



Pilgrims on the Pathway

Worship Resources for the Creative Church--Lent and Eastertide 2011

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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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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 packet was produced, as are all of our resources, with a great deal of love and prayer. We want you to be able to use these contents to enhance your congregation's Lenten and Eastertide experience.

The cover art, and much of the other new art in this packet, was created by Sally Lynn Askins, who is also the vice president for the Seeds Council of Stewards. The theme of pilgrimage (see page 3 for more) is in keeping with our overall theme for this liturgical year, which is hospitality.

The contents of this packet are your congregation's to use freely and share with others as the need arises. We pray that these materials, and the other packets that we have planned for the next liturgical year, will help you in leading your congregation into a new awareness of divine hospitality. And may you find a truly meaningful Lent and Eastertide.

—Gratefully, *The Staff and Council of Stewards*

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A Few Things about Pilgrims and Seashells

compiled by Mason Walter

To ancient Christians and pilgrims, the scallop seashell was a symbol of St. James the Greater (the son of Zebedee, brother of John and one of the Apostles) and was filled with significant metaphorical meanings.

According to old Spanish traditions, the body of James the Greater is interred in a reliquary in Santiago de Compostela. There are two popular legends connecting St. James and the scallop shell. In one version, James' corpse was lost at sea during a storm (after his martyrdom in Jerusalem in 44 BCE), but after some time, his body washed on the shore in Galicia unharmed and covered in scallops.

Another version credits St. James with miraculously saving a bridegroom and his horse from drowning in the ocean. According to this version, as the rider emerged from the water, he was draped in seashells.

Traditions relate that the tomb was abandoned until the seventh century, when a chapel and shrine

were built in Santiago de Compostela to hold the relic. In the eleventh century, a large basilica was erected at the site.

Dating back as early as the eighth century, devout folk traveled from far away to visit the shrine of St. James. As they made their way, the pilgrims carried scallop shells as a right of passage. The shell first acted as a credential, or "passport," for pilgrims as they traveled. They wore the symbol on their clothes and carried them in their pockets at all times while on their spiritual journey.

Whenever pilgrims needed refuge or shelter while traveling, if they presented the scallop shells they were carrying to other Christians along the route, they would receive an offering of food or water in the shell. This allowed even the poorest of Christians the opportunity to support their fellow believers who were on pilgrimage.

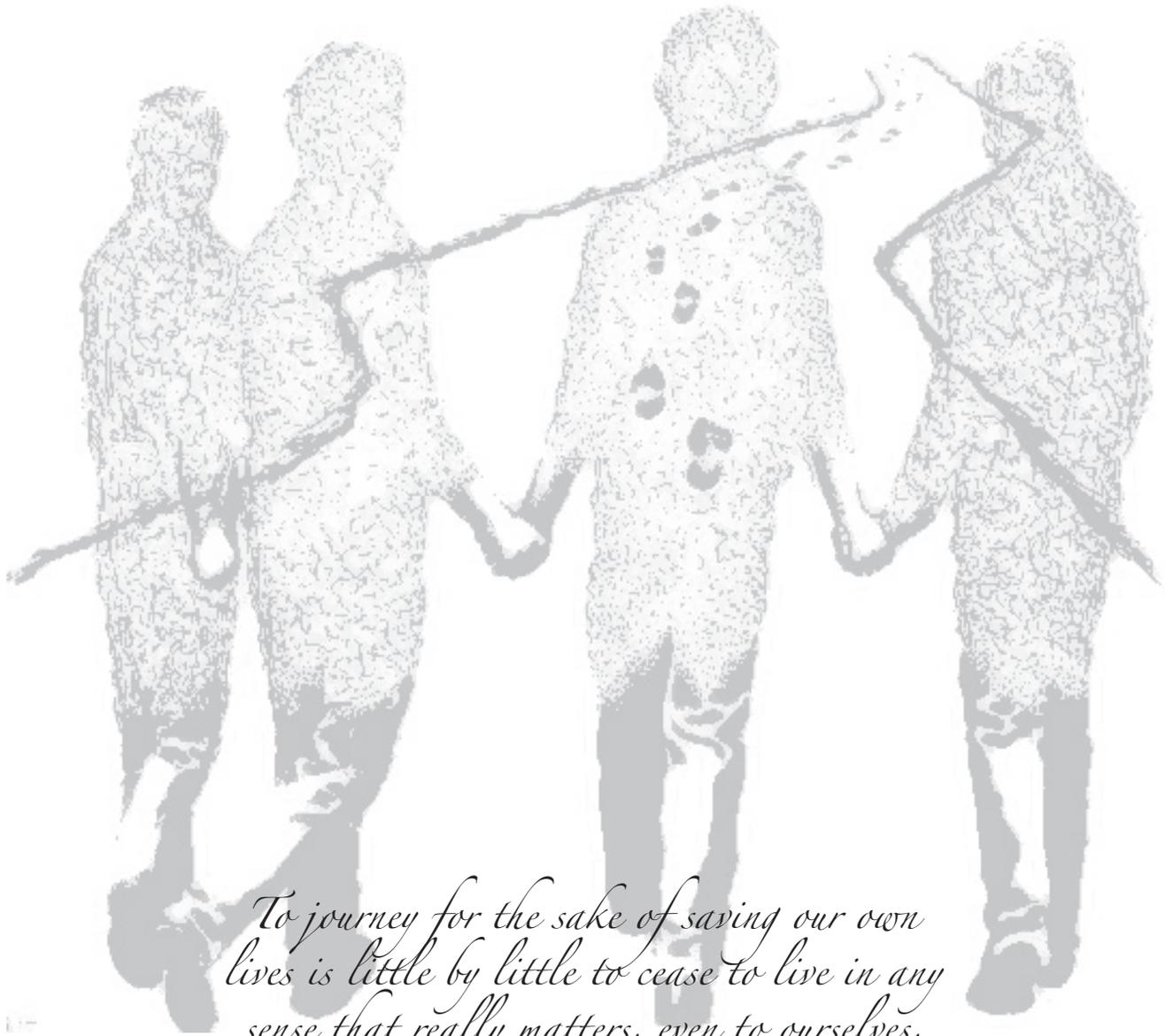
When they returned home, the pilgrims displayed their Galician scallops as proof of their completed journey to Santiago de Compostela. Eventually, this practice was applied to other pilgrimages as well.

The grooves of a scallop shell can also be viewed as a metaphor. The lines of a shell come from different places to meet at a single point, just as the pilgrims came from various pathways to reach the same ultimate goal and destination.

—Mason Walter, a native of Lorena, TX, is a public relations student at Baylor University and a Seeds of Hope intern. Sources include The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, the Oxford Dictionary of Saints and personal interviews with scholars.



art by Sallylynn Askins



*To journey for the sake of saving our own
lives is little by little to cease to live in any
sense that really matters, even to ourselves,
because it is only by journeying for the
world's sake — even when the world bores
and sickens and scares you half to death —
that little by little we start to come alive.
— Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey**



Fat Tuesday

by Katie Cook



For some reason, I have recently been thinking about Mardi Gras—Fat Tuesday, the last day before Lent, the last hurrah before the disciplines begin.

