

Glimpses of Grace



*Worship Resources for the Creative Church-
Lent / Eastertide 2012*

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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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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 season.

The theme, "Glimpses of Grace," is introduced on page 4. The structure for the Sundays in Lent is taken from Matthew 11:1-6, from Jesus' response to the disciples of John the Baptist, when he sent them to ask, "Are you the one?" (Jesus says, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.")

The inspiration for this structure was found on a series of Lenten worship guides from Seventh & James Baptist Church that date back to the late 1980s. We suspect that the inspiration for that came from Michael Usey, who was a minister at Seventh then and is now a pastor in Greensboro, NC. The art that we used for the "liturgy of the six Sundays" also came from those worship guides.

The Sunday liturgies are centered around healing stories (the blind receive sight, etc), and were written by Seeds editor Katie Cook, with lots of help. Each of these liturgies uses three readers: a Narrator, a First Reader (who gives voice to the various people who received healing), and a Second Reader (who is essentially the voice of Jesus). Please feel free to play around with these liturgies and adapt them to your congregation's needs and resources.

You will find in this packet several wonderful writings by Ken Sehested, a pastor and liturgical poet who lives in Asheville, NC. Many of these writings focus on John the Baptist and on the Matthew 11 passage. We are grateful to Ken for his genius and his continued generosity.

The Holy Week resources include a series of dramas for youth, written by John Ballenger, a pastor in Baltimore, MD. Before John served on church staffs, he taught drama in high school and has written a number of dramas, poems and hymns.

A good deal of the art is by Susan Daily, IBVM (from the Australian province of the Sisters of Loreto, headquartered in Auburn, South Victoria). Regular *Sacred Seasons* readers and subscribers will recognize many of the other artist's names from past issues.

You may notice that there are almost no Eastertide resources. We got really carried away with the Lenten Sunday liturgies and Holy Week dramas, and we

looked up to realize we already had 32 pages and Ash Wednesday was steadily approaching, so we stopped. For Eastertide resources, we suggest that you check out our *Sacred Seasons* archives, particularly the following:

- "Drama for Easter Sunrise," (J. Ballenger, *Journey into Hope, Lent 1998, page 12*)
- "A Monologue for Easter Morning" (K. Cook and D. B. Pate, *Journey into Servanthood, Lent 1999, page 20*)
- "Practicing Resurrection: A Service of Word and Table for Eastertide," (D. Ripley, *How Can We Sing the Lord's Song in a Foreign Land?, Lent 2003, page 18*)
- "With Our Own Eyes: Seven Monologues," (Monologues based on seven resurrection appearances in the New Testament, C. Goolsby, K. Scott and K. Cook, *Extravagant Love, Lent 2009, page 19*)
- "The Women Went That Morning: A Hymn for Easter Sunday," (a hymn for Year B by J. Ballenger, *Glorious Quest, Lent 2001, page 25*)
- "Were You There? A Celebration for Easter Morning," (drama by A. Baker and A. Mears, *What Does It Mean to Follow This Man?, Lent 2006, page 18*)
- "Room for Doubt: A Sermon for the Second Sunday of Easter," (B. Younger, *Seeking the Face of God, Lent 2004, page 20*)

You will find these and other resources at www.seedspublishers.org, under "Worship" and "Lent/Eastertide." Also, Keith Sanford, a psychology professor at Baylor University by day, has offered a song called "Branches" for your use. Go to www.SanfordSpace.com and look for the song by that name. Keith says the music is a variant of "Be Thou My Vision."

We are deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work. We are also grateful for the many people who contributed their work and ideas to this packet.

As always, 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 these materials will help you in leading your congregation into a holy Lenten season and a joyous Eastertide.

—Gratefully,
The Seeds Staff and Council of Stewards

Always Just Out of Sight

by Katie Cook

*M*y church has produced a version of the Seeds “Easter Walk” for probably 15 years now. The Easter Walk is a series of scenes, primarily designed for children, with monologues from characters who witnessed key events in the last week of Jesus’ ministry.

As the children are guided from scene to scene, they have just missed Jesus, and they are told about the events by witnesses from the entry into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the Temple, the Last Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, all the way to the empty tomb on Sunday morning. (*You can find all 12 of these monologues, plus monologues about the seven resurrection appearances from the Gospels, at the Seeds web site under “worship.”*)

Some of those children, who are now young adults in the church, recently confessed to me that they had felt a little frustrated that they never got to see Jesus, that they had just missed him at every scene. At first I felt guilty and chagrined, and then I started really thinking about that experience.

Perhaps that’s what we all feel, most of the time. Jesus is always just out of sight, something we saw out of the corner of our eyes, a flicker of something beautiful on which we couldn’t quite focus.

But we know something—someone—wonderful was there. We know because the world is somehow changed after that flicker is gone. We see the foam on the water that has been troubled. We see footprints. We feel movement in the trees. We see and feel flashes of beauty, rumors of glory, glimpses of grace.

But how do we know what it was? How do we know *who* it was?

John the Baptist, imprisoned by Herod Antipas, wondered the same thing. He sent some of his disciples to Jesus to ask, “Are you the one I have been preaching about? Or has my preaching been in vain? Are you

really the one we have been waiting for? Or has my ministry been for nothing?”

We wonder, “Was that experience from God? Is our preaching in vain? Jesus, is that you? Are you really the one?”

Jesus’ answer to John’s disciples—like many of his answers—was cryptic. He said to those men, “What have you seen? What have you heard?” And then he reeled off a litany of healing events.

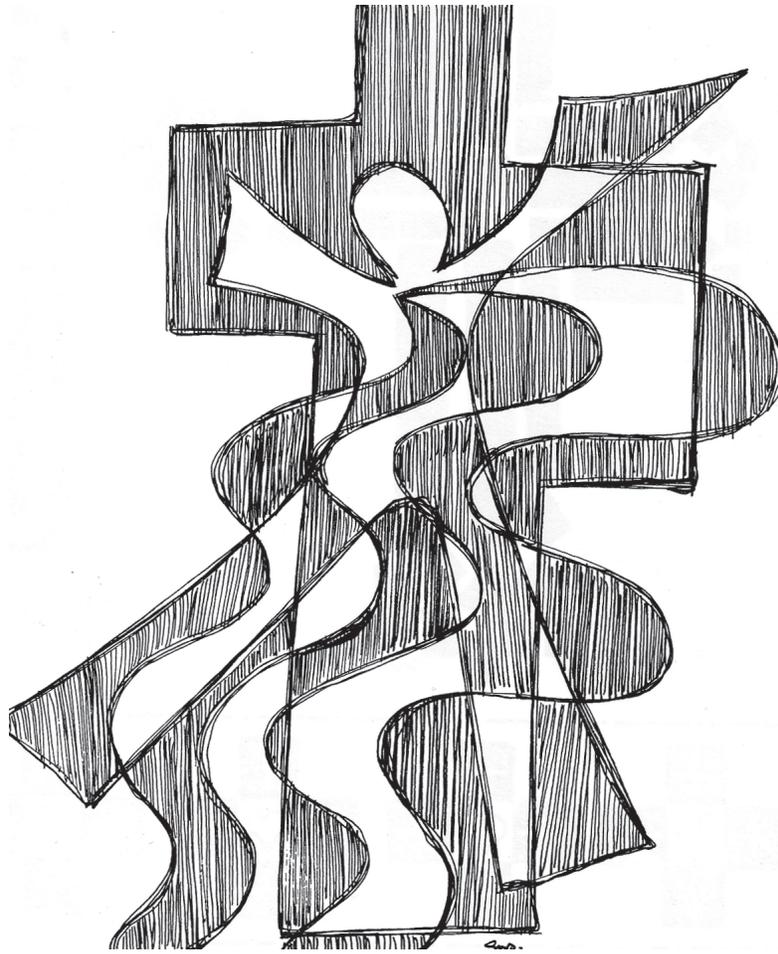
“People who had their eyes closed can now see,” he said. “People who were not able to walk are walking. People who were devastated by disease are healed in body and mind. People whose ears were closed can now hear. People who were dead are alive again. The good news is being proclaimed to the poor.”

People who were not whole (which is all of us) are being healed. The poor have hope for the first time. That’s how you know I am the one.

As we journey through this packet, our goal is that we will find those holy places and point them out to each other. We hope to journey together and listen to the stories of healing. We will see together those glimpses of grace. We will try to open our eyes and ears, come alive again, and listen for the good news of God’s reign. If we do this, perhaps we will experience together a meaningful Lent and emerge into a glorious Eastertide. —lkc



art by Susan Daily



art by Susan Daily,

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.

It was not a conclusion that I came to in time. It was a conclusion from beyond time that came to me. God knows I have never been any good at following the road it pointed me to, but at least, by grace, I glimpsed the road and saw that it is the only one worth traveling.

—Frederick Buechner,
The Sacred Journey

Lenten Glimpses: A Gracious Discipline

by Cameron Watts

This is an invitation to give up novelty for Lent and let wonder fill its place.
Here are six weekly undertakings to open ourselves to wonder.

*A Creature is not a Creator, and cannot be.
There is only one Creation, and we are its members.
Works of pride, by self-called creators, with their
premium on originality,
reduce the Creation to novelty—
the faint surprise of minds incapable of wonder.
—from the poem “What Are People For?”
by Wendell Berry*

Week 4:

Hang up the phone and go and sit in the living room of someone you haven't seen for six months.

Week 1:

For a season, deny the distractions of 4G and LTE and Gorilla Glass and Near Field Communication¹ and looking at the world through a lens, and notice some new things in your neighbourhood.

Week 5:

Turn off the news for a whole day and sit and write a paragraph about a grace-filled moment in your life.

Week 2:

For a season, stop watching cooking shows on TV and eat a pot of oatmeal that took at least 30 minutes to cook and a batch of applesauce made from Spys² from the cooler of a local orchard.

Week 6:

Take the batteries out of your Wii Fit or your Xbox Kinect,³ find some friends and an empty church basement and a fiddler and drummer and caller and have a Ceilidh.⁴

Week 3:

Eschew the car's heated seats, get up 20 minutes earlier and walk a new way to work.

Footnotes

1. These are all up-to-the-minute mobile-phone technologies.
2. These are highly appreciated apples in southwestern Ontario.
3. These are interactive, video-game exercise programs.
4. A Ceilidh, or *céilidh*, (pronounced KAY-ley) is a Gaelic social gathering with folk music, singing, dancing and often storytelling.

—Cam Watts is the pastor of Aylmer Baptist Church in southern Ontario, and a frequent contributor to Sacred Seasons. Art on this page is by Lenora Mathis.

