

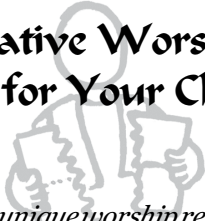


**What
Does It
Mean to
Follow
This
Man?**

Creative Resources for Lent and Eastertide

Sacred Seasons, a quarterly series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis, from Seeds of Hope Publishers:
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Sacred Seasons: Creative Worship Tools for Your Church



These unique worship resource packets are available for the liturgical year, four packets a year for \$120 (\$135 for non-US subscriptions), one packet for \$50 (\$60 outside of the US).

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Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for the poor and hungry of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. The group intends to seek out people of faith who feel called to care for the poor; and to affirm, enable, and empower a variety of responses to the problems of poverty.

Editorial Address

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What Does It Mean to Follow This Man?

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a word about this packet

The cover art for this packet is by Kate Moore, whose art you will see on several pages. She is a professional writing student at Baylor University. You will also find art from Sally Lynn Askins, Sharon Rollins, Lenora Mathis, Van Darden, Robert Darden, and Rebecca Ward. You will find two sermons by Marsha Martie, a pastor in Waco, Texas, and an Easter service by Amy Mears and April Baker, co-pastors in Nashville, Tennessee. Another feature is Eileen Campbell-Reeds meditations for walking a labyrinth during Holy Week. For Ash Wednesday services, Tenebrae or Maundy Thursday services, or children's materials, please refer to earlier *Sacred Seasons* packets. We hope you will be inspired and enriched by these contents.

As always, the material in this packet is your congregation's to use freely. We have tried to pull together creative and inspiring resources that you can use to raise awareness of issues surrounding economic justice and food security (especially from a biblical perspective) in your congregation. We endeavored to choose a variety of age groups, worship areas, events, and angles, so that you would have a potpourri of art and ideas from which to choose.

We make a conscious effort to maintain a balance between the apostolic and the contemplative—on the one hand, the dynamic challenge to stay true to God's mandate to feed the poor and struggle for justice, and on the other hand, our own compelling need for nurture and healing while we work toward those dreams. May it be so.

Gratefully, The Staff and Council of Stewards

Forethoughts

Last year, during Eastertide, I found myself in a number of conversations about Lent and about portrayals of Jesus in theatre, movies, pulpits, and music. I came across the Easter service you will see in this packet, written by Amy Mears and April Baker, which questions glorification of Jesus' execution. I was interviewed by a reporter who wanted to know why I preferred movies like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Godspell*, and *Jesus of Nazareth* to *The Passion of the Christ* released for Lent last year. That is a good question, I said, and set about to figure out the answer.

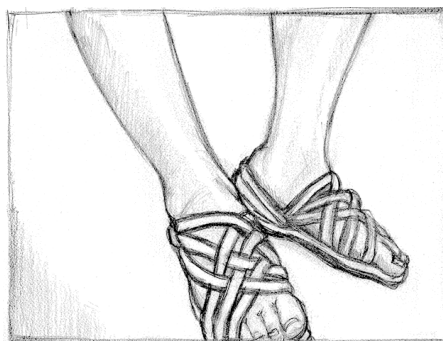
I discovered, in myself, a prejudice against Passion plays that do not include major coverage of Jesus' ministry—his teachings, his interaction with people, his concern for the poor and marginalized, and his admonishment of us over and over again (especially in the Gospel of John) to love each other. When I look at the gospel narratives, I see Jesus caring for people, loving them, liberating them, and then, eventually, dying out of love for them.

When I look at Passion plays, particularly the medieval type, I often see heavy-handed drama used to beat people down. I see the violence of the dramas promoting more violence—emotional, spiritual, economic, and physical. I see emotional response that somehow causes us to overlook the daily commitment of following Christ. As the actor and poet Al Skaggs pointed out in one of his writings, the Passion Play at Oberammergau, Germany was going strong while six million Jews were being gassed by people calling themselves Christian.

Jesus' death was violent and ugly, and we should not look away—especially during Holy Week. After all, he said that we should take up our own crosses and follow him. And it is true that Easter would be less meaningful—cheap, even—without the journey through Lent. But somehow I can't imagine that the details or theological implications of his execution would be what he wanted us to dwell on. Surely he would want us to imitate the revolutionary way that he treated people, to listen to his words, and to do what he told us to do. Surely he would say to us, "Love each other, feed the poor, watch out for the marginalized."

If you look at the Church today, you will see people calling themselves Christian frantically trying to protect the Ten Commandments in the public square, but no one trying to protect the Sermon on the Mount. You will see all varieties of Christians for whom the life and teachings of Christ are subsumed in religious ritual and dogma. You see people who think they hold the keys of heaven, who seem to ignore the only litmus test Jesus seems to have proffered: "I was hungry and you fed me" or "I was hungry and you didn't feed me." But what does it really mean to follow him?

Hopefully this Lenten packet will help us begin to ask this question and begin a journey toward an understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ.—lkc



O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee

(A Lenten Interpretation)

O Master, let me walk with thee
Teach me your truth and set me free;
Open my blinded eyes to see
Your life of love and humility.

Grant me fresh courage for each day,
Patience and wisdom as I pray;
Open my heart to people in need
To serve the poor, the hungry to feed.

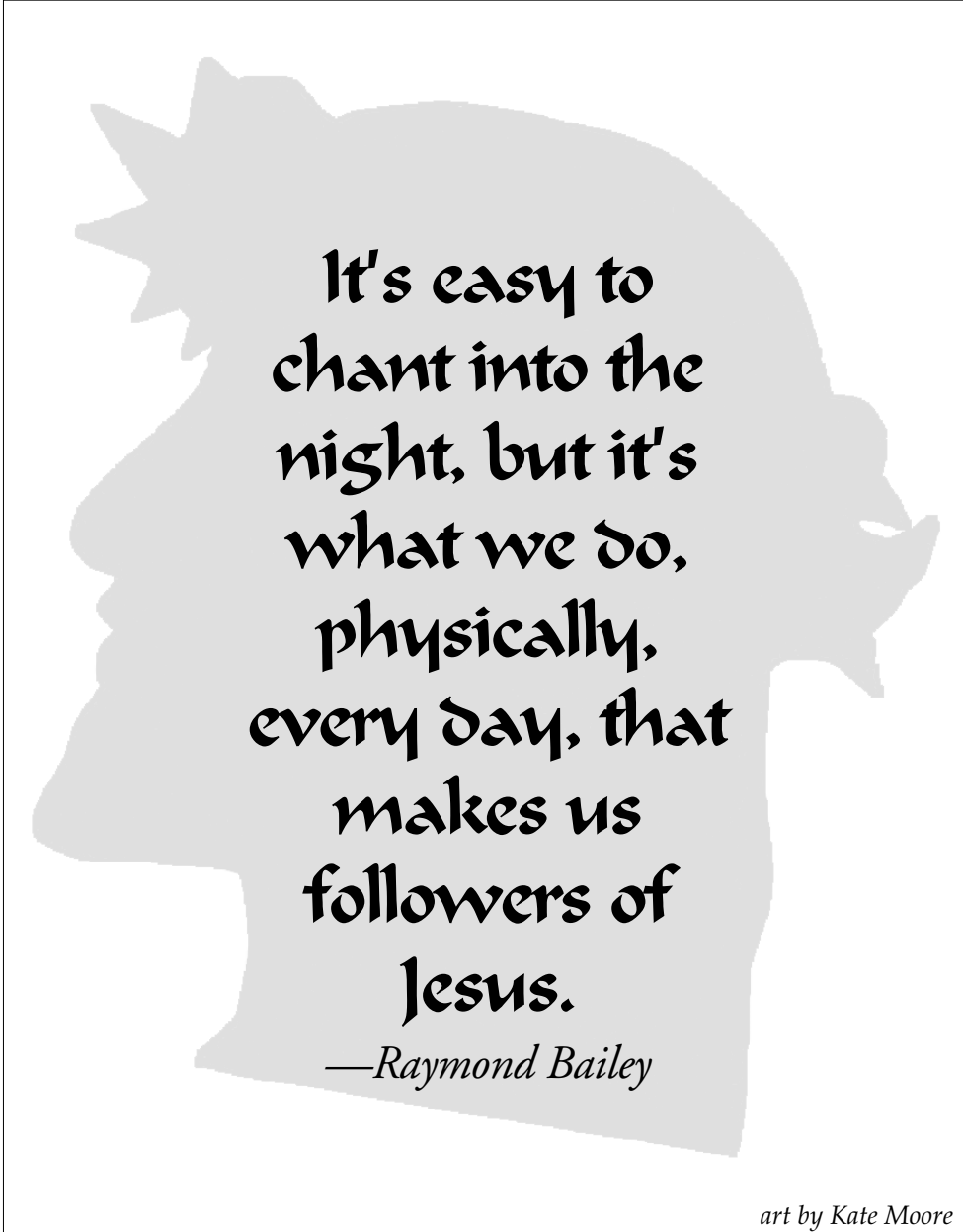
May I reflect upon each choice
Tuning my ears to your loving voice;
Help me to work for justice and peace
To live my faith, my master to please.