It seems now, with the post-modern relaxing of most Lenten fasts, that Mardi Gras is, for most people, merely an excuse to have orgiastic parades and parties, often for several days, gleefully wreaking mayhem and plastic beads on everyone in sight. (The ones I am most familiar with take place in New Orleans and on Galveston Island in Texas.)

These antics began, of course, when the traditional fasting behaviors of Lent were far more stringent. Some early church fathers decided to incorporate the ancient Roman mid-February carnival Lupercalia into the church calendar, making it a time to let off steam before the fasting began. They decided to let the people get their wild behaviors out of their individual and collective systems before Ash Wednesday.

So, as a person who abhors debauchery, why am I drawn to the symbols of Mardi Gras? Looking around my bedroom during a recent illness, I spotted the Mardi Gras mask and scepter given to me as Harvest Queen of my high school. (Don't get excited; it had nothing to do with beauty or talent. I was chosen by my class because they thought I'd be a good representative, and our class raised the most money, so I won.)

That was 42 years ago, and I still have that mask and scepter on the shelf above my dresser.

Is there something about those things that remind me of the Feast of Fools, that early church practice of social-revolution-for-a-day? According to stories that have survived from medieval times, during this festival (which is also linked to an ancient Roman custom) lesser clerics and laity could become pope or abbot for a day, or, in some settings, a town drunk could become mayor while the mayor became the street sweeper.

Or...is there something in me that secretly enjoys the pageantry? Generally, the thought of such excesses has me climbing onto tables to quote the prophet Amos, to fuss about all of the people who could be fed with those resources.

(But then, whom, besides Amos, do I sound like when I start doing that? A certain member of the Twelve who got himself told off by Jesus?)

Shrove Tuesday, coming out of the Anglican tradition, would be much better suited to my style.

Make pancakes. Empty out your cupboards—especially of sugar, fat and eggs—things you're supposed to be giving up during Lent. Have a nice, civilized last fling before they put the ashes on your head. But I have never kept anything from a Shrove Tuesday supper. I kept my jester-head scepter.

Is it something about the wise, loving fool in Elizabethan tragedies, especially Shakespeare's fool in King Lear? It is these fools who are the only ones who can tell the truth to their kings and queens, the only ones who try to stop them from making tragic mistakes,

So, as a person who abhors debauchery, why am I drawn to the symbols of Mardi Gras?

and the only ones who stay with those kings and queens until the bitter end. These fools, for me, wear the face of Christ.

Do these Mardi Gras souvenirs remind me of that? And how does this speak to my Lenten journey? Do I get my mask and scepter down and play with them before I put ashes on my head? Or is there something in their story that I should take with me when I set my feet on the path to Jerusalem?

Perhaps it means that, as pilgrims on our Lenten pathway, we need to find a balance between carnival and commitment. We need carnival—not debauchery, but a reminder that God often seems to choose the foolish paths, that our pathway will often not be the one honored by the world, that we might find ourselves doing extravagant and astonishing things, and that we, as pilgrims on this journey, need to let off steam from time to time. Especially if our commitments are deep and our pathways difficult.

So I will make a beginning to my Lent with these Fat Tuesday symbols in front of me. As I choose my Lenten disciplines, as I keep working to bring the commonwealth of God to this world, I will keep them with me to help me ponder these things.

—Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor.

art by Sallylynn Askins

Lectionary Texts for Lent and Easter, Year A

Ash Wednesday

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

First Sunday in Lent

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7
Psalm 32
Romans 5:12-19
Matthew 11

Second Sunday in Lent

Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 95
Romans 5:1-11
John 3:1-17
Matthew 17:1-9

Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 17-7
Psalm 95
Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42

Fourth Sunday in Lent

1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

Fifth Sunday in Lent

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

Liturgy of Palms

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29
Matthew 21:1-11

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9a
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 26:14-27:66
Matthew 27:11-54

Maundy Thursday

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

Good Friday

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

Holy Saturday

Job 14:1-14
Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24
Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16

Easter Vigil

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 Prov. 8:1-8, 19-21; 9:4b-6 and Psalm 19
Ezekiel 36:24-28 and Psalm 42, 43
Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Psalm 143
Zephaniah 3:14-20 and Psalm 98

New Testament Readings

Romans 6:3-11 and Psalm 114
Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Morning

Acts 10:34-43
Jeremiah 31:1-6
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
Acts 10:34-43
John 20:1-18
Matthew 28:1-10

Easter Evening

Isaiah 25:6-9
Psalm 114
1 Corinthians 5:6b-8
Luke 24:13-49

art by Peter Yuichi Clark

Return to the Lord

An Ash Wednesday Reading for Four

FIRST READER: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

SECOND READER: Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

FIRST READER: Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

SECOND READER: Yet, even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; Rend your hearts and not your clothing.

FIRST READER: For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

SECOND READER: The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

FIRST READER: You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

FIRST READER: Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

SECOND READER: Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.

FIRST READER: Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

SECOND READER: Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

FIRST READER: Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

THIRD READER: Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; Gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.

FIRST, SECOND & THIRD READERS: Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, "Where is their God?"

THIRD READER: Return to the LORD, your God, for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

—From Psalm 51, 1-17; Joel 2:1-2, 12-17



art by Lara Luksis

Confession and Intercession

A Prayer for Ash Wednesday

by Mark McClintock
Text: Psalm 51

Merciful God, In the sacred light of your Word and the truthful probing of your Holy Spirit, we cannot deny our infidelity to you. We bare our souls, and expose the ugliness of sin that distorts the beauty you have created in us.

At times, we have tried to do what is right, O God. And we would much rather recount our good deeds than acknowledge our evil ones—every hungry person we did not feed, each child on the streets whom we ignored, all the people who encountered in us not the loving face of Christ but the smug visage of complacency.

They are all evidence of our failure.

Like the psalmist, God, our only recourse is to ask that you recreate us. Blend the forgiveness you so freely bestow with a renewed passion to abide with you at every moment of our lives, to join our Savior and Lord, Jesus, as daughters and sons of God—not only as heirs with Christ, but as the hands and arms and legs of Christ, constantly carrying on his ministry to the world around us.

As the season of Lent progresses, let our chosen sacrifice be the continual relinquishing of our very selves, crucified with Christ—a discipline far too painful for us to make except by the patient, enduring work of your Spirit.

Grow in us the mind of Christ, always in communion with you, caring for our fellow humans. Help us to begin with our own flock.

Next, turn our eyes upon the outsiders, God—those with whom we would not think of sharing Wednesday night supper or to whom we might be reluctant to open our homes. Guide our attention to the oppressed, the overlooked, and the unwanted, and grant us compassion. Give us the courage to take action, God, beyond a shrug and a sigh.