Lent Is Upon Us

Calls to Worship for Ash Wednesday

by Ken Sehested

Editor's note: These readings were originally written for the first Sunday in Lent, but we have adapted them for Ash Wednesday. The second section can be a call to a Wednesday evening meal or to communion preceding the imposition of ashes. The service can be done by two readers, or by a reader and congregation.

Call to Worship

FIRST READER: The season of Lent is upon us. Listen for your instructions!

SECOND READER: Now is the time to flee Pharaoh's national security state for the insecurity of the wilderness.

FIRST READER: Now is the time to listen for the Word, whose hearing bypasses the ears of princes and high priests but is heard only in the wilderness.

SECOND READER: Now is the time to head into the wilderness to confront the Deceiver, led by the Spirit and sustained only by angels.

FIRST READER: Fear not, for God will sustain you. Your clothes will not wear out, your feet will not swell. God will feed you with manna and will bring water from the rock.

FIRST & SECOND READERS: We look to the wilderness! For there the Glory of God shall appear!

Call to the Table

FIRST READER: The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness, and we tremble.

SECOND READER: Why have you led us from the prosperous land of shopping and shiny plastic things and homeland security to this discomfiting and inconvenient place?

FIRST READER: To here, where our wanton craving is exposed?

SECOND READER: To here, where the misery of the world is no longer distant or hidden?

FIRST READER: To here, where water is scarce, food insecure, shelter foreclosed and the future uninsured?

SECOND READER: To here, where banks fail, investments shrink and terror threatens?

FIRST READER: Can God spread a table in the wilderness?

SECOND READER: These are the questions we bring to your table, O Christ. Faith and fear alike wrestle over our hearts. We believe; help us in our unbelief.

Call to the Wearing of Ashes

FIRST READER: A voice cries out, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

SECOND READER: "I am about to do a new thing!" says the Beloved. "Do you not perceive it?"

FIRST READER: God will comfort all your wasted places. You will find joy and gladness, thanksgiving and songs of delight.

SECOND READER: Come, oh people of mercy. Come into the desert to find the One your heart most desires. Worship in the wilderness. You will find what is needed: sustenance for your soul and nourishment for your body. Though your feet be tired, your heart will find rest.

—These readings were written by Ken Sehested for a worship service at the Circle of Mercy in Asheville, NC, where he serves as co-pastor.

art by Susan Daily,

Readings & Hymns for Ash Wednesday

art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

Editor's note: For a complete Ash Wednesday service, please go www.seedspublishers.org, and look under "worship" for the following, or email seedseditor@clearwire.net 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. See below for the "matching" Maundy Thursday service.)

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

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

Hymn

"What Was Your Vow and Vision"

Text: Brian Wren, 1975, rev. 1994

Music: *Southern Harmony*, 1835,
harm. Hal H. Hopson, 1986

Tune: COMPLAINER

Chalice Hymnal # 177

(c. Hope Publishing Company)

Reading from the Psalms

Psalms 51:1-17

Hymn

"O God of Earth and Altar"

Text: stanzas 1-2, G. K. Chesterton, 1906;
stanza 3, Jean Parker Huber, 1985

Music: Welsh folk melody

Tune: LLANGLOFFAN

Chalice Hymnal #724

(c. stanza 3: Jane Parker Huber, *A Singing Faith*)

Reading from the Epistles

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Reading from the Gospel

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

A Prayer for the Brink of Lent

by Katie Cook

God, how well we remember
the celebrations of last year—
the hopes and dreams
and wild expectations
that we dared to allow in our hearts.
And now, how troubled
we are to recall our failures!
We have not lived up
to our own expectations.
We have not measured up to your call.
The world has not been healed.
There is no peace.
The poor are still hungry.
Our dreams have burned to the ground.
The songs and carols of Advent and Christmas
brought a brief respite
from the darkness,
but now we stand on the brink of Lent.
We are weary and frustrated.
We are fearful of what
you might now ask us to do.
Help us to bring today
the ashes of our dreams,
and present them to you
for transformation.

Go Tell John...

by Ken Sehested

Text: Matthew 11:1-6

As followers of Jesus in the world today, it is not our purpose to raise up prophets. The prophets are already in place. Tens of thousands of them are scattered across the globe, sometimes in the most unlikely places; sometimes in places whose names are hard to pronounce and whose suffering rarely appears in the news.

These prophets have not forgotten the ancient stories of redemption and promises of deliverance, stories made new by the power of the Spirit even in our day, stories that speak of a new and different future, of the coming new heaven and new earth.

But prophets get tired. Disciples get weary. Followers of the Way are tempted to sing the song of resignation: "O Lord, I've made you a place in my heart, and I hope now you'll leave it alone."¹

Sometimes our knees grow weak and our hearts grow faint. Sometimes our vision grows dim and our resolve wavers. Sometimes we simply want Jesus to leave us alone.

The prophets, like the great Elijah, get frightened by the King Ahabs and the Queen Jezebels of this age.

Prophets get weary. No one listens. No one pays attention. The devil has every appearance of being in charge. Every day brings more evidence that the market is rigged, that when the rich wage war it is the poor that die, that even the cries of persistent widows fail to reach corrupt judges.

The daily news is saturated with evidence that the world's Pharaohs and Herods are still in control, that truth is bartered to the highest bidder, that the wicked will forever prosper,

that the land itself shall always be enslaved to ravage, ruin and robbery.

Daily we are bombarded with fresh reminders that Naboth's vineyard will never be secure from imperial greed; that the lame will never be permitted in Caiaphas' temple; that we will never know the name of the tortured, raped and murdered woman in Judges 19, that her cries will never be heard.

All of these cries carry the voice of Jesus, who will not leave our hearts alone.

Some of you know the African-American spiritual, "Balm in Gilead," with this line, "Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain. But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again."

Oh, yes, there is a balm in Gilead, and one of the ways we enjoy it is when we gather, to learn each other's names and hear each other's stories. There are a lot more of us out there than anybody knows, and we need to find more ways to stay connected, to instruct and encourage each other,

sometimes to argue with each other, because it's not just the world that refuses to listen—sometimes our churches refuse to listen as well.

Sometimes the very communities that baptized us—who heard our promises to renounce every Caesar's rule in favor of the Reign of God—sometimes even they fail to understand. Sometimes we realize that we didn't understand fully what we were saying when we vowed to follow Jesus. Sometimes we realize that we still don't fully understand it.

The text for this sermon is a little disturbing. Being



art by Susan Daily,

disturbed is always necessary to being delivered, just like labor comes before birth. Being confused is often the first step toward being converted. I hate to tell you this, but that little place in your heart that you made for Jesus—he's not going to leave it alone.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus has been teaching and healing when, suddenly, the narrative is interrupted by the arrival of two men, two disciples of John the Baptizer.

(You remember John. Earlier in Matthew's gospel, as Jesus began his public ministry, he was baptized by John. The same John, who, when he saw Jesus, said, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John, who first resisted, saying to Jesus, "It is I who need to be baptized by you." John, who preached "The one who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry.")

John had been a great vexation to the tetrarch Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee and Perea. John was now in Herod's prison. From the lonely isolation of that dark, dank prison cell, he began to question his earlier confirmation of Jesus as the Anointed One. Jesus wasn't sticking to the plan. Something was amiss here; something was not quite right. Can't you hear John talking to himself in that dungeon of doubt: "Could I have gotten it wrong?"

The story of Jesus is always disturbing. Jesus had previously warned the disciples about the inevitable conflict they would face. In Matthew 10, he said, "I have come not to bring peace, but a sword." This seems to contradict Jesus' message of peace in other places.

But perhaps Paul understood the paradox. In Romans 12, he writes, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves...." And then, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them" (vv. 19-20). The refusal of vengeance—and the feeding of enemies—are treasonous in the eyes of every empire.

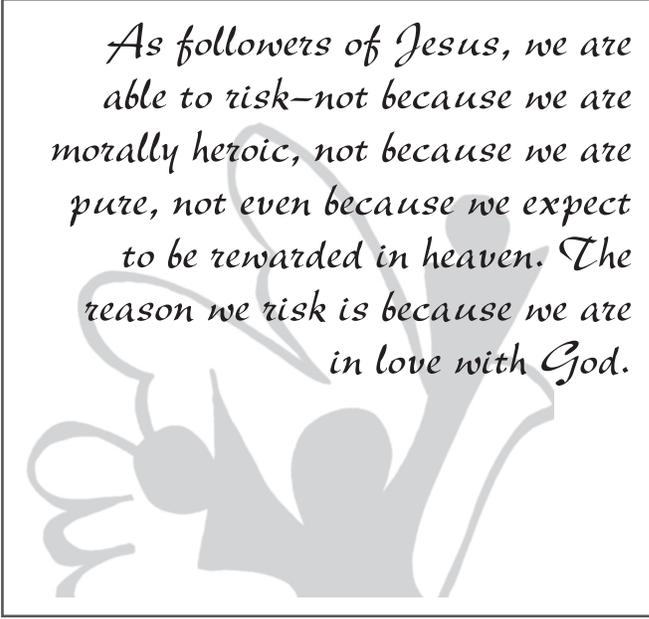
When I was in high school, I spent many Saturdays working at Cagle's Amoco gas station. For 12 hours I worked, pumping gasoline, doing oil changes and washing cars. I still have a vivid memory of coming into work early one morning. Mr. Cagle had just arrived. As we busied ourselves getting ready, a news report came on the radio, with a story about Martin Luther King, Jr. I don't recall any details. Some conflict of one kind or another.

Then Mr. Cagle muttered his disgust, loud enough for me to hear. "That Martin Luther King, he ain't no Christian. Everywhere he goes he causes

trouble." It would be many years before it occurred to me that you could say the same thing about Jesus.

Peacemaking can get you into trouble.

I recall my first trip to South Africa, during the apartheid regime. I was stunned to find out that



As followers of Jesus, we are able to risk—not because we are morally heroic, not because we are pure, not even because we expect to be rewarded in heaven. The reason we risk is because we are in love with God.

the word "reconciliation" was a bad word. Not for the white minority rulers, but for those seeking change. What I finally realized is that, in that context, "reconciliation" had come to mean "Once you get reconciled to the fact that we're on top, and you're on the bottom, then we'll have peace."

Or at least we'll have quiet. Unfortunately, not everything that's quiet is peaceful. During the 1980s, one Latin American military dictator was asked by a reporter if he was willing to offer peace terms to the insurgent leaders in his country. "Yes," he said with a laugh, "we will offer them peace. We will offer them the peace of the sepulcher." The peace of the graveyard.