Words: Deborah E. Harris, 2006
(Original Words: Washington Gladden, 1879)

Music: Henry Percy Smith, 1874
Hymn tune: MARYTON

—Deborah Harris is a freelance writer in Waco, Texas. Her song lyrics have appeared in *Sacred Seasons* several times.

Bulletin art



It's easy to
chant into the
night, but it's
what we do,
physically,
every day, that
makes us
followers of
Jesus.

—*Raymond Bailey*

art by Kate Moore

Repentance and Renewal

A Sermon for Ash Wednesday

by Marsha C. Martie

Readings:

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17, Is. 59:1-12, Ps. 103 or 103:8-14, 2 Cor. 5:20b- 6:10, Mt. 6:1-6, 16-21

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent. Tonight we come to reaffirm the fact that we are utterly dependent on God. We also come tonight to observe a ritual—the imposition of ashes. Ritual is important; it seems to remind us of an event, and of who we are and who we belong to. This ritual prepares us for the coming of Holy Week.

But sometimes ritual becomes stale and rote, and we do it because it is the thing to do. The message of the prophets on this subject is clear: God requires of us sincerity in our ritual and devotion. When we repent, it's not about donning sackcloth and/or ashes; it's about rending our hearts, and not our garments. It's about a real internal change.

I think Lent, in our culture, brings with it a particular temptation to garment rending. Too often we fast without purpose. We fast—but to what end, to accomplish what? Discipline without a goal is of no use. And too often, I think that we repent not at all.

When I speak of repentance, I am not talking about merely feeling sorry for the general state of sin in our lives, but rather I am talking about what the word actually means: to turn around or turn back to God. To literally and honestly change behavior. Again, I repeat, that for repenting or fasting to be of value, it must be sincere. It must be rooted in something.

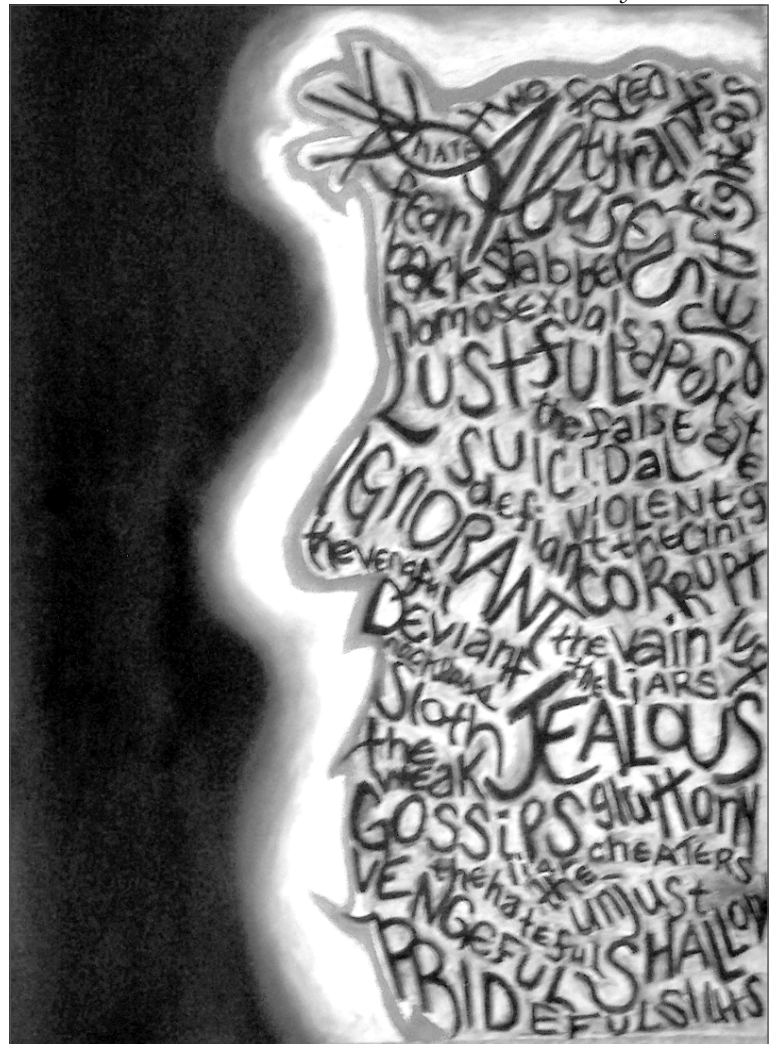
Each year, as I approach Lent, I begin by being aware of the biblical teaching on repentance. As I look across the Old Testament, I see that repentance brings the renewal of life, which demands a new heart and spirit. Jesus' teaching brings a new dimension: we repent in order to be a part of the imminent Kingdom of God and to reserve the baptism of forgiveness.

Repentance is necessary for life under God's rule and it involves the total person. Jesus tells us that the tree is known by its fruit. He says to cleanse the inside of the cup so the whole dish may be clean. Jesus further emphasizes the importance of

repentance by teaching the radical rejection of everything that hinders our return to God—in other words, pluck out your eye if it's getting between you and God.

We are to stop all of our negative behavior and begin to act in positive ways. Walk the second mile. Love your enemy. And by this radical rejection of everything that hinders us, we are to return to God. Jesus said, "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." Repentance means becoming another person. Jesus said,

art by Kate Moore



“Unless you become as a little child...” Through repentance we become the poor in spirit for whom the Kingdom of God is reserved.

Repentance is completed by faith. During Lent, we express our faith in Jesus and God through an act of devotion—fasting. But within this act we must continually remember that “God looks not upon outward action, but upon the disposition of the heart. The worth of fasting, as of any other act, lies in the devotion of which it is the expression. Without such devotion it is, of itself meaningless.”

What we are entering is not just another season—but rather we are submitting ourselves to a process of renewal that can only occur within the context of sincere devotion.

Lent prepares us for Holy Week. Holy Week prepares us for the joy of Easter. Easter brings us the good news that “for all who believed he gave the power to become the children of God.” And believing brings the command to follow—to act on the words of Jesus.

What we are entering is not just another season—but rather we are submitting ourselves to a process of renewal that can only occur within the context of sincere devotion. It is a process that requires a contrite heart—a repentance of soul, a turning around—and it is consummated in an act of devotion. In the prophets, God rhetorically asks: “

What is the fast that I require of you? To lose the chains of injustice and untie the ends of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your Lord with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked to clothe him and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

Jesus continues the teaching within the Sermon on the Mount. He teaches about giving to the needy, about prayer and fasting. He says that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

I think the lesson is this: Repentance is consummated in an act of restoration. To repent means to return to God—to be restored in that relationship. But carried with that is also the obligation to be in right relationship to our brothers and sisters in the word and to understand where our treasure lies.

As we begin this process of renewal, let us look across the last year and let us look deep inside ourselves and seek to see clearly our sin—all that hinders us from entering the Kingdom of God. Let us seek out our destructive patterns that destroy our souls and divide us from God and one another. Let us in contrition repent, return to God, and acknowledge our utter dependence upon God’s grace. And let us enter a fast, an act of devotion, that consummates our repentance, that seeks restoration, that seeks to stop our destructive behavior, and sets us on a path to reconciliation with God and with our sisters and brothers.