We readily admit that we are not yet perfect, God. Even when we want to have the nature of Christ, we fail. But we count on your eternal grace, and each time we fall in the ashes, we look to you

to dust us off and start us in the right direction once again. Accept us now and lead us onward toward Jerusalem.

—Mark McClintock is the director of PassportKids in Birmingham, AL.

Lenten Reflection

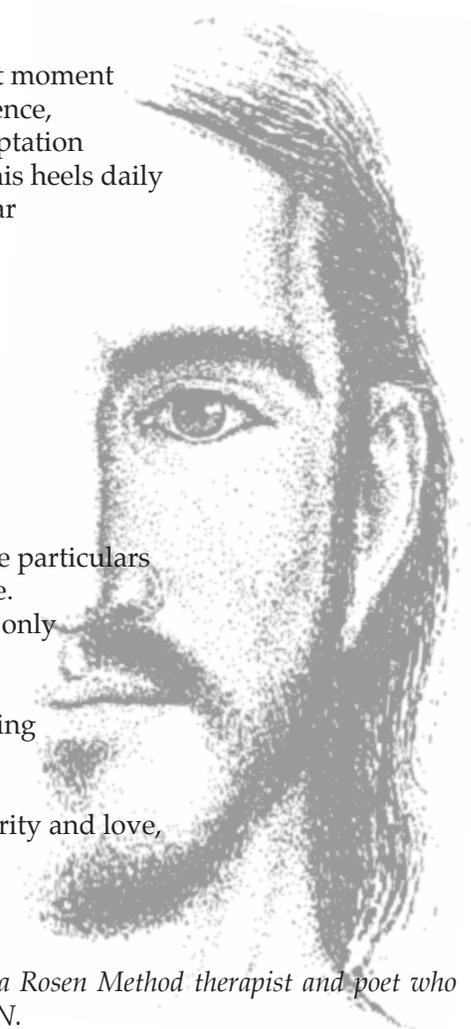
by Deborah Lynn

He set his face.
Knowing in that moment
every experience,
every temptation
that nipped his heels daily
served as mortar
to set

his foundation,
his vision,
his relational
reality
with
the One.

He set his face.
Knowing not the particulars
of future time.
Resolving only
to be
who he was,
teaching and learning
truths,
embracing
with integrity and love,
a city,
a vision,
the One.

—Deborah Lynn is a Rosen Method therapist and poet who lives in Nashville, TN.



Darkness

A Nested Meditation

by Sharon R. Rollins

Darkness...

Darkness looms around us.

Darkness looms.
Around us, all seems lost.

Darkness looms around us.
All seems lost but hope.

Darkness looms around us.
All seems lost.

But hope of grace grows brighter on the horizon.



—Sharon Rollins is a therapist in Waco, TX. She has contributed writings and art (including the Sacred Seasons logo) to Seeds for many years.

Author's note: The "nested meditation" style is borrowed from Kevin Anderson's Divinity in Disguise. This meditative style is best read section by section, with a breath and a pause after each, to consider the continually evolving meaning in each new line.

Is That a Serious Question?

A Lenten Meditation in Verse

by Cameron Watts
based on Luke 20:39-21:4

Vanquished
there was no other word for it;
the Sadducees decided they wouldn't dignify
what Jesus said with a response
and filed away.
Jesus trapped them in their own narrow way
of thinking
and opened the door for us to believe
that there was a resurrection.
The Scribes briefly joined Jesus' cheering section.

They swished a little closer,
obviously happy to have their rivals
take it on the chin.
"Well said, Teacher."

They actually honoured him
with the title of "Teacher."

And Jesus, not even acknowledging their applause,
put them in place.

He put a riddle to them.
That often was how teachers advanced learning.
It started as a normal conversation,
with two clever opponents
pushing each other to the heights of logic.
It was a contest
that was supposed to be edifying
or that would illuminate some passage of Scripture.
At the same time it allowed them
to show off their quick wit and intelligence.

I can still see them huddled together
trying to decide if Jesus' question
was serious or a trick question.

"If David's son is the Messiah
how can he be David's Lord?"
"Is that what it says?"

Was Jesus paraphrasing? Of course not,
they all knew the passage by heart.
If he had messed with the text
they would have nailed him on it.

No, back and forth they went
trying to decide if the passage
was about the Messiah and if it was
how David could call his own progeny his Lord.
The answer was pretty obvious
to the rest of us, the Messiah
had to be a greater king than David,
but they kept on playing with the words.
They didn't come up with an answer
but they spent a lot of time on it.



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

And while they were playing
Jesus talked about them.
They quickly deserted his cheering section.

He was talking to us
but it was like a stage whisper—
everyone could hear him.
Eventually the Scribes did too.

You know how you can be in a crowded room
and someone says your name
and you know it right away
no matter where you are?
And you know how you feel
if it isn't a kind reference?
It was like that for them.
There they are, debating away
until they hear the word "Scribes"
so they kind of turn and go "What?"

And Jesus is talking about the respect they are due—
and they are due some respect,
they are experts on the Scriptures
and advisors to our faith—
but goes on to say that's what they're in it for,
the respect.

They look over at us
and we are looking at their beautiful robes,
robes long enough to tell us all
that they are above the working class
and how they always get seats at the head table
at weddings and Chamber of Commerce Meetings
and want the front pews at worship
and come in just before the service
so everyone can watch their entrance.
We're all used to it, it's no big deal.
And heaven knows we are used to
their very—long—prayers.
So why did he say to beware of them?
Because we might fall asleep during worship
and have them mad at us?

Wait a minute. What did he say?
We were asking that and so were the Scribes.
They devour widows' houses.
They what?

Was this more about the story of the widow
who had seven husbands?

Which, by the way, wasn't a big deal either,
although seven is a little over the top.
Marriage is a widow's best protection
against poverty,
even if it means marrying your brother-in-law so
you can have a son for your departed husband.

It doesn't always work though, does it?
If a woman is older or married a single man
and has no family wealth to start with
her life expectancy dwindles. Quickly.
Unless the community looks after her.
Like we're supposed to.

I didn't understand what Jesus meant when he said
the Scribes devour widows' houses.
Does that mean that following the rules
and having a life above reproach
is more important than a little income security?
Does he mean that our Rules force women to sell
their homes just to survive?
Or is it the religious demands on our income
that drive them to poverty just to stay right
with God, like the guy in the synagogue
who gets up once in a while to tell them
to give all they have if they want to be sure
of God's care?

Don't know.

Widows know what it is to live from one day
to the next.

And most of us know
that everyone who thinks they are part of an elite,
like the Scribes,
like the trappings of their position.
And that the people who enjoy power
and authority and position and wealth do it
on someone else's back.

Jesus isn't like that, thank God.
It's pretty tiring playing to people's egos,
and I have never seen him do it.

Anyway,
there are the Scribes trying to figure out if Jesus'
question was a serious one or not,
while trying to answer it,
when all of a sudden along comes a woman,
by herself,
so she was a widow.
And she walks up to the collection box and drops in
two small coins.
The collection boxes are clever—they are made of
metal and you can tell by the sound
how much people put in.

