Turning Our Hearts Toward Justice

Art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

Worship Resources for the Creative Church – Lent/Eastertide 2020

Sacred Seasons, *a series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis,*
from Seeds of Hope Publishers: 602 James Avenue; Waco, TX 76706 • 254/755-7745
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Sacred Seasons

Worship Tools for the Creative Church

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).

Statement of Purpose

Seeds of Hope, Inc., is a private, independent group of believers responding to a common burden for poor and hungry people of God's world, and acting on the strong belief that biblical mandates to feed the poor were not intended to be optional. Since 1991, 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.

Bringing Justice into the World

...in this worship packet:

Art by Peter Yuichi Clark

Editorial Address

The Seeds of Hope ministry is housed by the community of faith at Seventh & James Baptist Church. The mailing address is: 602 James; Waco, TX 76706; 254/755-7745; seedseditor1@gmail.com; www.seedspublishers.org.

Material in this packet is for the use of the purchasing faith community to enhance worship and increase awareness in economic justice issues. ISSN 0194-4495. Seeds of Hope, Inc., holds the 501(c)3 nonprofit tax status. All contributions above the subscription rate are fully tax-deductible.

A Word about This Packet

As always, we are indebted to a lot of people for their generous contributions to this packet. I am indebted to our liturgical team—Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway and Alec Ylitalo—for the direction and theme, and for most of the elements of the liturgies.

The theme of the Advent 2019 packet was "Bringing Justice into the World." Our liturgical team suggested that we stay with the theme of justice throughout this church year. Since Lent is largely about personal renewal and repentance, we chose "Turning Our Hearts Toward Justice" for this packet.

The art in these pages is taken from a wide variety of our favorite pieces by longtime Seeds artists, along with some pieces we received from Hermano Leon of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca in Mexico.

We have included 10 liturgies, designed to take you from Ash Wednesday through the Sundays in Lent and Holy Week, and on to Easter Sunday. We have included a beautiful meditation for Holy Saturday written by Bruce Kay. It is adapted from a devotional he wrote for the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

We have assigned prayer themes for each liturgy. (See the sidebar on this page.) Many of the meditations and benedictions in the liturgies are from *Bless This Weary World*, published by the Spiritual Growth Mission Group of Oakhurst Baptist Church in 2003. Oakhurst is the congregation where the Seeds ministry was born. One of the benedictions is taken from a longer prayer in that book by Leslie Withers, a former Seeds editor and now a member of our Board of Advisors.

You will find writings here by Sharlande Sledge, associate pastor at Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, a longtime friend of Seeds. Some of the writings are new and some are from her book, *Prayers & Litanies for the Christian Seasons*, published by Smyth & Helwys. We are reprinting a meditation written by Louis Mazé about the women of Easter.

We hope all of these elements will come together to help you as you plan for your congregation's Lenten journey. As always, 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 counting on you to adapt these contents to your own needs, resources and inclinations. We would love to hear about how you used them.

The contents of this packet are your congregation's to use freely and we want you to share them with others. May we truly turn our hearts toward justice during this Lenten season, and may we continue on the path through Eastertide and beyond.

—Gratefully,
Katie Cook, on behalf of the Seeds staff
and Council of Stewards

Prayer Themes

• **Ash Wednesday**: We pray that our hearts will be turned toward justice.

• **First Sunday:** We pray for our faith communities as we acknowledge our brokenness and work together toward healing.

• **Second Sunday:** We pray for migrants, immigrants, refugees and those who provide shelter and welcome.

• **Third Sunday:** We pray for those who are victimized or marginalized because of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion, and for those who work to bring healing.

• **Fourth Sunday:** We pray for those who do not see the needs around them.

Fifth Sunday: We pray for people who suffer from disabilities, disease, mental illness and addictions, for people who are incarcerated or imprisoned within their circumstances, and for those who work to bring resurrection.

Palm Sunday: We pray for those with whom Jesus identified himself: hungry, thirsty, homeless and outcast people, the objects of scorn, hatred and violence.

Maundy Thursday: We pray for the grace and courage to wash the feet of those for whom we have fasted during this Lenten season.

Holy Friday: We pray that we can, like Christ, enter into the suffering of others for the healing of the world.