The early Christian community in Rome was not persecuted because they confessed Jesus as Lord. The Roman Empire was actually very enlightened in some ways. They offered freedom of religion to the many peoples they conquered. The reason Christians were persecuted was that, when they said "Jesus is Lord," they meant "Caesar is *not* Lord." And that makes a world of difference.

No one's empire minds if you create a little place in your heart for Jesus. The empire doesn't mind your religious decorations, just as long as it doesn't conflict with economic policies and military planning.

There is a fierce ideological struggle going on the gospel accounts of Jesus' birth. It comes through in Mary's song of praise, which prophesies that God has "shattered the proud" and "put down the mighty," "filled the hungry with good things, and the sent the rich away empty-handed" (Luke 1:51-53).

*Being disturbed is always
necessary to being delivered, just
like labor comes before birth.
Being confused is often the first
step toward being converted.*

We sometimes forget the backdrop to the nativity story, particularly of the great Caesar Augustus, who ruled the known world. Many inscriptions describing Caesar's divine status can still be found. There you can read about the "gospel"—literally, *euaggelia*, the same root word in Greek we Christians use when we speak of evangelism.

In Rome's imperial world, "gospel" was the good news of Caesar's having established "peace and security for the world." Before Jesus, Caesar was described as the "savior" who brought "salvation" to the world. Because of this, citizens were to have "faith" in their "lord"—the words "faith" and "Lord" are the same ones in the Jesus stories. Elsewhere, Caesar is referred to as a "redeemer" who has "saved the world" from war and established "peace on the earth."²

Do you see where this is going? Can you feel the sharp relief of those nativity stories, rising from the ornamental rendering we give them each Christmas?

The birth narratives are more than sweet lullabies. These are incendiary stories. They are bold contradictions to Roman imperial authority. No wonder Herod the Great was troubled when the magi told him of the birth of a new king!

One of my favorite quotes is from the American novelist Flannery O'Connor, when she paraphrased a line from John's Gospel: "You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you *odd*." The *peace* we are

promised is the *Peace of Christ—Pax Christi*, and it is forever at odds with the *peace of Rome—Pax Romana*. (Or, for that matter, of *Pax Americana*.)

There is something real at stake in the struggle for faith. In the words of Clarence Jordan, "Faith is not belief in spite of the evidence. Faith is life lived in scorn of the consequences." Theology doesn't just go through the head. First, it makes blisters on your feet and calluses on your hands.

Years ago, my family went camping with some friends in the Ozark Mountains. One of those friends, an experienced climber, brought along his ropes in case any of us wanted to try repelling. Do you know about repelling? Basically, it means dangling from a rope and walking backward down the sheer side of a mountain cliff.

The whole time I was getting strapped in, my friend kept saying, "This really is very safe...this is very safe." So I kept saying that to myself: *this is safe, this is safe*—until I got to the edge of the cliff, and then everything in me screamed out, "THIS IS NOT VERY SAFE!!!"

The thing is, you can't be absolutely certain that the rope will hold. You can check and make sure the rope is strong; you can make sure the rope is securely anchored; you can make sure the harness isn't frayed or the metal clip isn't cracked. After a while, though, you either lean back over the edge, or you don't.

Faith—Godly reverence, the decision to follow Jesus—is like that. Reverence is not a series of intellectual affirmations, or a pattern of piety and religious practices. The indicator of reverence is risk. As followers of Jesus, we are able to risk—not because we are morally heroic, not because we are pure, not even because we expect to be rewarded in heaven. The reason we risk is because we are in love with God.

As the angels sang to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock, "Glory, to God; peace, to the earth" (Luke 2:14). To glorify God, seek peace for the earth.

When John sat shivering in Herod's prison, he wondered about this promise of peace. *Had it been wishful thinking? A utopian fantasy? Childish make-believe?*

Which is why he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one, or shall we look for another?"

Do you remember Jesus' response?

Did Jesus answer in words that are now framed in the Nicene Creed? "I am the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten,

that is, from the essence of the Father, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father....”

Did he respond with the words of the Apostles’ Creed? “I am the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary. I will be crucified, dead, buried... and on the third day I will ascend into heaven to sit on the right hand of God....”

Jesus could have saved us a lot of trouble if he’d picked one of those creeds. We could have been spared a lot of hangings and drownings and burnings at the stake, not to mention inquisitions and church splits and seminary-faculty firings.

But he didn’t. This text is the most extensive Christological statement we have from the mouth of Jesus. Instead of resorting to philosophical abstractions, what he said was fleshly, incarnate: “Go tell John what you see and hear: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.”

Sisters and brothers, the first thing we need to do is to go tell John—go remind the folk who baptized you—where to look for *Pax Christi*, for the peace of Christ. *Go tell John.*

Go tell John, and Mary, too: The blind are being hired as wilderness travel guides. And the lame have signed up for ballroom dancing classes. *Go tell John!*

Go tell John, and Mary, too: The lepers are parading down the fashion circuit’s hottest runways in Milan and Paris. And the deaf are harmonizing over in Rome’s opera house. *Go tell John!*

Go tell John, and Mary, too: The dead have kicked off the coffin lid and put obituary writers out of business. The poor have food in the pantry and cash in their pocket. *Go tell John!*

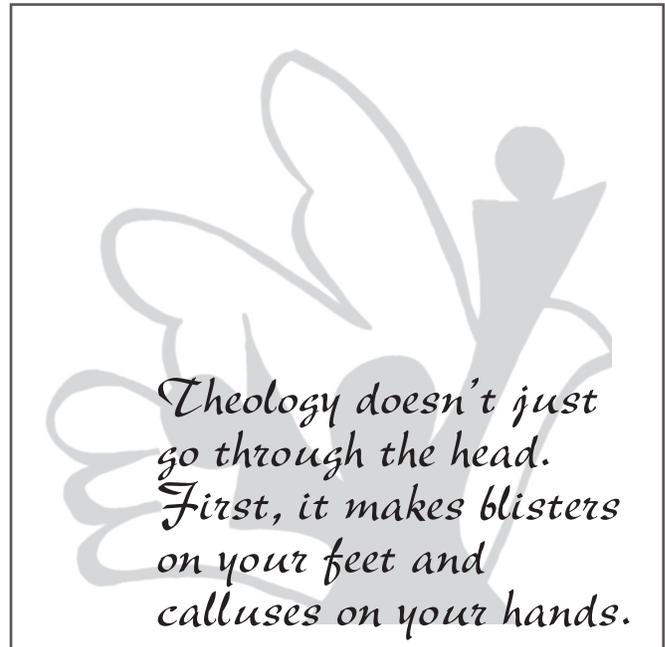
Sisters and brothers, this is the Gospel of our Lord: The grace of God is slowly saturating our lives. Not as some kind of special religious emotion, not as some abstract creedal statement, not as some particular habits of piety. Grace is freeing us to be fearless! And because of this fearlessness we are free to revere those whom the empires revile, those whom the superpowers neglect.

Go tell John: We are free to care for those who are useless to the world’s political establishments and economic systems. Neither Rome nor Washington can threaten us anymore; King Herod’s regime cannot take anything from us that is essential.

From this confidence we can pray as Jesus taught us: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth

as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Because one day, according to John’s Revelation, “The kingdom of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord” (11:15).

Go tell John, and Mary, too. The grace of God is disarming our hearts and will, in time, disarm the



nations. The day is coming, says the salmist, when we “shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (27:13). *Go tell John.*

Go tell John, and Mary, too, that the mark of Heaven’s vision is when wolf and lamb lie together (Isaiah 11:6), when justice rolls down like waters, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24). On that day shame will be turned to praise (Zephaniah 3:19), the poor will be lifted from the ash heap (1 Samuel 2:8), and immigrants will be welcomed (Malachi 3:5). *Go tell John.*

Go tell John, and Mary, too, that one day slaves will be released, debts will be canceled, ancestral lands will be returned (Leviticus 25) and all shall sit, unafraid, beneath their vine and fig tree (Micah 4:4). One day, Paul says in Romans, creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay (8:22). Tears will be dried (Revelation 21:4). The bows of the mighty will be broken (1 Samuel 2:4). Swords will be beaten into plowshares (Micah 4:3). *Go tell John.*

Go tell John, and Mary, too, that on that glorious day of disarmament, on that day when justice and peace will embrace (Psalm 85:10), we shall all meet again on the banks of that great river; and there we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside. Sing with me: *I’m gonna lay down my*

sword and shield, down by the riverside, down by the riverside....

—Ken Sehested is co-pastor of the Circle of Mercy in Asheville, NC. This sermon is adapted from one he preached at the Global Baptist Peace Conference in Rome, Italy in February 2009.

Endnotes

1. "Oh Lord, I've Made You a Place in My Heart," music and lyrics by Greg Brown, sung by Dar Williams, Richard Shindell and Lucy Kaplansky

from the "Cry, Cry, Cry" album, Razor and Tie label, 1998.

2. See "Longing from Below," by Ken Sehested in the Sacred Seasons packet "Dance of Deliverance" (Advent 2011, page 6). For more about this subject, see Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003, pp. 133-134 Press. See also John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007, pp. 28, 108, 117, 148, 204.

To John the Baptizer

by Ken Sehested

John. Such a tame name for a man born to inhabit the wild side of heaven's incursion into earth's contempt. You startle children with your leather-girdled, camel-haired attire, hot breath calling the devout into the Jordan's penitential wake. What brings you and your honey-smear'd beard into such a barren land?

Spirit-drenched baptizer of repentant flesh, exposing hearts to the advent of mercy, announcing dawn's infiltration of destiny's dark corner.

Witness to the Spirit-dove's descent, confirming Elizabeth's praise, Mary's assent and Messiah's demand for the hills to bow and the valleys to heave.

Declaring the baptism of fire by the One to come, by refiner's flame, fully pleasing to God and just as surely frightful to all who devise deceit and sponsor carnage.

The Baptizer's bargain is this: Enter these waters at the risk of all self-absorbed living. You've nothing to lose but frail fear.

A certain drowning is required for lungs to receive Breath from above on wings of a dove.

There's no getting right with God. There's only getting soaked.

So wade in the water. Don't mind the mud. For God's gonna trouble that cleansing flood.

—This meditation was written by Ken Sehested for a worship service at the Circle of Mercy in Asheville, NC, where he serves as co-pastor.