Some of the Scribes took note.
I had an image of them with long sharp teeth
and hungry eyes.
Jesus just looks at her and says she put in
everything.

After what he said to us before, I felt sorry for her.
But it is what it is, right?
I don't think the Sadducees would give her
a second thought,
although their story could have been about her.
And I am just as sure that she didn't give two cents
for the marriages they were pretending she would
have in heaven.
That's the system.
For the Sadducees and the Scribes.
She gives a lot and they give a little.
It is what it is.

Rich people have lots,
so they have lots to demonstrate their piety with
and occasionally look after the poor folk.

The poor people sacrifice and will
never have enough
to make sure the rich will never want for enough.
I was a little surprised that Jesus didn't do anything.
He has a soft spot for widows,
and I thought he would get Judas to open up the
purse and give her some of our change.

That night I couldn't sleep.
I kept seeing that woman walking up
to the coin box,
dropping in her savings
and walking away.
Full of dignity.

I saw Jesus watching her but looking at us
out of the corner of his eye,
as if he were waiting for us to do something.

I thought about how I am caught in the
It-is-what-it-is
system.

Jesus seems to think it could be what it could be.

I'm the one who listened and enjoyed the rebuke of
the Scribes and got what Jesus was saying.

I thought about my own life and the change I was
afraid to make:
my own willingness to break out of a system that
crushes everyone with obligation.

Why didn't anyone give her her money back?
Why didn't anyone interrupt the system that
demanded sacrifice but gave no grace?
Why didn't I?

Widows were the unprotected
and, if on their own, society owed them care:
not the other way around.

The next morning I went and found the widow and
gave her a coin.
It was all I had.

—Cam Watts is pastor of Aylmer Baptist Church in
southwestern Ontario.

Pilgrim's Song (for Lent)

We are pilgrims on the pathway,
fellow trav'lers on the road.
We are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.
I will weep when you are weeping,
when you laugh I'll laugh with you.
I will share our joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey thro'.

Christ, whose love through humble service
bore the weight of human need,
Who within his selfless suff'ring
offered mercy's perfect deed;
We, your servants, bring our worship
not of voice alone, but heart,
Consecrating to your purpose
every gift that you impart.

Still God's children wander homeless;
still the hungry cry for bread;
Still the captives long for freedom;

still in grief we mourn our dead.
As, O Lord, your deep compassion
healed the sick and freed the soul,
Use the love your Spirit kindles
still to save and make us whole.

Let us find the quiet center
in the crowded lives we lead;
Let our Lenten contemplation
clear our minds and bring us peace.
In the Spirit let us travel,
sharing strength and hope and grace;
Day by day as pilgrim servants
and God's family in this place.

*Words: adapted by Deborah E. Harris from those
written by Albert F. Bayly, 1961; Richard Gillard,
1977; and Shirley Erena Murray, 1989.*

*Music: Traditional American melody,
arr. Jack Schrader*

Tune: BEACH SPRING

Ten Stations of Suffering: A Holy Week Activity for Youth and Others

by Claire McKeever-Burgett

Note: You can use the lists "Ten Required Questions," combined with "The Ten Stations of Suffering" (roughly adapted from the Stations of the Cross) as an activity designed to help young people reflect on their personal lives, as well as on Jesus' death and resurrection. (See page 14 for the two lists.)

In order to execute the activity successfully, you will need to make several preparations. First, you will need a large room, such as a fellowship hall or a sanctuary.

You may also choose to do this activity outside along a sidewalk or field that will lead to a sanctuary or place where insightful worship and discussion will occur.

Second, you will need canned foods, of any kind, to serve as props at each station. The canned foods will be placed at each station for each student to pick up and carry with them if they feel they have committed the particular transgression described at the station.

Thus, you will need enough cans for each student to take one at each station. In other words, if you have 10 students and there are 10 stations, you will need 100 cans. (You can donate them to your local food pantry afterward.) You will also need a strong bag for each student in which to carry their burdens.

Next, you will need rectangles of poster board, printed with large, easy-to-read letters, each containing a question or a meditation from the "Stations of Christ's Suffering." Depending on where you choose to hold this activity, you may need small tables on which to place the cans and the meditations.

You will also need large, printed numbers to help the youth find each new station. If you hold the activity outside, it might be helpful to laminate the

meditations and numbers and staple them to wooden stakes that could be placed in the ground. (We urge you to use your own judgment on this, and adapt these instructions to your own situation.)

Finally, you will need a large, rugged-looking cross that will serve as the final destination of the journey.

It would be best for the room or area to be dark, with lights at each station, with a brighter light on the cross. At the end of the journey, all of the students will be gathered at the cross.

Before you begin, make sure that each young person understands everything that is going on. Explain what is about to happen, and entertain questions until you know everyone understands.

The cans the students carry with them from station to station represent guilts or burdens, and the cross represents a place of grace and forgiveness, where they can put down their cans and feel what it's like to lay their burdens at the foot of the cross. Instruct them to stay at the cross until all of the participants have arrived.

It is important, at that point, to lead the students in a debriefing session, allowing them to reflect on how they felt as they meditated at each station. In order to do this, you may want to lead them to a room where they can sit and talk—perhaps a room where this sort of discussion happens frequently. Create an atmosphere of comfort and security, in which the students feel free to speak candidly about their emotions during the experience.

The focus of this activity is on the practical application of the Ten Commandments to our lives, to help students realize that these are not mere age-old guidelines, but prevalent requirements for everyday life.



The Ten Stations of Suffering (Adapted from the Stations of the Cross)

1. Jesus is condemned to death. Jesus takes this death sentence to redeem you from your own humanity, imperfection, and ill-will.

2. Jesus carries his cross. Jesus carries not only the cross, but also all of our disasters, hurts and pains.

3. Jesus falls. Jesus—tired, overwhelmed, and weary—falls to the ground under the weight of the cross.

4. Jesus meets his mother. Can you imagine the worry and anguish that fill both Mary's and Jesus' hearts as they listen to the crowd jeering, embracing each other physically for the last time? Jesus loves his mother, and by touching her on his trek to Golgotha, he shows his deep devotion for her.

5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross. Even Jesus, God incarnate, needed help carrying the weight of the cross. Think of Jesus' ability to ask for help and accept it from another.

6. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem. Jesus instructs these women not to weep for him, but only for themselves. It is their sin, as well as ours, for which Jesus is to suffer and die.

7. Jesus' clothes are taken away. Can you imagine the embarrassment and humility Jesus experienced when he was stripped of his clothing? Standing in front of a great crowd, naked for the world to see, Jesus endured shame and scorn.

8. Jesus is nailed to the cross. Consider the physical pain Jesus endures as his body is stretched across the top beam. Consider the dread and agony Jesus feels as the nails pierce his hands and feet.

9. Jesus dies on the cross. After many hours of agony, Jesus breathes his last breath with you on his heart and mind. He dies for you.

