

# Holy Ground



...Encountering God  
in the Wilderness

Worship Resources for the Creative Church  
Lent/Eastertide 2016

*Sacred Seasons, a series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis,  
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# Sacred Seasons:



## Worship Tools with an Attitude—Toward Justice, Peace & Food Security for All of God's People.

*These unique 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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*Copy Editor:* Deborah E. Harris  
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### Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a

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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. For 23 years, the group has sought 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 hunger and poverty.

### Editorial Address

The Seeds of Hope ministry is housed by the community of faith at Seventh and James Baptist Church. The mailing address is: 602 James; Waco, TX 76706; Phone: 254/755-7745; Fax: 254/753-1909; E-mail: seedseditor1@gmail.com. Web

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# A Word about This Packet

In this Lent/Eastertide packet, we have chosen a wilderness theme. Our thinking was that we often run away from those wilderness experiences that form our spiritual selves, from the places where we encounter God and receive our calling.

Although you will find that theme of wilderness and “holy ground” runs through the packet, the individual liturgies are created around the gospel texts for each of those 10 services. We used a wide variety of art, some new pieces and some you may have seen before, based on the gospel themes for the services.

The cover art is by Rebecca Ward, who began drawing for Seeds in high school and is now an internationally recognized artist.

We are indebted to Guilherme Almeida, our resident liturgist, for his work on the themes and especially the musical selections for the services. Guilherme is a lecturer in Musical Theatre at Baylor University and is a member of the Seeds Council of Stewards.

You will find sermons by Richard Groves and April Baker, whose work our readers have encountered before. We included some monologues for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

They are taken from the Seeds publications *Easter Walk*, a Holy Week drama event that was originally written for children, along *With Our Own Eyes*, a collection of monologues describing the resurrection appearances of Jesus in the gospels.

These two collections might very well be the most popular of all of the *Sacred Seasons* publications; they have been performed in a number of churches.

The monologue for Good Friday, “Barabbas,” was written by a former Seeds intern, Robert Askins, now a highly acclaimed playwright based in New York City. Rob presented the first performance of this monologue, as a Theatre and Professional Writing student, at the annual Easter Walk at Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed.

We continue to be profoundly grateful for all of the people who are so generous with their time and creative gifts, and who think of us when they have written worship materials or conceived of innovative ideas for worship themes.

We are grateful for Deborah Harris, who proofread all of these pages, as well as other Seeds publications, in the midst of illness.

We are also deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work.

As always, we want you to feel free to play around with these liturgies and services, and adapt them to your congregation’s needs and resources. If you come up with something creative and different, we would love to hear about it.

The contents of this packet are your congregation’s to use freely and share with others as the need arises. We really do pray that our materials, and this packet in particular, will help you and your congregation find new, sacred meanings for wilderness, and that you will come to Eastertide having stood on holy ground.

—Gratefully,  
The Seeds Staff and Council of Stewards



art by Sharon R. Rollins

# A Few Ways to Prepare Youth & Children for Lent

## Burning Palm Leaves & Prayers

Here are some ideas from my church, Seventh & James Baptist, where the Seeds ministry is housed, for preparing youth and children for Lent.

Just before Lent last year, some of the youth asked a number of questions about Ash Wednesday, and the teachers described the way we save palm branches from the previous Palm Sunday and burn them just before Ash Wednesday for the imposition of ashes.

The youth asked if they could help. So, on Transfiguration Sunday—the sixth Sunday after Epiphany and the last Sunday before Lent—our youth minister, Kent McKeever, and I brought out the dried palm branches and let the youth burn some of them.

We said that the ashes represent our frailty and talked about how sometimes our best efforts go up in smoke and our biggest dreams turn to ashes. We said that Ash Wednesday is a good time to come to grips with that and to start over.

Having participated in the burning caused the youth to pay more attention when the ashes were put on their foreheads, and they want to do it again this year.

We also do something else that we think makes the ash ritual more meaningful. In our youth Sunday school classes, we have “burning bowls,” and each week everyone takes two small pieces of paper. On one piece of paper, he or she writes a prayer or concern—something he or she wants to release to God.

On the other piece of paper, each person writes a prayer request that someone else in the class will take and pray about during the following week. (We exchange these before we leave.) Each person takes the “release” prayer, lights it from the Christ candle, and burns it in the burning bowl, which is a stainless steel bowl sitting on a piece of wood that’s about two inches thick.

Each year, when we burn the palm leaves to make ashes for the Ash Wednesday imposition, we mix up the prayer ashes and add a few spoonfuls to the palm ashes. The youth know this, and they say that it is very meaningful to them to know that some of their prayers are in the ashes.

We have been doing this for a number of years, and sometimes adults will ask to add their prayers to the bowl—including former youth who are back in town to visit. This all may sound a bit odd, but we have found that rituals like this are powerful, and it seems to be extremely important to our youth.

## Where Did I See God Today?

For years, the senior-high Sunday-school class at Seventh has chosen a Lenten discipline in which we will all participate. We choose individual disciplines as well.

Several years ago, we decided together that we should give up whining for Lent. We went through the season, and, at the end, we decided that it only made us realize how negative we were. The next year, we change it up a bit. Every day, we jotted down something for which we were grateful. This turned out to be very meaningful. In fact, it seems to have rewired our brains.

Last year, we changed it again. We made up a calendar that includes boxes for the 40 days of Lent, with room to make notes each day, and we asked ourselves the question, “Where did I see God today?” (For a copy of that calendar, email [seedseditor1@gmail.com](mailto:seedseditor1@gmail.com), and I will be glad to send you a copy.) At Easter, we shared some of the things we had written.

## Lenten Bags for Children

The children at Seventh also learn about Lent. Last year, during the children’s sermon on Transfiguration Sunday, our Minister for Congregational Life, Leslie Rosencrans, gave the children Lenten bags. Each bag contained a small bag of ashes (saved from the year before), a dried palm leaf from the previous Palm Sunday, a purple piece of cloth and an olive-wood cross.

She explained where the ashes came from and talked about the ritual that happens on Ash Wednesday, and told them that the palm leaf might have come from a branch that they, the children, carried into the sanctuary on Palm Sunday. She held up the purple cloth and said, “You will see purple in the minister’s stoles (pointing to her stole) and the choir stoles, on the altar and the pulpit, and even the worship guides will be on purple paper. When we see purple, we remember Jesus.”

About the olive-wood cross, she said, “This will help us to remember what happened to Jesus.” She ended by saying, “Dear God, we thank you for the ways we remember Jesus.”

—Katie Cook



art by Erin Kennedy Mager

# Readings & Hymns for Ash Wednesday

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

## Meditation on Ashes & Easter

Easter is the great Christian celebration, but Easter is not our call. Sunday is not our call. Friday is our call... Good Friday. Easter Sunday is our hope. Good Friday is our lives radically committed. Easter Sunday is the promise such lives can claim. Today we are called to embrace our ashes, our dust, to embrace our mortality, our dependence on God, to embrace the difficulty of our crosses with joyful hearts.

—John S. Ballenger

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Joel 2:1-2, 12:17 or Isaiah 58:1-12

## Hymn

“Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy”  
(RESTORATION 8.7.8.7. with Chorus)  
WORDS: Joseph Hart; Refrain, Anonymous  
MUSIC: Walker’s *Southern Harmony*  
*Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, No. 415

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 51:1-17

## Hymn

“Beautiful Things”  
WORDS and MUSIC: Lisa and Michael Gungor  
CCLI Song No. 5665521

## Reading from the Epistles

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

## Meditation of Confession

If this is yours Lord, was and still is so—even from the depths of withering disappointment—dare to draw near to us once more, and tenderly. For we are in our deeds sorry for our indifference, our tolerances of injustice, our indulgence with destruction and the proud usurpation of power, before that which we

have not done in person, or have not yet committed ourselves to do, but with which we are fearfully familiar. Lord, we are accustomed to what is human and have grown both broken and twisted.  
—David Sparenberg, “Earth Is the Lord’s”

## Hymn

“Kyrie Eleison, Have Mercy”  
WORDS and MUSIC:  
Keith Getty and Stuart Townend  
CCLI Song No. 6016038

## Reading from the Gospels

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Note: For a complete Ash Wednesday service, please go [www.seedspublishers.org](http://www.seedspublishers.org), and look under “worship” for the following, or email [seedseditor1@gmail.com](mailto:seedseditor1@gmail.com) to ask for a copy:

“An Ash Wednesday Service of Worship” (J. Ballenger, *Journey into Servanthood*, Lent 1999, page 6); “Ashes from Our Lives: An Ash Wednesday Idea for Youth (and Others) (K. Cook, *Glorious Quest*, Lent 2001, page 3); “Ashes & Foolishness: An Ash Wednesday Service for Youth and Other Imaginative People,” (K. Cook, *Fools for Christ*, Lent 2002, page 8. The Fools for Christ packet also includes a “matching” Maundy Thursday service. Both are inspired by the movie *Godspell*.)