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

First Sunday in Lent: Open Our Eyes

Reading for Three, Part 1

NARRATOR: Early in his ministry, Jesus went around Galilee, speaking to crowds, teaching them and healing them, and he even stopped a storm on the great sea. One day, he was in Capernaum with his disciples, and he had already healed several people. Two blind men followed him, crying out to him,

FIRST READER: Have mercy on us, Son of David!

NARRATOR: Then he went into the house where they were. They came up to him. And Jesus said to them,

SECOND READER: Do you believe that I am able to do this?

NARRATOR: They said to him,

FIRST READER: Yes, Lord.

NARRATOR: Then he touched their eyes and said,

SECOND READER: Your eyes will be opened because of your faith in me.

NARRATOR: And their eyes *were* opened. Another time, Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, and Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus was sitting by the roadside. Bartimaeus couldn't see. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth coming by, he began to shout out and say,

FIRST READER: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!

NARRATOR: Many told him to be quiet, but this just made him cry out more loudly,

FIRST READER: Son of David, have mercy on me!

NARRATOR: Jesus stopped walking. He said,

SECOND READER: Call him here.

NARRATOR: And they called to Bartimaeus, telling him that Jesus wanted to talk to him. So, throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and walked up to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him,

SECOND READER: What do you want me to do for you?

NARRATOR: The blind man said to him,

FIRST READER: My teacher, let me see again.

NARRATOR: Jesus said to him,

SECOND READER: Go; your faith has made you well.

NARRATOR: Immediately he regained his sight and followed Jesus as he left Jericho.

Reading for Three, Part 2

SECOND READER (to the congregation): Do you believe that I am able to do this? Do you believe that I can make you see?

CONGREGATION: Lord, we have closed our eyes to the beauty of your world. We have closed our eyes to the needs of your people. We have closed the eyes of our hearts, so that we cannot see your love for us. We cannot see to follow you.

SECOND READER: Your faith has opened your eyes. Go, and look upon my world. Go, and look upon the needs of my people. Look within your hearts and see my love for you. And come, follow me.

CONGREGATION: Heal us, Lord, and we shall be healed.

—from *Matthew 9:27-30a; Mark 10:46-52*

Suggested Hymns

"Open My Eyes, That I May See"

Text and Music: Clara H. Scott, 1895

Tune: OPEN MY EYES

Chalice Hymnal #586 (c. Chalice Press)

"God, Give Us Eyes and Hearts to See"

Text: Jane Parker Huber, 1982

Music from *The English Hymnal*

Tune: *Lasst Uns Erfreuen*, arranged by Ralph

Vaughn Williams

Oxford University Press

A Singing Faith #24

Lectionary Readings

First Sunday in Lent

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalm 25:1-10

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:9-15

Second Sunday in Lent:

Help Us to Walk in Your Way

Reading for Three, Part 1

NARRATOR: Jesus was on the side of the Sea of Galilee, in the land of the Gadarenes, and healed people there. Then he got into a boat and crossed the sea again to Capernaum, where he had made his home since the time in which John (his kinsman who baptized him) was arrested.

FIRST READER: After he had been in town several days, word got out that he was at home. So many people gathered there that there was no room, not even in front of the door. Jesus was speaking to the crowd.

NARRATOR: Then some people came, bringing a man who was paralyzed. He was being carried on a mat by four of them. When they couldn't get in because of the crowd, they dug through the roof, and let down the mat—with the man lying on it! When Jesus saw the faith these people had, he said to the man,

SECOND READER: Take heart, my son. Your sins are forgiven.

NARRATOR: Another time, there was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went to Jerusalem to attend it. In Jerusalem there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha. The people believed that the water there, when they were stirred up, could heal all kinds of illness. Some believed that an angel would come from time to time and stir the water.

FIRST READER: The pool has five porticoes. There were many people there who had physical problems. Some of them were blind, some couldn't walk and some were paralyzed.

NARRATOR: One man was there who had been ill for 38 years. Jesus saw him lying there, and he knew that he had been there a long time. He said to him,

SECOND READER: Do you want to be made well?

NARRATOR ONE: The sick man answered him,

FIRST READER: Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way to it, someone else always steps down ahead of me.

NARRATOR: Jesus said to him,

READER TWO: Stand up, take your mat and walk.

NARRATOR: At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Reading for Three, Part 2

SECOND READER (to congregation): Do you want to be made well? Do you want to walk in the way that I walk?

CONGREGATION: Lord, we want to walk in your way. We want to follow you. But we cannot do it by ourselves.

SECOND READER: Then come, stand up, take up your mats, and follow me.

CONGREGATION: Come to us Lord, and teach us how to walk.

—from *Matthew 9:1-7, Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26, John 5:1-9*

Suggested Hymns

"O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee"

Text: Washington Gladden, 1879

Music: Henry Percy Smith, 1874

Tune: MARYTON

Chalice Hymnal # 602

"Your Hands, O Lord, in Days of Old"

Text: Edward H. Plumpre, 1866

Music: W. Gawler's *Hymns & Psalms*, 1789

Tune: ST. MICHAEL'S

Hope Publishing Company

The Worshipping Church #409

Lectionary Readings

Second Sunday in Lent

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalms 22:23-25

Romans 4:13-25

Mark 8:31-38 or Mark 9:2-9

Third Sunday in Lent: Make Us Whole

Reading for Three, Part 1

NARRATOR: Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching and healing, and great crowds began to follow him, from the Decapolis, Jerusalem, all of Judea and from beyond the Jordan River. Jesus had gone up to a mountain, where he taught the crowds many things. When he came down from the mountain, the huge crowds still followed him. In this multitude was a man who had leprosy, a disease that caused him to suffer physically and to be horribly shunned by all of the people. The man made his way to Jesus, knelt on the ground and said,

FIRST READER: Lord, if you choose, you can free me from this disease.

NARRATOR: Jesus reached out his hand to the man, and touched him.

SECOND READER: I do choose. Be well.

NARRATOR: Immediately, the man was well. At another time, Jesus was traveling between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten people came toward him. They all were suffering from leprosy, so they were required to stay away from other people. They called out to Jesus,

FIRST READER: Master, have mercy on us!

NARRATOR: Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priests. As they turned and began to do this, they realized that they were free of the disease. One of them, who was a Samaritan, turned back and began shouting in joy. He fell down at Jesus' feet and thanked him. Jesus said,

SECOND READER: Where are the others? Is this foreigner the only one who will return and thank me?

NARRATOR: But to the man, he said,

SECOND READER: Get up and go on your way. Your faith has made you well.

Reading for Three, Part 2

SECOND READER (to congregation): Where are those who have been healed?

CONGREGATION: We do not know. We only know we have been sick and broken, and we believe that you can make us whole.

SECOND READER: Then go on your way, and remember what has made you well.

CONGREGATION: Heal us, Lord, and we shall be healed.

—from *Matthew 8:1-3, Mark 1:40-42, Luke 17:11-19*

Suggested Hymns

"Hope of the World"

Text: Georgia Harkness, 1954

Music: V. Earle Copes, 1963

Tune: VICAR

Words c. The Hymn Society / Hope Publishing Company

Music c. The United Methodist Publishing House
Chalice Hymnal #538

"Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated"

Words: Frances R. Havergal, 1874

Music: Henri A. César Malan, 1827

Tune: Hendon

c. Hope Publishing Company

The Worshiping Church #568

Lectionary Texts

Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 20:1-17

Psalms 19

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

John 2:13-22



Fourth Sunday in Lent: Give Us Ears to Hear and Hearts to Sing

Reading for Three, Part 1

NARRATOR: Jesus was in the region of Tyre, and he traveled back toward the Sea of Galilee, by way of Sidon, in the region of the Decapolis. The people were still following him and bringing sick people to him.

FIRST READER: Some of them brought to him a man who could not hear or speak, and they begged Jesus to lay his hand on the man. Jesus took him aside, away from the crowd, and put his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said,

SECOND READER: Be opened.

NARRATOR: Immediately the man's ears were opened, and he began speaking plainly. Even though Jesus told the people not to tell anyone what had happened, they spoke of it everywhere. The more he told them not to, the more they did it. They said,

FIRST READER: He can do anything. He can even make people hear and speak when they weren't able to do it before.

NARRATOR: Right after Jesus went onto the mountain with Peter, James and John, they came down and found a great argument going on. There was a boy who suffered from great seizures. His father said,

FIRST READER: He has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.

NARRATOR: Jesus said,

SECOND READER: How much longer must I put up with you people? Bring him to me.

NARRATOR: The boy began having a seizure and rolled on the ground. Jesus said,

SECOND READER: How long has this been happening to him?

NARRATOR: And the father said,

FIRST READER: From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us."

NARRATOR: Jesus said,

SECOND READER: All things can be done for the one who believes.

NARRATOR: The father of the child cried out,

FIRST READER: I believe; help my unbelief!

NARRATOR: Then Jesus said,

SECOND READER: You—spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing—I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!

NARRATOR: The boy had a great convulsion and was lying on the ground like a corpse. The people thought he was dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand.

Reading for Three, Part 2

SECOND READER (to the congregation): Anything can be done for you if you believe. Do you believe?

CONGREGATION: Lord, we believe sometimes, but it is hard to believe all the time.

continued on page 18

SECOND READER: I know the spirit within you that keeps you from hearing and speaking. I can open your ears and your mouths.

CONGREGATION: Help us, Lord, to hear your voice and speak your truth.