Easter Sunday: We recognize that resurrection was just the beginning of the story. We pray today that we will be empowered to continue our journey toward justice.

Finding God Together

Thoughts for the Beginning of Lent

by Erin Conaway

Have you ever experienced the absence of God? Have you ever felt like your prayers fell flat on the ground in front of your lips? That you could cry out to the heavens and only hear back the echo of your pain, with no guiding voice, no comforting presence, no gentle hand preventing you from falling into the abyss? It feels like hell. It hurts and it causes confusion. But God doesn't apologize or try to justify being "away."

The saints have termed it "the dark night of the soul." We often misuse that phrase to mean a season of acute suffering brought about by some pain in our lives, but the dark night of the soul is about experiencing the absence of God. And that brings its own kind of pain. The two may happen at the same time, causing a double blow to the heart and soul, but they are different.

The dark night of the soul, based on the wisdom of those who have gone before us and graciously shared their experience with us, is intended to generate in us a new kind of seeking after God—a new zealous searching for God perhaps in ways we had not previously experienced. This night is intended to expand our understanding and our ability to see and hear and feel and know God by closing off our old connections and forcing us to find new ones. The dark night is supposed to expand God's presence in our lives and to widen our own understanding of who God is and how God is present in the world as well as in our lives.

But it requires work. Hard work. Faithful followers are supposed to cry out into the darkness, "WHERE ARE YOU, GOD?" We are supposed to rattle the gates of heaven and search the four corners of the earth to try to find where God is apparently hiding. We are to sit in intentional empty stillness and wait for God to show up—in new ways we were unable to see before. Sometimes we fall in love with the way we love and experience God more than we love God, and the dark night hides or removes our old connection. This forces us to find new ones or to fall in love again with the true God and not simply the way we experience God.

What if we don't ask the question, "Where is God?" What if we decide God is gone and we must find something else to fill the void? That's what happened in the stories of the prophets. The people couldn't hear God, couldn't see God at work in their lives, couldn't feel God's presence. So they assumed that God was gone for good and turned to whatever else was around and convenient at the time, which was Baal.

Do we do that in our time? Tribalism seems to be one of our new gods. To adjust a line from *Hamilton*, we're fractured into factions and we're breaking down like fractions. We should be saying,

> *Where is God in our crisis at the US southern border? Where is God in the Syrian civil war and the massive movement of refugees across the globe? Where is God in the seemingly endless cycle of gun violence and mass shootings? Where is God in our national budget and what it says about our values and priorities? Where is God in this climate crisis we have created and from which we are beginning to suffer the*

Art by Robert Darden

consequences? Where is God on issues like abortion and the death penalty and all that happens in between?

But instead of asking the question and seeking the answers, I'm afraid we are more likely to run to our tribes and then claim God's preference for our tribe, and God's presence with us there. Far too often, even our religious leaders aren't asking, "Where is God?" They are casting their lot with a particular political party or movement and then telling the rest of us, "God is here—and definitely NOT over there."

Our prophets are sounding too much like partisan pundits rather than voices that speak the words of the Lord. If this is not so, why would we have so few who don't villainize the other side? If this isn't our sin, then where are the people of God standing up for bi-partisanship and working towards issues rather than amassing power? Where have the independent Christian voices gone—the ones who don't care about political affiliation, but are concerned with the children of God and their welfare?

In my own desperation, I fear I've traded my affiliation and allegiance to God for something far less—for a tribe of people who think like me, who yell at the things I yell at, who shake their fist at the things I shake my fist at, who feel righteously indignant at the same things for which I feel righteous indignation.

So what if I'm right? What if my tribe IS the one on the side of God and the other side is a bunch of power-hungry pagans, or at best a bunch of people who are so lost they can no longer see that God is clearly on OUR side?

Here's my test, and it might work for you: Can I imagine God being pleased with anyone on "their side?" Can I imagine God being upset with anyone on "our side?" If not, I have some hard work to do because I've now confessed I've aligned the will of God along party lines and that is some serious religious gerrymandering. When God's will looks exactly like one party's platform—we can be sure we have traded in the one true God for something far less. We've stopped asking the question, "Where is God?" and decided we know for certain.