10. The body of Jesus is taken down from the cross and laid to rest in the tomb. Can you imagine the grief of those who take Jesus' body from the cross, as they prepare him for the tomb? Learn to revere Jesus through those who prepared Jesus' dead body for the tomb.

Before the Cross

Why do you now stand before an empty cross with many sins, burdens, and cares? Why do you not stand at a tomb or a gravesite? You stand before an empty cross because Jesus' story does not end at the tomb. Jesus rose from the grave on the third day after his death, revealing to all that death can not hold God, destroy God or diminish God.

The Ten Required Questions (based on the Ten Commandments)

1. Have you worshipped a friend, a music album, or a computer game more than God? Do you care more about what other things have to say about life than what God has to say about it?

2. Do you place people or sports or television or books before God? Do you turn to these things for comfort and security rather than turning to God?

3. Do you oftentimes make wrongful use of God's name by saying degrading things about others? When you say in one sentence that you love God, but in the next, you insult one of God's creatures, you also insult the name of God.

4. Do you set aside time to worship God every day? Do you remember God and celebrate the sacredness of God? Keeping the Sabbath holy does not mean you're going to hell if you miss one Sunday morning. It simply means to worship God continually, setting aside specific, holy time for this worship.

5. Have you dishonored your parents by not only getting into a fight with them, but by doing something of which they would disapprove? Let's face it, we all tend to disagree from time to time, but God provides parents so we may gain perspective and structure in our lives. Thus, are you obeying your parents with your actions and words in public and in private?

6. Have you killed someone's dignity with a sly comment or offensive joke? Have you destroyed another's ability to laugh? Do the things you say and the things you do edify your neighbors, or do they devastate them?

7. Have you looked at another person as an object, rather than as a child of God? Do you debase another's character by seeing them as an impure object?

8. Have you stolen another's faith, love, peace, or kindness by not supporting or believing in them? Do you steal a person's selfhood when you antagonize or cause them embarrassment?

9. Have you misrepresented one of your friends in front of other people to make them look stupid? Do you tell funny jokes about other people in order to make yourself look better and feel better?

10. Do you long so badly for what your friends have that you forget all that you have been given? Are you dissatisfied and discontent, always wanting more?

—Claire McKeever-Burgett is a minister at Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, TN. This activity is the brain-child of Susan Shearer Ballenger, a minister in Baltimore, MD. Susan was also the creator of the popular Easter Walk for children, available on the Seeds of Hope website and Facebook page.

Quotes, Poems and Pithy Sayings

We follow the Jesus who casts out demons and heals hurts. The Jesus who approaches Jerusalem with lament in his heart and maybe even tears in his eyes because he so wants to love the people and they can't receive his love. The Jesus who rears back, wings spread wide, flapping and squawking like crazy when a threat is nearby and who then gathers us up, wraps those sheltering wings round us, and holds us close in a love that we can't begin to comprehend.

—April Baker & Amy Mears

Journeying with Jesus also means to be in a community, to become part of the alternative community of Jesus. Discipleship is not an individual path, but a journey in a company of disciples. It is the road less traveled, yet discipleship involves being in a community that remembers and celebrates Jesus. Though that is not the only role of the church, it is its primary role. To use John Shea's very apt description of the church: Gather the folks, tell the stories, break the bread.

—Marcus Borg

The church has failed to follow her appointed pathway of separation, holiness, heavenliness and testimony to an absent but coming Christ; she has turned aside from that purpose to the work of civilizing the world, building magnificent temples, and acquiring earthly power and wealth, and, in this way, has ceased to follow in the footsteps of Him who had not where to lay His head.

—C. I. Scofield

People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child—our own two eyes. All is a miracle.

—Thich Nhat Hanh

Jesus' ministry was clearly defined, and the alternatives to the illusion and temptations of the desert were spelled out. A choice was

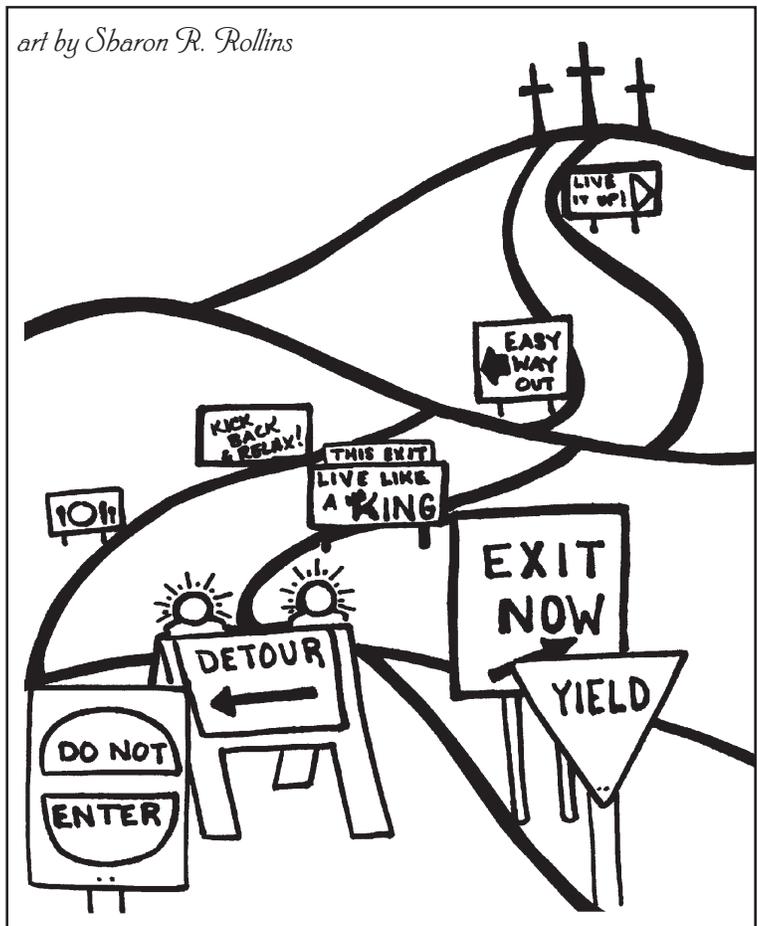
made—life abundant, full and free for all. Make no mistake about it, the day that choice was made, Jesus became suspect. That day in the temple he sealed the fate already prepared for him. How was the world to understand one who rejected an offer of power and control?

—Joan B. Campbell

The purpose of Lent is to be, with eyes wide and hearts open, among those who move closer to Jesus through difficult times. It is to find ourselves embracing his willingness to do the difficult work of reconciliation. As we journey through the season of Lent, we take the hand of Jesus, if we dare, and move into a path that leads us to a dangerous love and that just might land us in the heart of God.

—April Baker & Amy Mears

art by Sharon R. Rollins



We Want

A Nested Meditation

by Sharon R. Rollins



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

We want.

We want for love and inclusion.

We want.

For love and inclusion, they come and go.

We want for love and inclusion.

They come and go in human form.

We want for love and inclusion.

They come and go in human form.