—from Mark 7: 31-35, 9:14-27

Suggested Hymns

“I Will Sing the Mercies of the Lord”

Text and Music: James H. Fillmore (early 20th century)

Tune: FILLMORE

Chalice Hymnal #87

“Heal Us, Immanuel, Hear Our Prayer”

Text: Willam Cowper, 1779

Music: John B. Dykes, 1875

Tune: BEATITUDO

Hope Publishing Company

The Worshiping Church #411

Lectionary Readings

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Numbers 21:4-9

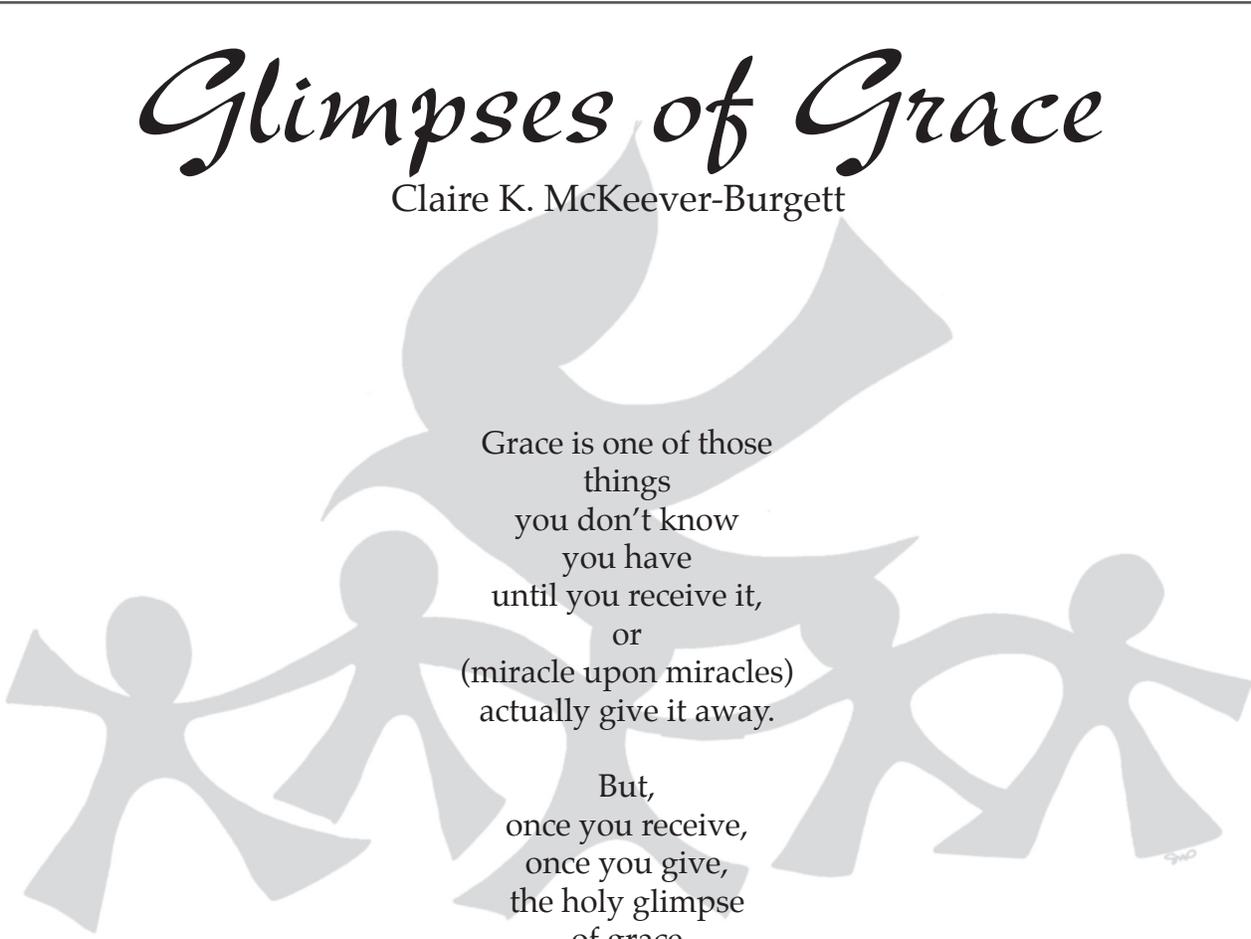
Psalms 107:1-3, 17-22

Ephesians 2:1-10

John 3:14-21

Glimpses of Grace

Claire K. McKeever-Burgett



Grace is one of those things
you don't know
you have
until you receive it,
or
(miracle upon miracles)
actually give it away.

But,
once you receive,
once you give,
the holy glimpse
of grace
reminds you what it is
to live as a graced and
gracing people;
to live as the people
of God.

—Claire McKeever-Burgett is Associate Pastor of Northminster Baptist Church in Monroe, LA, a former *Seeds of Hope* intern and a frequent contributor to *Sacred Seasons*.

art by Susan Daily

Fifth Sunday in Lent:

Raise Us to New Life

Reading for Three, Part 1

NARRATOR: Jesus was by the sea again, and a great crowd was once again gathered around him, when Jairus, a leader of the synagogue came to him. Jairus fell at his feet and said,

FIRST READER: My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.

NARRATOR: So Jesus went with him, and the crowd followed them. Along the way, Jesus stopped, and said,

SECOND READER: Who touched me?

NARRATOR: People were astounded, because a great many people were pressing in on him. But he felt a power going out from him to someone. A woman in the crowd fell down before him and confessed that she had touched the end of his cloak. She had been suffering from hemorrhages for 12 years. She had been to many doctors, but no one could help her. She had thought that, if she could only touch him, she would be well.

FIRST READER: As soon as she touched him, she knew that she had been healed. Jesus said,

SECOND READER: Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.

NARRATOR: While this was happening, people came from Jairus' house, saying that his daughter was dead. Jesus said to Jairus,

SECOND READER: Do not fear, only believe.

NARRATOR: He would not allow anyone to go with him except Peter, James and John. When they came to the house, people were weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said,

SECOND READER: Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping.

FIRST READER: They laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and

mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her,

SECOND READER: Little girl, get up!

NARRATOR: Immediately the girl, who was 12 years old, got up and began to walk around. They were overcome with amazement.

FIRST READER: Another time, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When Jesus saw her, he said,

SECOND READER: Do not weep.

NARRATOR: Then Jesus came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said,

SECOND READER: Young man, I say to you, rise!

NARRATOR: The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. And all the people said,

FIRST READER: A great prophet has risen among us!

Reading for Three, Part 1

SECOND READER (to the congregation): Why are you weeping?

CONGREGATION: We live in the midst of death.

SECOND READER: Do not be afraid. You need only to believe.

continued on page 20

CONGREGATION: We are fearful. We need for you to bring us out of our lives of fear and death. Heal us, Lord, and bring us to new life.

—Luke 7:11-16, Mark 5:21-43

Suggested Hymns

"The Strife is O'er"

Text: Latin, 1695, tr. Francis Pott, 1861

Music: Giovanni P. da Palestrina, 1591,

adapt. William Henry Monk, 1861

Tune: VICTORY

Chalice Hymnal #221

"O God of Vision"

Text: Jane Parker Huber, 1981

Music: Stralsund Gesangbuch, 1665
arr. in *Praxis Pietatis Melia*, 1669

Tune: LOBE DEN HERREN

A Singing Faith # 17

Lectionary Readings

for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

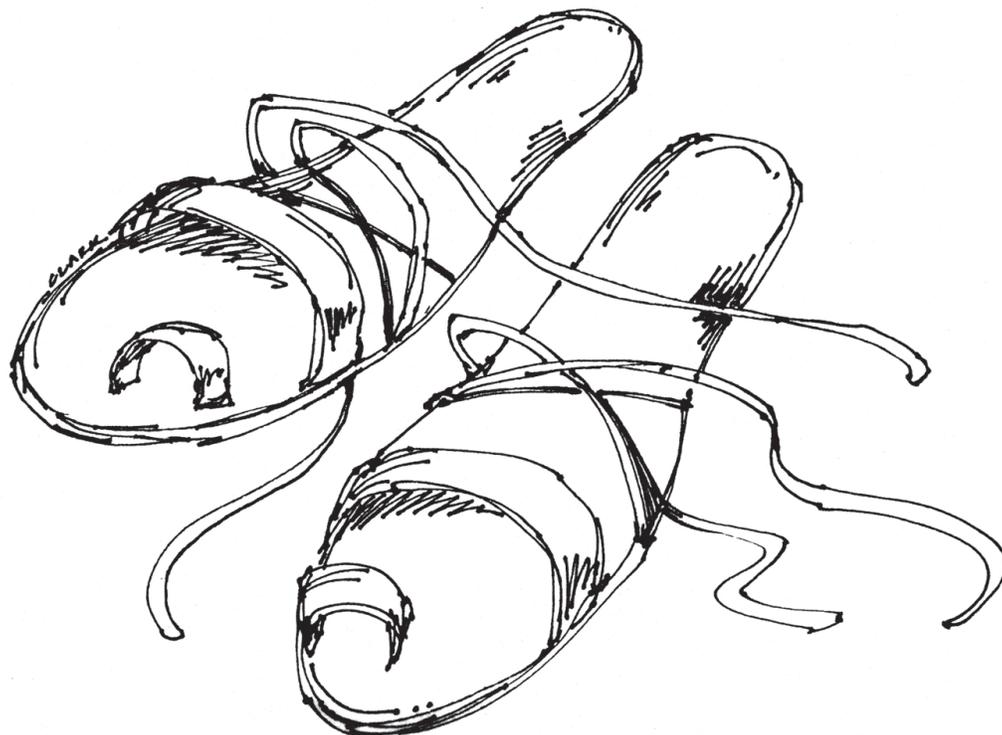
Jeremiah 31:31

Psalms 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

art by Peter Yuichi Clark



*The only sign you gave of who you were
When you first came walking down the road
Was the way the dust motes danced around
Your feet in a cloud of gold
—Bruce Cockburn,
"Hills of Morning"*

Palm Sunday: *Help Us to Bring Good News to the Poor*

Reading for Three, Part 1

NARRATOR: While John, the one they called Baptist, the kinsman of Jesus, was in Herod's prison, John sent word to Jesus, asking,

FIRST READER: Are you really the one whose coming was foretold to us?

NARRATOR: Jesus answered,

SECOND READER: Go and tell John what you see and hear. People who could not see have had their eyes opened. People who were devastated by disease are healed in body and mind. People whose ears were closed can now hear. People who were dead are alive again. The good news is being proclaimed to the impoverished.

NARRATOR: According to Luke, when Jesus first started his ministry, he read from the words of the prophet Isaiah,

SECOND READER: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. God has anointed me to bring good news to people living in poverty, to proclaim release to those in prison and slavery, the recovery of sight to those who are blind, to bring freedom to those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

NARRATOR: And Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and said,

SECOND READER: Today this scripture is being fulfilled, in your hearing, in your presence.

NARRATOR: Once, Jesus was about to set out on a journey, and a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked,

FIRST READER: What must I do to inherit eternal life?

NARRATOR: Jesus answered,

SECOND READER: You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother."

NARRATOR: The man said,

FIRST READER: I have kept all of the commandments since my youth.

NARRATOR: Jesus looked at him with love, and said,

SECOND READER: But you haven't. There is one commandment you haven't kept. You have stolen from the poor. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to those who have nothing. If you do this, you will have riches in heaven. Then come and follow me.

FIRST READER: But the man's wealth was too important to him, so he walked away from Jesus with great sadness.

NARRATOR: Another time, Jesus was talking about luncheons and dinners, and he said,

SECOND READER: When you give a banquet, invite those who live in poverty. Invite those who are disabled, who can't see or hear. Invite the riffraff. These people cannot repay you or invite you to a banquet, but you will be blessed beyond measure.