I'm not saying we shouldn't be involved in our nation's politics. I'm not saying we shouldn't be zealous in our support for the legislation and actions we believe to be right and good for our community and state and nation. I am saying that we cannot trade in our fidelity to God for fidelity to one side or another. We cannot blindly support any tribe other than the tribe of God—who, it turns out, are spread out in both US political parties and in independents alike.

There has to be some humility infused in our enthusiasm for what is right politically and in our shared life together. We dare not make miscreants of God's children just because they have a different view about how to best love God and love our neighbors. And isn't that supposed to be our guiding question as we approach all of these issues?

In my own desperation, I fear I've traded my affiliation and allegiance to God for something far less—for a tribe of people who think like me, who yell at the things I yell at, who shake their fist at the things I shake my fist at, who feel righteously indignant at the same things for which I feel righteous indignation.

How can we best love God and love our neighbors in this specific situation? When we realize there are genuine people on the other side of the aisle asking the same questions, but coming up with different solutions, then we have a common starting place—and that should lead to some mutual understanding between us. We should realize that we want the same thing, and that we simply imagine it should come about in different ways.

Not all ideas are valid or good. Some ideas and laws definitely need to be voted down or stopped or protested—or even defied, if they violate what we believe to be God's law. There may be a time when we need to join forces against certain laws and certain leaders who champion and create those laws, but we must do so in ways that show forth our Christian identity and our Christian values.

That was the power of much of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The nonviolent protests, even in the face of extreme violence and hatred, revealed the heart of God. There was strength of conviction and a vivid witness of God's love that would not have been on display had the Civil Rights protestors matched violence for violence, eye for an

eye and a tooth for a tooth. It was hard work—the most difficult thing that many of the participants had ever done before or since. But it was the only way they could reveal God's love for all of God's children, which was the basis for the protest, and their methods were consistent with that belief. Are our methods and language consistent with our belief that we are all God's children and neighbors to one another?

> Here's my test, and it might work for you: Can I imagine God being pleased with anyone on "their side?" Can I imagine God being upset with anyone on "our side?" If not, I have some hard work to do because I've now confessed I've aligned the will of God along party lines and that is some serious religious gerrymandering.

I believe in the separation of church and state. I also believe we have a responsibility to participate vigorously in our democracy and to do so as faithful followers of Christ. And in this current and eroding environment it is so tempting to make the other side out to be nasty and to believe my side has the only claim on righteousness and goodness. Friends, only God has the claim on righteousness and goodness. And when we stop asking, "Where is God?" and assume we know, we've traded our fidelity to God for something far less, and we become blind to our sisters and brothers who are part of a different tribe.

This will only end in chaos and hatred if we keep trading our God for something less. Someone has to stand up and fight for good in such a way that honors the good in the other side, while also holding firm to what we believe is right. That is our call. We should be the ones with an eternal perspective that allows us to not get sucked into the madness of tribalism and "othering" our sisters and brothers. We should be the ones who are able to disagree without casting people into the outer darkness.

This should be our time to rise up and reveal, through the way we love and live together as people who disagree about a lot of things, but share life together. And we stay together because what draws us and keeps us together is so much greater than anything that might separate us. And we value the freedom we give to one another to find our own way and not be coerced into a certain belief or behavior until it is our own conviction under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This is our moment and our movement—let it shine into a world that so desperately needs to see we can disagree vigorously without hating one another. We can work together where there is common calling and interest, and we can learn a lot from each other if we will just take time to listen and seek together the answer to the question, "Where is God?"

If you've left home for a place that looks and thinks more like you, come back to a home where love is wider and taller and deeper than anything we could think or imagine. Stay home even when the temptation is strong to join a tribe with an allegiance to a smaller standard than God. Drink deeply from God's well and know you are a part of the family of God and nothing will satisfy your thirst the way God will when you sit deeply into your place at God's table. Amen.