—*Marsha Martie is the pastor of Crossties Ecumenical Church in Waco, Texas. Crossties was founded as a seed group of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC. The community works in a poverty-stricken area surrounding the Kate Ross housing development in South-Central Waco.*

I met this preacher from Australia
He'd read the Bible searching for its dominant themes
And he counted 87 times when Jesus said, "Follow me!"
Well you know that got me thinking
Maybe that's the bottom line of what "Christian" means.
'Cause "I follow Jesus" is deeper than "I believe"
'Cause it don't take much to mentally agree
With a set of beliefs written down in some creed.
Now, don't get me wrong. We need to know what we believe
But lately I've been wondering...

—Bryan Sirchio, from the song “Follow Me”
(www.sirchio.com)
—art by Robert Darden

Phantoms and Truths

by Richard Moore

There is within us, O God—
beneath the layers of illusion and pretense
which consume so much of our lives and our energy—

One true thing.

As we peel back the layers to discover what is truest in us,
We discover a truth and a phantom truth.

The phantom truth shows us that we are empty inside —

We are not complete,

We are not sufficient.

This phantom teaches us to fear,
it makes us small and mean.

It justifies our untruths and closes us off.

But the truth is, the space within us is a God-shaped space.

The space within us is our place, our need, for You.

The space within us makes relationship possible.

For the phantom is fear, but the truth is love.

And we are never so much like God
as when we love each other.

We come to this place each week, O God.

We come to this dangerous place.

We come to this place which requires us to risk
that which we would hardly admit we possess.

For it is here that we reveal

that tender, vulnerable, honest, true thing;

We open ourselves to your grace and to each other.

For we are never so much like God
as when we give and receive love.

art by Van Darden

—*Richard Moore is a minister at the University Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.*

Overcoming Our Blindness

A Sermon for Lent

by Marsha C. Martie

As we come to the third week of Lent, we are given the gospel story in John 9:1-41 to be with. This story comes on the heels of a series of questions and controversies that rise up between Jesus and the Pharisees. These, the very religious, ask him, “Are you the one?” And in words similar to those used by the tempter earlier in the desert, they say, “if you are, prove it.”

In a way uncharacteristic of the other gospels, Jesus answers them pretty directly saying, “Yes I am, but you don’t

Certainly children are harmed by adult sin, but not all people who have tragedy come into their lives have it arrive because they or someone else has sinned. Sometimes, things just are.

believe it.” In the end, they get so furious with him that they pick up stones to stone him with, but Jesus manages to get away.

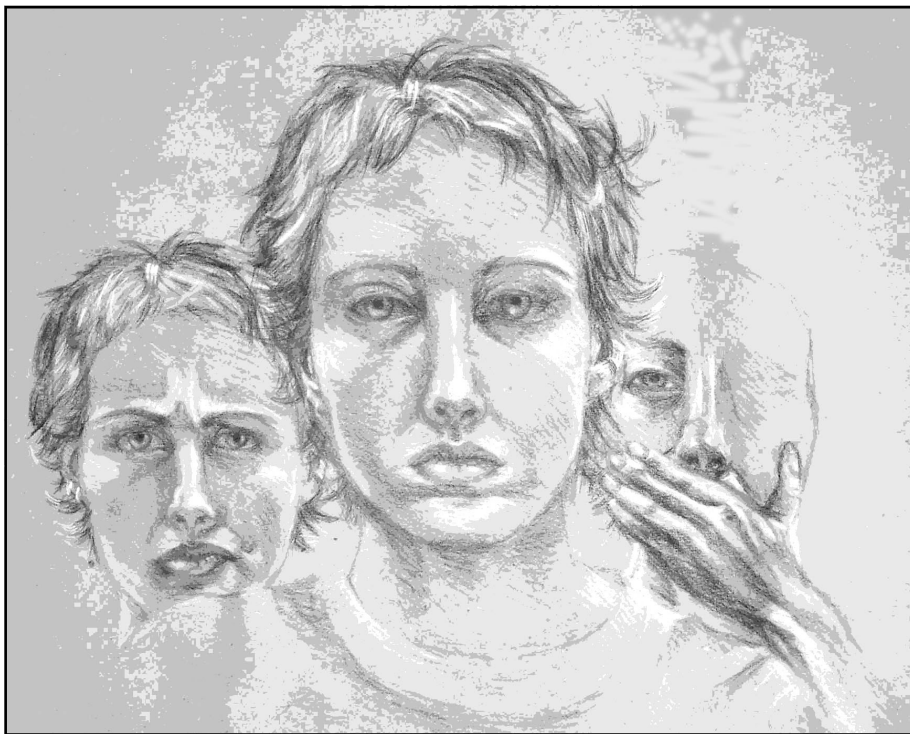
Then there is another story—a story about blindness. It begins with the apostles: Upon seeing a man who was blind from birth, they ask, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Blinded themselves by traditional thought, these who were closest to Jesus still held ideas that were not in keeping with God’s character. Back then, people believed that tragedy was always someone’s fault—always the result of someone’s sin. If a child was born with a birth defect, someone had to be at fault—so who sinned? his parents? Or did this infant somehow commit a sin? Jesus calls them on their blindness and tells them: “Neither this man nor his parents sinned. But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

These are sometimes difficult ideas for us to reconcile. Surely much tragedy is caused by sin. A child can be terribly handicapped because his/her mother chose to drink or consume drugs during the pregnancy. Fathers have damaged their children *in utero* by beating their pregnant mothers. Children have been born with defects because our government has poisoned them in war or in harmful testing—thereby genetically altering the parent. Children have been damaged at the time of birth because a doctor wasn’t paying attention, because of arrogance, or fatigue, or simple lack of care.

Certainly children are harmed by adult sin, but not all people who have tragedy come into their lives have it arrive because they or someone else has sinned. Sometimes, things just are.

The fact is, all of us have tragedy, loss, and sorrow for various reasons—most of which I think come because that’s the way life is. But when it comes, we must keep in mind that this is also an opportunity for God to work. It is a joyously ironic truth that often our call proceeds from our deepest pain. That somehow out of our worst wounding,

art by Kate Moore



God molds us into who we best are. God causes us to become an extension of God's healing in the world by transforming our darkness into light and our wounds into wellsprings of joy. The blind man receives his sight, and God is glorified.

But understand that this is not work that either we or God does alone. Notice the "we" in the next verse: "As long as it is day, WE must do the work of the one who sent me.

Then, the man—blind from birth—with mud on his face—had to make his way to Siloam's pool. Probably he was followed by a buzzing crowd as he tapped his way down the narrow street, counting his steps, trying to keep track and trying to hold down both his excitement and his fear. What if he went through all of this humiliation and it didn't work?

Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." What is always true is that life is a joint effort—it is "we." It is you and me, and Christ in us. "While I am in the world," he said. And surely he is in the world, by means of his spirit at work in us.

That which he says of himself is extended to you and me. In Matthew 5:14, he says, "You are the light of the world... let your light shine before people, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven." Surely our light is a reflection of the light of Christ. It is only with him that we can shine in the world.

We come to project his light into the world and thereby to extend his healing in the world to all those who still suffer under the misguided thinking that they are worthless, sinners from birth, beyond the pale of any help or hope. To them we go, with Jesus, to say that, working together, we can realize our healing and accept the gift that God brings.

Now, this is not to say that it's going to be easy. Certainly it wasn't for this man. Look at what he went through to regain his sight. He was most likely in a public place because he was a beggar. We know that Jesus was in Jerusalem and had been at the temple, but we don't know precisely where this took place. I'd guess it was in Jerusalem. The pool of Siloam was on the southern edge of the city.

So, in a public place, Jesus mixed spit and dust to make mud. He put it on the man's eyes. Then, the man—blind from birth—with mud on his face—had to make his way to Siloam's pool. Probably he was followed by a buzzing crowd as he tapped his way down the narrow street, counting his steps, trying to keep track and trying to hold down both his excitement and his fear. What if he went through all of

this humiliation and it didn't work?

But he wanted to see so badly that he did what it took. He made it to the pool of Siloam, and he washed the mud from his eyes, and he could see! He went through a great deal. He did what it took to cooperate with Jesus for his healing, and he was so changed that his neighbors didn't recognize him.

