



Extravagant
Love



Worship Resources for the Creative Church Lent 2009

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Sacred Seasons:



Creative Worship Tools for Your Church

These unique worship resource packets are available for the liturgical year, three packets a year for \$100 (\$125 for non-US subscriptions), one packet for \$50 (\$65 outside of the US).

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Statement of Purpose

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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a word about this packet

This worship resource is the second of a two-part set called "Extravagant Love." The first was the 2008 Advent/Christmastide packet. The concept for the cover art for both was created by Deborah E. Harris, a freelance writer who gives extravagantly and lovingly of her time to proofread and edit many of the Seeds of Hope materials. The art and writing for this packet comes from people who have frequently contributed to *Sacred Seasons*. Some of it was adapted from much longer pieces that appeared in *Formations*, an adult Sunday School curriculum from Smyth & Helwys. Brett Younger again contributed homiletic work, and Sharon Rollins contributed art and nested meditations.

With Our Own Eyes is a set of seven monologues, about the resurrection appearances, for children. Most of that work is by Crystal Goolsby, a former Seeds of Hope intern now working in Austin, Texas. These dramas can be an intergenerational event, with youth and adults helping to set the scenes and playing the parts. We are excited about this new resource and hope to get it into the hands of many people for Eastertide.

As always, we have tried to pull together worship resources and information to help you lead your congregation in responding to this crisis with hope and creativity. The material in this packet is your congregation's to use freely and share with others as the need arises. May we together bring the news of God's extravagant love to a world of fear and struggle. May we together find ways of creating abundance for those who live in scarcity.

Gratefully, *The Staff and Council of Stewards*

Lectionary Texts for Lent

Year B

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12
Psalm 51:1-17
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

First Sunday in Lent

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

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
Psalm 22:23-31
Romans 4:13-25
Mark 8:31-38 or Mark 9:2-9

Third Sunday in Lent

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

Fourth Sunday in Lent

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

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Jeremiah 31:31-34
Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16
Hebrews 5:5-10
John 12:20-33

Palm Sunday

Liturgy of the Palms
Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Mark 14:1-15:47 or Mark 15:1-39, (40-47)

Maundy Thursday

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14
Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19
1 Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Psalm 22
Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9
John 18:1-19:42



Repentance & Ashes

by Katie Cook

We would rather not talk about repentance and ashes, thank you very much. Many of us are still recovering from a youth spent in churches where preachers railed and ranted about the fires of hell and how close we were to falling right into it. Many times they used emotional manipulation that caused us to doubt our relationships with God. Because of this, we almost always react negatively to the kind of language we heard in those sermons.

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 13, we hear Jesus calling for repentance and telling a parable about an unfruitful fig tree. But we've heard enough about repentance. We don't want to look at stories about malfunctioning fig trees. We don't want to hear him talking about repentance. That's for the scribes and Pharisees. We don't want to put ashes on ourselves. We're ready to hear about grace.

And yet, Jesus says, in verse 5, "You must repent, or you will perish." All kinds of warning lights go off in our heads. "Repent" is one of those "red-alert" words. We're tempted to replace it with another word, but there really isn't one that would work. "Mourn, lament, weep, bemoan, regret," the thesaurus says. They really don't carry the same meaning, do they?

The noun form of the Greek word used here is *metanoia*. It means "turn around." It doesn't mean being sorry about what we've done. It means facing another direction and following a different course. It means conversion.

However, in order to turn around and go the way God wants us to go, we have to understand what God wants. So how do we discern what God wants from us?

One way to start is by looking at the biblical literature as a whole. If you were to conduct a word search, you'd find that the subject that is mentioned most often in the entire Bible is idolatry. The subject that is mentioned second-most is poor and marginalized people.

Let's look first at idolatry. In the beginning, when the law was first given, this seemed to refer to actual "gods" like the Egyptian gods and the Canaanite gods. In Jesus' day this did not seem to be such a temptation for the Jews. Some of the Gentile groups around them were polytheistic, but the worship of Yahweh does not seem to have been so threatened by those pantheons.



art by Peter Yuichi Clark

However, there are other things that Jesus speaks of as if they were false gods. "You cannot serve both God and money," he said. He also indicated that the strong identities of the Jewish people with family, and with the nation of Israel, could get in the way of following him. So the idolatries of his day had more to do with materialism and nationalism than with sun gods or fertility cults.

What are the idols of our day? Are we seduced by the glitter of consumerism? Do we hold onto our creature comforts to our own detriment? Do we place our faith in human terms of security? Have we gotten to the point where we worship our nation in the place of God?

One of the things that seems to have made God angry the most often in the Old Testament was the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the vulnerable. When the people of the Northern Kingdom came to their temple to worship, while in the midst of committing these injustices, God said to them, through the prophet Amos, "I despise your rituals. They stink. I don't want your sacrifices; I want you to treat the poor fairly."

Do we take part in these kinds of injustices today? Are we guilty of the kinds of empty ritual that made Jesus lash out at the Pharisees?

As you can see, the question of the poor and vulnerable is closely linked with idolatry—particularly the worship of things, the love of conspicuous consumption. But those who are not poor are responsible for those who are.

This is a theme that permeates the Bible—the law, the prophets, the wisdom literature, the gospels, the Acts, and the epistles of Paul and John. In John's first epistle (1 John 3:17) we find it in the middle of a discourse on love: "If they have the world's good and see someone in need and do nothing, how can they say they have the love of God in them?"

So, as we enter into this season of Lent, let us look squarely at the word "repent" and see if there's something in our lives that we need to change. As we take on the ashes of grief and repentance, let us make a promise to spend these weeks wrestling with that question.

—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. This piece was adapted from "Turning Towards God," in *Formations*, Smyth & Helwys Sunday school curriculum for adults, a lesson for Lent, 2004.

Extravagant Faith

a sermon by Brett Younger

text: John 12:1-11

The earliest appointment I could get at the seminary housing office was Monday at 9:00. I was coming from seven hours away, so I left for my meeting at 1:30 in the morning.

I'm fairly certain that, if I had explained my situation to the people at student housing, they would have given me an appointment at 4:00 in the afternoon, but I was too excited to wait another minute.

I was as wound up as any seminary student has ever been wound. I was pumped to learn Hebrew and Greek, backwards and forwards. I planned to read Augustine's *Confessions* in the original Latin. (I didn't mention this to anyone, because I wasn't sure Augustine wrote in Latin.)

I was going to get to study preaching, the queen of the theological disciplines. What could be better?

I intended to pray for thirty minutes early every morning. I was planning to meet a beautiful, intelligent seminarian. We would get married and name our children Martin Luther and Karl Barth—Martina and Karla if we had girls. I was unreasonably excited for a long time.

But then, after a while, I calmed down. Exhilaration gave way to routine. I became a normal student. Greek never quite clicked for me—*luw*, *luois*, *luie*, *luomev*, *luete*, *luousi*—is most of the Greek I can remember—and I had to look up the third person plural.

Augustine's *Confessions* is long and dull. I learned that Karl Barth's last name is pronounced "Bart". I bought a copy of *Cliff Notes on the New Testament*. I tried to figure out which required reading was really more recommended than required.

When I woke up late, I prayed in the car on the way to school. I did marry a beautiful, intelligent seminarian, but we named our children Graham and Caleb—for which they are

grateful. I got so used to seminary that I had no desire to leave and stayed seven years. (I hear that's not the record.)

When I was called to be the pastor of my first church, I was beside myself with excitement. I couldn't believe they were going to pay me to study the Bible and then to stand up on Sunday and say, "I've been listening carefully and this is what I think God wants us to hear."