—Erin Conaway, a native of Midland, TX, is a member of the Sacred Seasons *liturgical team and a frequent contributor to Seeds publications. He is the pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed.*

Artist of souls,
You sculpted a people
for Yourself
out of the rocks
of wilderness and fasting.
Help us as we
take up Your invitation
to prayer and simplicity,
that the discipline of these forty days
May sharpen our hunger for
the feast of your holy friendship,
And whet our thirst
for the living water you offer
through Jesus Christ. Amen.
—*Revised Common Lectionary Prayers*,
Augsburg Press

Art by Rebecca S. Ward

A Broken & Contrite Heart

by Sharlande Sledge

God, at the same time that you renew the world with spring,
we are called to give ourselves to the season of Lent,
to consider our humanity,
to reflect on the brokenness of our lives
and of the world.

We are called to come to terms
with the shards of our lives,
with the realization that life is
not only welcome fields of bluebonnets
or a purple iris regally
punctuating a yard with your glory.
It is also the raw grittiness of ashes
and the sharp angles of the hard news of life,
whatever the season.

And this is how we walk through Lent,
carrying the pieces of what is broken
that we collect along the way
and bringing them for you
to bless even in their brokenness,
maybe especially in their brokenness.

For things fall apart. We fall apart. Things shatter.
Things unravel.
They tear.

They wear away,
They disappoint.
They fragment.
Cyclones swallow villages.
Rivers consume farmland.
Guns take lives,
and fear of the other robs your children of joy.

O Lord, break our hearts.
Leave them open and vulnerable.
for the sake of the life of your world,
for our brothers and sisters who are living with profound loss,
and at the risk of breaking our hearts
in your name.

As we bring our gifts to worship, may we remember that you tell us,
The sacrifice acceptable to you "is a broken spirit,
And a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."
Amen.

—Sharlande Sledge is associate pastor of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, TX, and a frequent contributor to Seeds publications.

Art by Rebecca S. Ward

A Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Vitalo

We pray that our hearts will be turned toward justice.

Call to Worship

One: We return to the LORD with all our hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
Many: We return, knowing that steadfast love abounds here.
One: We come knowing the embers of the palms, the shouts of Hosanna from last year have cooled,
Many: But new fires of justice, new blessed shouts arise from these ashes.
One: As we take those ashes upon us to kindle the flame, as we don sackcloth to make us uncomfortable to the status quo,
Many: May our hearts be startled and awakened, and begin to turn towards justice.

First Reading from the Prophets

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Hymn

"Return to the Lord Your God"
WORDS and MUSIC: Bob Dufford, SJ
TUNE: [Take with you works from your sorrow]
SOURCE: *Glory and Praise* (3rd ed.)
No. 412 - Publisher OCP, 2015

Meditation of Preparation

The traditional emphases and disciplines of Lent are intensely personal but not merely private. The depths of our hearts are connected with the depths of the world. The brokenness of our personal lives is profoundly bound up with the brokenness of creation itself. The logic of focused attention to personal repentance is not private holiness but the healing of "the earth and all who dwell therein."
—Ken Sehested, "Things to Do During Lent," *Sacred Seasons*, Lent/Eastertide 2003

Second Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 58:1-12

Hymn

"Volvamos Hoy a Nuestro Dios"
("Return to God")
WORDS and MUSIC: Marty Haugen

Art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

TUNE: [Now the time of grace has come]
SOURCE: *Oramos Cantando - We Pray In Song*
No. 406 - Publisher GIA, 2013

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 51:1-17

Hymn

"Sign Us with Ashes"
WORDS and MUSIC: Mary Louise Bringle
TUNE: PHOENIX - LM with refrain
SOURCE: *Glory to God* No. 433

Epistle Reading

II Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Meditation of Commitment

Repentance is consummated in an act of restoration. To repent means to return to God—to be restored in that relationship. But carried with that is also the obligation to be in right relationship to our brothers and sisters in the world and to understand where our treasure lies.
—Marsha Martie, "Repentance and Renewal," *Sacred Seasons*, Lent/Eastertide 2006

Hymn

"Thine Arm, O Lord, in Days of Old "
WORDS: Edward Hayes Plumptre
MUSIC: William Croft

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Ash Wednesday

by C. W. Christian

Art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

Ash Wednesday, and shadows all around me, lives lived in shadows and emptiness, longing for substance, aching to be filled. But there is no one and nothing to fill them—nothing save ashes. Nothing to give joy and hope, nothing to brighten their eyes, to make them glitter in the anticipation of another day. It is as the poet has told us, "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day 'til the last syllable of recorded time, and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death."