But God promises to meet our wants with unending love and redemption.

— Sharon Rollins is a therapist in Waco, TX. She has contributed writings and art (including the Sacred Seasons logo) to Seeds for many years.

Author's note: The "nested meditation" style is borrowed from Kevin Anderson's Divinity in Disguise. This meditative style is best read section by section, with a breath and a pause after each, to consider the continually evolving meaning in each new line.

A Sunday Parade

A Palm Sunday Meditation

by April Baker & Amy Mears

Text: Luke 19:28-40

Though our church begins worship most weeks with a procession, rarely is it as visually celebratory as on Palm Sunday, when we wave branches and sing “Hosanna!”

Our procession each week is not meant to be a reenactment of Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem, but it is reminiscent of that day. Like those who gathered to see Jesus and go with him into the city, we gather to celebrate our relationship with God and to see what God is doing and will do in our midst.

We gather to stay within sight of Jesus so we can follow him more closely. We gather to sing and to proclaim liberation and hope. We gather to honor the one who is our best teacher and example

of what it is to live in the Reign of God. And we enter our time of worship with intention because what we are here to do is important.

We come together because in Christ we have reason to hope that we will know the Reign of God both here and now, and in the fullness of time.

We all know that Palm Sunday is a celebration of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But, in

their book *The Last Week*, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan draw a picture of two parades that entered that city in preparation for the feast of the Passover.

On one side of the city, coming down from the Mount of Olives, was a parade of common people—peasants whose

Our church has a custom of closing our Lenten times of worship with the words “Take the hand of Jesus, if you dare, and go with him to Jerusalem.” Today, we might examine a little more carefully whether we dare.



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

lives were held hostage by an occupying force and a foreign law. This parade was led by one from a peasant village, born into a family of common folk, Jesus.

On the other side of the city, the parade was a bit different. Pontius Pilate and the Roman troops marched to a military cadence that testified to both imperial power and imperial theology. They were there to serve Rome and the emperor of Rome, who was not merely the ruler of the empire, but was also called Son of God.

A half-century before, Augustus Caesar was believed to have been conceived in his mother by

So, if we dare, let us take the hand of Jesus, set our faces with him toward Jerusalem and, indeed, toward all the locations where power is misused and abused. Let us move forward with a new way of sharing power and a new way of loving one another, a new way of speaking truth and a new way of spreading good news.

the god Apollo. The Caesars who came after him—including Tiberius, who was emperor at the time of these events—all assumed this position of demigod.

Borg and Crossan remind us that the might of the Roman Empire stood undergirded by an imperial theology, giving divine sanction to its political and economic oppression of the peasant crowd that gathered on the other side of the city, and the subjugation of others like them who lived throughout the empire.

Jesus' procession begins to look more intentional, more political, more revolutionary, when we look at a panorama of the city on that day. Columns of soldiers and horses, armor and weapons appear in sharp contrast to a single man on a colt, peasants' cloaks and palm branches. Might Jesus have planned this parade to proclaim that he belongs to—and can show the way to—a realm of peace and a God of justice rather than a kingdom of might and a god of power?

Borg and Crossan also describe the role the temple had played in the life of the Jewish people. The temple had been the center of religious life, the place of God's presence, the location where one might offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of particular sins. Under Roman rule, not only were people to bring their tithes to the temple, but also they were to pay the imperial taxes there.

Temple authorities and high priests were put in the position of collecting an annual tribute to Rome and at least maintaining the appearance of loyalty to Rome. With their sacred places corrupted and their spiritual leaders' loyalties divided between God and Rome, Jesus' parade into Jerusalem must have offered the people a glimmer of hope for a different future.

At the very least, it gave them a moment to imagine freedom and a restoration of life with God without interference from Rome.

So what does it mean to stand in the crowd, knowing that Pilate and an entire regiment of soldiers are marching into town expecting devotion and tribute? What does it mean to shout "Hosanna" with the crowd, and to place ourselves squarely in the parade of Jesus, in the counter-demonstration that defies and denies the claims of the empire?

What do we do when we find ourselves situated, as Joan Chittister says, between the "keepers of the system and the word of God"?

Our church has a custom of closing our Lenten times of worship with the words "Take the hand of Jesus, if you dare, and go with him to Jerusalem." Today, we might examine a little more carefully whether we dare. For it seems that Jesus didn't go into Jerusalem meekly riding a little donkey so he could offer himself as a sacrifice.

No, the more we listen to the gospel writers and the more we expand our understanding of who Jesus was and what he was about, the more clear it becomes that Jesus went to Jerusalem to bear witness, to testify—even with his life if necessary—to the Reign of God. He set his face toward the city that held the temple, and along the way he forgave sins without the need for sacrifice.

He wept over Jerusalem, and he rode right through its gates to confront without violence the powers that created the reasons for his tears.

He went not just willingly, but intentionally, into the local center of the empire and painted a picture of what was wrong with it—so vividly that the Roman authorities, and their local agents whose lives depended on Rome being happy with them, could not ignore it.

Jesus' parade got a lot of attention. Perhaps more than Pilate's procession. If you are trying to run an

empire, you certainly can't have blatant opposition gaining popularity. Treason, some might say.

The deeper into the city Jesus' parade goes, the closer it comes to Pilate's parade. The closer they come to one another, the easier it is to see what Pilate and Caesar don't want us to see—that divine blessing doesn't rest on those who oppress and exploit and use force and fear to maintain control, and that there is an alternative realm.

The reign of Caesar is an empire that benefits a few on the backs of the many. The Reign of God is a gathering of common folk who look toward one who breaks the norms and shows us what might yet be.

Those who would follow Jesus must realize where he is going, or at least be willing to give their lives to go with him, for he is leading us through the city, past Pilate's parade, around the temple, out of the kingdom and into the "kin-dom" of God.

So, if we dare, let us take the hand of Jesus, set our faces with him toward Jerusalem and, indeed, toward all the locations where power is misused and abused. Let us move forward with a new way of sharing power and a new way of loving one another, a new way of speaking truth and a new way of spreading good news. Let us go with Jesus, if we dare....

O God, we want to be courageous; we want to take the dare and march with you right into Jerusalem or Washington, or even out into our own yard, and speak up for what is right and what leads us to the peace and goodness of your Reign.

Sometimes we are bold and stand strongly beside you. Other times we are scared and we make excuses. Hear now our prayers of confession for all that keeps us from going with you wherever you ask us to go. Amen.

—April Baker and Amy Mears are the co-pastors of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, TN.

Readings and Hymns for Maundy Thursday

Reading from Hebrew Scriptures:

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14

Reading from the Psalms:

Psalms 116:1-2, 12-19

Epistle Reading:

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Gospel Reading and Interpretation:

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Note: You might add an interpretive element to this reading by arranging for two people to wash each other's feet as the words are read. If you would like to invite others to join in, arrange for several people to begin the process and provide several bowls and pitchers, as well as a good supply of towels. If the footwashing lasts longer than the Gospel reading, begin instrumental music such as "What Wondrous Love is This" or "How Can I Keep from Singing."