It was my job to see the hurting people in the world and ask how God might be calling the church to respond. I was going to stir things up and lead my people to take faith more seriously.

This little church in Paoli, Indiana, was going to become a beacon for Christ, a shining star for social justice, a guiding light in the evangelical world. All that, and I would get a private room at youth camp. I was unreasonably excited for a long time.

But then, after a while, I became more realistic. Exhilaration gave way to routine. Sundays seemed to roll around about every four days. Carl Chaplin fell asleep during every sermon.

Deacons' meetings weren't all that I had dreamed of. When we got stirred up, it usually didn't have anything to do with social justice. I got too old for late nights at youth camp.

But I loved being a pastor, so much so that I pastored four churches, twenty-two years. But some days excitement gave way to reasonableness.

I was delighted at the prospect of coming to McAfee [Theological Seminary] to teach. On my second day I went to Swilley Library and checked out *The Joy of Teaching*. I started preparing manuscripts for every class. (A three-hour class requires a really long manuscript.)

I'm re-reading all of the



art by Rebecca S. Ward

books I assigned. Maybe I'll remember, by osmosis, the Greek I've forgotten, just by having an office next to Tom Slater, the Greek professor.

I love the idea of teaching and learning about Christ's church, studying and sharing the ideas of Christian scholars, and being part of a grace-filled community. I'm eager to meet all my new best friends.

But I'm also afraid that the excitement will be overcome by routine. I haven't read any of *The Joy of Teaching*, but I've learned there's no sequel titled *The Joy of Grading*. I'm thinking that for the three-hour class, I could divide the students into small groups to discuss whatever I just said. I could skim the books I've read before.

I'm afraid that some days when I try to share my love for the church I'll remember that the phrase "dysfunctional church" can seem redundant. It's possible that I won't be as thrilled to be invited to my second faculty meeting as I was to the first.

It's understandable that we fall into patterns of thinking and acting that are reasonable and expected, but if we don't hold on to at least a little of the enthusiasm the Spirit sends, then we're not following Jesus.

God calls us to maintain some level of unreasonable, head-over-heels, fall-down-at-his-feet devotion to Christ. God leads us beyond cautious, routine, carefully measured faith to extravagant, if sometimes frightening, possibilities.

Take a look at our text.

The reasonable thing is for Jesus to hide in Ephraim. Visiting a town only a few miles from Jerusalem is dangerous. The disciples want to return to the relative safety of Galilee, but Jesus insists on this irrational trip to Bethany.

While they are there, Martha throws a dinner party in Jesus' honor. Unlike most dinner parties, every guest is glad to be there. They are at the same table with Lazarus—once dead, now looking more alive than ever. They are at the same table with Jesus—who, in spite of the stories they've heard, looks like a real person.

Then, in the middle of this already extraordinary setting, Mary takes out a bottle of expensive, perfumed oil—used only a few drops at a time and only on the most important occasions. Mary quietly moves behind Jesus, anoints his feet, and wipes the excess with her hair.

Her gift seems foolish to those who don't love Jesus as much as she does. They are offended by this act that produces nothing. Judas is the voice of reason: "Why didn't she sell this perfume and give the money to the poor?"

It's a good question. If the perfume is worth a year's wages, and minimum wage is \$6.55 an hour, then the

puddle at Jesus' feet costs over \$13,000. Is it any wonder Judas is shocked?

What would be the reaction if your church's next financial report included a \$13,000 expenditure for perfumed oil? What if the only explanation the responsible staff member could give was that she wanted to show her love for Christ? She'll be looking for a new line on her resume, because we're more practical than this. We're clear-thinking people who weigh alternatives and do what's logical.

If Mary had asked us beforehand, we might have said, "I'm not sure this is appropriate. Giving Jesus a gift is a

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good idea, but think of something simpler. A silk tie is always nice."

We're sensible people. We believe in moderation. We look at the pros and cons, ask what others think, and act prudently.

But the problem with Judas' practical approach is that it kept him from being a true disciple. Judas' betrayal didn't begin on the night of the Last Supper, but with a calculating way of life that couldn't understand Jesus' impractical way. Could it be that the greatest betrayal of Christ is to live a careful, sensible faith when God calls us to extravagance?

God hopes for the out-of-the-ordinary, but only a small number see it God's way. The Spirit leads these few

to do things that aren't sensible. The people who go too far are eventually called "saints."

John tells us that the fragrance of the ointment filled the house. The sweet smell of sacrifice, of lavish faith, fills the world.

The heroes and heroines in scripture are at their best when they live out their faith excessively, irrationally, abundantly: Noah building an ark without a cloud in the sky; Abraham packing up everything he owned and heading for God only knew where; Ruth going with her mother-in-law when common sense said to stay home; David picking up five smooth stones when all the smart money was on Goliath; Hosea searching for his wife with

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a love that made no sense; Joseph marrying a young mother whose child wasn't his; the disciples dropping what they were doing to follow Joseph's stepson; Zacchaeus giving half to the poor, when a third seems quite sufficient; Stephen dying when he could have rotated off the deacon board; Peter and John announcing to those who imprisoned them, "We cannot but speak of what we've seen and heard."

They weren't trying to meet others' expectations. They did as they believed God directed, no matter how it looked. Paul said it for all of them: "We are fools for Christ's sake."

There have been other fools as well: Saint Francis giving up his material goods, taking his place with the poor; Martin Luther facing prison and announcing, "My conscience is captive to the Word of God. God help me. Here I stand"; Lottie Moon, preaching the gospel in China, praying for someone to respond; Dietrich Bonhoeffer returning to Germany to suffer with his people; Rosa Parks sitting in the front of the bus, when it would have been easier to move to the back; Oscar Romero standing for what the church could be even when it cost

him his life; Desmond Tutu challenging the powers, when he knows what the cost could be.

God's fools aren't practical. They don't live reasonable lives, but abundant ones. They live the same abundant life to which the Spirit calls us.

Mary's love was uncalculating. She wholeheartedly spent her life savings on one grand gesture. She didn't carefully weigh the alternatives. She did the unthinkable. A respectable Jewish woman would never untie her hair in public, but Mary was too caught up in her love for Jesus to be concerned with her own scandalous behavior. When God's grace overwhelms us we don't carefully weigh the alternatives.

God has extravagant possibilities for you and me. Every once in a while we feel the Spirit pulling us to do something new, something rare, something good. There's a relentless spontaneity about it.

Every once in a while we should act on impulse with just the faintest impression that we heard God say, "Go."

No day is without the possibility of a unique opportunity. If we keep asking, "What peculiar thing might God want from me?" we'll find ways to adore God.

Try telling God that you want to live an out of the ordinary day. Pray more than an ordinary prayer. Pray that God will empty you of everything that isn't love. Speak an extravagant word of grace to someone. Look for words so lavish that their face and yours will turn red.

Students, embarrass one of your professors. Love Greek and Hebrew excessively. Read Augustine hopefully. Read your preaching textbook passionately. Read a book that's only recommended, not required. Read the Bible.

Others, do something for your church that you've never done. Pick something that frightens you. Stir things up. Be the one who mentions Jesus during deacons' meetings.

Speak to someone to whom you've gotten used to not speaking. Sell something and give the money to feed hungry children. Give more than a reasonable amount.

Be open to all kinds of extravagant possibilities. God may invite you to go beyond what's reasonable. God will lead us to become better thinkers, better ministers, better Christians, to love each other, love the church, love Christ.

How long has it been since you did something impractical because you believe in God? When was the last time you did anything foolish for love? Mary thought about her gift for the rest of her life. She could have used that money in a thousand different ways, but God gave Mary a love that was worth everything. God offers us the same love.