Ash Wednesday and a world bereft—bereft of hope, of love—eyes that seem to see nothing at all and yet seem as old and as all-seeing as the sages. It is a fallen world, full of old men unnoticed by those who pass by, old men with sunken cheeks and bent backs sitting by the wayside, waiting—for what?

Ash Wednesday! A world of business tycoons and kings of oil and industry who are fiduciary visionaries and moral myopics. A world filled to weeping with children, children who might in any moment be dissolved in a flash by dynamite or torpex, or eaten away slowly to nothing by want and neglect. A world full of nursing mothers who have no milk and pious priests who have no comfort to bestow.

Ash Wednesday! The color again is purple, not the joyful purple of royalty, the color of a coming king, but the purple of blood and of deep sorrow. For I have sinned, O Lord. I have seen this dark world and have remained silent. I have lived in the shadows and done little to dispel them, to scatter the encircling gloom with the light of truth.

Ash Wednesday! It is not so much the ashes on my brow that are most with me, but the taste of ashes in my mouth, the flavor of sin and death. Where do I look, Lord? Where is the horizon? When will it glow with the light of hope and resurrection?

—C. W. (Wally) Christian, a theology professor at Baylor University for many years, wrote this meditation in 2008. A longtime friend of Seeds, he shared many poems and meditations with us over the years. The 2016 Sacred Seasons *Advent packet, "Harbinger of Hope," was designed around his poems and dedicated to his memory.*

Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

continued from page 8

TUNE: ST. MATTHEW
SOURCE: *The Hymnal* 1982 No. 567

Gospel Reading

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Benediction

From ashes to "hosannas" we follow you.
Walk with us through the desert, Lord,
even as we stumble and fall
on our journey to the cross.
Create a holy pause in our cluttered lives.
Empty us of all that would keep us from
entering into your suffering for the sake of the
world.
—Sharlande Sledge, *Prayers & Litanies for the Christian Seasons*

A Liturgy for the First Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Ytitalo

We pray for our faith communities as we acknowledge our brokenness and work together toward healing.

Call to Worship

One: From the time the fruit was taken and our eyes were opened, cracks began to appear in humanity;
Many: We've wallowed in silence, fractured, as we pull farther apart every single day.
One: The only hope is to admit it...
Many: We are broken.
One: As we look to God to put us back together again, to mend the deep wounds, to unite our faith communities as one,
Many: May our hearts join together, and begin to beat as one for justice.

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Hymn

"Touch the Earth Lightly"
WORDS: Shirley Erena Murray
MUSIC: Colin Gibson
TUNE: TENDERNESS - 5.5.10.D.
SOURCE: *Chalice Hymnal* No. 693

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 32

Meditation of Preparation

You and I struggle up through demons of economic injustice, racism, war-mongering and homophobia, and promptly forget how far it was for us to get here. We're promptly furious at everybody else for not having gotten here before we did, for the demons that still posses their wills. We forget how many other demons still hold us.
—George Williamson, "Limping Toward Easter," *Sacred Seasons*, Lent/Eastertide 1998

Hymn

"Lord, How Can We Forgive"
WORDS: Ruth Duck
MUSIC: Jewish Melody, 17th Cent.
- adapt. Meyer Lyon and Thomas Olivers
TUNE: LEONI - 6.6.8.4.D.
SOURCE: *Glory to God* No. 445

Epistle Reading

Romans 5:12-19

Meditation of Commitment

Easter is coming—the piercing light in the vision we've been given. This is why we're on this pilgrimage. It's because our eyes are fixed on Easter that we're always stubbing toes and cutting feet. But it's stubbed toes and cut feet through which Easter is rising in us.
—George Williamson, "Limping Toward Easter," *Sacred Seasons*, Lent/Eastertide 1998

Hymn

"Seek Ye First"
WORDS and MUSIC: Karen Lafferty
TUNE: LAFFERTY - Irregular Meter
SOURCE: *Celebrating Grace* Hymnal No. 436

Gospel Reading

Matthew 4:1-11

Benediction

O Lord, Maker of each one of us, carry us through another week…. Plant firmly in our hearts the memory of your pursuit and embrace of us, of the pursuit and embrace of those we love, so that we might more freely and earnestly pursue and embrace those who are forgotten and unloved.
—Nancy Hastings Sehested, from "Give Joy for the Journey," *Bless This Weary World*

Art courtesy of Cafe 458

A Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Vitalo

We pray for migrants, immigrants, refugees and those who provide shelter and welcome.

