22; John 8:21-30

The people are travelling in the wilderness and they sin against God and Moses. Suddenly God sends snakes at them. The snakes bite them. Then the few remaining people leave to find Moses so he could heal their friends who had been bitten by the snakes. God said to Moses: take a staff and get a bronze snake and twist it around a staff and whoever looks at the snake will be cured from the bite. And all who looked at the staff lived and never doubted God again.

I think this is a strange story because there has been lots of stories where snakes attack people. I want to know why. I also want to know why looking at the bronze snake heals the people when earlier the snakes are what bites them? I remember that Moses used a staff to part the Red Sea.

With the snake, how can a thing of death can become a symbol of life?

Also, with the cross, a symbol of death becomes a symbol of life. It means that God is powerful because God makes miracles.

**April 1, 2020**

Contributor: Arleigh Alexander

Daniel 3:13-28; Psalm 24:1-6; John 8:31-47

**Psalm 24:1-6 King James Version (KJV)**

<sup>1</sup>The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

<sup>2</sup>For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.

<sup>3</sup>Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?

<sup>4</sup>He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

<sup>5</sup>He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

<sup>6</sup>This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah **(KJV)**

I sat in a circle of 20 people. It was the final day of the “Making Space Retreat” which was a beautiful experience from beginning to end. We were surrounded by nature, healthy food, able leaders, willing and generous participants. During the three day retreat we listened several times to The Wisdom of Solomon 6: 12-14. We responded to this passage through various mediums: dance, painting, nature walks, poetry and conversations of the heart.

As we joined in our final circle we were invited, each in our own timing, to express how our perceptions of epiphany had changed over the three days. When I began to speak, suddenly tears flooded from my eyes. I was unable to stop them. I had lost control. Here I

was in a group of relative strangers with tears flowing down my face. The group was silent and simply “held space”. The tears, formed from a long and complex network of experiences, emotions and buried dreams, did not stop for hours.

There were many epiphanies during the retreat, but this was by far the biggest: it was a revelation of the ego. Not a grandiose ego, not a one-up-on-you ego, not an overinflated ego, but rather an ego born of fear. It was the anxiety of appearing weak, fragile, and out of control. It was an ego that blocks feelings, pain, frailties, yet conversely, awareness, dreams, people and many of the heart’s desires.

Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? Those who .. hath not lifted up their soul unto *vanity* ... . And so for lent, along with giving up many favorite foods as a reminder of His suffering and a desire to arrive at Easter with clean hands, a pure heart, humility and honesty, I seek to know more deeply what God’s message means. What does God say about our separated suffering, what does God want us to learn from our frailties, in what ways does vanity affect our relationship with God?

As we walk towards calvary, there is comfort in walking towards Jesus who knew humiliation, fragility, and pain; Jesus, who is the giver of righteousness and salvation. Also assuring as we go, and trusting that God will provide, fixed upon my heart right now are the words “*Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. The one who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for they will find her sitting at their gate*”. The Wisdom of Solomon 6:12-14



## **April 2, 2020**

Genesis 17:3-9; Psalm 105:1-9; John 8:51-59

*“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.”*

-John 8:58

### **BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS I AM**

- Malcolm Guite

Oh pure I AM, the source of everything,  
The wellspring of my inner consciousness,  
The song within the songs I find to sing,  
The bliss of being and the crown of bliss.  
You iterate and indwell all the instants  
Wherein I wake and wonder that I am,  
As every moment of my own existence  
Runs over from the fountain of your name.

I turn with Jacob, Isaac, Abraham,  
With everyone whom you have called to be,  
I turn with all the fallen race of Adam  
To hear you calling, calling ‘Come to me’.  
With them I come, all weary and oppressed,  
And lay my labours at your feet, and rest.

## **April 3, 2020**

Contributor: Rob Crosby-Shearer

Jeremiah 20:7-13; Psalm 18:1-7; John 10:31-42

*The following is an excerpt from the final speech of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr - delivered on this day, April 3, 1968 - 52 years ago - the day before he was assassinated. The complete text can be found here:*  
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>

\* \* \*

...the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding.

Something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, ...the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."

...we have been forced to a point where we are going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence. That is where we are today.

And also in the human rights revolution, if something isn't done, and done in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed. Now, I'm just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period to see what is unfolding...

...We need all of you. And you know what's beautiful to me is to see all of these ministers of the Gospel. It's a marvelous picture. Who is it that is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher? Somehow the preacher must

have a kind of fire shut up in his bones. And whenever injustice is around he tell it. Somehow the preacher must be an Amos, and saith, "When God speaks who can but prophesy?" Again with Amos, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Somehow the preacher must say with Jesus, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me," and he's anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor."...

...And they were telling me --. Now, it doesn't matter, now. It really doesn't matter what happens now....

And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop.

And I don't mind.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

**April 4, 2020**

Contributor: Liz Dieleman

Ezekiel 37:21b-28; Psalm 121; John 11:45-57

Ezekiel 37:

22: "...There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms."