—Brett Younger is professor of homiletics at McAfee Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia.

A Lesson from Babette

by Katie Cook

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15, in answer to the charge that he is spending time with the wrong kind of people, Jesus tells three parables. These three stories have come to be called the “parables of recovery.”

In the first, a shepherd leaves his entire flock to go out searching for a missing sheep. In the second, a woman turns her house upside down looking for a misplaced coin. In the third, a loving father receives and embraces a son who had gone abroad and frittered away the family fortune.

The “moral” of these stories, which come in rapid succession, is not just about prejudice and judgment of people. It is about the bountiful grace of God.

In the Just Betzer movie *Babette’s Feast*, based on the book by Isak Dinesen, we find a story of astonishing extravagance. Babette, a noted chef for the French aristocracy, has to flee the country because of political upheaval.

She ends up living on the desolate coast of Denmark with two elderly sisters, pious Protestants whose approach to life is based on prudence and self-sacrifice. Babette cleans house and cooks simple meals for them, using what resources they can spare.

One day, however, Babette receives word that she has won 10,000 francs in the lottery. “Now you can afford to go home,” the sisters say, happy for her.

But Babette makes one request before departing. The Papa of the two sisters was the founder of the village church, and the annual celebration of his birthday is coming up. Babette asks to be allowed to cook the meal for the event, using her own money.

She receives permission and prepares a magnificent multi-course meal, fit for royalty. The villagers and guests,

at first fearful and skeptical, eventually become wrapped up in the magic and beauty of the event.

The next day, the sisters discover that Babette has used every franc of her money for the feast. She cannot go back to France. But she is totally content with having, one last time, allowed her art to come to life—bringing joy to herself and to the villagers.

—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. This piece is adapted from “Extravant Love,” in *Formations*, Smyth & Helwys Sunday school curriculum for adults, a lesson for Lent 2004.



art by Robert Darden



art by Rebecca S. Ward

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—Brett Younger

For Liberty to Free the Soul

by David Sparenberg

A man made out of love
came to the heart of the world
and felt the passion underneath
the fallen leaves of sorrow.
How long must this be so?

Alphabet of creation grew
legs to walk and wings to fly
and flew across the lands and oceans.
How long must the white dove wait
to heal the bloody fields of war?

We are not much although
we have made ourselves the miniatures of grandeur.

Daughter of the green day brought
her children of the starry night to play
and underneath her wings of gold
the crippled bowed to pray.

When will we heed the whispered word
hatched in the nest of time
and peace grow like a global tree?

A man of love came and turned
from shadows drear to light.
But that was midnight,
while many slept.
How long must this be so?
Or heaven wait for liberty
to free the love songs
of the soul?



—David Sparenberg—a playwright, poet, storyteller, stage director, Shakespearean actor and novelist—works in Las Vegas, Nevada. He uses his craft to help people cope with life-threatening illness and loss.

Mary of Bethany

A Monologue from the Easter Walk for Children

by Crystal Carter

Scripture: John 12:1-8

(See also Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-19—here it is an unnamed woman at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany), Luke 7:36-40—here it is an unnamed woman at the house of a Pharisee.)

Setting: Mary is dressed simply but elegantly, as if she has some wealth but chooses not to use it on clothing. She is in a small, darkened room where it looks as though some people were gathered to eat, drink and relax.

Her main props are a towel and an empty, fancy perfume jar. She will have small perfumed bath oil balls to give to the children for their baskets.

My name is Mary, and I live in Bethany—that’s a small town right outside Jerusalem—with my sister Martha and my brother Lazarus. You may remember stories about how my brother died and Jesus brought him back to life. Really!!

There was another time that I was listening to Jesus teach and my sister got mad at me for not doing the housework. But Jesus took up for me. But I bet you want to hear about the night Jesus and his disciples came to dinner at our house. Yes? I knew it! Everyone wants to hear about it. I poured a really expensive jar of perfume on his head and feet, and everyone thought I was crazy. But I’m not crazy...I just had a really strong feeling that it was the right thing to do. And I still think it was right.

About six days before Passover, I was helping Martha prepare for dinner one night when there was a knock at the door; and who do you think it was? It was Jesus and the disciples! We had heard that Jesus had been in Jerusalem, so we were hoping that he would come to our house. We had made plenty of food, so we helped them wash their hands and put the food on the table.

As they started to eat, I thought to myself, “This is Jesus—the teacher whom I loved, and who everybody was saying was the Messiah—eating at our table! Surely there is something special I can do for him.” I got up and ran into my bedroom as fast as I could and got an alabaster jar filled with an expensive ointment my father had given to me as a little girl. I was so pleased with my idea that I ran up behind him, broke the alabaster bottle of ointment and poured the perfume all over his head and his feet.

While I was washing his feet and drying it with my hair—that’s how someone like me shows how much we love someone—I could hear some of the disciples complaining. Judas was getting angry with me for not selling

the perfume and giving the money to the poor. I guess I could have done that; I know Jesus said to do all we could for the poor.

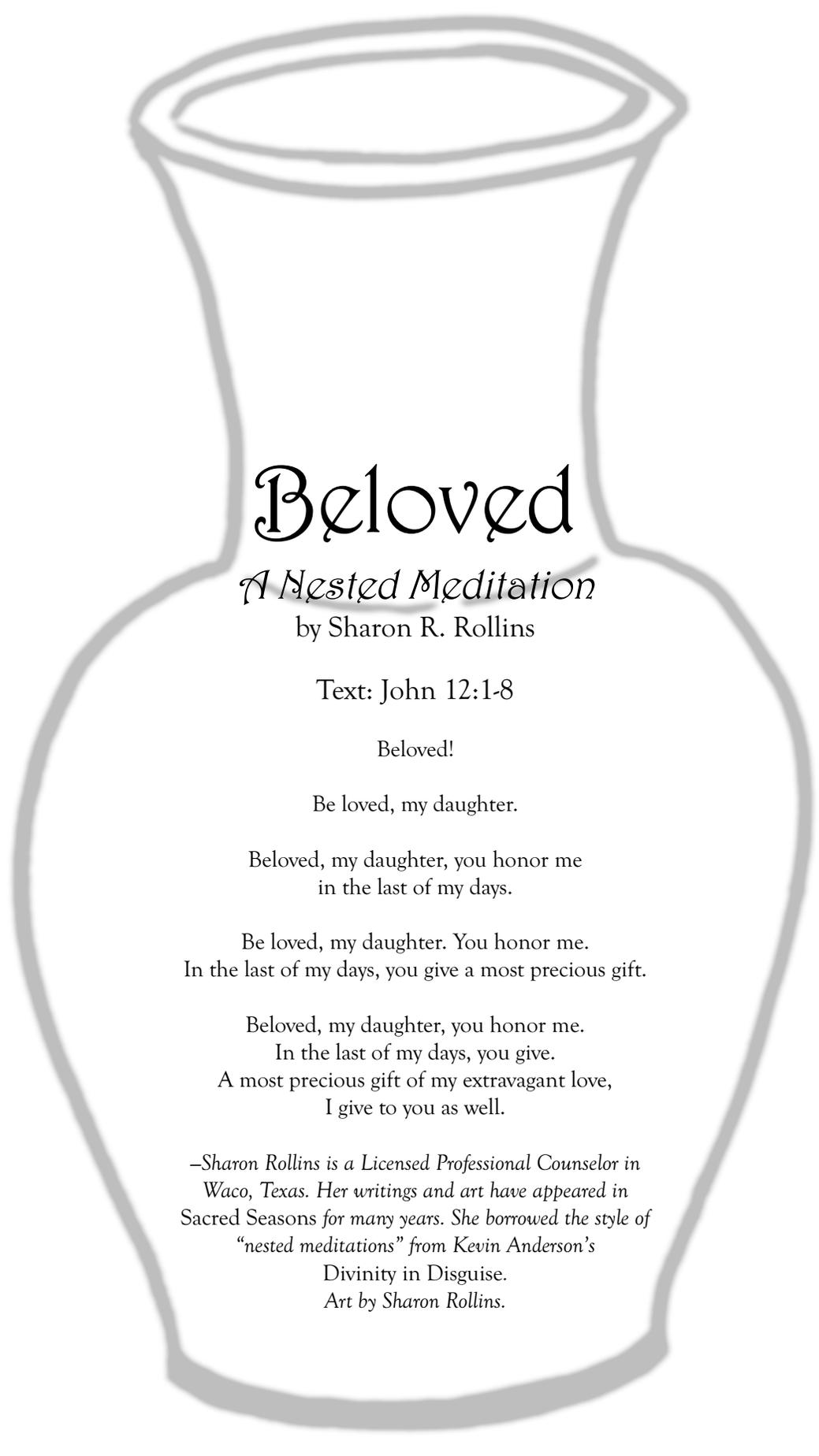
But you know what? Jesus defended me. Me! He said, “Leave her alone; why are you giving her a hard time? She is performing a good service for me. There will always be poor men and women around you can give money to, but I will not always be around. This woman, Mary, has done all she can; she has anointed me in preparation for my death. Whenever my story is told, let her story be told as well in remembrance of her.”