Now I think we have to ask ourselves: What are we willing to do to be healed? I think one of the things we must do to be healed is to give up our comparing minds, and rely on the fact that what Jesus is doing for me is right for me, and that may not be what he did for someone else. What if this guy had said. "But Jesus, why do I have to go down to Siloam's pool? I heard you healed blind Bartimaeus on the spot. He didn't have to go through all of this!

Then there's that other guy—it took two times to heal him, but he didn't have to go through this pool thing. You spat on him, yeah, but then you touched him and that was it. Why can't you do that for me?" We too often say to Christ, "I don't want your unique gift given to me for my healing. I want what you did for her." It is important that we be willing to lay aside our comparing minds, and then we must willingly walk the way Jesus has prescribed for our unique healing.

Today, we often have difficulty knowing what that is, but I believe if we will listen to the voice inside us, we will know. The voice that I'm referring to is the Spirit that is also our conscience. That voice is placed within us to guide us in life. It will tell us our path to healing, for it knows with whom we are unreconciled. Our healing can be stopped because we will not do the work of reconciliation. This is difficult work—work that must be done if we are to be freed, if we are to see.

This is because we are most often blinded by the pain of our past. I am blinded to a person's uniqueness because they subconsciously or consciously remind me of someone with whom I have pain. It could be simply the way they lift their eyebrow. So, because of that, I can't see them. I am blinded to my path to freedom because I tried it once before, or tried something like it, and I got hurt. So now I can't see the way to try again. I am blinded to entering into Christ's Body because of my fear. I can't see the joy of it because my fear blinds me in a blizzard of "what ifs" and "I'll nevers." Our healing awaits us in our journey, but we must be willing to walk the path Jesus prescribes for us.

If we will let go of our comparing minds and walk the path that Jesus prescribes for us, then we will be healed of our blindness.

But know this. With seeing comes responsibility. Just as this man was called to account for his seeing, so are we. You see, when we begin to see through the lies, folks start getting uncomfortable. This is because the thing most folks

want is not the healing for others, but *status quo* for themselves. Seeing got this man in trouble—not just the physical sight, but seeing through the thin veil of the overly righteous into their clutching hearts of fear. He began to see their slavery to the very sin they tried to claim was his.

Seeing got this man in trouble—not just the physical sight, but seeing through the thin veil of the overly righteous into their clutching hearts of fear. He began to see their slavery to the very sin they tried to claim was his.

The result of seeing for this man is he was thrown out of the synagogue. He was shunned by the religious establishment. We need to remember that this is often what happens to one who sees. Jesus knew that truth early on; so, to those with a single eye and a pure heart, he said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and

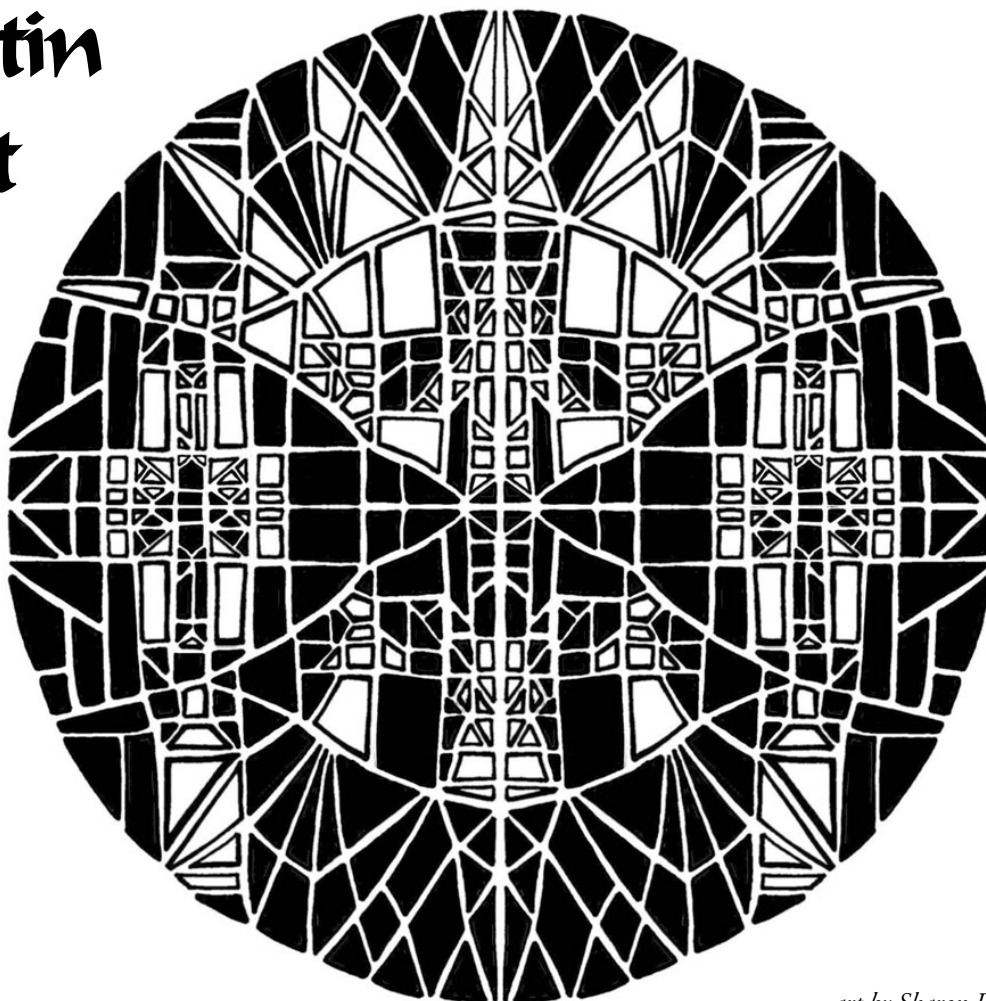
falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

So here we are in this third Sunday in Lent, and we are challenged to see—to work with Jesus—to reflect his light into a world longing to be healed. In these next few weeks, I challenge us to put aside our comparing minds and accept the path that Jesus has uniquely chosen for each of us to regain our sight. And then, as we come to see beyond the thin veil of the lie, let’s rejoice and be glad even in the midst of difficulty, because we are focused on the one who always calls us forward.

Oh—and by the way—notice that the guy that got thrown out of the synagogue was thrown out to where Jesus was. And Jesus—also thrown out of the synagogue—went and found him and brought him comfort and even deeper seeing.

—*Marsha Martie is the pastor of Crossties Ecumenical Church in Waco, Texas. Crossties was founded as a seed group of the Church of the Saviour in Washington, DC.*

Bulletin Art



art by Sharon Rollins

Open Our Eyes

by Deborah E. Harris

art by Lenora Mathis

Open our eyes, God, we want to see Jesus...
We want to see him as a vulnerable baby, lying in a simple stable manger.
We want to see him in the temple as a young boy,
speaking of holy things with his elders.
We want to see him in the Jordan River,
coming for baptism and receiving your blessing.
We want to gather with his disciples and throngs of seekers,
as he reached out to teach, heal and affirm.
We want to see him in the garden,
humbly praying for guidance and strength.
We want to witness his sacrifice,
as he surrendered completely to your will and purpose.
We want to know the wild wonder and hope
of the empty tomb and the upper room.
We want to walk beside him on the road to Emmaus,
feeling our hearts quicken with joyous recognition.

Open our eyes, God, we want to see Jesus...
We want to see him in the innocent faces of children,
who need our protection and tender care.
We want to see him in the inquiring eyes of adolescents,
who need our honesty and loving respect.
We want to see him in those
who suffer with the challenges of illness and aging,
needing our presence in prayer and fellowship.
We want to see him in the weary eyes of countless hungry
and homeless ones, who need our generosity and kindness.
We want to see him in the stunned and tear-stained gaze
of those victimized by natural disasters,
who need our compassionate support, physically and spiritually.
And we want to see him in the angry, defiant and troubled faces
of those whose beliefs, actions and cultures are disparate
from our own, needing our patient and peaceful response.

Open our eyes, God, we want to see Jesus...
Once again, O Gracious One, will you bend down
to mix the mud and spittle in your hands
to heal our blindness and restore our sight?
For when you are made visible, we are changed.

AMEN

Deborah Harris is a freelance writer in Waco, Texas.