# Readings & Hymns for the First Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

## Meditation on Wilderness, Part 1

For ancient people, numbers weren't simply functional tools for counting but rather rhetorical devices for assigning significance. The story of Jesus' wandering in the desert draws forward the drama of the ancient Hebrews' 40 years of stumbling between Pharaoh's brick yards and the promised land of milk and honey. Life starting over, as with Noah, as with Hebrew slaves.

—Ken Sehested, "Things to Do During Lent"

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

## Hymn

"Be Not Afraid"

WORDS and MUSIC: Bob Dufford, SJ  
Worship and Rejoice, No. 430

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16

## Hymn

"You Who Dwell in the Shelter of the Lord"  
(ON EAGLE'S WINGS, Irregular)

WORDS and MUSIC: Michael Joncas  
Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal, No. 43

## Meditation on Wilderness, Part 2

It all happens in some kind of desert, whether of sand and rock or of water, a place where illusions are stripped bare, where the powers of disorientation force us to recognize that our petty systems of security, of conceited self-confidence in building our own future, come under withering attack. And we realize that, in order to receive the Gift of new life that is promised, we must relinquish the impulse to control—which is, in fact, the impulse to violence, to shaping reality in our own image.

—Ken Sehested, "Things to Do During Lent"

## Reading from the Epistles

Romans 10:8b-13

## Reading from the Gospels

Luke 4:1-13



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de la Cruzblanca.

# Living in Lent: A Wilderness Experience

## A Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent

by Richard Groves

Scripture text: Luke 4:1-3

Today is the first Sunday in Lent, which Episcopal priest and academician Barbara Brown Taylor calls "Outward Bound for the soul." The Gospel reading for this Sunday each year is the story of the temptations of Jesus. Like Moses before him, and the children of Israel, and Elijah, Jesus went to the desert.

Lent begins with Jesus in the wilderness and ends as he rides triumphantly into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. On the Sundays ahead we will accompany Jesus on this journey.

The wilderness to which Jesus went was that barren, waterless expanse called the wilderness of Judea. Later, he set the parable of the Good Samaritan on the "road that leads from Jerusalem down to Jericho," right through the heart of the wasteland. The harshness of the place, its unrelenting, unforgiving meanness, has made a metaphor of the geography. Jesus had a "wilderness experience" out there in the desert.

The terrain of the metaphorical wilderness is familiar to us, even if we have never seen the physical place. We have all been there. But we did not go there on purpose. We were compelled to go.

Maybe we were led into the spiritual desert by life-threatening illness. Maybe it was personal failure and disappointment in ourselves, or disillusionment with people we trusted. Or maybe it was sin and an overwhelming sense of guilt, or confusion and uncertainty, doubt and despair. Or maybe it was tragedy, sudden and devastating.

Whatever gave us entry into that desert place, we have all been there. We know the terrain. But we did not go on purpose. Forces outside ourselves compelled us to go there.

Yet in Lent we are asked to go to the wilderness Sunday after Sunday, day after day, of our own free will. Why on earth would we do that? Why would anyone go

to the wilderness on purpose? We know what happens out there.

In the wilderness we are tested in ways that seem to have been designed with us in mind, and we begin to suspect that someone out there knows us very well. Obviously gifted, Jesus was tempted to use his considerable powers to satisfy his own needs, and not just his physical needs, his ego needs as well.

"Worship me and I will give you the whole world," the Tempter said. "You want the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, world without end. Amen? I can give it to you."

There was something in Jesus that resonated with that temptation. We may not want to believe that, but there must have been something in him that wanted to say yes, or it would not have been tempting.

Barbara Brown Taylor compared living in Lent with the final exercise in *Outward Bound*, being left alone in the wilderness:



*The strangers put you out all by yourself in the middle of nowhere and wish you luck for the next 24 hours. That is when you find out who you are. That is when you find out what you really miss and what you are really afraid of....*

That is the nature of the wilderness. That is what happens out there.

If someone were to say what our spiritual weaknesses are, yours and mine, they would say, "It is this, or it is that." But they would never guess what it really is, because we have spent a lifetime refining ways to hide it.

*The Gospel reading for this Sunday each year is the story of the temptations of Jesus. Like Moses before him, and the children of Israel, and Elijah, Jesus went to the desert.*

Yet in the wilderness—in the ICU, in the funeral home selecting a casket, waiting by the phone, standing face to face with the one to whom we have been unfaithful, with the pain so apparent on his/her face—everything is stripped away—the disguises, the projections and rationalizations, all that hides us from others and even from ourselves—our weaknesses are exposed, and temptation speaks tantalizingly, almost irresistibly to our greatest vulnerability.

My friend Wilson was entering the last stages of his life. He knew it. His wife, Hazel, knew it. His grown sons knew it. His doctor knew it. So, when he left town for the weekend, the physician wrote on Wilson's chart that if anything happened no "heroic measures" were to be taken to preserve his life.

Wilson was ready to go. Hazel was ready to let him go. Their wilderness experience was coming to an end. Someone else's was about to begin.

On Saturday Wilson's breathing became labored. The young physician on call worked at a nearby military base. His dream was to be invited to join the practice when he finished his tour of duty.

To have someone die on his watch was not exactly the impression he wanted to make. Against advice, he decided to do a biopsy, and in the process he punctured one of Wilson's lungs, and Wilson died.

The young surgeon suddenly found himself all alone in the middle of a vast wilderness. In an act of

hubris he had caused the death of a patient. Frantically, he worked to bring Wilson back, only to see him slip away again.

He panicked, and brought him back again, and again he slipped away. Finally, the hospital chaplain literally pulled the distraught doctor off Wilson's body.

"You have to go talk to the family," the chaplain said.

A look of terror came across the physician's face. "I can't do that," he said.

"You have to," said the chaplain. "It's your responsibility."

"You do it for me," he begged. "I can't."

"I'll go with you," the chaplain said, "but this is something you have to do."

I was in the family room with Hazel and her sons and daughters-in-law; we knew nothing of the drama that had taken place behind the swinging doors that led to surgery.

The door opened, and we saw the ashen-faced young doctor. He took one step inside the family room and collapsed in a sobbing heap on the floor, saying over and over, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Then, in as unlikely an act of forgiveness as I have ever witnessed, Wilson's brand new widow knelt on the floor with her arms around the young doctor, joined by her sons and her pastor, and together we prayed for him.

That's the kind of thing that happens in the wilderness, and that's why we don't go there on purpose. We are "suddenly exposed," Barbara Brown Taylor said, "like someone addicted to painkillers whose prescription has just run out. It is hard. It is awful."

It is necessary to encounter the world without painkillers, to find out what life is like with no comfort but from God...."

That is what we really find out in the wilderness—what is left at the center of our being after everything else has been taken away.

Jesus looked into the abyss. The temptations were real. He actually thought about changing sides, gaining the whole world but losing his soul in the process. He seriously considered attracting a mass following with a theatrical use of his powers, putting God to the test in the process.

Perhaps we do not like to think of Jesus in that way, but if he did not think seriously about the possibilities that flitted into his mind while he was in the Judean wilderness, he was not really "tempted as we are, yet without sin," as the Epistle to the Hebrews says (4:15).

He looked into the abyss, and just before he fell, he reached back and grasped the single line that linked him to his lifelong, life-supporting trust in God.

Each time Satan spotted a chink in his armor and aimed a temptation toward it, Jesus desperately quoted scripture.

"If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become bread." "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'"

"If you will worship me, all this shall be yours." "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and God only shall you serve.'"

"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple; for it is written, 'God will give the angels charge of you, to guard you.'" "It is said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

Would it surprise you to know that each of the verses that Jesus quoted in an effort to stay in touch with

*In Lent we are asked to go to the wilderness Sunday after Sunday, day after day, of our own free will. Why on earth would we do that?*

the deepest commitment of his life can be found in the Old Testament texts that describe the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai?