Can you believe that? He stood up to his own disciples for me. He took up for me—again. I didn’t like what he was saying about dying, but I really didn’t understand all of that at the time.

—Crystal Carter, a former Seeds of Hope intern, is a writer in Los Angeles.

Editor’s Note: The Easter Walk is a dramatic production in which children go from scene to scene and hear monologues from characters who describe very recent encounters with Jesus during the last days before his death. (The packet also includes a scene from Easter morning.) Some churches change the scenes around each year, to make the event a little different. See pages 18-24 for brand new monologues from Seeds about the resurrection appearances of Jesus.





Beloved

A Nested Meditation

by Sharon R. Rollins

Text: John 12:1-8

Beloved!

Be loved, my daughter.

Beloved, my daughter, you honor me
in the last of my days.

Be loved, my daughter. You honor me.
In the last of my days, you give a most precious gift.

Beloved, my daughter, you honor me.
In the last of my days, you give.
A most precious gift of my extravagant love,
I give to you as well.

*—Sharon Rollins is a Licensed Professional Counselor in
Waco, Texas. Her writings and art have appeared in
Sacred Seasons for many years. She borrowed the style of
“nested meditations” from Kevin Anderson’s
Divinity in Disguise.
Art by Sharon Rollins.*

Jesus and the Feast of Fools

by Katie Cook

In Medieval times, on the first day of January, folks in Europe celebrated what came to be known as the Feast of Fools. During this celebration, clergy and townspeople who were normally circumspect would dress in costumes and masks and engage in a frolic that was sometimes burlesque.

The social order would be turned upside down; the person who held the lowest status in town would be named king or duke (or whatever rank the town's ruler held) and often a child would take the place of the highest-ranking religious leader.

Historians say that the people of the ruling classes avoided the Feast of Fools because the celebration exposed the obvious difference of power and resources between rich and poor. At times, during a parade through the town, the "ruler" for that day would be pelted with vegetables and other unpleasant missiles as the townspeople would vent their true feelings toward the "powers that be."

The central idea for the Feast of Fools seems to have been taken from the old Roman feast of Saturnalia, the festival at winter solstice, which evolved into a brief social revolution in which power and dignity was transferred for a time to people who normally occupied a subordinate position.

Perhaps, in some ways, it was a safety valve for the frustrations of the peasant classes, but there were also deeper meanings. The parody of leadership was much like the well-disguised wisdom of the Shakespearean fools, who seemed to be the only ones who got away with telling the unpleasant truth to the monarchs they served.

These "clown" figures have been compared, throughout the centuries, with the absurd way that Jesus seems to have operated his public career. He chose a motley group of

peasants and social outcasts as his ministry team. He constantly criticized the "in" crowd and the upwardly mobile, while championing the "down and out." His whole ministry looks like the parody of a messianic campaign. As he prepares to enter the city of Jerusalem less than a week before his death, he seems to have been planning something resembling the Feast of Fools.

So how does Jesus' triumphal entry touch our lives, other than the fact that we sometimes march down the aisle of our churches carrying palm branches and singing "Hosanna"? What does a medieval festival of fools have to do with us? Perhaps if we compare our world with the world of first-century Palestine, or even with medieval Europe, we might be able to see some connections.

In the first century (BCE) there was a large gap between those who were quite wealthy and those who were quite poor. In the United States today, the richest 2.7 million Americans take home the same amount of income as the 100 million people with the lowest incomes. And the gap continues to grow at an alarming rate.

In Jesus' day, a group of legalistic religious leaders had seized control of the Jewish culture and used their rules as



weapons against those with no voice. In our day, fundamentalists from almost every religion in the world seem to be wreaking havoc everywhere they exist.

In Jesus' day, the Hebrew people were expecting a political leader, a military leader, to rise up—a leader chosen of God, who would deliver them by crushing the opposition. Many in people in the US, even among those who proclaim Jesus' name, would also prefer this kind of leader.

Jesus refused to conform to the expectations of the people. He chose to travel around, hanging out with riff-raff, healing and feeding people and preaching about peace. The reign of which he spoke was crazy, topsy-turvy. His entry into the city of his royal forefathers was an absurd parade. His whole ministry was like a Feast of Fools.

Whoever was in power should be out of power, he said. Whoever is up should be down. Whoever is first should be last. He spoke out candidly against the religious establishment of Israel. He condemned their hypocrisy and greed.

In our world there is considerable hypocrisy and greed. There is economic injustice foisted on the poor by the

wealthy and powerful. There are people who raise themselves above others, electing themselves to be the judges of who is socially acceptable and who is not.

People are marginalized, even within our churches, because of an infinite number of things. They are different in some way. Maybe they were born different. Maybe they've made mistakes. Maybe they're just without resources. If we think about it, we will remember that Jesus would probably have embraced those marginalized folks. And sometimes we have a sneaking suspicion that he might not be too thrilled with us.

But it takes a lot of courage to act in loving ways toward people who are different. It takes even more courage to stand up for them in the face of powerful authority or self-righteous hatred. But we are called by this king, riding into the town of his death on the back of a donkey, to seek out marginalized folks, to do something that doesn't make sense, to find a way to turn something upside-down.

—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. This piece was adapted from "The Absurd Parade," in *Formations*, Smyth & Helwys Sunday school curriculum for adults, the lesson for Palm Sunday, 2004.

Lectionary Texts for Easter Sunday

Easter Vigil

The Revised Common Lectionary calls for a minimum of three Old Testament readings from the following list. The reading from Exodus 14 should always be used.