A Service of Communion:

Call to Confession

ONE: "If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of the human race," and yet we live our lives as if there is no hope. We even live as if Christ is not a part of our lives. We prefer to forget what Christ gave for us—what suffering Christ endured. It



art by Dara Luksis

is easier to remember a resurrection than to remember the suffering. But when that is all we remember, we fail to forget that suffering can be eased, healing can take place, and our complacency forgiven. But these things happen through the power of the resurrection. Let us confess our sins of omission before God.

Silent Prayers of Confession

The Assurance of Forgiveness and Pardon

ONE: Everyone who believes has forgiveness of sins through Christ's Name. Let us be thankful for his unspeakable gift to us.

Blessing of the Elements

ONE: At the feast of the Passover that Jesus shared with his followers on the evening prior to his death, Jesus expressed life through the sharing of food that took on the significance of his body. It was Jesus' desire that the followers repeat this meal as a source of strength, remembering that their beloved Rabbi would provide life for them over and over again. We now come to this table, remembering Jesus' act of love for us. May we find strength and renewal for our ministry, as did the early disciples, in the sharing of this meal. May we find hope and healing through the power of the resurrection.

The Blessing of the Bread

ONE: Jesus said, "Eat this bread and remember who I am." May this bread bring us healing down to the core of our being.

The Blessing of the Cup

ONE: Jesus said, "Drink this cup and remember my promises." May this cup infuse us with new life.

Invitation to the Table

ONE: Draw near to the table of sustenance and love. And may all God's children everywhere come to know this sustenance and love.

Hymn

"O Jesus Christ, Life of the Earth"

Hymn #34 in *A Singing Faith*

(Jane Parker Huber, Westminster Press: 1987)

Words: Jane Parker Huber

Music: Bohemian Brethren's Kirchengeseng, 1566

Tune: MIT FREUDEN ZART 87 87 87

1. O Jesus Christ, life of the earth
And light to every nation,
Breathe meaning into death and birth,
Your Spirit, our salvation.
Your perfect life in every age

Imprint afresh on history's page—
Life of the World, and our Life!

2. O Jesus Christ, in whom we find
Abundant life and caring,
Grant us an open heart and mind
Each other's burdens bearing.
From others may we truly learn
What each can offer, turn by turn—
Life of the World, and our Life!

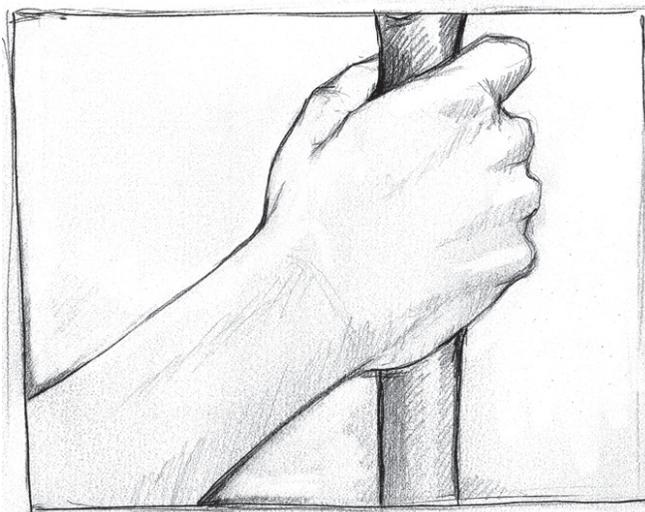
3. O Jesus Christ, call us anew
To lives of firm decision.
Give youth and age your work to do
With courage, faith and vision.
Let justice be the measuring rod
Of our devotion to our God—
Life of the World, and our Life!

4. O Jesus Christ, best gift of God,
Born, dead, and raised to save us,
Friend of the pilgrim way we've trod,
Let nothing ill enslave us.
In unity life overflows
With richness God's good grace bestows—
Life of the World, and our Life!

Benediction

Go into this night, remembering the uncertainty and fear that surrounded Jesus and his followers, but also remembering the love that they shared in this time before darkness and betrayal closed in around them. Hear the message of Jesus in your hearts: "Let not your hearts be troubled. I have come to bring you hope."

—Note: The communion portion of this service was adapted from a liturgy by Buddy Vess.



art by Sallylynn Askins

Out of the Depths I Call unto You

A Service of Worship for Holy Friday

by Katie Cook

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in God's word I hope; my soul waits
for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those
who watch for the morning...*

Musical Invocation:

"Out of the Deep" from John Rutter's *Requiem*

Scripture: Psalm 42

Responsive Reading:

LEADER: Deep calls unto deep in the roar of the waterfalls.

PEOPLE: Out of the depths I cry unto the Lord.

LEADER: Schedules and deadlines roar over my head, voices clamor around me and old tapes keep running in my mind.

PEOPLE: I cry out to my God for a moment of peace, a season of silence, a glimpse of the holy.

LEADER: Pain comes crashing down upon me like angry waters, and despair wells up from deep within.

PEOPLE: I cry out to you, God, for healing; I cry out to you for hope.

LEADER: Just when I feel that I cannot stand the chaos,

PEOPLE: You whisper, softly, and my world is remade.

LEADER: Just when I feel that I cannot stand the pain,

PEOPLE: You come to me with healing in your wings.

LEADER: I wait for your touch. I hope in your word.

PEOPLE: More than those who watch for the morning, I watch for you.

LEADER: More than those who watch for the morning, I wait for your touch.

ALL: More than those who watch for the morning, I hope in your word.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:6-13

Musical Benediction:

"Non Nobis, Domine"

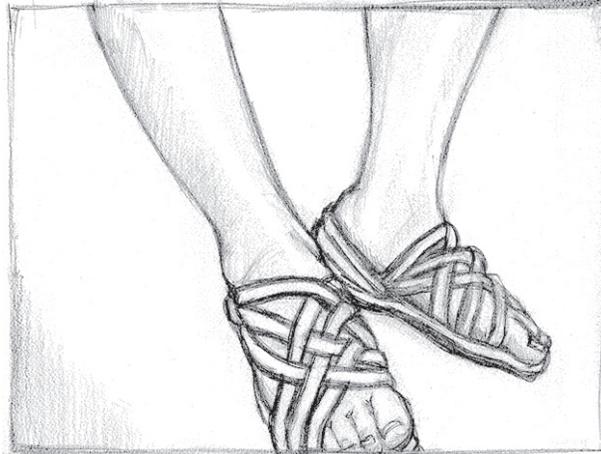
—from the *Henry V* movie soundtrack, arranged by Patrick Doyle



Atonement

A Nested Meditation

by Sharon R. Rollins



art by Sallylynn Askins

Atonement.

A tone meant to ring redemption.

A tone meant to ring redemption
from individual sin.

A tone meant to ring redemption.

From individual sin to corrupt, oppressive powers on earth.

Atonement.

From individual sin to corrupt, oppressive powers.