In the wilderness we find out what is left at the core of our being when everything else is taken away. What we fear is that when we are forced to fall back on the center of our self there won't be anything there. An image comes to mind.

The only time I ever came close to dying was when I was in high school. Members of our senior class were on our graduation outing to a lake in East Texas. I was not a good swimmer and found myself farther out than I intended to go.

Somehow, trying to get closer to the banks, I began struggling. I was too far from my friends to call for help, and suddenly I was underwater, frantically trying to get back to the surface.

My lungs were beginning to burn. If I could bounce off the bottom, I reasoned, I could make it to the surface. But I had no idea how deep the water was. If the bottom was twenty feet beneath me, I was doomed.

But I did know what else to do. So I sank slowly, deliberately until my feet touched bottom. I pushed off and fought until my face broke the surface of the water.

Our greatest fear in times of testing is that there won't be a bottom. We will sink deeper and deeper into oblivion. Many of us have found, to our great surprise, relief, and even joy, that the opposite is true.

There is a paragraph that, over the years, I have quoted to many people who were wandering around in the middle of their own wilderness. I have had occasion

to quote it to myself. It is from the Presbyterian minister and teacher William Barclay:

*We are still alive and our heads are above the water; and yet if someone had told us we would have to go through what we have actually gone through, we would have said it was impossible. The lesson of life is that somehow we have been enabled to bear the unbearable and to do the undoable and to pass the breaking point and not to break.*

It has not been true for some, but it has been true for many of us. We have found that there is a core, there is a bottom.

We have discovered the existential truth of the testimony of the psalmists:

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
Your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me (23:4).*

*Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to Heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the (place of the dead), you are there,  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast (139:7-10).*

We have made God's promise to Joshua our own: "I will neither leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). We have taken Jesus at his word, "Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). And again, "I will pray that God will send you another Comforter to be with you for ever..." (John 14:16).

In that confidence we face the unknown wildernesses that lie ahead, and the testings that will seem designed especially for us. And in that confidence we begin the Lenten season, entering the wilderness intentionally, setting up camp, living there for forty days and forty nights, as an act of spiritual discipline.

We will dare to look inward, to consider our own spiritual depths, because "thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." And because we know that down the road, on the other side of Gethsemene, beyond Golgotha, is Resurrection morning.

In the days ahead may we find at the very core of our being, that deep place of "groanings that cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:27), God's ministering Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that, hard experiences notwithstanding, we are the children of God.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

—Richard Groves is a retired minister. When this sermon was written, he was pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church Winston-Salem, NC.

# Voices in the Desert

## A Reading for Youth & Others for the First Sunday in Lent

by April Baker

based on Luke 4:1-11

FIRST READER: A voice called out in the desert,

SECOND READER: "Prepare the way of the Lord  
...and all will see the salvation of God."

FIRST READER: But then, in the heat and sand of the  
desert, came another voice:

THIRD READER: "If you are hungry,  
turn these stones to bread."

SECOND READER: "Give homage  
to me, and all power and majesty  
will be yours."

THIRD READER: "Throw yourself  
from this high place and prove your  
faith."

FIRST READER: O God, in these weeks,  
a cross looms ahead, and we do not  
want to prepare the way toward it.

SECOND READER: We find  
it easier to reach for a stone  
and give in to the moment's  
desire.

THIRD READER: Our  
knees quiver, perilously  
close to bending to  
whatever voice offers an  
escape.

SECOND READER: We find ourselves leaning toward  
the edge of the spectacular and away from the edge of  
the faithful.

FIRST READER: The love you demand is too dangerous.

SECOND READER: We may not be able to prepare for  
such love, but, God, O God, help us to fall into it.

FIRST READER: Stay with us when we stumble  
on the path,

THIRD READER: Trying to stay within  
earshot of the voice that calls us to love,

SECOND READER: Passionately,

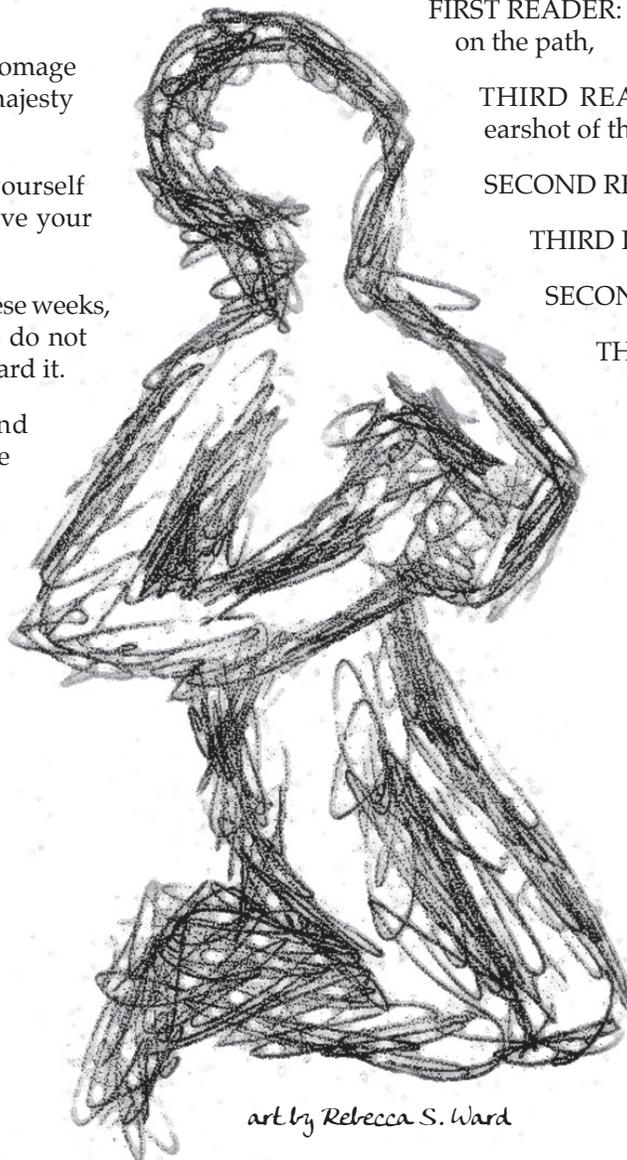
THIRD READER: Abundantly,

SECOND READER: Recklessly,

THIRD READER: Dangerously.

FIRST READER: That we too  
might find our salvation.

—April Baker is co-pastor of  
Glendale Baptist Church in  
Nashville, Tennessee.



art by Rebecca S. Ward

# Readings & Hymns for the Second Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

## Hymn

"Be Strong in the Lord"

(STRENGTH 11.11.11.10.)

WORDS: Linda Lee Johnson

MUSIC: Tom Fettke

*Worship and Rejoice*, No. 514

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 27

## Meditation on Seeing

Suddenly they saw him the way he was,  
the way he really was all the time,  
although they had never seen it before,  
the glory which blinds the everyday eye  
and so becomes invisible. This is how  
he was—radiant, brilliant, carrying joy  
like a flaming sun in his hands.

This is the way he was—is—  
from the beginning,  
and we cannot bear it.

So he manned himself,  
came to manifest to us;  
and there on the mountain  
they saw him, really saw him,  
saw his light.

We all know that  
if we really see him we die.  
But isn't that what is required of us?  
Then, perhaps, we will see  
each other, too.