Quotes, Poems, & Pithy Sayings

O Lord, if you are there, you do understand, don't you? Give me what I need, but leave me free to choose. Help me work it out my own way, but don't let me go. Let me understand myself, but don't let me despair. Come unto me, O Lord—I want you there. Lighten my darkness—but don't dazzle me. Help me to see what I need to do and give me strength to do it. O Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.

—from *The Oxford Book of Prayer*

Jesus promised those who would follow him only three things...that they would be absurdly happy, entirely fearless, and always in trouble.

—Gregg Lavoy

The Eucharist does not simply bind individuals to God in a vertical relationship or bind people to each other in another kind of purely social construct. We are bound to one another in *Christo*. And Christ, who is the head of the body, is to be found persistently on the margins in those who are the least in the Kingdom of the world. The margins include those who are other, foreign, strange, dangerous, subversive—even socially, morally or religiously distasteful in our eyes. Yet the Eucharist insists that humans find solidarity where they least expect it and, indeed, least want to find it.

—Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity*

The hope of Jesus Christ is never a dash of pepper or a spoonful of mustard.

It is bread and wine,
the essential and basic food itself,
without which there is only
the delirium of knowledge
and an illusion of action.

It is essential that hope be the all.
It has to commit us
to those insane actions
which alone are reasonable,
to that critical knowledge

which alone is constructive,
to the relentless scouring
of the real which is the only realism.

—Jacques Ellul

In despair we hope against hope. Apathy alone is hopeless. After every attempt to find meaning within ourselves has failed and irresistible compulsions continue to enslave us—there on the edge of despair, we perceive the Holy Presence.

—Martin Bell



Lord, it's too late for you to be quiet,
you have spoken too much;
you have fought too much;
You were not sensible, you know, you exaggerated;
it was bound to happen.
You called the better people a brood of vipers,
You told them that their hearts
were black sepulchres with fine exteriors.

You chose the decaying lepers,
You spoke fearlessly with unacceptable strangers,
You sat with notorious sinners, and you said
that streetwalkers would be the first in Paradise.
You got on well with the poor, the bums, the crippled.
You belittled the religious regulations.
Your interpretation of the Law reduced it
to one little commandment: to love.
Now they are avenging themselves.
They have taken steps against you; they have
approached the authorities, and action will follow.

—Michel Quoist

Walking the Labyrinth

a Holy Week Meditation Guide

by Eileen R. Campbell-Reed

Editor's note: Last year before Holy Week, the members and leaders of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee constructed a labyrinth on the church grounds. This can be done in many ways. Some people have used rocks to outline a path. Others have painted lines on a large tarp to use inside a large room. The labyrinth can vary in size, but should be big enough for people to be able to walk to the center and back out, perhaps meeting each other coming and going. [See the art on this page.]

Eileen Campbell-Reed wrote the following meditations for folks to use as they walked the labyrinth every day during Holy Week. She made copies available at the entrance to the labyrinth in a plastic display case like those that realtors use. Since it was written for last year, the lectionary readings are for Year A.

Introduction

The suggested scriptures for daily meditation during Holy Week are taken from Revised Common Lectionary (Abingdon, 1992). You may want to read and reflect on the passage prior to beginning your labyrinth walk. The words of meditation may help you reflect on the scripture, and the words under “walking the labyrinth” may guide your reflections as you make the circuit. It is fine for more than one person to walk the labyrinth at the same time. It may help to observe the following guidelines:



- Be mindful that persons may be praying or reflecting deeply as they walk, and so respect both the quiet and the space of each person;
- Move at your own pace, and let others pass in silence if they are walking at a different pace;
- You may want to take a journal for recording your insights and thoughts after walking the labyrinth and reflecting on the questions for the day.
- May your holy week be enriched by taking time to reflect while walking the labyrinth in the days ahead.

1. Palm Sunday

Scripture:
Matthew 21:1-11

Meditation

We will never know fully the mind of Jesus. Yet as we look at his life portrayed in the Gospels, we are compelled to wonder what must have been going through his mind as he approached Jerusalem, the city where prophets died. Did he anticipate a showdown with the religious establishment? Surely amid this waving of palms and cries of hosanna, he must have wondered if the reign of God was truly at hand. Maybe love was going to win the day! Were Jesus and his followers swept into the holy city on waves of hopefulness?

Ironies abound in the gospel stories of Holy Week. Poignant among them is the fickle nature of the crowd, which changes its cry in one short week. Even more heartbreaking is the turn of events that ended in a very dark day indeed. Yet we know something about walking through a day or week that quickly shifts from celebration to grief. A Thanksgiving celebration interrupted by heart pains becomes a trip to the emergency room and bypass surgery. A car ride from the ball game turns into a devastating wreck and then a funeral when someone drives drunk. A march for peace becomes a riot and a jail sentence when demonstrators are mistaken as criminals. The Highway of Hosannas turns into the Via Dolorosa—the way of suffering.

We may not know the mind of Jesus, but we may trust the presence of God to walk with us through devastating moments and dark nights of the soul that disrupt and change our lives.

Walking the Labyrinth

Today, as you walk the labyrinth, imagine you are present at the first Palm procession. Put yourself into the story and see the crowds around Jesus walking toward Jerusalem on the way to the Passover festival (see John 12). As you walk along, are you ahead of him or behind? What shouts come from your lips? Are you a follower, a reluctant watcher, or a studious observer of Jesus of Nazareth?

Notice, as you enter the city, the impact of the processional. What is all the turmoil about? What turmoil has been part of your life lately? What turmoil have you witnessed in the lives of others? Where do you sense God's presence in these circumstances? As you continue through the labyrinth, ponder this question from the crowds with reference to your own life: "Who is this Jesus and what difference does my answer make?"

Prayer

O God, in this Holiest of Weeks, guide my path, fire my imagination, and open my heart to the deep and penetrating questions of life.

2. Monday of Holy Week

Scripture: John 12:1-11

Meditation

Feet. When they are well they help us stand, walk, run. They offer a way to exercise our freedom, carry us to amazing places, cross the paths of wondrous souls, and take us to places of service and love. Yet, feet can also kick in anger, stomp away in hurt, march to war, or trudge slowly in grief.

When the feet of Jesus drew near to the place of his death, they slowed and rested. His dearest friends came to his aid. Martha comforted and nourished him with home cooking. Lazarus smiled deeply the smile of the recently dead and revived. Mary brought out her most extravagant gift and poured it on the feet of her teacher and friend. I'm sure each gift carried with it a gentle prayer of love.

Walking the Labyrinth

As you walk the labyrinth today, concentrate on your feet as you walk and pray. Pray first in thanksgiving for the body you have been given—whatever its limits—that serves and cares for you. Thank God for the places, the people and the paths which your feet have crossed. Then turn your prayers toward those in need. Ask God for your own needs. Pray for those who cannot walk on their own, who walk only in places of suffering, poverty or despair.

Thank God for those who walk on faith and not sight alone. Ask yourself these questions: How shall I walk in

paths of service? Where will my feet take me? What gifts—small or extravagant—do I have to offer? How will I know when a cause, a person, or a need is worthy? For what are my own feet anointed? To what am I called this holy week?

Prayer

O God, may gratitude for your extravagant gifts to me inspire my actions and overflow my heart in service and compassion.

3. Tuesday of Holy Week

Scripture: John 12:20-36

Meditation

The life of faith is one of mystery. Sometimes Jesus speaks in riddles. And important questions go unanswered. Only when something dies does it bear much fruit. To be lifted up means to die on a cross. Love your life and make it a god, and you'll lose it. Accept your death and let go of life, and it's yours in abundance. Who is this Son of Man anyway? And what is he saying?

Despite the riddling language about the life of faith, which sounds like a mystery wrapped in an enigma, some deceptively simple direction is given by Jesus: Walk in the light. Now. We don't know when darkness might be coming or overcoming. So get moving while there is still light.

Walking the Labyrinth

The labyrinth looks like a maze, a series of tricky turns and passages. In reality there is only one way in and out. It is deceptively simple. As you walk it today, put your mind and heart in touch with the mysteries of life and faith...the wonder of birth...the inscrutability of death...the unexpected twists and turns of your path. Ponder the paradox of accepting death in order to live life to its fullest...the way suffering and trouble are sometimes a path to joy and meaning...how life is a strange mixture of light and shadow.