Old Testament Readings and Psalms

Genesis 1:1-2:4a and Psalm 136:1-9, 23-26
Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13 and Psalm 46
Genesis 22:1-18 and Psalm 16
Exodus 14:10-31; 15:20-21 and Exodus 15:1b-13, 17-18
Isaiah 55:1-11 and Isaiah 12:2-6
Baruch 3:9-15, 3:32-4:4

or Proverbs 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6 and Psalm 19

Ezekiel 36:24-28 and Psalm 42 and 43

Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Psalm 143

Zephaniah 3:14-20 and Psalm 98

Epistle Reading

Romans 6:3-11

Gospel Reading

Mark 16:1-8

Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34-43

or Isaiah 25:6-9

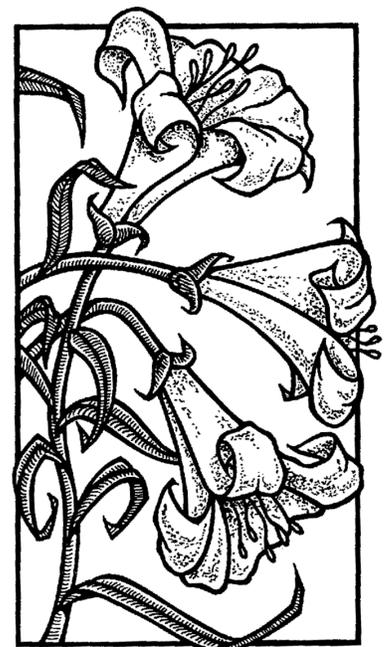
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

or Acts 10:34-43

John 20:1-18

or Mark 16:1-8



Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Jesus, overhearing, shot back, “Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? Go figure out what this Scripture means: ‘I’m after mercy, not religion.’ I’m here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders.”

—Matthew 9:12-13, *The Message*

The Lord can clear the darkest skies
Can give us day for night.
Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
To rivers of delight.

—Isaac Watts

The spiritual quest is not for interesting “spiritual experiences” but for the expansion of our capacity for mercy, the opening of our hearts wide enough to embrace the world, and not just the fragments of it, here and there, which at present we manage to feel with and care about.

—Martin L. Smith, *A Season for the Spirit*

Easter says you can put truth in a grave, but it won’t stay there.

—Clarence W. Hall

It is the hour to rend thy chains,
The blossom time of souls.

—Katherine Lee Bates

The joyful news that He is risen does not change the contemporary world. Still before us lie work, discipline, sacrifice. But the fact of Easter gives us the spiritual power to do the work, accept the discipline, and make the sacrifice.

—Henry Knox Sherrill

Easter is not a time for groping through dusty, musty tomes or tombs to disprove spontaneous

generation or even to prove life eternal. It is a day to fan the ashes of dead hope, a day to banish doubts and seek the slopes where the sun is rising, to revel in the faith which transports us out of ourselves and the dead past into the vast and inviting unknown.

—Author unknown, quoted in the *Lewiston Tribune*

Awake, thou wintry earth
Fling off thy sadness!
Fair vernal flowers, laugh forth
Your ancient gladness!

—Thomas Blackburn, “An Easter Hymn”

God expects from [people] something more than at such times, and that it were much to be wished for the credit of their religion as well as the satisfaction of their conscience that their Easter devotions would in some measure come up to their Easter dress.

—Robert South, *Sermons*

Be the light of the world, [Jesus] says. Where there are dark places, be the light especially there. Be the salt of the earth. Bring out the true flavor of what it is to be alive truly. Be truly alive. Be life-givers to others. That is what Jesus tells the disciples to be. That is what Jesus tells his church, tells us, to be and do. Love one another. Heal the sick, he says. Raise the dead. Cleanse lepers. Cast out demons. That is what loving each other means. If the church is doing things like that, it is being what Jesus told it to be.

—Frederick Buechner,
The Clown in the Belfry



art by Lenora Mathis

The Loving Father

A Nested Meditation

by Sharon R. Rollins

Text: Luke 15:11-32



I could feel you coming before I saw you.

I could feel you coming.
Before I saw you go, you were full of the life I gave you.

I could feel you coming.
Before I saw you go, you were full of the life I gave you.
But now you have returned, tattered and worn.

I could feel you coming.
Before I saw you go, you were full of the life I gave you.
But now you have returned.
Tattered and worn, I embrace you once more.

I could feel you coming.
Before I saw you go, you were full of the life I gave you.
But now you have returned, tattered and worn.
I embrace you.
Once more, I offer you life.

–Sharon Rollins is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Waco, Texas. Her writings and art have appeared in Sacred Seasons for many years. She borrowed the style of “nested meditations” from Kevin Anderson’s Divinity in Disguise.

–Art by Rebecca S. Ward

While Looking on a Crucifix

by David Sparenberg

Poor man
Jesus
how ashamed
do i stand before you
body-symbolic
of human affliction

how in suffering do
i stand beside you
brother
your crown of thorns
encircling my heart

in all of our generations
we still do not hold
to the love of roses
but keep nailing our souls
to crossbeams of pain

when do we receive
the frail human body
cast out forever
the demons of death

is it truly so
hard to understand
when eyes behold
crucifixion
what is troubling the world

Poor man
Jesus
you are everywhere

in the secret
prisons of torture
in the beggar's lap of hunger
in the tent towns of
buried dreams
in the future of
children
in tears of despair



—David Sparenberg—a playwright, poet, storyteller, stage director, Shakespearean actor and novelist—works in Las Vegas, Nevada. He uses his craft to help people cope with life-threatening illness and loss.

—Art courtesy of Hermanoléon of the Franciscanos de Cruzblanca.

That's All Well and Good, but What Do We Do Now?

by Katie Cook



An overriding theme in the Gospel of John is love. In chapter 13, in John's version of the last supper, Jesus washes the feet of the disciples and tells them they must love one another. Gail O'Day writes that the mission of the church emerges from this commandment and from Jesus' love for his followers:

By loving one another as Jesus loves, the faith community reveals God to the world; by revealing God to the world, the church makes it possible for the world to choose to enter into relationship with this God of limitless love.

Perhaps concentrating on this theme of love can somehow help us to begin thinking out of the liturgical box. We don't need to wait until Pentecost to celebrate the beginning of the church. We certainly don't need to fall into a post-Easter lethargy.

The lilies and balloons and Easter dramas may be past, but the excitement is not over. Wonderful things are just around the corner. We are to share this love with the world. There is much work to be done to this end, and many adventures to discover.

—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor. This piece is adapted from "What It Means to Believe," in *Formations*, Smyth & Helwys Sunday school curriculum for adults, the lesson for the first Sunday after Easter, 2004.

Resurrection by Bread

by David Sparenberg

My burned Lazarus made holocaust
will walk again.
He will live another day
through the wilding desert of hunger.

Bread has passed
from my hands to him.
He will pray.
Among the dregs
the mouth of pain is holy spirit
crying.

What does he ask this
crucified son of man from God
but to be saved by a touch from
one of us?

Life's truth is littered
in the valley of dry bones
where starvation's slow death reigns
through sins of neglect.

My burned Lazarus
matchstick thin and voiceless
his parched cross seared
on skin of his hollow chest
will live for yet another day
He is of the flesh.
Dust to dust.
We will pray.



—David Sparenberg—a playwright, poet, storyteller, stage director, Shakespearean actor and novelist—works in Las Vegas, Nevada. He uses his craft to help people cope with life-threatening illness and loss. Art by Sharon Rollins.

With Our Own Eyes

Seven Monologues

from Seeds of Hope

Editor's Note: Following are seven monologues written to be enacted for children during Eastertide. These monologues are fashioned after the monologues of the Easter Walk, created by Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, several years ago and published by Seeds of Hope.

The scenes are based on the resurrection scenes from the four Gospels and from the Acts of the Apostles and are arranged in a somewhat chronological manner. They include the final scene from the Easter Walk—the testimony of the three women at the tomb compiled from Matthew, Mark and Luke, Mary Magdalene, the Emmaus Incident, two testimonies from Thomas, breakfast by the sea in Galilee, and the ascension.

Each Maundy Thursday at Seventh & James, seven of twelve available scenes are set up in different rooms in the church buildings and outside on the church grounds.