—Madeleine L'Engle

## Hymn

"Wait for the Lord"

(WAIT FOR THE LORD 8.8)

WORDS and MUSIC: Jacques Berthier,

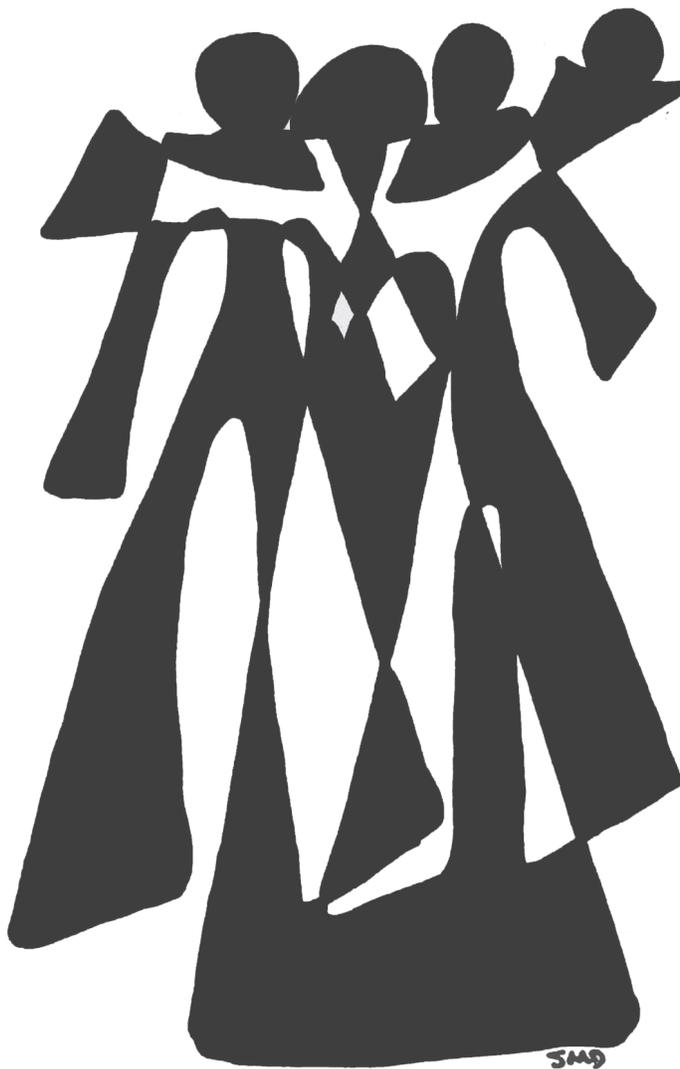
from *Songs and Prayers from Taizé  
Worship and Rejoice*, No. 166

## Reading from the Epistles

Philippians 3:17-4:1

## Reading from the Gospels

Luke 13:31-35 or Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)



art by Susan Daily, JBV/M

# Readings & Hymns for the Third Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 55:1-9

## Hymn

"From Every Stormy Wind That Blows"  
(RETREAT L.M.)

WORDS: Hugh Stowell

MUSIC: Thomas Hastings

*The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration*, No. 432

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 63: 1-8

## Meditation on Faith

I am a man who has hoped, in time, that his life,  
when poured out at the end, would say,  
"Good-good-good-good-good!"  
like a gallon jug of the  
prime local spirit.

I am a man of losses, regrets, and griefs.  
I am an old man full of love. I am a man of faith.  
But faith is not necessarily, nor not soon, a resting  
place.

Faith puts you out on a wide river in a little boat,  
in the fog, in the dark.

Even a man of faith knows that...

we've all got to go through enough to kill us.

—Wendell Berry,

*Jayber Crow*

## Hymn

"Step by Step"

(STEP BY STEP Irregular Meter)

WORDS and MUSIC: David Strasser

*Celebrating Grace Hymnal*, No. 495

## Reading from the Epistles

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

## Reading from the Gospels

Luke 13:1-9



art: Daniel Mauk/Sojourners

# A Guided Meditation for the Third Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

**T**he reading from the Hebrew Scriptures in the Roman Catholic lectionary for the third Sunday in Lent is Exodus 3:1-8a, which relates the call of Moses. This meditation is based on that passage.

During a guided meditation, it is important for participants to relax as completely as possible. Ask your participants to get into a comfortable position in which nothing in their bodies is nagging at them. Lying on one's back is best, but not always practical. It is good to have one's head level with the rest of the body, if possible. Ask them to spend a minute or two breathing. Ask them to take several long, deep breaths.

Read the passage through once, without stopping. Then read or say the following quietly, as participants continue in their meditative positions. The goal is to allow them space to mentally put themselves in the story.

**I**magine that you are, like Moses, tending a flock of sheep in the desert hills of Midian. You are alone with about 40 sheep, moving from place to place to find foliage for them to eat. Maybe you're moving toward a stream so that you and they can drink.

What time of day is it? Can you hear the stream? Can you feel the warmth of the sun on the top of your head? Imagine the light breeze, the dry desert air, the sound of the sheep as they shuffle along and graze, the snap of the grass as they tear it with their teeth.

Now you see smoke on a hillside. You go up to investigate. It's a bush, on fire. The flames leap and flicker, but the bush is somehow not burned up. As you get closer, you get a strong impression that you should take off your shoes. You know somehow that this is a sacred, holy experience.

A voice comes from somewhere—is it coming from the fire? It calls you by name. The voice says, "You are special to me. You are my beloved."

Imagine yourself standing, or perhaps kneeling or sitting before this fire for a moment in silence. Then the voice says, "I have something for you to do."

You ask, "What is it that you want me to do? How do I know what the task is?"

The voice says, "What have you got in your hand?"

Think for a while about this. The answer, the map to your next adventure, the key to that riddle you've been wrestling with, is in the answer to this question:

*What have you got in your hand?*

Take this question and dialogue with it during your meditation time. The answer might come to you quickly, or it might take considerable time. Allow yourself grace to live with the question if you need to do that.

—Katie Cook is the *Seeds of Hope* editor.



# Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

In the face of death, live humanly. In the middle of chaos, celebrate the Word. Amidst babel, I repeat, speak the truth. Confront the noise and verbiage and falsehood of death with the truth and potency and efficacy of the Word of God. Know the Word, teach the Word, nurture the Word, preach the Word, defend the Word, incarnate the Word, do the Word, live the Word. And more than that, in the Word of God, expose death and all death's works and wiles, rebuke lies, cast out demons, exorcise, cleanse the possessed, raise those who are dead in mind and conscience.

—William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*

To be commanded to love God at all, let alone in the wilderness, is like being commanded to be well when we are sick, to sing for joy when we are dying of thirst, to run when our legs are broken. But this is the first and great commandment nonetheless. Even in the wilderness—especially in the wilderness—you shall love God.

—Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember*

Jesus performed much of his ministry in urban settings, yet many of his most transformative moments occurred in outdoor settings—bodies of water, mountaintops and wilderness. The wilderness of the Bible is a liminal space—an in-between place where ordinary life is suspended, identity shifts and new possibilities emerge. Through the experiences of the Israelites in exile, we learn that, while the Biblical wilderness is a place of danger, temptation and chaos, it is also a place for solitude, nourishment and revelation from God. These themes emerge again in Jesus' journey into the wilderness, tying his identity to that of his Hebrew ancestors.

—Jenny Phillips

The dictionary description of a *wilderness* is a wild place untouched by human development. There is wildness about the place that causes us to reconsider ways of doing things and focusing on

the priorities. In the wilderness, you feel alone, out of place, abandoned, disoriented, and inadequate and not in control. Welcome to the transformation chamber! Here, all wild urges and out-of-control personalities are brought under the authority of Jesus Christ.

—Moses Asamoah, *Sweetly Broken: Into the Wilderness*

## Phantoms and Truths

by Richard Moore

There is within us, O God—

beneath the layers of illusion and pretense

which consume so much of our lives and our energy—

One true thing.

As we peel back the layers to discover what is truest in us,

We discover a truth and a phantom truth.

The phantom truth shows us that we are empty inside —

We are not complete,

We are not sufficient.

This phantom teaches us to fear,

it makes us small and mean.

It justifies our untruths and closes us off.

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

The space within us is our place,

our need, for You.

The space within us makes relationship possible.

For the phantom is fear,

but the truth is love.

And we are never so much like God

as when we love each other.

We come to this place each week,

O God.

We come to this dangerous place.

We come to this place

which requires us to risk

that which we would hardly

admit we possess.

For it is here that we reveal

that tender, vulnerable, honest,

true thing;

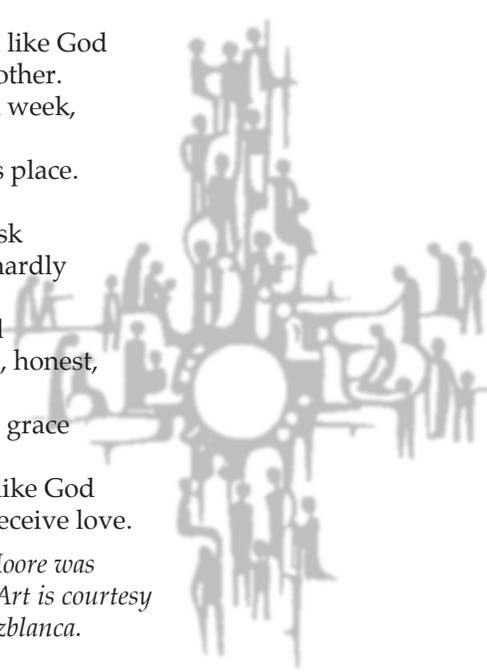
We open ourselves to your grace

and to each other.