Prayer

Lord of mystery, paradox, and shadowy light, teach me to walk in your ways and embrace the fullness of life.

4. Wednesday of Holy Week

Scripture: John 13:21-32

Meditation

Through the ages lent has typically been a season of confession, repentance and purification from sin. Early followers of the Way of Christ often used the season to

prepare new believers for an Easter morning baptism in which they came out of the water facing the rising sun.

The story of Judas tempts us to divide the world into those who are good and those who are bad: those like Judas who need repentance and those like Peter who lean close to Jesus. But wait! Peter betrayed Jesus, too... later that very same night, after Jesus was arrested. All of the twelve eventually ran, hid, denied, and betrayed Jesus—leaving him to die alone, except for a few women gathered around the cross. Even they were reported by Mark to have fled at the sight of the empty tomb.

All of us have betrayed someone dear in our lives. We've let down a friend or acted in self-interest or desperation rather than compassion or courage. This season of repentance and purification is not designed as a time to dwell on our shortcomings, but rather as a time to let them go, to make amends, to move forward into a new beginning. Scholars agree that even Judas may have acted in the interest of ushering in the new reign of God, but he missed his opportunity for repentance and reconciliation. Surely we can and must learn from his mistakes.

Walking the Labyrinth

As you walk the labyrinth today, prepare yourself for Easter by reflecting on the need in your life for confession, repentance and purification. As you walk into the labyrinth, focus on confession: with each step offer your life for examination by Christ's loving gaze. See it as God sees it. Confess your shortcomings, betrayals, and hurts as you walk along. When you reach the middle of the labyrinth, shift your focus to repentance, which can be understood as turning in a new direction. Spend a few moments there experiencing the mercy, love, and forgiveness that Christ freely offers. As you start away from the center, focus your attention on the purification that is yours in Christ. Revel in the joy of starting anew. When you emerge from the labyrinth you will be facing east. Thank God for the gift of baptism and new life, and turn your hear toward the coming Easter.

Prayer

O God, there is a wideness in your mercy. Make room for me there.

5. Maundy Thursday

Scripture: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Meditation

In John's Gospel the upper room gathering of disciples is placed on Thursday, so that Jesus becomes the new "lamb that was taken to slaughter" on Friday, fulfilling the Passover

festival and the promise of God's deliverance. In the fourth gospel, Jesus offers only one commandment: a new command to love (13:34-35). It is from the Latin word for commandment, *mandatum*, that we get "Maundy" Thursday.

In John's recounting of this important evening the disciples gather not only for a Passover preparation meal, but also to be served one last time by Jesus, who washes their feet. The task of offering hospitality through washing the dusty, dirty feet of travelers was usually reserved for the lowest among the household servants. Jesus embraced the role and took up towel and basin in order to ritualize the one new commandment that he gave that night. Love each other in ways so clear that everyone will know you are my disciples. Love as I have loved you.

Walking the Labyrinth

Remember as you walk the labyrinth today that you are God's creation, sent by God to this life. You are no greater than the One who sent you, and the One who sent you loves you so much that even washing your feet is not too much to ask. For servants, students, and messengers are not greater than their masters, teachers and senders. We can do no other than to love those to whom we are sent, those with whom we learn and walk and live.

If someone were to watch your life closely, would they see a disciple who loves? As you watch your own feet taking the path of the labyrinth, first thank God for the servants who have been Christ to you, who have washed your feet literally or metaphorically. Then ask God to guide your steps to those who need your love and service. Ask Christ to show you those whose feet need washing.

Prayer

You sent me in love. In Christ you have taught me to love. Now help me to live as the beloved.

6. Good Friday

Scripture: John 18-1-19:42

Meditation

These are among the most graphic and difficult scriptures to read in the New Testament. This man Jesus, whose judgments were always restrained by love, whose grace and mercy put his adversaries to shame, whose compassion extended all the way to the outermost margins of life—this man was swept into events beyond his control which swiftly ended his life. Was he at heart a prophet? A reformer? A rabbi? What could be attributed to his name? The religious leaders accused him of breaking the religious codes of the day, yet his purpose was simply to teach and to live the love at the heart of those laws.

Whatever his role and purpose, a collusion of forces from his closest circle of disciples to the occupying forces of the Roman empire—including the religious authorities of his day—converged during the frenzy of a religious holiday and brought the work and life of Jesus to a screeching halt.

We are left like the disciples to watch from the sidelines and wonder in frustration and anger at the injustice of it all. And we find ourselves asking: would we have been as useless as Peter, drawn to the trial in fascination and horror, yet denying any connection with our beloved teacher?

When we open ourselves to the drama of Good Friday, the important question seems not to be: What would Jesus do? We have that on record. The more important question may be: What will we do in response to the strange and horrifying events of the story?

Walking the Labyrinth

Upon entering the labyrinth on Good Friday, ask yourself this question: What would I have done, had I been there to witness the events of Jesus' trial and crucifixion? Where would I have gone? What would I have said? With whom in the story do I identify? Attempt to answer these questions with brutal honesty. What do you learn about yourself?

Ask God's mercy on the Church, who through the ages has unduly placed the burden for Jesus' death on the shoulders of the Jews, while failing to see its own shortcomings as persecutor of the righteousness and crucifier of love. Ask God's grace for yourself that you may find a renewed courage for living in the face of life's many dangers, toils and snares.

Prayer

O God, on this dark and wounded day, grant us wisdom and grace to see ourselves more clearly.

7. Holy Saturday

Scripture: John 19:38-42

Meditation

In John's Gospel there is no word about Saturday. The scripture at this point is silent. Certainly there must have been a great pall over the circle of disciples and close friends of Jesus. It was the Sabbath and a holy day besides. By law, they could do nothing. No one could even visit the tomb on such a day.

We, who relive this day year upon year, are left in silence to wonder...at the grief that surely must have belonged to the disciples...at the mystery of what may have happened on that silent day... at what God might be saying with the

language of silence. We are also faced with the silent gaps in our own lives, the harsh stillness in our own grief, and the mysteries of death itself hovering at the outer boundaries of our existence. We probably rather have the joy and noise of Easter, but its amazing significance is not much unless it proceeds from a shattering silence.

Walking the Labyrinth

As you walk the labyrinth today, do so in utter silence. When thoughts assault you let them pass by without response. Hear the sounds of finitude and death in the hush of your steps and the stillness of your mind. Sink deep into this quietest moment of Holy Week.

Prayer

Lord, fill me with your deep mystery...deep silence...deep peace.

8. Easter Sunday

Meditation

This may be the most difficult day of the Christian year for those of us who live comfortably with cynicism, scientific realism, or just healthy doubt. We know with certainty the hard realities of betrayal, death, grief, and injustice. Where we find ourselves uncertain is in the scores of theories about why Jesus died and what happened to him after that end.

However, without giving up our passion for realism, may we accept this invitation today: May we set aside our doubts and disbelief long enough to glory in the miracle of birth, to revel in the flowers blooming in the desert, to walk barefoot in the grass, and to join the shouts of children? May we rejoice that the story doesn't end in crucifixion, and death is denied the final word? May we simply celebrate that God's Beloved lives on in this community: the risen body of Christ? Alleluia! Sound the bells!

Walking the Labyrinth

Walk in joy! Skip if you can. Walk with a friend. Sing as you go. Laugh and kick up your heels. For today is Easter and life is yours to celebrate and to shout thanksgiving to God for all its richness!

Prayer

O God, may I throw myself with reckless abandon into the glory of your goodness this Easter Day!

—Eileen Campbell-Reed is a freelance writer and a leader in many ways at Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville.

We Will Remember You

(A Communion Hymn for Maundy Thursday)

We will remember you in the breaking of the bread
We will remember ev'ry loving word you said;
“Eat this bread and live, my peace to you I give.”
In the breaking of the bread, we will remember you.

We will remember you in the pouring of the wine
We will remember how you looked into our eyes;
“Drink this cup and live, your sins I will forgive.”
In the pouring of the wine, we will remember you.

A new command you gave to us
That we might love as you have loved;
That all God's children here would kneel as one,
Believing you are God's own Son.