On earth, Jesus came and walked in our shoes.

A tone meant to ring redemption.

From individual sin to corrupt, oppressive powers on earth.

Jesus came and walked in our shoes

so we might know God more fully.

—Sharon Rollins is a therapist in Waco, TX. She has contributed writings and art (including the Sacred Seasons logo) to Seeds for many years.

Author's note: The "nested meditation" style is borrowed from Kevin Anderson's Divinity in Disguise. This meditative style is best read section by section, with a breath and a pause after each, to consider the continually evolving meaning in each new line.

The Night Before Easter

An Easter Meditation in Verse

by Cameron Watts

‘Twas the night before Easter
and all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a
mouse

The children were nestled up against
each other –
Thank God –
Leaving a few private moments
for their mother

When suddenly from the doorway
there arose a loud clatter
With a groan I got up to see what was
the matter

My groan turned to a sigh as I saw
standing there
A stranger who looked to be
fouling the air.

I stood on the other side of the door
considering;
We all are obliged to welcome travelers
who ask
But I was tired and he was dirty
Besides, I gave up being a host for Lent.

Maybe if I were quiet he would try
another door
But he stood there knocking
With diminishing insistence
A few more moments and he would
leave.

Then his eyes danced sideways to see
me beholding him from the window
And he knocked once more,
as if this was my last chance.

I opened the door.
They say that houseguests are like fish,



After three days they begin to stink
God knows what this one would be like
after three days.

I invited him in and asked him to wait
On the lower level, you know,
with the livestock
I went upstairs to get water
And came back to find him on the floor
chatting with a goat.

“You speak goat?”
“Not really, but for the last few weeks
I’ve only had animals to talk to,
And, well, they listened.”

I gave him the water to drink,
hoping it would shut him up.
I didn’t like the wild look in his eyes.

I poured him more while he sat
looking at me.

“What have you been doing for the past
few weeks?”

“I’m not sure.
Wandering, thinking, praying.”

I waited for him to say more or thank
me for the water so he could be on his
way.

“By yourself?”
“Sometimes.”
“Where?”
“The wilderness.”

continued

*art courtesy of the Franciscanos
de Cruz Blanca*

"Wasn't it dangerous?"
"Sometimes."

I began to wonder if he had been assaulted
and was lost.
Maybe he was one of those wealthy
pilgrims who had been waylaid
And would reward me for my help.

"Were you attacked?"
"I suppose."
"By bandits? Did they beat you
and take what you had?"
"Only one. But he took nothing.
He did try to give me what I didn't want."

I wondered how many times they hit him.

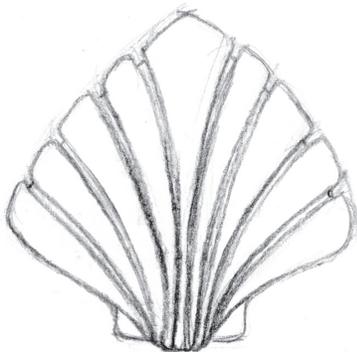
"What were you thinking about?"
"Lot's of things."
"Like what?"
"What to do next."
"What did you decide?"
"To keep walking."

"What else did you think about?"
"Bread mostly."
"Bread?"
"I thought about bread a lot."
"Do you have any?"

There went any hope of getting rid of him
quickly.
I came back with half a loaf.
He nibbled at it, caught me watching him,
then broke off a piece
And gave it to me.

"Do I know you?"

—Cam Watts is pastor of Aylmer Baptist
Church in southern Ontario.



art by Sallylynn Fiskins



Easter Prayer

by Joshua Speight

Christ is risen!
We give thanks for the gift of Easter
That runs beyond our explanations,
Beyond our categories of reason,
Even more, beyond the sinking sense
of our own lives.

Almighty God,
Grant to us that we may seek to live out each day
as members of your kingdom,
Grant to us that we may believe in the resurrection
with our whole heart, mind, and soul,
Grant to us that we may stay steadfast in this faith
so that we may praise and thank you always.

As we remember the Easter event we pray
for the ability to stand up for injustice in the world,
We pray that we will continually seek
the peace of Christ,
We pray for our world
which everyday reminds us of the grace
given to us by God
who came to earth so that we might live.

Hear our thankful, grateful, unashamed Hallelujah!
In the name of the resurrected Christ,
Amen.

—Joshua Speight is a minister in Louisville, KY.

Readings and Hymns for Easter Sunday

Hymn:

"Christ the Lord is Risen Today"
#216 in the Chalice Hymnal (Chalice Press: 1995)
Words: Charles Wesley, 1739
Music: *Lyra Davidica*, 1708; desc. Charles H. Webb
Tune: EASTER HYMN 77.77 w. *alleluia*

Note: Many churches give their children small bells to ring during the hymns on Easter Sunday. Every time the hymn lyrics say "Allelujah" or "Hallelujah," the children ring the bells. This adds a festive note to the singing.

The Easter Proclamation:

ONE: We have felt the sorrow and the pain of loss. We have felt the oppression of humankind. We have borne with Jesus the sorrows of this world. But now—a new thing has happened. Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

MANY: Christ is risen indeed!

ONE: Prophecy has been fulfilled, for God promised through the Prophet Isaiah, "I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind." Christ is risen!

MANY: Christ is risen indeed!

ONE: We will then be glad and rejoice forever in this new creation; for God has created Jerusalem as a joy, and all people as a delight, and has made us all a part of that creation through Jesus Christ—the risen one. God rejoices in Jerusalem and in all God's people. No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. Christ is risen!

MANY: Christ is risen indeed!

ONE: Salvation has come through the power of the resurrection morning. God's promises are sure. God's love is our strength. We are forgiven for our trespasses. We are a resurrected people. Christ is risen!

ALL: Hallelujah! Christ is risen indeed!

Call to Confession:

ONE: "If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of the human race," and yet we live our lives as if there is no hope. We even live as if Christ is not a part of our lives. We prefer to forget what Christ gave for us—what suffering Christ endured. It is easier to remember a resurrection than to remember the suffering. But when that is all we remember, we fail to forget that suffering can be eased, healing can take place, and our complacency forgiven. But these things happen through the power of the resurrection. Let us confess our sins of omission before God.

Silent Prayer of Confession:

Assurance of Forgiveness:

ONE: Everyone who believes has forgiveness of sins through Christ's Name. We are a resurrected people. Hallelujah!

Reading from the Psalms:

Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24

Reading from the Acts:

Acts 10:34-43

Epistle Reading:

Colossians 3:1-4

Gospel Reading:

John 20:1-18

—*Note: The Easter Proclamation and litany are from a liturgy by Buddy Vess.*

Benediction



*“Be not afraid...for lo, I am with you
always, even unto the end
of the world.”*

*He says he is with us on our journeys. He
says he has been with us since each of our
journeys began.*

Listen for him.

*Listen to the sweet and bitter airs of your
present and your past for the sound of him.*

*— Frederick Buechner,
The Sacred Journey*