24: "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd..."

John 11: 49-53

49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at

all! 50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish."

51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the

Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them

together and make them one. 53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

The One and the Many

- Liz Dieleman, 2020

Dear Caiaphas,  
How right you were:  
That it is better for One to die  
Than all to perish.

Alas,  
How wrong you were:  
About death itself  
And your definition of a nation.  
Prophetically Yours,  
G\_D

**April 5, 2020**

Contributor: Roxy Humphrey

Psalm 31:9-16; Phil 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14-27:66

***“Judas, Peter” by Luci Shaw***

because we are all  
betrayers, taking  
silver and eating  
body and blood and asking  
(guilty) is it I and hearing  
him say yes  
it would be simple for us all  
to rush out  
and hang ourselves  
but if we find grace  
to cry and wait  
after the voice of morning  
has crowed in our ears  
clearly enough  
to break our hearts  
he will be there  
to ask us each again  
do you love me?

## April 6, 2020 Holy Week

Contributor: Rob Crosby-Shearer

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; John 12:1-11

Mary has taken costly perfume and anointed Jesus' feet; an act which might have numerous meanings; a preparation for burial, a setting apart for ordination – or, for the early Christians, a ritual of healing.

Whatever the symbolism here, Mary's is an action that's deeply sensual and intimate – and a bold thing for a woman in that time and culture to do to a male Rabbi.

In response to this intimate boldness, Judas feels a need to virtue signal his way into favour with his community - while seeking to shame Mary in her costly action: “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?”, he rather reasonably asks.

And though his words might even make purely economic and social justice sense, the Gospel writer makes it clear that Judas' intentions do not match his words.

But before we move on and explore that, let's get one thing clear: this is not a statement against sacrificially caring for the poor, as the text is often misappropriated towards (remember that Jesus is actually referencing Deuteronomy 15 here: “Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, *I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”*” – emphasis added). Nor is it a blanket statement that we should prioritize the sensual and the aesthetic or beautiful over that

which is just (thousands of verses of scripture clearly speak to the opposite of that).

I would suggest that what this is, is a call to prayerfully seek right-intention in our actions. And in this case, Mary gets it right in her extravagance and Judas misses the mark even though he is technically correct about the poor. Mary, in her risky vulnerability and intimacy trumps the surface-truthiness of Judas' virtue signalling. And in doing so she engages in an act of sacred worship.

Interestingly, way back on Ash Wednesday, Lent began with a caution to avoid virtue signal in our fasting: "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them" - Matthew 6:1a - and I suggest that that exhortation continues here through this story.

How often have I loudly spoken about some issue, when my intentions do not align with my words?

How often have my critiques directed at someone or something been a mask to the shadows in my own heart?

How is my heart directing me to a place of worship that is risky, vulnerable and intimate; and that leads me to a place where my words match the intentions of my heart?

**April 7, 2020**

Contributor: Bishop Logan McMenamie

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; John 12:20-36

“Sir, we would see Jesus.” -*John 12:20-36*

There is a story about a sacred well that folk would come to and receive healing and a blessing from its waters. Pilgrims would travel from all over the country to experience and participate in this offered healing. As the news about the well grew and people visited, they would leave a stone or a stick to mark their visit. Over time, a structure grew, and folks added coloured fabrics and precious jewels. More and more people paid a visit, until a time came that the structure around the well became very large and beautiful. One day, all that could be seen was the structure created on the outside. In the adoration of this structure, the well was lost to those who visited. Much of what was done in decorating the well was done in good faith and with good intent. It was done because of a recognition of the importance of the well to all who visited and experienced new life and healing there. However, many began to leave disappointed and frustrated that they could not see or access the healing power of the water. The real magic of the well had been obscured behind the structure that had been built by its admirers.

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Over the years, Jesus has been obscured because of how we have built an institution around him. In many cases, it is difficult for us to see Jesus and access his way, truth or life because of what we have built. As we move into the mid-21st Century, the church needs to strip back all that has obscured Jesus. We need to strip back from our lives all that could obscure Jesus. The Gospel calls us into courageous living and says that if we hold onto our life, or what we mistakenly



think is our life, we will lose much, if not all. If we, however, have courage to let go of what interferes with our relationship to Jesus and let it die, then we will gain life and abundance. The kernel which is the institution needs to fall to the ground and die. Jesus must be lifted in our lives and in our culture. Lifted above all that might obscure Him. Let this Lent be a time when we remove from our life, and our communities, all that would obscure our healing and our hope.

Friends, we would see Jesus.

**April 8, 2020**

Contributor: Matthew Cook

Isaiah 50:4-9A; Psalm 70; Hebrew 12:1-3; John 13:21-32

Lord teach us to join the cloud of witness  
that bare testimony to your life here  
and in the hereafter

Let our gaze rest upon thy image  
and be reflected in it  
as the Saints were.