We will remember you as we share the bread and wine
We will remember and look forward to the time,
When your kingdom comes and your will is done;
As we share the bread and wine, we will remember you.

Yes, as we break the bread and pour the wine,
And as we pledge our hearts and lives;
We will remember, we will remember you.

Words: Deborah E. Harris

Music: Mark Hayes

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913-888-6087; www.markhayes.com

- (1) Jesus has called [us] to follow him; this allegiance to his person he regards as a decisive, indeed as *the* decisive act.
- (2) His calling is the beginning of something new, changing all things. It takes place in sovereign liberty, and can at once assume the character of an act of divine grace.
- (3) Following Jesus means togetherness with Jesus and service to him.
- (4) It entails giving up all other ties, to boat and tax-office, to father and mother, in short, to one's own life, to oneself.
- (5) As Jesus' own way, by divine necessity, leads to rejection, suffering and death, and only so to glory, so also the way of those who follow him.

—Eduard Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship*

Were You There?

A Celebration for Easter Morning

by Amy Mears and April Baker

Editor's Note: This was originally presented by co-pastors Amy Mears and April Baker, along with a soloist Ginger Newman, for an Easter Sunday morning service. It could also be effective with four players, in costume or not, and a commentator reading the second reader's part.

I. Soloist sings the first verse of "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?"

FIRST READER (or PILATE): I was there when they decided to crucify him. Actually, they had already decided to kill Jesus, or so it seemed. I was the Roman Governor, so my signature was necessary for them to carry out a death sentence. But the leaders had already stirred up a crowd, and they were bloodthirsty.

I was ready to give my permission—after all, it was a holiday, and the leaders weren't usually unreasonable people. But then I interviewed the alleged criminal and found no charge that would possibly stick. I attempted to appease the crowd by having him whipped, but they weren't buying it.

I wondered for weeks—for months—why they wanted so badly to get him. It finally dawned on me that they were afraid of him. Scared to death of someone who would not even speak in his own defense.

I wanted them to release him. I tried three times to talk some sense into them. I tried to intimidate them, but they were so determined! I finally consoled myself by making perfectly sure that they knew I was against it. I had a bowl of

water brought and I symbolically washed my hands of the whole affair. I was determined that his blood wouldn't be on my conscience. But it is. It has been ever since that day, and it probably always will be.

SECOND READER: Western Christianity claims that we are saved by the execution of Jesus, that this violence and terror is what reveals the grace of God. In their book, *Proverbs of Ashes*, Rita Nahashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker suggest that this claim isolates Jesus just as violence isolates

its victims. When the victims of violence are made singular, solitary, unprecedented in their pain, the power of violence remains.

Jesus' death was not unique. The torture inflicted on Jesus had been visited on many. It continues in the world, masked by the words "virtuous suffering," and "self-sacrificing love." But violence is illuminated by insistent exposure. Steady witnesses end the hidden life of violence by bringing it to public attention. They help to restore souls fragmented by violence. They accompany the journey to healing.

II. Soloist sings the second verse: Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

FIRST READER (or MARY MAGDALENE): I was there when they crucified Jesus. I stood nearby—as close as the soldiers would let us stand—with his mother and the other Mary. I wanted to stand even closer and talk to him for as long as he could hear me—just



art by Kate Moore

to make sure that he knew that a few of us were still there. We felt powerless, but we were present. John was with us. He called to John once, asking him to take care of his mother.

Slowly the truth began to sink into me. In the middle of the grief and the horror at his pain and all the violence, I started to panic. Soon there would be nothing I could do. It would all be completed in just an hour or so—if he lived even that long. He was actually going to die. What would we do then? What would I do? How could we scrape together the pieces of our lives? How could we live on just the memories? Like I said, I started to panic. It was all falling apart.

SECOND READER: When systems trap us in violence, they betray us. Jesus had been betrayed by his own religious tradition. A military empire murdered him. His life and work were not furthered by death. His execution ruptured his community. But the dead provide a legacy of Presence that folds tragedy into living. Jesus' spirit linked his followers to that legacy. They did not let their movement die. Risking the cost, they refused to acquiesce to the legacy of violence. They remembered the legacy of his presence. Fred Craddock writes, "When I began this journey, I thought that wherever the Messiah was, there was no misery. Now I know that wherever there is misery, there is the Messiah."

III. Soloist sings the second verse: Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

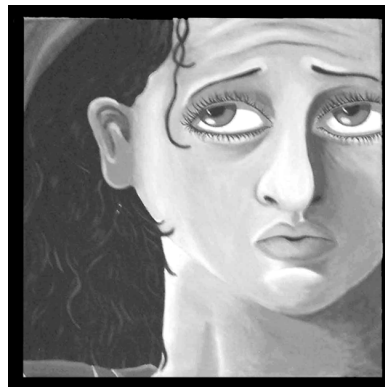
FIRST READER (or JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA): I was there, that Friday evening. I had actually been there all along. My friend, Nicodemus, also an elder on the council, had insisted that I get to know Jesus and hear his teaching about the coming reign of God. I secretly became a follower of his, but retained my seat on the council as well.

What a horrible situation his trial and death were for us. We had to be present at all proceedings, being members of the council, and we wanted to lend Jesus any support that we could. But if the other leaders found out that we are actually Jesus' followers, we just didn't know what might happen. So we kept quiet.

That traumatized us—our failure, our silence. But we weren't without hope. We knew that Jesus is Messiah. We knew the power that he has. We thought surely something would happen—an unexpected twist, a surprise ending, An act of God. We were sure that Jesus wouldn't actually die. Then the surprise came: he died. The time to act was passed.

It took that realization to spur us to action, finally. Nicodemus and I went to Pilate and asked permission to take his body and bury it. We didn't have much time, so we

hurried to wrap the body in strips of cloth and burial spices. I had recently had a tomb hewn out of a rock in my garden, and we laid his body there. In my tomb.



SECOND READER: Edna St. Vincent Millay writes, "Humanity has never been the same since God died. We have taken it very hard.... We get along pretty well, as long as it's daylight...but it's not use. The moment it begins to get dark, as soon as it is night, we go out and howl over the grave of God."

But grieving and mourning strengthen our ability to choose life and protect it, even as the pain of grief threatens to destroy us. Those who mourn experience the mystery of a presence that is not wholly lost, that accompanies the living with a tenderness and power that alters their lives. We can only speculate about the progress, the successes, the gains that Jesus might have advanced had he not been killed so young. We can know for a fact, though, that the followers of Jesus have learned, through his early death, that the comfort of God's presence in our grief is real.

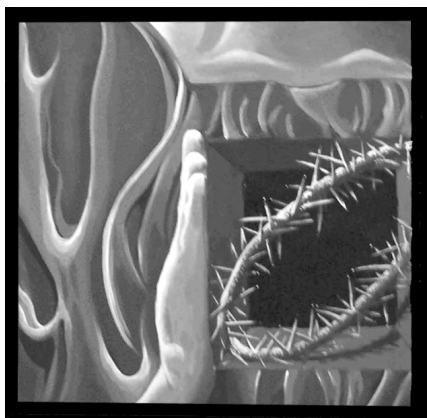
IV. Soloist sings the second verse: Were you there when he rose up from the grave?

FIRST READER (or JOANNA): I was there, and what a load of conflicting emotions I carried! Never had I dragged myself out of bed with so little reason to live. I had promised Mary Magdalene that I would go with her to prepare Jesus' body so I had to get up and go with her, like it or not.

We gathered our materials in silence. We walked in silence. I suppose that we were in a state of shock, still. This was the last possible thing that we could do for Jesus—and this just for his body. There was no hope for us as a group. Everybody had hidden from the authorities.

So that's how things were as we entered the garden. We were exhausted, afraid, hopeless, grieving. When we came upon the empty tomb, with the stone rolled away, we became confused. Who would have moved his body? Then we saw the messengers God had sent and we were astonished! They told us that Jesus had risen; and all of his words—those statements we did not understand—came back to us.

We ran to find and tell the others—we knew where they were hiding. When we had gotten the whole story out, and repeated it, and answered all their questions, they said that it sounded like nonsense. And I suppose that it did sound like nonsense.