FIRST READER: Jesus told many parables about this, and about caring for one's neighbor. And people like Zacchaeus, who had cheated people as a tax collector, became followers of Jesus, the first thing they did was give back what they had stolen from the poor.

NARRATOR: Five days before the Passover, Jesus had been in Bethany and was about to come into Jerusalem. A huge crowd heard that he was coming, and they took leafy branches and took off their cloaks and spread them on the road in front of him. When he came over these branches and cloaks, riding on a donkey, the people shouted,

FIRST READER: Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!

NARRATOR: And thus began the last week of Jesus' life.

Reading for Three, Part 2

SECOND READER (to congregation): I hear you calling out my name and saying, "Blessed is he," but do you really know what I am here to do?

CONGREGATION: Lord, we confess that we have studied your life, and we have gone through these stories many times, but we still do not fully understand what you want from us. Show us the way, Lord. Heal us, and we shall be healed. Show us, and we shall follow you.

—from Matthew 11:2-6, Luke 4:14-21, Mark 10:16-26, Luke 14:7-14, Luke 19:3-13, John 12.8-18, Matthew 21.1-9

Suggested Hymns

"Christ Calls Us Now, as Long Ago"

Text: Jane Parker Huber, 1984

Music: Gesangbuch der Herzogl, Witermbergischen Katholischen Hofkapelle, 1784

Tune: ELLACOMBE

A Singing Faith #29

"All Glory, Laud and Honor"

Text: Theodulph of Orleans c. 821

tr. John Mason Neale, 1854

Music: Melchior Teshner, 1615

harm. William Henry Monk, 1861

desc. O. I. Cricket Harrison, 1994

Tune: ST. THEODULPH

Chalice Hymnal #192

"A Cheering, Chanting, Dizzy Crowd"

Text: Thomas H. Troeger, 1985

c. Oxford University Press, 1985

Recommended Tune: MORNING SONG

Chalice Hymnal #193

Lectionary Readings

Palm Sunday

Liturgy of the Palms

Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29

An Idea for Palm Sunday

Here's one way you can connect the "Good News to the Poor" theme to your Palm Sunday worship. We have heard of several churches, from the Texas Hill Country to Kentucky, that have gone with the Synoptic accounts of the triumphal entry, in which the people lay their cloaks along with the "leafy tree branches" to make a carpet in the road for the unlikely king and his donkey to tread.

These congregations have brought clothing on Palm Sunday, laid them down like a carpet for the morning's procession, gathered them up afterwards, washed them, and taken them to a local thrift store or emergency assistance agency.

It adds to the processional a feeling of the impromptu gallantry and reverence of the people who made up the crowd that day. It also serves as a reminder that this king constantly emphasized the importance of providing for people in need.

If you try this activity, we'd like to hear how it went. We'd like to hear about any such activity that you have tried, so that we can share the ideas with our subscribers. —lkc



art by Susan Daily

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Dust trails on the ground and vapor trails in the sky where man travels with such speed we can only see where he has been—and these are everyday wonders. Others have left tracks for us—men and women we may never have heard about, or it may be our own mothers and fathers. Eras pass leaving only the faintest signs. Hills stay pretty much the same, the sky changes and changes again. The wind sweeps a trail of seeds that give us trees and flowers. Universal tracks—footsteps we hear again and again. Will ours be marching—or rolling softly as the steps of an evening walker?

—Joyce Sequichie Hifler,
A Cherokee Feast of Days, Volume II

The growth of grace is like the polishing of metals. There is first an opaque surface; by and by you see a spark darting out, then a strong light; till at length it sends back a perfect image of the sun that shines upon it.

—Edward Payson (1783-1827)

Grace is an energy; not a mere sentiment; not a mere thought of the Almighty; not even a word of the Almighty. It is as real an energy as the energy of electricity. It is a divine energy; it is the energy of the divine affection rolling in plenteousness toward the shores of human need.

—Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893)

Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues.

—John R. W. Stott

The gospel is...a truth widely held, but a truth greatly reduced. It is a truth that has been flattened, trivialized, rendered inane. Partly the gospel is simply an old habit among us, neither valued nor questioned. But more than that, our technical way of thinking reduces mystery to problem, transforms assurance into certitude, quality into quantity, and so takes the categories of biblical faith and represents them in manageable shapes.

—Walter Brueggemann,
Finally Comes the Poet

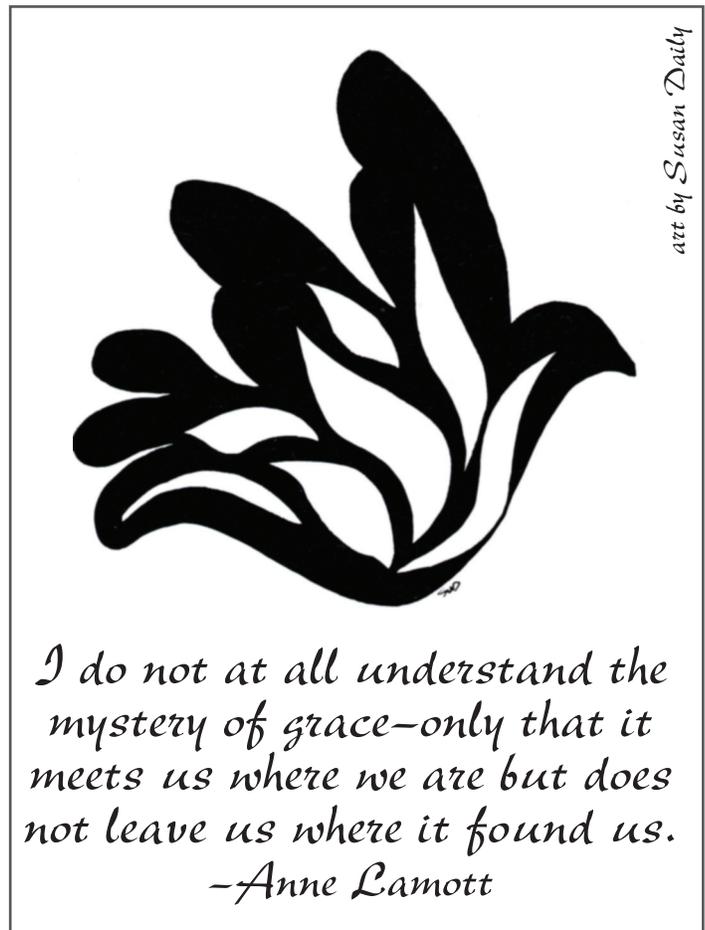
The church has failed to follow her appointed pathway of separation, holiness, heavenliness, and

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

Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people...reexamine all you have been told in school or church or in any book, and dismiss whatever insults your own soul....

—Walt Whitman



I do not at all understand the mystery of grace—only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.

—Anne Lamott

art by Lara Luksis



Stones & Songs

A Holy Week Drama for Youth

by John Stewart Ballenger

A note from the author and editor: This series was originally performed at a youth camp and was presented as a call to worship on four consecutive evenings. It could be presented in one service. We have the lines divided between five players and a chorus that does mostly background chants. You can adapt the number and gender of actors to fit your youth or college group. Please feel free to adjust this script to the needs of your congregation.

Act. 1:

Palm Sunday, The Triumphal Entry

Luke 19:28-44

Actors are seated in the audience and stand up to say their lines—moving toward the stage as they do so. As the actors discover that others share similar experience they should get more and more excited—more and more vehement—lines delivered faster and louder as the commonality of the experience encourages each to speak, but also threatens the individuality of the comments. After several have spoken, add expressions of agreement after the comments—head nodding or a chorus of “yeeses” and “that’s rights” and “uh-huhs.” Actors take their places on the stage.

PLAYER 1: My boyfriend expects me to make him happy—he can’t handle it when we disagree, or, God

forbid, when we fight, so I end up feeling like I can’t say anything that might upset him.

PLAYER 2: When I got a girlfriend I didn’t expect to not ever be able to get to sleep because I was staring at the ceiling feeling alone. I expected a relationship like that to make that feeling go away.

PLAYER 3: My parents expect me to be perfect—and I’ve started wanting them to feel like I am—I don’t feel like I can tell them everything anymore.

PLAYER 1: I expect my parents to be perfect—the first time I realized they couldn’t fix everything—make everything feel better—was a big shock; somehow I don’t expect them to be just people, I mean, they’re parents!

PLAYER 4: And when I got my first car I expected freedom and romance and all kinds of stuff that never happened.

PLAYER 5: My friends expect me to always have time for them—they don’t understand that I want to be alone some too.

(A chorus begins quietly in the background: “Live up to my, ex-pec-tation. Live up to my, ex-pec-tation. etc.” This should never drown out the lines but should build steadily.)

PLAYER 1: My friends expect me to have the perfect relationship with my boyfriend.

PLAYER 2: My church—oh, my church doesn’t seem to expect people to be real—people are those things in coats and ties that look nice and have all the right Jesus-loves-you answers.

PLAYER 3: My teachers seem to expect that their subject is the only one I should spend time on.

PLAYER 4: And more than just sometimes, I seem to expect me to be good at something without having to put in the practice or the work to get good. I’m not

supposed to have to practice my guitar every day to be able to play like—

PLAYER 5: —Yeah, and the coach should recognize how good I could be and let me play all the time.

PLAYER 1: And my grades should be based not necessarily on what I do, but on what I expect my teachers to know I'm capable of.

(background chorus stops)

PLAYER 2: All these expectations I have of others and others have of me

PLAYER 3: And then, say I meet some expectations—meet the expectations of my girlfriend, for example—live up to them—make her happy—for a few minutes, but then it starts all over again—somehow even intensified.

PLAYER 2: It's like expectations when you don't meet them are a kind of fall.

PLAYER 4: And when you do meet them they're just the set up for a fall later.

PLAYER 3: I expect—you expect—he expects—she expects—we expect—you expect—they expect—*(this chant continues softly in the background as other voices go on—cannot drown out lines)* we're building a jail—stone by stone—each stone someone's expectation—my girlfriend expects me to make her happy—it encloses us—my parents expect me to be perfect—it hems us in—my church just wants all the right Jesus-loves-you answers—we're defined by the borders of our cell—all these expectations I have of others and others have of me—as if we can only be what and who people expect us to be—as if others should only be what and who we expect them to be...

(background chant stops)

CHORUS: Hosanna!