Let us remember their humanity, and the grace that  
touched them  
The dance they wove, between this world and the next  
Forever signing glory along side  
“Lord make haste to help us, Lord make speed to save  
us.”

We the earthly,  
worn out as the Earth is worn  
struggle to be near the dance  
to keep the heavenly grove.

Teach us not to flee to comfort of darkness  
the night before glory  
a dish with oil  
the long cold before dawn  
three crows  
the satisfaction of silver

To mind the common purse  
That the poor and creation may be answered in our  
giving  
And this be to thy glory

Let us with breath  
Join those without  
and say: Amen  
the Lord's will be done

**April 9, 2020**

Contributor: Marylin Gough

Psalm 102:1-17; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Jesus, our Teacher and our Lord, the God who made the heavens in human form, who sustains all that is, strips off his robe and crouches on the floor in the dust to wash our feet! These dirty feet that have trod through dirt, corruption and possibly manure through the long day are to be washed by Jesus? Yes! Every bit of us, every unclean, corrupted, diseased, impure and grotty bit of our fallen humanity is washed, cleansed, redeemed and loved by Jesus. Every part of me which might cause me shame is cared for and loved by Jesus. Can I feel this in the depths of my being?

If I can believe in this love, can it liberate and empower me to go and do likewise? This is the self-giving, kenotic love of God as shown in Jesus that

models for us how we are to love. This is a love that gets down in the dirt and mess of human existence to redeem us from our shame and failure.

“By *this* everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

*And here He shows the full extent of love, To us whose love is always incomplete,*

*In vain we search the heavens high above, The God of love is kneeling at our feet.*

Excerpt from *Maundy Thursday* by Malcolm Guite  
Sounding the Seasons, Canterbury Press.

### **April 10, 2020 - Good Friday**

Contributor: Meagan Crosby-Shearer

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12; PSALM 22; JOHN 18:1-19:42

From the collection: **The Seven Last Words of Jesus**

### **III Mother, this is your son.**

This is *not* my son

*You* are my son.

This is my son's friend. He is about your age.

He is strong and vital, as you were just this morning,  
Before they began to do

What they are doing to you now,  
Before they drove nails into your hands

As if they were blocks of wood,  
before this happened to my baby.

Now, we stand and watch,

Your best friend and I. I cannot bear to see,  
But neither can I bear to leave.

And neither can he. And so, I *do* love him.

I love him for staying.

So I will not argue with you now about this.

I won't allow our last talk  
To be an argument.  
I want so much to help you get through this  
It tastes like blood in my mouth.  
And there isn't anything *else* I can do to help you since  
They won't let me come *near* you,  
Let alone *touch* you.  
They won't even let me give you a drink.  
I can't even brush your hair out of your eyes.  
You are going quickly now. This cannot last much  
longer.  
So all right. When this is over,  
It will be John and I.  
I will love him, because he will remember you.  
And you will be all I'll want to talk about,  
For a long time after this is over,  
Long after most people think it's time I got over it.  
But there was a time you lived in me:  
I held you safe right here,  
Under my heart,  
In the place where you have an open wound.  
You were a part of my body then.  
I would be part of yours now.  
I would leap  
To take your place up there.  
I would laugh  
If they drove nails into my hands  
Instead of yours.  
I would look down at you  
Looking up and I would see your chest  
heave with your crying and mine would  
heave with my failing breathing and I would  
shout, "He lives!" and send my last breath to the sky.  
Thanksgiving".

Marjorie A, Burke. **Women's Uncommon Prayers: Our Lives Revealed, Nurtured, Celebrated.** Edited by Geitz Elizabeth Rankin and Smith Ann. Harrisburg, PA:Morehouse Publishing, 2000. (296-297)

**April 11, 2020 - Holy Saturday**

Contributor: Caroline Allan

LAMENTATIONS 3:1-9; PSALM 31:1-4, 15-16; JOHN 19:38-42



**April 12, 2020 - Easter Sunday**

Contributor: Matthew Humphrey

PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; COLOSSIANS 3:1-4; JOHN 20:1-8



*“Noli Me Tangere,”* Fra Angelico, 1441

When Mary Magdalene  
Saw Christ at dawn  
In the tomb-haunted grove  
She thought he was the gardener,

Then saw he was the Christ.  
But Still she was mistaken,  
Not seeing that the flowers in the rock,  
The grass, the gnarled, deep-rooted olive trees  
The rock itself  
Were rooted in his flesh  
And nourished by his blood.

For Christ was gardener of that place  
But his is workman's hands,  
The flower of his flesh,  
Lest the young church see  
Persephone, Osiris, or only wild Pan  
And not the God beyond the world  
Who made it for our flesh, and his:  
And tends, in each new Adam,  
The garden of his earth.

By Loren Wilkinson





EMMAUS  
COMMUNITY



THE  
ABBHEY  
CHURCH