SECOND READER: And it continues to sound like nonsense. Modern, rational thought has led us since the 19th century to apply our minds to our faith. Along the edges of our experience there have always been those who can't quite swallow the story of a miraculous resurrection, who don't need that component to justify their experience. How odd, that we have made space for those who don't believe that salvation requires a resurrection, but remain entirely comfortable with a God who would require the crucifixion!

We are confronted today by a religious culture that tries to convince us to believe something that I'm not sure we believe at the core of our being. We experienced last year the mass promotion of a movie that urges us to rejoice in

the hideous execution of our leader and messiah. We are encouraged by many to attribute the separation and pain of Jesus to the will of God. We face the often unspoken, but sometimes direct injunction to bear the violence done to us and to others in silence like Jesus—in isolation, as though redemption is found in secrecy.

Hear now the good news. Redemption is found not in secret, not in isolation, not in separateness. Redemption is found in presence—in community. The raucous message of our times says: "Glory in the cross!" ... "God requires a blood sacrifice for your sin," ... "Your sins put Jesus on the cross."

We can resist the destructive results of that message by embracing and living our belief, by acting for justice, by being present—present to one another, present to beauty, present to the fire at the heart of things, the spirit that gives breath to life.

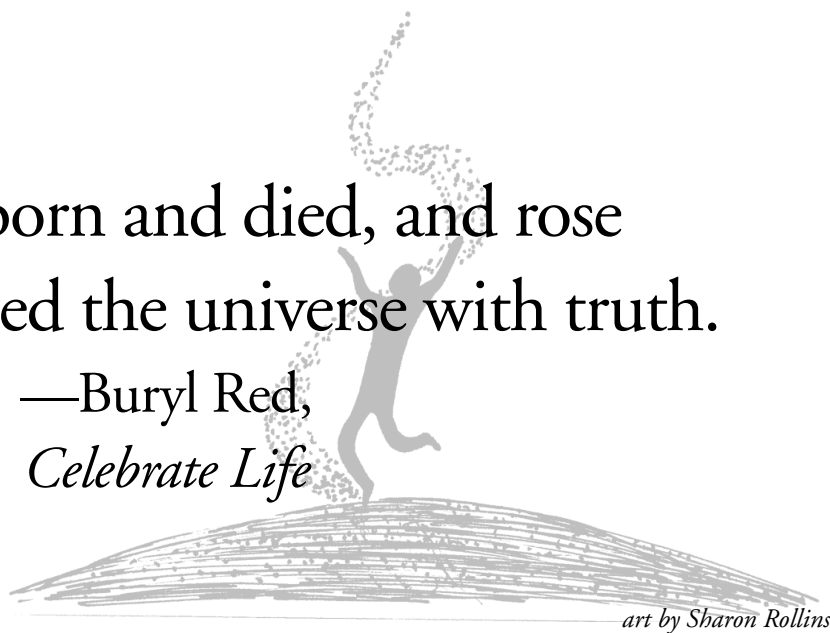
For we live not as a crucifixion community, but as a resurrection community. Even in their grief, the followers of Jesus found the advent of fire, the loosening of their tongues, the arrival of courage. Something happened.

Something happened that was strong enough to override the fear, the risk, the threat. Violence was not the last word; rather, new life became the next word. The renewed presence of God among us becomes the new reality. For it is Easter and we live as resurrection people. Christ is risen—risen among us, risen between us, risen within us. Christ is risen. Alleluia. Amen.

—Amy Mears and April Baker are copastors of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. April says that, although it was a collaborative effort, Amy did most of the writing. James Strange also contributed to the writing of the four monologues.

Jesus was born and died, and rose
...and exploded the universe with truth.

—Buryl Red,
Celebrate Life



art by Sharon Rollins

Dropping Everything

Some Thoughts for Easter

by Cameron Watts

When the sabbath was over,
Mary Magdalene,
and Mary the mother of James, and Salome
brought spices so that they might go
and anoint him . . .
As they entered the tomb
they saw a young man . . .
And they were alarmed
But he said to them
Do not be alarmed—
you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth
who was crucified.
He has been raised;
he is not here...
So they went out and fled from the tomb,
for terror and amazement had seized them;
and they said nothing to anyone,
for they were afraid.
(from Mark 16:1-8)

Two linen bags and a jar lie in the dust. Their contents spill out and are caught in the wind and swirl away, bringing the sticky fragrance of the bouquets of the funeral home to those downwind. They had spared no expense and now their purchases lay forgotten. Not mattering any more.

How could they matter? There was no body to anoint. How could they matter? The world was spinning backward. They ran, dizzy, ran away from a stranger, and a stranger universe. They ran in amazement and terror and were silenced by fear. As we must run and be silenced when we see life from the empty tomb.

Faith is about a world spinning backward. The women had to go back and re-live every conversation, every word he said, to try and make sense out of Jesus' missing body. The women had to try and keep their balance in a world where things happened just as they always had—life was cheap, people died, gentle heroes and good guys who spoke the truth were permanently silenced—but now, obviously they didn't. God valued a life and restored it.

It is hard to keep your balance in a world where the rules no longer apply. They had to drop everything to live in this new world of resurrection. They needed free hands and open arms to embrace the future.



Faith is about a world spinning backwards. When faith turns us around, we have to take another look at our lives, because we have to live them differently when God values our lives and restores them.

We have to keep our balance when the world streams by us or we work against its flow. Life still is cheap. People die. Gentle heroes and good people who speak the truth are targeted by others. But we now say life is valuable. People die too early.

People of faith, good people, stand with Jesus and are ready to drop everything to speak up and restore life to others. The burial spices soon returned to the dust. Forgotten. But life continued. The Life continued. Our life continues. Beyond life.

—Cam Watts is the pastor of Aylmer Baptist Church, Aylmer, Ontario. His writings, revealing a refreshing slant on the Christian life, have appeared several times in *Sacred Seasons*.

Drawn to Deep Wells in our Worship

John Ballenger, b. 1963

BRADBURY 8.7.8.7.D.
William B. Bradbury, 1816-1868

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Year B
Psalm 23
1 John 3:16-24
John 10: 11-18

1. Drawn to deep wells in our worship
where the Shepherd meets our needs.

In the presence of each other,
truth and grace from God proceed.

God is with us, in our waiting,
and will work to slake our thirst.

God is waiting, in our worship,
in God's presence we're immersed.

2. So we come anticipating,
seeking guidance from above
finding truth—the One who knows us,
and in grace we're given love.
For God chooses to forgive us;
we no more need be afraid.
God surrounds us, with God's blessing—
in God's image we are made.

3. Saved by One who gave his own life
that salvation we receive.
Still we daily take that one life:
this the truth that we believe.
Set the table in the Presence—
with the bread and with the wine.
In the sharing—in the caring,
is the element divine.

4. Drawn to deep wells in our worship,
and then sent throughout the earth.
Taking all that we've been given—
Sent to tell of our new birth.
Gifts are given, to be given—
not to keep and not to hoard.
We were lost once, and are found now—
being shepherd's our reward.

John Ballenger is a pastor in Baltimore, Maryland.

art by Rebecca Ward

Signs of Grace and Wonder

John Ballenger, b.1963

WELLESLEY 8.7.8.7.
Lizzie S. Tourjée (1858-1913)



The Fifth Sunday of Easter
Year B
Acts 8:26-40
1 John 4:7-21
John 15:1-8

1. The Creator blessed creation
in the most amazing way.
There are signs of grace and wonder
in the moments of each day.
2. And this gift we do not work for—
freely given as it is.
We just name it, and embrace it—
treasured as a valued kiss.
3. Yet this gift, we still may work at—
probably deeper, finding more:
all the ties that bind together—
such rich bounty to explore.
4. There are people all around us
who don't know that they belong.
Singing words of God's assurance,
we can share with them our song.
5. There are signs of grace and wonder
in the moments of each day.
May our lives reveal God's presence
ever clearer, this we pray.

John Ballenger is a pastor in Baltimore, Maryland. The art on this page is by Sharon Rollins.



*The message of the Bible is...
that into the confusion of [our] world,
with its divisions and hatred,
has come a message
of transforming power,
and those who believe it
will experience within themselves
the power
that makes for reconciliation
and peace on earth...*

*—Thomas Merton
—art from the Blanco Cruz Franciscans*