For we are never so much like God

as when we give and receive love.

—At this writing, Richard Moore was a minister in Austin, Texas. Art is courtesy of the Franciscanos de la Cruzblanca.



# Readings & Hymns for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Joshua 5:9-12

## Hymn

"Come, Ye Disconsolate"

(CONSOLATOR 11.10.11.10)

WORDS: Thomas Moore; alt. Thomas Hastings

MUSIC: Samuel Webbe

*Chalice Hymnal*, No. 502

## Meditation on the Presence of God

People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and there, and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen,  
*Return of the Prodigal Son*

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 32

## Hymn

"Blessed Redeemer"

(REDEEMER 9.9.9.9. with Chorus)

WORDS: Avis B. Christiansen

MUSIC: Harry Dixon Loes

*Baptist Hymnal* (2008,) No. 258

## Meditation on Finding God

For most of my life I have struggled to find God, to know God, to love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the Scriptures—and to avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself.

I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair. Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me.

—Henri J.M. Nouwen,

*Return of the Prodigal Son*

## Reading from the Epistles

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

## Reading from the Gospels

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32



art by Rebecca S. Ward

# A Prayer for the Daily Walk

by William F. Cooper

Dear God,

We come each week  
to music that calls us into your presence,  
to readings that open our hearts to your way for us,  
and to proclamations that seal your way into our daily walk.  
And in that daily walk, we step into our responsibilities,  
reaching out to friends and loved ones.

Surprised by unanticipated fullness, we are often challenged to do more.  
Sometimes we are disappointed by pettiness and deceit,  
by illness and lack of perception,  
especially our own.

So we turn again to what you have sealed  
into our daily walk,  
so that our hearts can be strengthened in our decisions,  
to do what is good and fruitful.

We are ever grateful  
for the continuing unexpectedness  
with which you heal our sorrow  
and shed light into our darkness.  
For as we turn to the One you sent  
we find the example,  
the words  
and the infilling spirit  
to endure through what comes,  
and to rejoice in the fruited fullness you scatter before us.

In the name and through the guidance  
of the One who came  
to teach us how to love you  
with all we are  
and to love each other  
as we love ourselves,  
we come in gratitude,  
strengthened through your grace and peace.  
Amen.

*—Bill Cooper is a somewhat retired philosophy professor and former Dean of Arts and Sciences  
at Baylor University in Waco, TX.*

*Art on this page is courtesy of the Franciscanos de la Cruzblanca.*

# Readings & Hymns for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 43: 16-21

## Hymn

"Depth of Mercy"

(CANTERBURY 77.77.)

WORDS: Charles Wesley

MUSIC: adapt. from Orlando Gibbons

*The United Methodist Hymnal*, No. 359

## Meditation on Extravagant Faith, Part 1

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.

—Brett Younger, "An Extravagant Faith"

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 126

## Hymn

"A Charge to Keep I Have"

(BOYLSTON S.M.)

WORDS: Charles Wesley

MUSIC: Lowell Mason

*The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration*,  
No. 448

## Meditation on Extravagant Faith, Part 2

The heroes and heroines in scripture are at their best when they live out their faith excessively, irrationally, abundantly.... 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.

—Brett Younger, "An Extravagant Faith"

## Reading from the Epistles

Philippians 3:4b-14

## Reading from the Gospels

John 12:1-8



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de la Cruzblanca

# Readings & Hymns for Palm Sunday

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 50:4-9a

## Hymn

"All Glory, Laud and Honor"

(ST. THEODULPH 7.6.7.6.D.)

WORDS: Theodulph of Orleans; transl. John M.

Neale

MUSIC: Melchior Teschner

Glory to God: the Presbyterian Hymnal, No. 196

## Meditation on Parades, Part 1

That Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem on a donkey shows that he was trying to make a point. But what was that point? He was not dressed as a warrior or any kind of ruler. He was not accompanied by an army. He was riding a colt, a young donkey, instead of a war horse. He had told stories on the way to this city about an upside-down kingdom. Now he was acting like an upside-down king.

—Katie Cook, "The Absurd Parade"

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 31:9-16

## Hymn

"Filled with Excitement/  
Mantos y Palmas"

(HOSANNA 10.10.10.10. with refrain)

WORDS and MUSIC: Rubén Ruíz Ávila

Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal,  
No. 199

## Meditation on Parades, Part 2

Jesus refused to conform to the expectations of the people. He chose to travel around, hanging out with riffraff, 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.... Perhaps our reaction today, after reading the story of Jesus' absurd parade, should be to seek out marginalized folks, to do something that doesn't make sense, to find a way to turn something upside-down.

—Katie Cook, "The Absurd Parade"

## Reading from the Epistles

Philippians 2:5-11

## Reading from the Gospels

Luke 22:14-23:56 or Luke 23:1-49



art by Lenora Mathis

# What Kind of King is This?

## a Sermon for Palm Sunday

by April Baker

text: Luke 19:28-40

Today is a hard day in the liturgical year. It begins with a festive parade where hope is riding high and the promise of fulfillment stirs the air as palms wave. And it ends with a funeral procession that seems to dash all hope and squash all dreams.

The journey from Palm Sunday into Holy Week is one we often wish we could avoid. It is painful. It puts before us in excruciatingly clear detail just what happens when you come up against powers and principalities.

It hangs over us not like a palm branch stirring the air, but like a shroud prepared to cover for eternity all that brings us hope.

Yet we take this journey together each year, trying once again to grasp from the experience what Jesus was about—who he was—and who we are who profess to follow him. Every year we hold him up as our king, but what kind of king was he?

We live in a world of terror and violence, extreme wealth for some and extreme poverty for others, injustice perpetrated by those who profess to be speaking for God. And we look around and wonder: just why is it that Jesus didn't get off that donkey, rally those enthusiastic crowds—who obviously would have done

anything he asked of them in that moment—and once and for all put an end to such things?

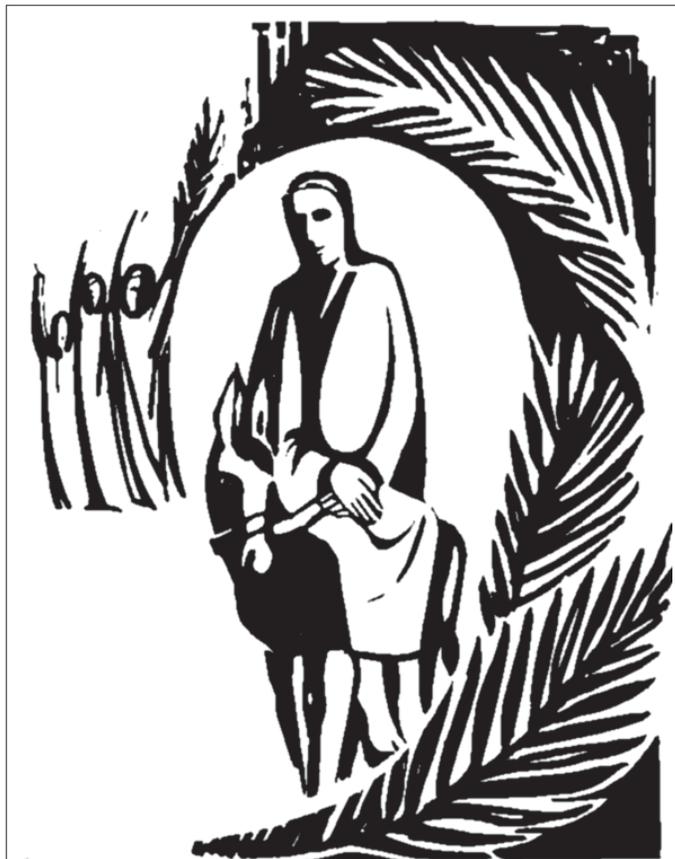
Why did he lead us, instead, into one of the most terrifying weeks in our Christian heritage?

The little crowd gathered there surely thought this was the

beginning of a revolution when Jesus would confront the powers and set their world right again—get rid of the occupying forces from Rome and cleanse the Temple not only of the merchants, but of all those who distorted God's Law. They must have seen Jesus' coming to Jerusalem as the most likely time for a showdown.

Here in Jerusalem, those powers could not ignore Jesus, for he was prophet and king—and people were listening to him. They would have to contend with him, and when they did, surely, surely Jesus would tear down their political machines and religious empires and fulfill the prophecies of the coming of the Reign of God.