During the first year, we borrowed costumes from the Baylor University theater department—mostly rough or loosely woven tunics. (Costume professor Sally Askins—now the Seeds of Hope Council president—later helped us to make costumes to put in our Easter Walk closet.)

Outer garments were created by wrapping lengths, of various woolens and woven fabrics with “ethnic” stripes, around the body. We also borrowed a few props, such as Roman columns, from the theater. Mostly, however, the props were improvised from furniture that was already in the church. (For instance, the tomb was recreated by making a room dark with several candles, and a white sheet over a coffee table, with a cloth folded on one end. We placed styrofoam “rocks” and small potted trees at the entrance.)

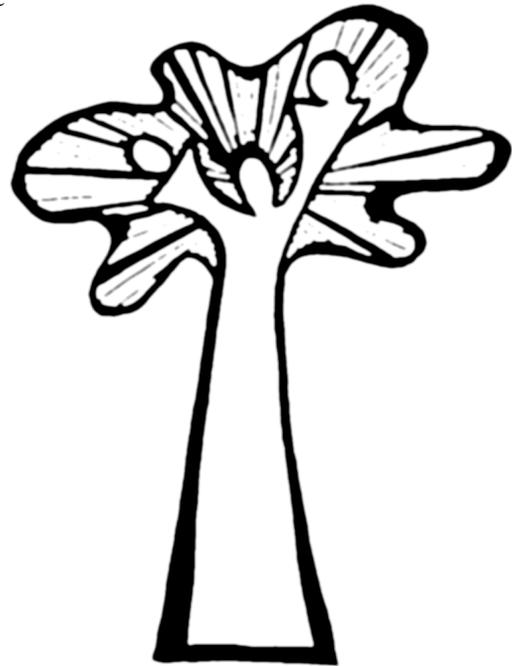
On the evening of the Walk, the children went from place to place (with at least two adult sponsors) to hear the monologues that the characters had prepared. After each presentation, the children were invited to ask questions. The players answered questions and posed their own (such as, “Why do you suppose Jesus was so angry that he knocked all these tables over?”) They interacted with the children in character.

During the Easter Walk, each player gives the children a token to help them remember the testimony. For instance, the witness in the Upper Room gives them small pieces of cloth to represent towels and help them remember the footwashing. The children carry baskets in which to keep their tokens. This was originally intended to be an alternative Easter basket. You might want to create a token, or perhaps a card from each scene with

art that will help the children remember the events.

This is designed to be an intergenerational event, with youth and all ages of adults playing the parts and creating the sets. It can be enacted in one event or spread out over the seven Sundays in Eastertide. It could be included in Sunday morning worship or performed in Sunday school. We encourage you to be creative.

You will find an overview of the resurrection appearances, and how we arrived at the arrangement of the scenes, on page 23. —lkc



art by Susan Daily, IBVM

Scene 1. Three Women at the Tomb

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10,
Mark 16:1-8 (9-11), Luke 24:1-12

Setting: The entrance to a tomb. (We set this up by using an empty corner area under a stairwell. The area should be any isolated area that is not well-traveled; it should be a space with which the children are not familiar. An outdoor tool shed would also work. We draped the area with fabric to create the tomb. We used styrofoam “rocks” at the entrance, with a stool covered in fabric for one sturdier rock. We also used a coffee table draped with a white sheet, with a white cloth folded at one end.) The women are dressed like simple peasant women.

When the children arrive, they are standing around the entrance. One could be sitting on the sturdy “rock.” As they talk, they interrupt one another, and they nod their heads at what one another is saying. They are clearly agitated.

FIRST WOMAN: We came here, where they buried our friend and master, to anoint his body with spices, as is our custom of treating the dead. But, well...it’s amazing! As we were walking to the tomb, we had been worried about how we would move the stone that covered the entrance to the tomb. We knew that it was very heavy—too heavy for us to move, and we were hoping that someone would be there to help us. But, as we walked up the path toward the tomb, we saw...

SECOND WOMAN: We saw that the stone had already been moved! We were nervous and a little frightened, so we slowed down a little and we looked all around. “Who would roll away the stone from the door of the tomb?” We asked each other. These two pushed me in front and made me go into the tomb first!

THIRD WOMAN: Oh, but you should have seen what we saw! There was a young man sitting on the right side of the tomb...

FIRST WOMAN: Wearing a white robe!

THIRD WOMAN: Yes. And it was the most beautiful white I have ever seen. It almost sparkled! Well, as you can imagine, we were amazed and speechless. After a few moments, we dropped to our knees, out of fear and respect, and bowed to this radiant man.

SECOND WOMAN: Then he spoke! “Don’t be amazed,” he said, “you seek Jesus, the Nazarene, who has been crucified. He is risen; he is not here.”

FIRST WOMAN: When we heard these words, we all began to cry. He is what?! Risen?! What was that supposed to mean?

SECOND WOMAN: But the angel went on. “Come, look at the place where they laid him!” We all got up slowly and walked toward where they had laid Jesus. His garments were there, but his body was gone! It was...

THIRD WOMAN: Incredible, amazing, wonderful! Then the angel spoke to us again! “Go quickly, and tell his disciples he is risen from the dead. He goes before you into Galilee; it is there that you will see him.” See him!! We were going to see him alive again!

FIRST WOMAN: Well, we were so excited, we couldn’t run fast enough!

SECOND WOMAN: The guys didn’t believe us at first. They thought we were crazy! Well, all except for Peter, who

got up and ran to the tomb to see for himself.

THIRD WOMAN: And we don’t blame them, not really. We hardly believe it ourselves. That’s why we came back to look again. But it’s true! We just went back inside and He is gone! He is alive!

—This monologue, written by Kimmy Scott, is part of the Easter Walk, a dramatic Holy Week event for children, published by Seeds of Hope.

Scene 2. Mary Magdalene

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Setting: First-century Jerusalem, in a garden, morning. Mary is dressed in modest clothing of the time.

MARY: This is where I was when it happened. Jesus had been killed. That was so hard for me. I loved him very much. If you had known him, you would have loved him, too. He treated me—me, a woman—like I was an important person. He worried about poor people and orphans and widows. He talked about people who didn’t have any way to take care of themselves, people who were hungry or thirsty or sick or in prison.

He loved us. We knew that, we had no doubt. And he allowed us to love him back. He taught us so much about God and about taking care of each other. He taught us about love. But then he was taken and killed.

I had to wait until the Sabbath was over, because you can’t go very far or do any work on the Sabbath. I came out here to the tomb as early as I could on the next morning.

It was still dark, but I saw that the stone was taken away from the entrance, and I didn’t know what to do! I thought that someone—maybe the religious leaders or the Romans, I didn’t know—had stolen his body. I was so upset and confused!

I ran to where Simon Peter and the others were hiding, and I said, “Someone has taken the body! Come and look!” And Peter and John came running to the tomb with me. They saw where the stone was rolled away, and they went inside the tomb.

They saw the linen cloth we had used to wrap the body, but there was no body. It was gone. They left, but I stayed there, outside the tomb. I was weeping.

I went to look in the tomb one more time, and what do you think I saw? I saw two angels sitting there! Really! They were sitting where the body had been. They asked me why I was crying. And then I turned around, and there was a man standing there. I thought he was the gardener. He asked me why I was crying, and I blurted it out: “They

have taken away the body of my Lord, and I don't know where it is! Do you know where it is?"

And he said, "Mary." And I recognized his voice. It was Jesus! Alive!

I ran again to where the disciples were, and I told them that I had seen him and that he had spoken to me—called me by name, but I don't think they believed me. Do you believe me?