PLAYER 1, 4 & 5: Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

PLAYER 4: We're building a jail—stone by stone—each stone someone's expectation—that encloses us—hems us in—we're defined by the borders of our cell—we're building a tower—stone by stone—expecting to reach the stars—a tower made of everybody's differing expectations—we might as well all be speaking different languages—we're building a temple—stone by stone—a jail for God to feel good about—a definition of God outlined by our expectations—as if God can only be what and who we expect God to be...

PLAYERS 1, 2 & 3: Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

CHORUS: Hosanna!

PLAYER 4: It's that scene in any one of the Rocky movies, where Rocky's at the back of the arena and the spotlight hits him in his little robe with the hood up and the crowd goes nuts (*background chant of: "Rocky! Rocky! Rocky!"*) and there's rock music throbbing under the roar of the multitude.

PLAYER 5: It's the scene when a rock star makes a surprise appearance somewhere and people are trampled trying to get in close to get a piece of clothing or hair or whatever. (*screams of girls*)

PLAYER 1: It's the world-champion whatever on their ticker-tape parade in the home city coming back from the scene of their victory. (*crowd noise—whistling, clapping, yelling*)

PLAYER 3: It doesn't seem to matter if it's the celebration of a victory already won—or the anticipation of victory to be won.

PLAYER 5: It is the crowds', the masses', the multitudes' affirmation of one person, one group of people who have lived up to their expectations—are living up to their expectations—will live up to their expectations (*pause*) better live up to their expectations.

PLAYER 2: It's a triumphal entry.

(crowd noise again—building through Jesus' introduction as one actor picks up a mike and holding it as if it were hanging down from above—uses a PA voice for the next lines)

PLAYER 3: In this corner, wearing white—on a white donkey, it's Jesus "the Gateway to the Afterlife" Christ, a relative unknown from the country who has amassed quite a following on the local circuit and is now attracting the attention of the professionals

PLAYER 1: And in this corner— (*silence*)

PLAYER 4: —It's the devil, right? The Host of Hell holding the power of this world in his hands—emerging from the locker room in a cloud of smoke that eerily reflects the red spotlights (*crowd boos*) as the crowd boos.

PLAYER 2: Awwww—I've heard this before. God's the referee who counts backwards or something—real cheesy.

PLAYER 1: So here comes Jesus—through the crowd and they're pressing in on him—hemming him

in—he's surrounded—the cheers are deafening—can you feel the energy of frenzy?

PLAYER 2: What could he not do?

PLAYER 4: What would they not let him do?

PLAYER 3: He could send them all out to get weapons and tell them to join him on the compound that would be the stump of a branch of the root of Jesse and they would've done it.

PLAYER 5: Yes!

PLAYER 2: He could tell them to storm the temple with him and they would.

PLAYER 1: Yes!

PLAYER 3: The power of this world offered freely... freely?

PLAYER 5: Yes!

PLAYER 4: It's the people of the city singing a Middle Eastern version of: *(turn on soundtrack)* "You've Never Had A Friend Like Me!"

PLAYER 1: And what is the genie—what is the magic lamp revealed to be, but another temptation—

PLAYER 4: A variation on this: Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please."

PLAYER 3: You mean anyone who pleases YOU.

PLAYER 2: If you, then, will worship me, it will be all yours.

PLAYER 1: And amazingly, it's Jesus saying, "I don't need a friend like you. *(soundtrack off)* It is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God."

Soft chorus in the background "Live up to my expectations." builds slowly through following lines.

PLAYER 2: We're building a jail—stone by stone—each stone someone's expectation—that encloses us—hems us in—we're defined by the borders of our cell—we're building a tower—stone by stone—expecting to reach the stars—expecting to reach God—we're building a temple—stone by stone—a jail for God to feel good about—Blessed is the one who comes to validate my concept of God—another variation—they keep getting more subtle—get thee behind me Satan!—I am not defined by your expectations—not limited by your expectations *(chant loud and intense)* get thee behind me!

(silence)

PLAYER 4: Hey! you need us! *(group hums "You've never had a friend like me" in the background)* you can't make it without friends like us—in coats and ties and answers to everything.

PLAYER 3: You got it backwards—I don't need friends like you; *(group hums "What a friend we have in Jesus" in the background)* you need a friend like me, and if you don't sing and praise in recognition of who I am *(Hosanna chorus from Jesus Christ Superstar on jambox)* the very rocks will sing out the praise and glory of the God they cannot contain—cannot enclose—cannot limit—cannot define.

(add to the music crowd noise, slowly building, over the next three lines)

PLAYER 1: So, on this day of triumph,

PLAYER 2: On this day of public affirmation and celebration,

PLAYER 5: On this day after being surrounded by the people of the city who would have done anything,

PLAYER 3: On this day Jesus wept *(all background noise off)* over Jerusalem and said: "If you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! If only you had seen me. But now they are hidden from your eyes—hidden behind your expectations, which blind you. Indeed, the days will come upon you when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you with their expectations and hem you in on every side with their concept of what's right—crush you to the ground with their sense of what should be—you and your children within you and they will not leave within you one stone upon another of your jail, your tower, your temple because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God and having missed God, all you had left were your own expectations and those of others. So, instead of rocks that sing—you're left with rocks that imprison.

(Next lines said with background conjugation chant)

PLAYER 1: We're building a jail—stone by stone—each stone someone's expectation—that encloses us—hems us in—we're defined by the borders of our cell—we're building a tower—stone by stone—expecting to reach the stars—expecting to reach God—we're building a temple—stone by stone—a jail for God to feel good about.

(Chant continues as actors leave the stage—when they've taken their seats—silence) ■

Act 2. The Cleansing of the Temple

Mark 11:15-19

Act 2 begins with “live up to my expectation” chant from Act 1.

PLAYER 1: We’re building a jail—stone by stone—each stone someone’s expectation—that encloses us—hems us in—we’re defined by the borders of our prison—we’re building a tower—stone by stone—expecting to reach the stars—expecting to reach God—we’re building a temple—stone by stone—a jail for God to feel good about—Blessed is the one who comes to validate my concept of God.

PLAYER 1: SHUT UP! (pause)

PLAYER 2: Beyond the expectations that everyone has of me, there is me.

PLAYER 3: Beyond who my parents want me to be.

PLAYER 4: And my girlfriend, boyfriend.

PLAYER 5: And my teachers.

PLAYER 1: And my church.

PLAYER 3: There is who I am.

PLAYER 2: Sometimes that’s even hidden by who I expect me to be.

PLAYER 5: I am not defined by what and who other people think I should be.

PLAYER 4: I am not even defined by what and who I think I should be.

PLAYER 1: I’m me—lovingly shaped and created by God.

PLAYER 2: And other people are not defined by what and who I think they should be.

PLAYER 4: They too, are lovingly shaped and created by God to be them.

PLAYER 3: And God is not defined by what and who I think God should be.

PLAYER 5: God simply is.

PLAYER 1: We don’t have to play in the land of make-believe that expectations create.

PLAYER 5: We can admit that we don’t have answers to every question.

PLAYER 4: We can admit that knowing someone is a process—

PLAYER 3: And getting to know someone is not a process of defining.

PLAYER 2: We can admit that we have to get to know ourselves—

PLAYER 1: That getting to know ourselves is a process, and a difficult one at that.

PLAYER 2: We can admit that we can spend a lifetime getting to know God and still not know very much at all about what and who God is.

PLAYER 3: We can begin to celebrate the mysteries that await us in processes of getting to know people.

PLAYER 4: And getting to know God.

PLAYER 5: And as we move out of the land of make-believe we must begin to reject the make-believe that wants to stay a part of our lives.

PLAYER 1: As we discover who we are, we discover who we’re not.

PLAYER 5: As we discover who people are, we discover who they’re not.

PLAYER 4: As we discover who God is, we discover who God is not.

PLAYER 3: And as we affirm what is, we must denounce and deny what is not.

PLAYER 2: So we walk into jails—

PLAYER 1: And set the prisoners free—

PLAYER 2: To begin teaching people about the responsibilities of being free.

PLAYER 4: We walk into towers—

PLAYER 3: And declare that before we reach for the stars we have more to learn from each other.

PLAYER 1: To begin practicing how to listen to each other.

PLAYER 4: We walk into temples.

PLAYER 3: And shout (*in unison*) “This should be a house of prayer for all the nations!”

PLAYER 5: To remind people of the den of thieves that the church all too often is.

PLAYER 1: We walk into jails.

PLAYER 2: We walk into towers.

PLAYER 3: We walk into temples.

PLAYER 4: And we tear stones apart, leaving not one upon another.

PLAYER 5: So that the stones don’t hem in—surround—limit—define.

PLAYER 1: Can't hem in—surround—limit—define.

PLAYER 5: And we're not sure what to expect having done this.

PLAYER 4: So maybe we won't expect, but wait patiently for our God.

PLAYER 3: And maybe—just maybe—after three days—the rocks—strewn about structures they used to comprise—might begin to sing.

(soprano sax in the background—building)

PLAYER 2: Sing about the possibility of living in harmony.

PLAYER 1: Sing about the unity arrived at through diversity.

PLAYER 3: Sing about living together without exploiting.

PLAYER 2: Living together without separating into us-and-them categories.

PLAYER 5: Sing about not even understanding the concept of haves and have-nots.

PLAYER 4: Of not even understanding the concept of winners and losers.

PLAYER 1: Sing of an inclusiveness we should be modeling, but that we actually don't have an earthly idea—let alone a heavenly one—about.

PLAYER 2: And do you think we might sing along?

PLAYER 3: Tentatively, at first, but gaining strength, as we hear our friends trying to sing along too.

PLAYER 4: Singing with courage, because this song does not harmonize with the songs the world sings.

PLAYER 1: So those who do sing this song sound like fools.

PLAYER 5: Look like fools—standing there with their mouths open—with sounds coming out that don't fit anything around them.

PLAYER 2: Until—listen! Listen to the sounds of creation—the sounds our world has distorted and polluted and killed—the sounds of life, the sounds of nature.

PLAYER 3: And the louder we sing, the stronger sings creation.

PLAYER 4: And then, suddenly, it's the songs of greed and aggression, of manipulation and exploitation that begin to sound out-of-key.

PLAYER 5: It's the justifications of those who seek money and material goods and success and popularity that begin to sound false.

PLAYER 1: And the sounds of sharing and caring and loving and playing DO fit.

PLAYER 2: And putting others before self doesn't sound stupid anymore.

PLAYER 3: And maybe the greatest will be as the youngest.

PLAYER 4: And the leaders will be those that serve.

PLAYER 5: Because everything's turned upside down.

PLAYER 4: And we sing louder and louder.

PLAYER 2: With abandon.