Call to Worship

One: So many lift up their eyes to the hills of a new place, wondering where help will come from;
Many: The Lord will keep your going out and coming in, your help comes in that hope.
One: We hear the voices crying out for refuge, the families seeking peace, the lost wanting to be found,
Many: And we answer by becoming the shade at their right hand, the warmth of hospitality, and the assurance of welcome at the table.
One: As we witness God's children stopped at the gates, turned away because of no room, and chastised for daring to hope,
Many: May our hearts be rent for the suffering of those seeking help, and bleed for justice.

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis 12:1-4a

Hymn

"We Walk by Faith, and Not By Sight"
WORDS: Henry Alford
MUSIC: Gordon Slater
TUNE: ST. BOTOLPH - CM
SOURCE: *The Hymnal* 1982 No. 209

Meditation of Preparation

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

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 121

Hymn

"Unto the Hills We Lift Our Longing Eyes"
WORDS: John Campbell, Duke of Argyll
MUSIC: Charles Henry Purday
TUNE: SANDON - 10.4.10.4.10.10.
SOURCE: *The New Century Hymnal* No. 466

Epistle Reading

Romans 4:1-5,13-17

Meditation of Commitment

Jesus welcomed all kinds of people. And his hospitality was a threat to the way society was structured in his day, no less than it is a threat to society as it is structured today, whether we perceive the threat or not.
—Richard Groves

Hymn

"Lift High the Cross"
WORDS: George William Kitchin
MUSIC: Sydney Hugo Nicholson
TUNE: CRUCIFER - 10.10.10.10.
SOURCE: *Glory to God* No. 826

Gospel Readings

John 3:1-17
or
Matthew 17:1-9

Benediction

As we go out from a safe place of warmth and welcome, keep us mindful of our neighbors who have no place to call home, no space to relax, and no one who hears the cries of their hearts. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and courage to act according to your will and word, remembering our ancestors were refugees fleeing violence and enslavement at the mercy of others' kindness. Amen.

Art by Sally Lynn Askins

A Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Vitalo

We pray for those who are victimized or marginalized because of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion, and for those who work to bring healing.

Call to Worship

One: Like the woman at the well, victimized, cast off by society, marginalized not by her own doing but by humanity's labels,
Many: We thirst not just for water, but for acceptance, for coexistence, for respect of who we are and what we believe.
One: We see those on the margins, villainized, rejected, alone,
Many: And we meet them where they are, offering a cool cup of water.
One: As we encounter each other at the well, recognizing the humanity within,
Many: May our hearts gush with living water, and overflow into the world with justice.

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Exodus 17:1-7

Hymn

"Shepherd of Souls, Refresh and Bless"
WORDS: James Montgomery
MUSIC: John Bacchus Dykes
TUNE: ST. AGNES - 8.6.8.6.
SOURCE: *The Hymnal* 1982 No. 343

Art by Rebecca S. Ward

Meditation of Preparation

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

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 95

Hymn

"And Can It Be, that I Should Gain"
WORDS: Charles Wesley
MUSIC: Thomas Campbell
TUNE: SAGINA - 8.8.8.8.8.8. with refrain
SOURCE: *Celebrating Grace* Hymnal No. 605

Epistle Reading

Romans 5:1-11

Meditation of Commitment

Without equivocation or hesitation I fully and completely admit that I deny the resurrection of Christ.… I deny the resurrection of Christ every time I do not serve at the feet of the oppressed, each day that I turn my back on the poor; I deny the resurrection of Christ when I close my ears to the cries of the downtrodden and lend my support to an unjust and corrupt system. However, there are moments when I affirm that resurrection, few

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What if on Tuesday...

by April Baker

Jesus rides into Jerusalem and we anticipate the coming of a new day when the powers and principalities will get what's coming to them and good will win out. Then we realize that our dreams cannot feed the thousands of hungry ones. Our hopes for a better day do nothing to quiet the gunfire in the neighborhood.