—This monologue was written by Katie Cook.

Scene 3. Thomas the Twin, part 1

Scripture: John 20:19-25

Setting: Outside, in Jerusalem. Evening, first-century Palestine. You could use a painted backdrop that suggests a Jerusalem street or an olive grove. Thomas is dressed in modest clothing.

THOMAS: I can't believe all that has happened in the last few days. We thought Jesus was the Messiah we had all been waiting for, but he died without delivering us! Who will help us now?

Three days ago, Jesus of Nazareth was put on the cross and he died. He was put in a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea. My friends, who, along with me, make up a group of his followers, came running to me just now, saying that they saw him, alive. Impossible! They insist that it is true, but I don't believe it.

They told me that were hiding in the upper room of a house, in a group, talking, when a man suddenly appeared in the room and said, "Peace be with you." The room was locked, because they were afraid they would be arrested, too, and this man just appeared inside the room!

As you can imagine, they were shocked and horrified! They thought it was a ghost. But then he showed them the wounds he got when he was crucified—holes in his hands and feet, as well as a wound in his side from a spear.

They said they were still not sure he was a real human being. But he asked for some food. They gave him a piece of fish from their supper, and he ate it while they watched. It was then that they knew he was really alive, and they came running to tell me.

But I don't believe it. Once a man is dead, he is dead. I won't believe it until I see him for myself, and can put my fingers into his wounds.

—This monologue was written by Crystal Goolsby, a writer who lives in Austin, Texas. Part of the monologue is taken from Luke 24:36-43.

Scene 4: The Emmaus Incident

Scripture: Luke 24:13-35

Setting: A road in first-century Palestine, daytime. This is written for two speakers, one whose name is unknown and one who is named Cleopas. They are dressed in modest traveling clothes. Scholars say that these two travelers were probably men.

FIRST TRAVELER: It was the first day of the week. Cleopas and I walked side-by-side toward Emmaus in a very sad state. So many bad things had happened in the last three days. We asked each other how it could be that the Master came to us and then was taken away so soon. How he could have been handed over so easily. He was supposed to be the one who saved our nation. Instead, he was killed.

As we walked, a man appeared in the distance. We had never seen him around before. He walked right up to us and began to walk *with* us. He asked, "What are you two talking about?"

What could we tell him? We felt as though someone very close to us had died. How do you say something like that out loud, though? Finally, Cleopas said to him, "You must be new around here, or else you would have known what happened."

CLEOPAS: But all the stranger said was, "What has happened?" How was it possible that anyone could miss hearing of the events that occurred during the last three days? Nonetheless, we explained to him the amazing and sad events that have taken place. We told him that we were discussing the fate of Jesus of Nazareth—how we thought he would save Israel, but instead he was handed over by the chief priests to the Roman government. How he was nailed to a cross and died, instead of delivering us.

FIRST TRAVELER: We also told him about how some women from our group went to Jesus' tomb earlier that morning, only to find that Jesus' body was not there! Even more amazing, they said some angels who were sitting by the tomb told them that Jesus was alive! We didn't believe it when they told us, but some of the men from our group went to check the tomb, and found that the tomb was empty.

CLEOPAS: After he heard all of our story, the stranger looked at us, amazed, and said, "All of you people are so foolish! Why is what happened so hard to believe, when it is what the Scriptures say? You know very well that they say that the One to save Israel would have to suffer all the things you just told me about before He was glorified!" He

then quoted many of the writings of the old prophets that included predictions about Israel's deliverer.

FIRST TRAVELER: By this point we were almost to Emmaus, and we asked the stranger to come and eat with us, and to stay the night with us so that we could keep talking to him. It was getting late, anyway. He agreed to come, and so the three of us went to our house. When we sat at the table, he blessed our food and then passed it out. Suddenly, we realized to whom we had been talking the whole time. We were sitting with Jesus himself, the very man we had been mourning! As soon as we realized who he was, he disappeared from our table. Cleopas and I left the table and ran out to find the other members of our group, who told us that the Lord was risen, and that he had appeared to Peter.

CLEOPAS: How amazing! The Master had come to us, and we did not even recognize him! But when he broke the bread for our supper, we suddenly knew it was he!

FIRST TRAVELER: And how wonderful it is that he is alive once again.

—*This monologue was written by Crystal Goolsby, a writer who lives in Austin, Texas.*

Scene 5. Thomas the Twin, part 2

Scripture: John 20:26-29

Setting: A week after the first appearance. An interior room with a long rustic table, set as though a simple meal has just been concluded. It is evening. The room should be darkened, with lamplight or candlelight. Thomas is dressed in the clothing of a person of modest means in first-century Palestine.

THOMAS: I have a confession to make to all of you. I am the one who told you I didn't believe any of these stories about Jesus being risen from the dead. This is the place that the others saw Jesus a week ago. They were here again tonight, but I was with them this time.

And what do you think happened? A man suddenly appeared in the room, like they described, and it looked just like the Master! But, I said to myself, it can't possibly be true.

The man said, "Peace be with you," to the whole group. Then he turned to me and said, "'Thomas. Put your finger here. Look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'" So I did what he told me. I actually put my fingers into his wounds and felt that it was real flesh! I was astounded. I exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus was happy that I now believed that he was alive, after I saw and touched him, but still he told me, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

If only I had believed it was really he when my friends told me they saw him. I am ashamed that faith was not enough for me, but I am happy that he showed himself to me. And I know he loves me. I will never doubt him again.
—*This monologue was written by Crystal Goolsby, a writer who lives in Austin, Texas.*

Scene 6: Peter, Breakfast by the Sea

Scripture: John 21:1-23

Setting: first-century Galilee, the beach at the Sea of Tiberius. Very early Morning. Peter looks like he has dressed in a hurry. His hair is wet, and his clothing is partly wet.

PETER: It's a true miracle! The Master has risen and come back to us. I would feel better about it if I had not said on the day that he was arrested that I did not know him. It was exactly what he had told me earlier that night at dinner—that I would deny him three times before morning. And that is what I did. I was so ashamed!

But since then, He has risen and appeared to us—to me and his other followers.

This weekend, several of us are spending some time at the Sea of Tiberias. I spent hours fishing last night with my friends, but we did not catch a single fish! We continued to fish all night, with growling stomachs and empty nets.

Just as the sun was rising, we saw a stranger on the shore. "Who can that be?" I thought. He asked us if we had any fish, to which the answer was still no. He told us to put our net out on the other side of the boat. And to our amazement, it filled with fish, so many that we could hardly lift it! We brought them to the shore, overjoyed that at last we could have a good meal.

When we got closer to shore, we realized that the man was not a stranger at all. John said, "It's the Lord!" And you know me—I jumped out of the boat. He told us to come have breakfast with him, and of course we did so, gladly. He cooked some of the fish that we had just caught.

After breakfast, Jesus pulled me aside. I knew what he was about to say. He was about to talk to me about how I denied that I knew him.

But all he said was, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

I was surprised, but I said, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you."

“Then feed my lambs,” he said.

And then again he asked, “Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?”

And I said, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

“Take care of my sheep,” he replied.

He asked again, a third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

I was hurt. How could he not believe me? I had told him twice that I love him, and he is the Master—he should already know! All I can say is, “Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you.”

Again, he told me to feed his sheep. Then he says, “When you were young, you could do what you wanted and take care of yourself. One day, when you are older, people will do with you what they want to do, spread your arms, and take you where you will not want to go.”

He is telling me that I will be killed like him one day! But all I can do is accept it; I cannot change it. I already know that what he predicts will come true. But, for now, I am back in his company and I no longer have to feel guilty for what is past.