PLAYER 3: And some begin to dance.

PLAYER 1: And in the midst of singing such a song (*soprano sax stops*) we will begin to know what a temple truly is. ■

Lectionary Readings for Holy Week

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4-9

Psalms 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Mark 14:1-15:47

or Mark 15:1-39, (40-47)

Maundy Thursday

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

Psalms 116:1-2, 12-19

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Holy Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53

Psalms 22

Hebrews 10:16-25

or Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42



art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

Act 3. The Last Supper.

Luke 22:7-38

PLAYER 1: We walk into jails.

PLAYER 2: We walk into towers.

PLAYER 3: We walk into temples.

PLAYER 4: And we tear stones apart, leaving not one upon another.

PLAYER 5: So that the stones don't hem in—surround—limit—define.

PLAYER 1: Can't hem in—surround—limit—define.

PLAYER 5: And we're not sure what to expect, having done this.

PLAYER 4: So maybe we won't expect, but wait patiently for our God.

PLAYER 3: And maybe—just maybe—after three days—the rocks—strewn about structures they used to comprise—might begin to sing.

PLAYER 2: And do you think we might sing along?

PLAYER 1: I want to sing—but I don't know what words to use.

PLAYER 5: And I think I'm kind of comfortable in my jails, towers and temples—just as they are.

PLAYER 3: Comfortable with me—just as I am.

PLAYER 4: I don't really see me going on a rampage—tearing all these things down.

PLAYER 2: And buildings are hard to tear down, aren't they?.

PLAYER 1: I might get hurt.

PLAYER 2: And might not some people react negatively to buildings being destroyed?

PLAYER 3: Stone from stone leaving not one upon another?

PLAYER 4: So I haven't heard these rocks singing.

PLAYER 5: And wasn't it just a possibility that they might sing, anyway?

PLAYER 1: And I don't really trust my voice.

PLAYER 4: I don't trust my voice.

PLAYER 2: I don't trust me!

("Have Thine Own Way, Lord" on guitar.)

PLAYER 3: We are all part of one body—one song.

PLAYER 5: A body with many members.

PLAYER 1: A song with many parts.

PLAYER 2: But, nonetheless, one body.

PLAYER 3: Nonetheless, one song.

PLAYER 5: The body of Christ.

PLAYER 4: The song of God (*guitar stops*).

PLAYER 2: The song gathered together some of its important singers for one last meal.

PLAYER 1: And tried once more to explain.

PLAYER 2: It's busting you all out of jail—the prison of excessive focus on occupation instead of vocation. Being fishers of fish cannot compare to being fishers of people; what people do for money cannot compare to the part they have in the song of God.

PLAYER 3: It's leveling towers—questioning the proud achievements of human kind.

PLAYER 5: It's freeing God from temples—from restrictive religion—religion with more "don'ts" than "dos."

PLAYER 4: It's freeing God from prescriptive religion—religion with an answer for everything.

PLAYER 1: Freeing God from religion more interested in the world than in God—more like the world than like God.

PLAYER 2: It's all that, but that's not all...there's more.

PLAYER 3: It's not just about jails and towers and temples.

PLAYER 4: It's about us.

PLAYER 5: It's about me.

PLAYER 1: It's not just stones that will be torn apart.

PLAYER 4: We will be torn apart—by fear and doubt and betrayal.

PLAYER 2: No! Never!

PLAYER 3: And I'll be torn apart—by whips and thorns and nails.

(All lights out except for blue or red filtered lights on stage. 39 Lashes song from Jesus Christ Superstar. Four people step to the front of the stage and squat. On each lash, two people stand up holding a banner or board with one of the following words, and then drop it off the stage:

ridicule—rejection—status—wealth—power—brand names—“in” groups—abuse—crime—war—hatred—fear—acid rain—pollution—politics—religion—abusive religious leaders—lust—a “yes” is not a “yes”—a “no” is not a “no”—manipulation—exploitation—materialism—violence—racism—hypocrisy—greed—injustice—gossip—homelessness—profit—oppression—sexism—cliques—lies—exclusivism—addiction—hunger—selfishness.

Blue or red filters off—backlighting for the rest of the drama.

PLAYER 1: I am torn apart—as if by whips and thorns and nails.

PLAYER 2: No! Never!

PLAYER 3: Get thee behind me! Do you still blind me with your expectations? There is a wholeness beyond the broken.

PLAYER 4: There is life that begins with death—an ending that is a beginning.

PLAYER 5: You have eyes to see, and see not.

PLAYER 1: You have ears to hear, and hear not.

PLAYER 5: If you sing me, you too will be torn apart.

PLAYER 4: Torn into the richer wholeness.

PLAYER 3: You will die into a richer living.

PLAYER 2: We walk into jails.

PLAYER 1: We walk into towers.

PLAYER 3: We walk into temples.

PLAYER 5: And God walks into us—and sings through us.

PLAYER 4: This is my body—broken for you.

PLAYER 2: Can we eat of this bread?

PLAYER 1: This is my blood—shed for you.

PLAYER 3: Can we drink of this cup?

PLAYER 2: Take this cup away from me.

PLAYER 5: Do this in remembrance of me.

PLAYER 4: We are all part of one body—the body of Christ.

PLAYER 1: We are all part of one song—the song of God.

PLAYER 2: To be broken—sacrificed.

PLAYER 3: For if we claim to be as Christ—Christian—

PLAYER 4: And refuse to be broken for others—

PLAYER 5: We make a mockery of his words: “nevertheless thy will be done.”

PLAYER 1: Can I eat of this bread?

PLAYER 5: Can I drink of this cup?

PLAYER 3: Can I break myself modeling an inclusiveness the world has no concept of?

PLAYER 4: Can I pour myself out, singing of living together without exploiting, manipulating, dividing and separating?

PLAYER 2: Can I change the way I live?

PLAYER 1: Give up name brands for thrift store clothes?

PLAYER 3: Defy the pressure of cliques?

PLAYER 2: Can I stand out as someone looking like a fool? Singing out of key?

PLAYER 4: Is the song strong enough in me that I can stand being rejected by the world?

PLAYER 5: Can I do it? Can I? Can I? Can I?

PLAYER 1: Will I?

PLAYER 2: Tentatively at first, but gaining strength, as I hear others trying to sing along.

PLAYER 3: Singing with courage.

PLAYER 4: Singing with creation.

PLAYER 5: Louder and louder.

PLAYER 1: With abandon.

PLAYER 4: Beginning to dance.

PLAYER 5: Singing the song of God.

PLAYER 2: And lost in the music is the percussion of breaking—a hammer and nails (*hammer on wood, rhythmically*).

PLAYER 3: The depths of this music contains even the cruel rejection of the world.

PLAYER 1: We are all part of one body—singing as we are broken—for you.

PLAYER 2: We are all parts of one song—dancing the depths of music that is poured out for you.

PLAYER 3: Eat.

PLAYER 4: Drink.

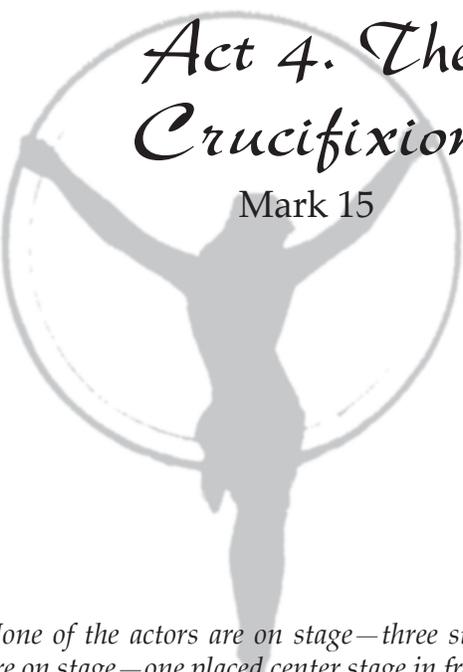
PLAYER 5: Live.

PLAYER 1: Sing along.

Lights out—one more beat of the hammer—houselights up. ■

Act 4. The Crucifixion

Mark 15



None of the actors are on stage—three stones or bricks are on stage—one placed center stage in front, one placed upstage left, and one placed upstage right. Soft lighting on the stage and voices come from the back of the room.

PLAYER 1: We build our jails—to imprison the person.

PLAYER 2: We build our towers—to limit the imagination.

PLAYER 3: We build our temples—to restrict our God.

PLAYER 4: And seem quite content to linger away.

PLAYER 5: Dying without having ever really lived.

PLAYER 1: Unwilling to risk the more.

PLAYER 5: And the song we hear—

PLAYER 2: In high and holy moments—

PLAYER 3: Threatens us with its difference—

PLAYER 4: Scares us.

PLAYER 1: And having chosen not to sing—

PLAYER 2: We'd rather not have to listen.

Three people come on stage in silence with hammers—kneel behind the bricks—all lights out except for blue or red filtered lights—the three actors break the stones up into powder as the filtered lights dim and finally go out. When the lights are out the three stop hammering and in the darkness comes the last line.

PLAYER 1: And the song is silenced.

—John Ballenger is the pastor of Woodbrook Baptist Church in Baltimore, MD. He served for a number of years as the resident poet and dramatist for Seeds of Hope.

My Rite of Communion

by David Sparenberg

I participate
in the beauty of the earth.
And without violation
I partake
of the wonderment
of this awakening day.

I drink in the wine
of morning breeze,
sweetened by the flowers of May.

I break and eat the
bread of Spring, seasoned
from life's garden.

This is my rite
of communion.

In this way,
I say no to war.
And to the evil death
in the minds of
deceptive men, who have
turned to a god who is
no god: an idol loveless.
and exacting judgment.

In this way, my heart declares my
love of justice.
And my soul stands firm
in the prophecy of peace.

I turn out
to the dawn awareness.
And to my God who
creates out of love.
And who instills love even
in the eyes of those
suffering most. And who
tremble for their children's safety.

This is my rite
of communion.

—David Sparenberg—a playwright, poet, storyteller, stage director, Shakespearean actor and novelist—lives and works in Seattle, WA. He is a frequent contributor to Sacred Seasons. Art by Lenora Mathis.

Benediction



art by Susan Daily

*The dawn breaks.
Day lies ahead.
One thinks on a
journey of those things past,
and what the future might become.
Between the places-
coming from and going to-
lies a peaceful hope.
Not a longing but a quiet hour.
Thinking of the faces
that make the journey soft,
the winter becomes simply
a moment of transition
waiting for the deliverance of spring.
- Marc Ellis, *A Year at the Catholic Worker**