As the week went on, though, this little band of followers watched as Jesus confronted challenges by telling stories. They



*We look around and wonder: just why is it that Jesus didn't get off that donkey, rally those enthusiastic crowds—who obviously would have done anything he asked of them in that moment—and once and for all put an end to such things?*

*art courtesy of the Franciscanos de la Cruzblanca.*

listened as Jesus called the leaders on some of the things they were teaching and pointed out to them that they were missing the message.

The folks who listened and watched Jesus must have been waiting eagerly for the moment when one person would push him too far—when the religious leaders who were in Herod’s pocket would be exposed and Jesus would set things right. He was, after all, the prophet from Nazareth and the royal Son of David, the great king. Wasn’t he?

But the days went by, and nothing seemed to be falling into place like they had hoped. I’ve wondered if any of this had an affect on Judas. It seems too easy to imply that he would simply betray Jesus for a sack of money.

He held the money for Jesus and the disciples. If it was merely greed, wouldn’t he have just absconded with the purse? Perhaps Judas had a hope that if he forced the confrontation, Jesus would get on with it and God’s Reign would come sooner.

With the disciples and the others who were following Jesus, we look and wonder—just what kind of King is this? And we must ask, what kind of king do we want?

On the dust jacket of a little book that sits on my shelf is a photo of a terra cotta relief done by Margaret Parker. The book is a collection of reflections on the stations of the cross—in poetry, Margaret Parker’s art, and scripture. The ninth station, the last time that Jesus falls with the cross, is depicted on the cover of the book.

At a glance, it is just another picture of someone falling under the weight of a cross. But then the steps in the relief come into focus, and the cross is not a cross, but a police barricade, broken and tangled across the chest of a homeless man. His fall down those steps has left him with his head on the ground, with his feet seven or eight steps up, with his hand gripping the last step in a final attempt to hold on or to break his fall. A thin, broken man under the weight of a society that really doesn’t notice or care or count him as important at all.

It is a striking picture.

And it calls out just what kind of king this Jesus is. He is the kind that will pick up a cross and carry it, fall under its weight, and finally be killed on it, rather than concede the world to those who don’t care, or won’t care, or don’t know how to care.



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de la Cruzblanca.

He is the kind of king who lived through Holy Week with the same intention and love that he lived and taught throughout his life. He is the kind of king who refused to prove himself by resorting to things that were counter to his true and most genuine self.

He is the kind of king that would lay down his life—not so much that his people might be saved from occupying forces, or false teachers, or even from their own sins.

No, he is the kind of king that would lay down his life so his people might know what it means to be the Son of God, the Daughter of God—so that we would have a living and dying example to follow.

*Jesus took each step, spoke each word, looked into the face of each person with the same radical love he had been teaching and living. He looked at them with the love that gives itself fully—with heart and soul, mind and body.*

As daughters of God, sons of God, we are called to follow Jesus, even to a cross. The church’s recent insistence that the whole of the gospel is summed up in a run-on event, called the life-death-resurrection of Jesus, condenses Jesus’ journey to the cross to an obedient act of a martyr fulfilling the demands of a God who can only be reconciled through the spilling of blood. This robs us of the depth of what Jesus’ willingness to suffer conveys.

Despite betrayal by his friends, the desertion of those who loved him so deeply that they had given their lives to be with him—despite facing the powerful and mighty who could kill him if they wished—Jesus took each step, spoke each word, looked into the face of each person with the same radical love he had been teaching and living. He looked at them with the love that gives itself fully—with heart and soul, mind and body.

Despite the temptation to resist evil with force, and perhaps win the day over it, Jesus chose the harder way. He chose the way that resists evil, not in a moment of triumph but through living a life steeped in a radical love that makes no space for evil. He chose a way that keeps that radical love, even in dying.

So cry Hosanna! Our king has come, riding on a donkey, tossing tables in the Temple, eating with his friends, washing their feet, healing the wound of a soldier come to arrest him, facing Pilate and Herod and all who wished him dead, forgiving those who beat him, loving those who did not know what they were doing, and those who did know and did it anyway. This is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Here is our king. Here is the One we are invited to follow.

—April Baker is co-pastor of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, TN and a frequent contributor to Sacred Seasons.

# Readings & Hymns for Maundy Thursday

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

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

## Hymn

“Wash Me Through and Through”

WORDS: Samuel Batts Owens; Bert Polman

MUSIC: Samuel Batts Owens

Sing! *A New Creation*, No. 239

## Meditation on Eucharist

The Eucharist does not simply bind individuals to God in a vertical relationship or bind people to each other in another kind of purely social construct. We are bound to one another *en Christo*. And Christ, who is the head of the body, is to be found persistently on the margins in those who are the least in the Kingdom of the world.

The margins include those who are other, foreign, strange, dangerous, subversive—even socially, morally or religiously distasteful in our eyes. Yet the Eucharist insists that humans find solidarity where they least expect it and, indeed, least want to find it.

—Philip Sheldrake,

*Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory and Identity*

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 166:1-2, 12-19

## Hymn

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”

(HAMBURG L.M.)

WORDS: Isaac Watts

MUSIC: Lowell Mason

*Celebrating Grace Hymnal*, No. 186

## Meditation on Hope

The meal is eaten, the magic appears, the invisible thread of longing remembrance and of hopeful waiting are cast forth, and, beginning from there, men and women who have in their eyes that sad-happy mark of longing remembrance and of hope clasp each others' hands. Just as it should be with anyone who loves and is far away and has nothing to hold except the dried flower, the poem, the memories, a word. That's how it is with the community of Christians, this thing that is called church: together, conspiring, hands joined, they eat the bread, drink the wine, and feel a longing remembrance/hope that has no end.

—Ruben Alves

## Reading from the Epistles

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

## Reading from the Gospel

John 13:1-17, 31b-35



art by Sharon R. Rollins

S. Rollins '99

# Witness in the Upper Room: A Monologue for Maundy Thursday

by Kimmy Scott & Deborah E. Harris

**S**cripture: Matthew 26: 17-35, Mark 14: 12-31, Luke 22:7-38. *Setting: An interior room with a long rustic table, set for a simple meal. We used a regular banquet table with a long piece of fabric. We didn't put chairs around it, so that the children could gather around it more easily. We set the table with wooden bowls and goblets, basket-type bowls, and earthenware pitchers. We poured a little bit of grape juice into some of the goblets and arranged torn pieces of pita bread on some of the plates. A man or woman is there, dressed a little better than a peasant, but not extravagantly, with sandals. Jesus and the other disciples have just left the room.*

*This script was written for children who walk from scene to scene and witness the monologues that tell the Easter story, although we discovered that adults enjoy them as well. Each child carried a basket for the tokens given to them by each character. The witness gives them small wooden goblets or small pieces of a towel-like cloth.*

You just missed them. Jesus and the Twelve just left to go and pray. They ate here at my home tonight. I offered them my upper room so they could have some privacy. Man, you all missed something big!

The first thing that happened was that, when everyone came into the room, Jesus took a bowl of water and a towel and went around the room, washing everyone's feet. When he came to Peter, Peter pulled away from him and said, "You shouldn't be washing our feet!"

But Jesus said, "If you don't let me wash your feet, then you can't be my follower." And he looked around the room and said, "I am showing you how to be a servant. This is the way I want you to be."

While Jesus and his disciples were eating, I came in and out of the room to check on them. In the middle of the meal, Jesus stood up to speak. I stood in the doorway of the room so I could hear.

"I tell you the truth," he said, "one of you in this very room will betray me in just a few hours."

I was shocked when I heard those words—everyone was! The disciples were outraged and

dismayed at Jesus' accusation. Each one said over and over again that he had no intention of betraying the Master. I looked at Jesus, wishing I knew what he might be thinking. All I could see was that his eyes were filled with tenderness, love and sorrow all at the same time. I felt both frightened and comforted by what was in his eyes. He held up his hand to silence the men, and he continued to speak.

"It is the one of you who is dipping the bread into the bowl with me. That man will betray me."

All of them quickly dropped their bread and looked at one another. All except Judas—the one they call Iscariot. (He's a Zealot, one of those people who want to overthrow the Roman government.) He held his bread tightly and looked down at the table. That seemed kind of strange to me.

Once more Jesus spoke. "Woe to the one who betrays the Son of Man! It would have been better if that man had not been born."