—*This monologue was written by Crystal Goolsby, a writer who lives in Austin, Texas.*

Scene 7: The Ascension

Scriptures: Matthew 28:16-20;
Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-11

Setting: First-century Palestine (exact location debated), sometime after all of the other appearances. The speaker can be any one of the disciples, dressed in modest clothing of the day. The setting could be like the upper room of Thomas’s second monologue, or it could be outside, during the day.

DISCIPLE: Many wondrous things have happened during these recent days. Our Master was taken and executed, and we thought all hope was lost. But now, he is alive again! He has performed many wonderful acts since his return.

We, his followers, have seen him many times. Finally, one night at dinner, he told us not to go anywhere but to stay in Jerusalem. He told us to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which He says is better than being baptized with water.

The last time we saw him, we asked

him if he was still going to deliver Israel—if he was going to do what we had all expected the Messiah to do.

But he said that it was not for us to know that. He promised that the Holy Spirit would come and help us and that, after the Holy Spirit comes, we will take his message to all of the nations of the earth.

But we must be patient and wait. He promised that he would always be with us, even to the end of the earth, the end of time.

And then the clouds in the sky opened up, and he started going up into heaven. We looked around, and two men were standing where he had been. They said that he will come again, the same way he went up that day. We were amazed at that, and at all of the things he did and said since that morning when he first appeared to the women outside his tomb. And now we must go back and pray, and wait, as he told us to do.

—*This monologue was written by Crystal Goolsby, a writer who lives in Austin, Texas.*

What Was Jesus Trying to Tell Us?

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 23, Jesus is teaching in Jerusalem and he unleashes a diatribe against the scribe and Pharisees. At the end, he quotes one of the Psalms in a lament over the city, saying that he longs to gather Jerusalem’s children together as a hen gathers her brood—but the city is full of stubborn, misguided people.

What was Jesus trying to tell his followers? What was he trying to tell the religious leaders of his day? What is he trying to tell us? He talked about the poor and the marginalized more than anything.

“I was hungry and you fed me,” he said.

“You give them something to eat.”

“I want you to be servants, not masters.”

“Don’t worry about tomorrow.”

“Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

“Love your enemies.”

What do we do with these sayings? How are we supposed to be like this man?

The “WWJD” trend has, in some ways, cheapened the question, “What would Jesus do?” But it’s still a good question. In fact, I think it’s one of the most important questions we will ever ask. In any given situation, what would Jesus do? If we don’t ask it as individuals, we might very well be missing the whole point of the gospel. If we don’t ask it as a people, we might very well see Jesus looking out over our nation, our churches, and grieving for our stubbornness.

—*Katie Cook, adapted from “Missing the Point,” in Formations, Smyth & Helwys Sunday school curriculum for adults, the lesson for Lent, 2004.*

Overview of the Resurrection Appearances

Early on the First Day of the Week, Jerusalem
Luke 24:1-12, Mark 16:1-8; Matthew 28:1-10

Some Galilean women on the first day of the week (including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Joanna—Mark says Salome)

John 20:1-18
Mary Magdalene

The Same Day, on the Way to Emmaus
Luke 24:13-35
The Emmaus incident (including Cleopas)

That Evening, Jerusalem
Luke 24:36-43
John 20:19-25
Appearance to the disciples, without Thomas

A Week Later, Jerusalem
John 20:26-29
Appearance to the disciples, with Thomas

Sometime Later, Galilee
John 21:1-23
Several disciples, breakfast by the sea

Sometime Even Later, in Galilee
Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-11
Last group of disciples, the ascension

The oldest written records of Jesus' resurrection appear in four of Paul's letters (Romans 1:3-4; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20*) and in the book of Acts. (Acts 2:23-24; 2:32; 3:15; 4:10; 10:40)

These passages include brief reports of Jesus' appearing to different apostles, some including Simon Peter by name. The gospels, written later, relate longer narratives of Jesus appearing to various groups and individuals.

All four gospels tell of the women at the empty tomb, and all four mention Mary Magdalene by name. Mark's gospel relates several appearances briefly in chapter 16 and foretells an appearance in Galilee, which is reported in Matthew 28. Luke 24 includes stories in and around Jerusalem, and John 20-21 includes stories from both Judea

and Galilee.

An attempt to place all of these appearances in chronological order would be a frustrating exercise. We have it from all of the gospels that women went to the tomb early on the first day of the week, found it empty, and encountered messengers who told them that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

However, the gospels all diverge at that point. They differ in the ways they relate the Sunday morning story. For instance, in Mark—except for the portion that was, according to scholars, added later—the women encounter at the tomb a young man dressed in white and are too afraid to tell anyone what they saw.

In Matthew's version, the women witness the removal of the huge stone that blocks the opening and are told by one angel that Jesus is no longer there. Then the women see Jesus alive on their way home.

In Luke's gospel, the women see two men in dazzling robes and return to tell the others—who don't believe them—except, perhaps, for Peter, who needs to make sure and goes to the tomb, finding it empty. John has Mary Magdalene going to the tomb alone and encountering Jesus. Then she goes and tells the disciples, at which point Peter and John (or the "Beloved Disciple") go to see for themselves.

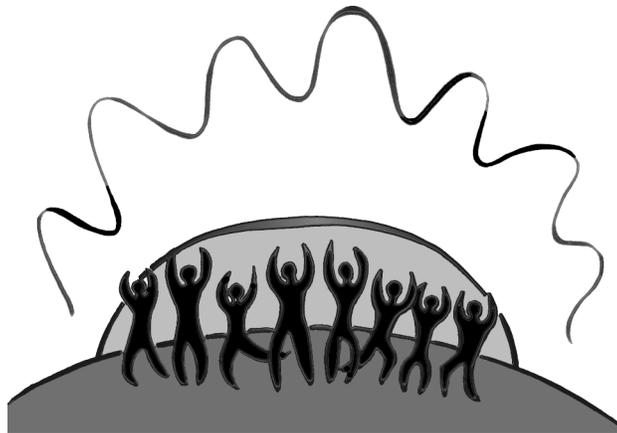
The subsequent resurrection appearances are even more diverse in the four gospel accounts. The only consensus is that—either on that Sunday, a week later, or forty days later—Jesus appeared several times to various people. These groups and individuals include—besides the women—Simon Peter, a gathered group on that Sunday evening, "the eleven," James (traditionally James the brother of Christ), five hundred "brethren," seven people by the Sea of Galilee, and other groups rather vaguely identified.

Luke, in chapter 24—the final chapter in the gospel—relates the finding of the empty tomb by the women, the Emmaus episode, Jesus appearing to the disciples (minus Thomas) in Jerusalem, and Jesus' final appearance and ascension. In the book of Acts, the author continues the story of the ascension.

—*This piece was adapted from "Practicing Resurrection" by Katie Cook, in Formations, Smyth & Helwys Sunday school curriculum for adults, Easteride 2004.*

benediction

Get on out of here, little children,
for you and we
and all the people of the world
are God's children.
Get on your way,
brothers and sisters together,
and of all people,
because of Jesus who names and claims us all
as his beloved siblings.
Get yourself out of this sacred place,
pushed by the spirit who blows when and where she will,
making all places sacred.
Go and do some more singing and talking,
laughing and crying,
hugging and holding,
by which you are strengthened
to be tellers of truth,
bearers of justice, offerers of resistance,
so becoming part of the great cloud of witnesses.
Go also to do some sleeping and resting,
anticipating tomorrow,
which will be another Easter day
of God's wonderful surprises
and God's true successes.
Go now, people of faith.
Amen!



—John Furry is a minister in Woodstock, Ontario. This benediction was written for a worship service at the summer conference of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.