Our best intentions cannot make the hurt disappear. The cheers that swelled with our enthusiasm fall aside when the way is not what we expected. Jesus is betrayed with a kiss, a word left unsaid, the silence that voices complicity.

There is no Easter in the everyday for many in our world. But there is hope.

God's presence can be revealed through our many encounters with each other and with all that share this earth home with us. We can create the safety and welcome of home for all of creation. We can refuse to let any opportunity for wholeness and peace go by. We can insist that justice bound by love be our law and work to make it be so.

And as we create hope together, I wonder what would happen if on one day—maybe next Tuesday—everyone in the world felt the presence of God powerfully in their life? What if no one resorted to hitting to solve their conflicts?

What if on Tuesday every child in the world heard that her or she is a wonderful person? What if people parked their cars and the factories stopped and the earth could breath a little easier?

What if home was a safe and joyful place for everyone? What if everyone had a home?

What would the world look like on Tuesday if each person refused to step on another to move a little higher up? What if no one had too much and everyone had plenty?

What if people with mental challenges were taken as seriously as people with PhDs? What if the differences within the human family were reasons to create community rather than reasons to create divisions?

What if the voices of children were more important than the rhetoric of politics?

What if every person set an extra place at their table and no one was hungry?

Let it be so.

—April Baker is co-pastor of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, TN. The above is adapted from "Are They Gonna Bring God Back?" an Easter sermon printed in Sacred Seasons, *Lent/Eastertide 1999.*

Art by Rebecca S. Ward

Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Lent

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and far between as they are. I affirm it when I stand up for those who are forced to live on their knees, when I speak for those who have had their tongues torn out, when I cry for those who have no more tears left to shed.
—Peter Rollins, Irish writer and founder of the faith group Ikon

Hymn

"Canción del Cuerpo de Cristo"
WORDS and MUSIC: David Haas
TUNE: NO KE ANO' AHI AHI - Irregular Meter
SOURCE: *Oramos Cantando - We Pray in Song* No. 768 - Publisher GIA, 2013

Gospel Reading

John 4:5-42

Benediction

You are created in and bear the image of God to the world, and so too does your sister with different skin, and your brother who is shunned for who he loves, and the older person alone and forgotten, and the child working in a factory for pennies a day. May you see the person of Christ in everyone you meet, and in the mirror as well. Amen.

A Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Vitalo

We pray for those who do not see the needs around them.

Call to Worship

One: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, I pray;
Many: But not everyone gets green pastures and still waters in life.
One: Our eyes glaze over as we pass someone holding a sign, someone begging for food, someone hunkering in for the night under an overpass.
Many: "Surely we are not blind, are we?" We echo the Pharisees.
One: We see it every day with our eyes, but do we really see how pervasive injustice is in our world?
Many: May our hearts be witness to the suffering, and ache for justice.

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

I Samuel 16:1-13

Hymn

"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"
WORDS: Isaac Watts
MUSIC: Adapt. Edward Miller
TUNE: ROCKINGHAM - LM
SOURCE: *The Hymnal* 1982 No 479

Meditation of Preparation

The spiritual quest is not for interesting "spiritual experiences" but for the expansion of our capacity for mercy, the opening of our hearts wide enough to embrace the world, and not just the fragments of it, here and there, which at present we manage to feel with and care about.
—Martin L. Smith, *A Season for the Spirit*

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 23

Hymn

"The King of Love My Shepherd Is"
WORDS: H. W. Baker
MUSIC: John B. Dykes
TUNE: DOMINUS REGIT ME - 8.7.8.7.
SOURCE*: The Celebration Hymnal* No. 683