Once again, the disciples began talking loudly, each defending himself to the others. But I continued to look at Jesus. I wish you all could have seen his face! They were all so busy talking about themselves that they didn't notice Jesus. As I watched him, I saw such sadness fill his eyes.

Then he held up a piece of bread and cleared his throat. After blessing it, Jesus passed the bread around the table. Someone leaned over and handed me a piece as well.

See "Witness" on page 25.



art by Jesse Manning

# Readings & Hymns for Good Friday

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

## Hymn

"In His Cross I Glory"

(WALKER 8.7.8.7.)

WORDS and MUSIC: Tricia Walker

*The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration*, No. 187

## Meditation on the Cross, 1

Despite our earnest efforts, we couldn't climb all the way up to God. So what did God do? In an amazing act of condescension, on Good Friday, God climbed down to us, became one with us. The story of divine condescension begins on Christmas and ends on Good Friday. We thought, if there is to be business between us and God, we must somehow get up to God. Then God came down, down to the level of the cross, all the way down to the depths of hell.

—William Willimon, *Thank God It's Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words of the Cross*

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 22

## Hymn

"O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"

(PASSION CHORALE 7.6.7.6.D.)

WORDS: attr. Bernard of

Clairveaux;

transl. James W. Alexander

MUSIC: Hans L. Hassler;

harm. Johann Sebastian Bach

*Chalice Hymnal*, No. 202

## Meditation on the Cross, 2

The cross is the very point at which our joy and pain intersect. The cross represents the place where despair and doubt don't have to be ignored—can't be ignored—but rather the depths of human hurt are embraced and celebrated as part of the whole person. The whole, alive person that God desires each of us to be. Alive to celebration and defeat, but alive to the wonders of the abundant life through Christ. Alive to the hurts of our sisters and brothers and how we can be an instrument of healing. Ready to respond to their hurts in a spirit of reconciliation and justice.

—Allison Stone, "A Confession for Holy Week"

## Reading from the Epistles

Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

## Reading from the Gospel

John 18:1-19:42



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de la Cruzblanca.

# Barabbas after Jesus' Death: A Monologue for Good Friday

by Robert Askins

*Scripture: Matthew 27:15-31, Mark 15:6-20, Luke 23:18-25 (also Matthew 27:32-34, Mark 15:21-24, Luke 23:26-34)*  
*Setting: Outside. There should be an empty cross above where Barabbas sits to tell his story. We draped a red cloth on the cross. Since he has just been released from prison, Barabbas should be dressed in worn, dirty clothes, of highly textured fabric, with signs of rough repair, and rope sandals.*

*This script was written for children who walk from scene to scene and witness the monologues that tell the story of Holy Week, although we discovered that adults enjoy them as well. Each child carried a basket for the tokens given to them by the characters. Barabbas gives them wooden crosses to help them remember his story.*

I wasn't always an evil man. When I was young, my parents hoped that I would be very successful, and I tried to please them. But all of that ended when the Romans killed my father.

I remember the day it happened. I was young, but I remember it well. I made up my mind that day to avenge my father's death. I soon lost control of myself. I no longer longed only for revenge, but I began to thirst for Roman blood. I hated all Romans. I shouted for the overthrow of their government, and I took it upon myself to bring it about. I got other people involved—and brought about their ruin as well. Our little "revolution" was soon crushed. The whole thing was ghastly and bloody, and I had asked for it.

I found myself sitting in a dirty, wet prison. I was to be killed by crucifixion on a cross, just like this

one behind me. I have never been so scared in my entire life. I had led a violent life, but I wanted to make changes, to become a good man. My time was up, though. I had blown my chance.

As I sat, chained to the wall, so many thoughts went through my head. I knew how painful this death would be. I had watched crucifixions before. It was a shameful and horrible way to die, and I knew it.

When I heard the guards approach my cell, I felt my stomach drop and my mouth went dry. I swallowed hard. I wouldn't let them see my fear. I wouldn't give them that satisfaction. Two guards walked into my cell and stood in front of me. They didn't try to hide their hostility from me—nor I from them. As I looked up at them, I laughed, mostly to hide my fear. When they unlocked the chains that held me down, for a short moment I thought about

trying to run, but decided it was no use. I waited for them to tie my hands and lead me out.

Well, you can imagine my surprise when the guards pulled me up to my feet and told me I was free to go!

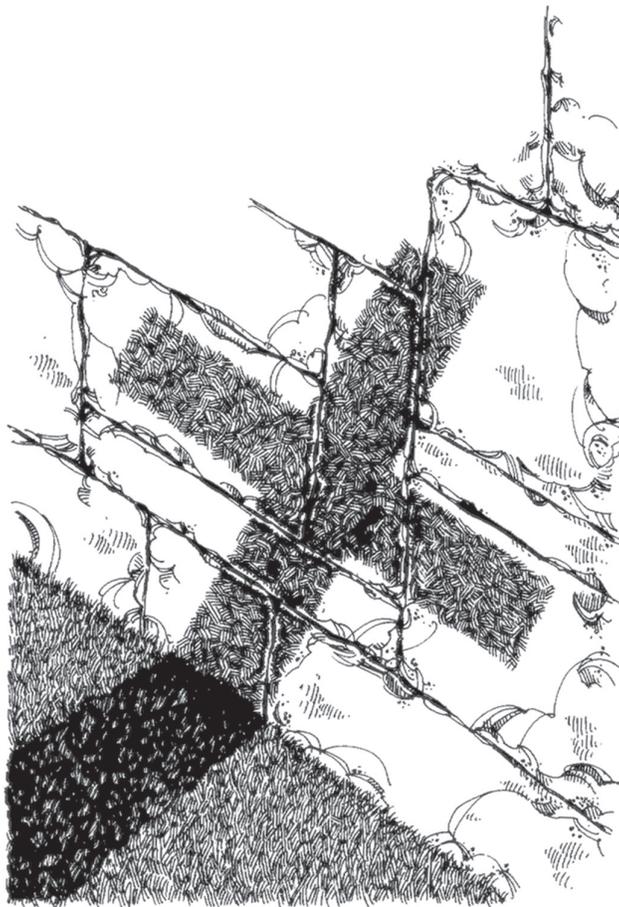
"What?!" I replied looking at them with wide eyes. I thought they were joking.

"You're free to go," they mumbled again, clearly disgusted with the way things had turned out.

I didn't know what to think. How could this happen! I had killed a Roman soldier, started an insurrection, and they were going to set me free?!

"Another man has been tried and is going to die in your place. You have been pardoned because there are those who want him

See "Barabbas" on page 25.



## Witness, *continued from page 22*

“This represents my sacrifice for you,” Jesus said, “Eat this bread and remember me.” Jesus put a piece of the bread into his mouth. As I raised mine to my lips, he caught my eye and smiled sadly at me. I knew what that look meant. He wanted me to remember him after he died. After that, he took up the wine and poured it into a cup.

“This cup that is poured out for you represents the new covenant between us. Drink this wine and remember me.” We each took a sip from the cup. The room was very silent. The men finished their meals quickly and got up to leave. Judas walked off quickly, before anyone could speak to him. The rest of the men followed Jesus to the garden.

So here I am, left to clean up and think about what happened. I wish you all could have been here. I don’t know what will happen now. I have a bad feeling about all of this.

My rabbi, my master—my friend, Jesus—may have eaten his last meal in this very room. I will never forget this night.—*This monologue is from Easter Walk, a Holy Week drama event for children from Seeds of Hope. “Witness in the Upper Room” was first written by Kimmy Scott, a Seeds intern, in 2000. It was revised by Deborah E. Harris 2011.*

*The first of 12 Easter Walk scenes, including two resurrection scenes, were published in 2000. Several were added later, and Easter Walk was revised and reissued in 2009. It was joined by With Our Own Eyes, which included five more resurrection scenes, designed to use with the other two for the Sundays in Eastertide. For more information, go to [www.seedspublishers.org/worship](http://www.seedspublishers.org/worship) and look for Easter Walk and With Our Own Eyes, email [seedseditor1@gmail.com](mailto:seedseditor1@gmail.com) or call 254-755-7745.*

## Barabbas, *continued from page 24*

to die,” one guard explained. He would not look me in the face.

Well, I didn’t wait for them to change their minds. I ran out of the room and up the dark steps, stumbling into the bright street. Tears of joy flooded my eyes and streamed down my face as I looked up at the sun that I had not seen in weeks.

“I’m free,” I shouted, laughing and crying at the same time.

That’s when I noticed the crowd of people rushing past me. They were headed up a long narrow road, which led to Golgotha.

“No way,” I said to myself. “The last thing I want to see right now is a crucifixion.”

When I turned to walk away, though, I was overwhelmed by a desire to see the man who was to be killed in my place. What could he have possibly done to deserve that death more than I did? I turned down a side street and took a short cut up the road. When I came out, I entered into a vicious, angry crowd. They were shouting over and over, “Crucify him!” I couldn’t see what was going on so I climbed some nearby stairs and leaned over to catch a glimpse of this hated man.

What I saw made me sick to my stomach. The man walking up the street was so badly beaten that he could hardly walk.

“He must truly be evil,” I thought, “to have deserved such a beating first.”

I leaned over to a man standing beside me and asked him why this man was being killed.

“They say his name is Jesus. He’s supposed to be some kind of Messiah. He claims to be the King of the

Jews; the Son of God.” The man sneered and shouted at this Jesus along with everyone else.

When Jesus and the soldiers reached the place where I stood, he stumbled and fell to the ground. He looked up and caught my eye. What I saw in his face was not evil, nor anger. There was no sign of hatred. I saw only love and forgiveness. This man was innocent—more innocent than anybody I had ever known. He had done nothing wrong. But why, then, was he dying in my place?

As Jesus struggled to get up, the guard reached over and pulled a man from the street, commanding him to carry the cross. Jesus looked up at me one more time. I had to lower my eyes. I didn’t deserve to look into that face. I couldn’t watch him die. I had to leave. But I came back right after they took the body away.

I should not be alive! I don’t deserve to be free, but I am. I’m free only because he died for me. (Looks up at cross and reaches out to touch it. Whispers.) For me.

—*This monologue is from Easter Walk, a Holy Week drama event for children from Seeds of Hope. The “Barabbas” monologue was written by Robert Askins, who was then a Seeds intern, in 2004. Rob is now a highly acclaimed playwright based in New York City.*

*The first of 12 Easter Walk scenes, including two resurrection scenes, were published in 2000. Several were added later, and Easter Walk was revised and reissued in 2009. It was joined by With Our Own Eyes, which included five more resurrection scenes, designed to use with the other two for the Sundays in Eastertide. For more information, go to [www.seedspublishers.org/worship](http://www.seedspublishers.org/worship) and look for Easter Walk and With Our Own Eyes, email [seedseditor1@gmail.com](mailto:seedseditor1@gmail.com) or call 254-755-7745.*

# Readings & Hymns for Easter Sunday

by Guilherme Almeida & Katie Cook

*Note: During Eastertide, a reading from Acts is often substituted for the lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures. For Easter Sunday, the substitute reading is Acts 10:34-43*

## Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 65:17-25

## Hymn

“Christ the Lord Is Risen Today”  
(EASTER HYMN 7.7.7.7. with alleluias)  
WORDS: Charles Wesley  
MUSIC: *Lyra Davidica*  
*Celebrating Grace Hymnal*, No. 194

## Meditation on Easter, 1

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*

## Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

## Meditation on Easter, 2

What matters, more than anything, is that the faith we claim, in our better moments, is an embodied faith, incarnate; the church is the body of Christ, resurrected. What’s true is the Christ I see in your eyes, when I dare to look deeply into them. What matters is the suffering of Christ crucified in you and in me, and the joy of Christ resurrected in all of us.

—Dawn Ripley, “Practicing Resurrection”

## Hymn

“Christ Is Risen / Cristo Vive”  
(CENTRAL 8.7.8.7.D.)  
WORDS: Nicolás Martínez; transl. Fred Kaan  
MUSIC: Pablo Sosa  
*The United Methodist Hymnal*, No. 313

## Reading from the Epistles

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

## Reading from the Gospel

John 10:1-18 or Luke 24:1-12

## Benediction

God, you are our beginning and you will be our end; we are made in your image and likeness.

We praise and thank you for this day.

This is the day on which you created light and saw it was good.

This is the day in whose early morning light we discovered the tomb was empty, and encountered Christ, the world’s true light.

For us your acts are gracious and your love endures forever.

—from the *New Zealand Prayer Book*



art by Susan Daily, JBV/M

# Mary Magdalene: A Monologue for Easter Sunday

by Katie Cook

*Scripture: John 20:1-18. Setting: We have set up this scene outside, on grass with a background of trees. We have also set it up as the entrance to a tomb. We used an empty corner area under a stairwell. The area should be any isolated area that is not well-traveled. An outdoor tool shed would also work. We draped the area with fabric to create the tomb. We used papier-mache 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. Mary is dressed in modest clothing of first-century Jerusalem.*

*This script was written for children who walk from scene to scene and witness the monologues that tell the Easter story, although we discovered that adults enjoy them as well. Each child carried a basket for the tokens given to them by each character. Mary gives them a smooth stone to help them remember her story.*

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!

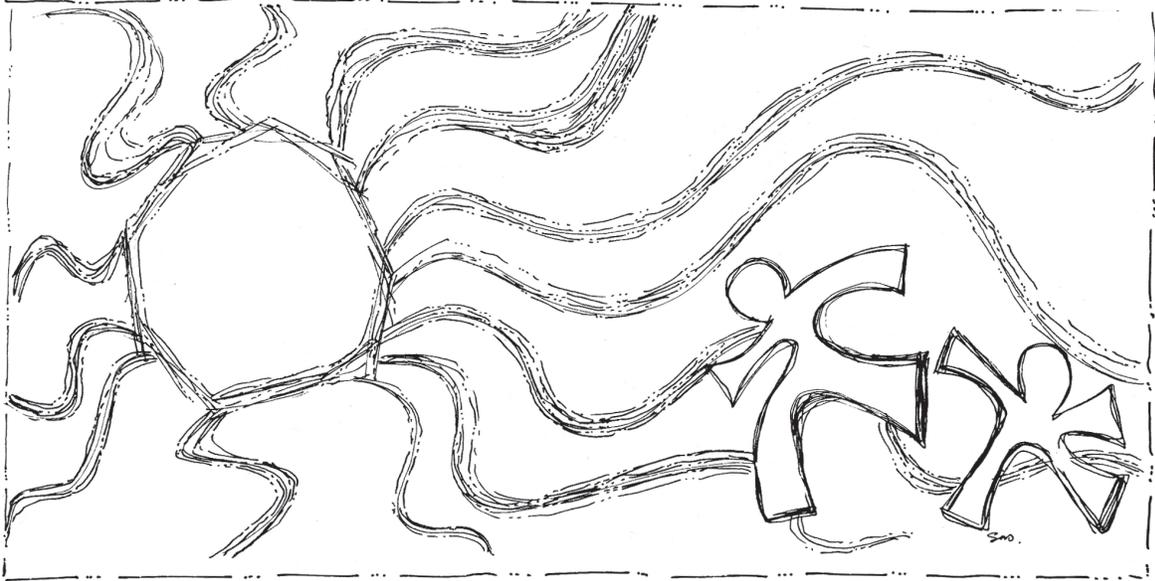
I ran again to where the disciples were, and I told them that I had seen him and that he had spoken to me—called me by name, but I don't think they believed me. Do you believe me?

—This monologue is from "With Our Own Eyes," a series of monologues based on the resurrection appearances of Jesus in the four gospels, from Seeds of Hope Publishers. For more information, go to [www.seedspublishers.org/worship](http://www.seedspublishers.org/worship) and look for With Our Own Eyes, email [seedseditor1@gmail.com](mailto:seedseditor1@gmail.com) or call 254-755-7745.



art by Susan Daily, JSV/M

# Benediction



art by Susan Daily, JBV-111

*Come, let us go into the wilderness,*

Knowing we have been called by God  
to this journey.

Let us go into the wilderness,  
For God will be with us.

There we can better hear the voice of God.  
There we are most likely to see bushes that burn.

*Let us go into the wilderness,*

Even though we are more than a little afraid,  
For there we are most likely to stand  
on holy ground.

There we will find strength for the mission  
to which we are called.

*Let us begin our journey in hope,*

That we might arrive at Easter morning  
with a new song,  
Ready to bring the light of God to the darkness  
that surrounds us;

Ready to bring the peace of God  
where there is violence and chaos;

Ready to bring the love of God  
to shattered hearts;

Ready to bring the joy of God  
to a joyless world.

—Katie Cook