Epistle Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14

Meditation of Commitment

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

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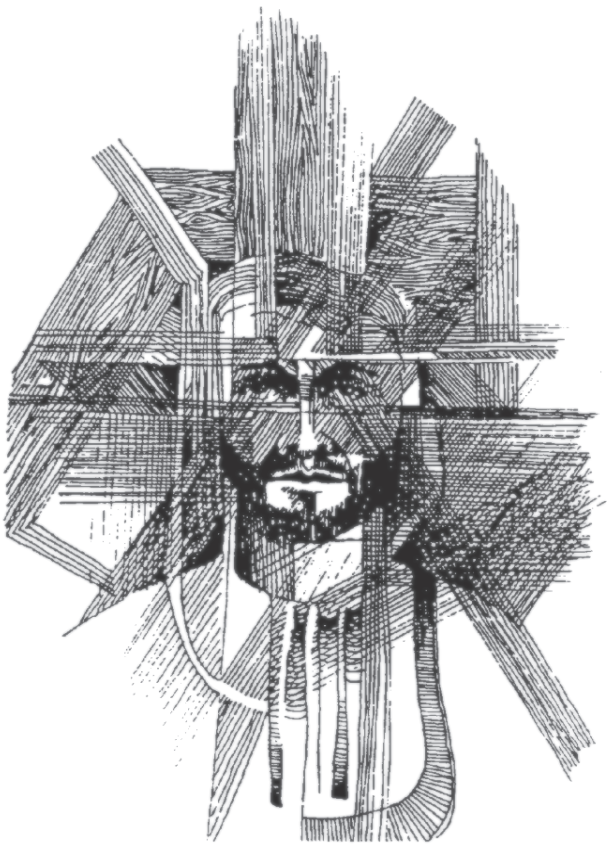


Art courtesy of Seventh & James Baptist Church

A Liturgy for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Vitalo

We pray for people who suffer from disabilities, disease, mental illness and addictions, for people who are incarcerated or imprisoned within their circumstances, and for those who work to bring resurrection.

Call to Worship

One: The valley of dry bones can be the desert of our minds, our bodies, our imprisonment,
Many: Out of the depths we cry as those bones rattle and creak, and Jesus weeps for us.
One: Suffering isn't always easy to see or understand, but it crushes the soul.
Many: And so we acknowledge that plight even when we can't understand, and simply point towards hope.
One: The Lord breathes new life into the valley, and the bones rise up, the dead live again;
Many: May our hearts weep for those walking in the valley, and pump new life into the world through justice.

Reading from the Prophets

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Hymn

"I Will Sing the Wondrous Story"
WORDS: Francis H. Rowley
MUSIC: Rowland H. Prichard
TUNE: HYFRYDOL - 8.7.8.7.D.
SOURCE: *Celebrating Grace* Hymnal No. 607

Meditation of Preparation

Christians are distinguished by their
radical esteem for Incarnation…
by their reverence for the life of God in the whole of creation, even, and in a sense especially, creation in the travail of sin.
The characteristic place to find Christians is among their enemies.
The first place to look for Christ is in hell.
—William Stringfellow

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 130

Hymn

"Recuerda Tu Amor" ("Remember Your Love")
WORDS: Mike Balhoff
MUSIC: Gary Daigle and Daryl Ducote
TUNE: [The Lord Is My Light and My Salvation]
SOURCE: *Oramos Cantando - We Pray in Song* No. 780 - Publisher GIA, 2013

Epistle Reading

Romans 8:6-11

Meditation of Commitment

Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues.
—John R. W. Stott

Hymn

"I Am the Bread of Life"
WORDS and MUSIC: Suzanne Toolan, RSM
TUNE: TOOLAN - Irregular Meter
SOURCE: *The Hymnal* 1982 No. 335

Gospel Reading

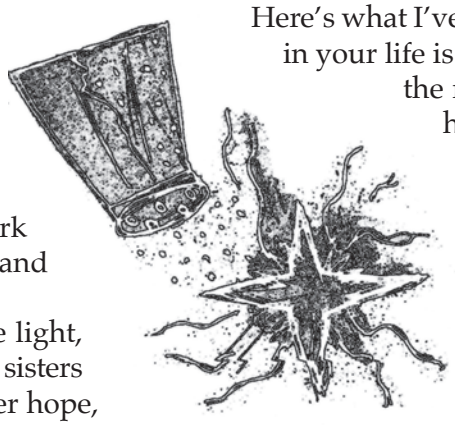
John 11:1-45

Benediction

O Lord, make your story of a kingdom of peace our story to live. Feed us day after day on the memory of who we are and whose we are. Give us joy for the journey to proclaim your triumphs, You who called us out of darkness into your marvelous light. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.
—Nancy Hastings Sehested, from "Give Joy for the Journey," *Bless This Weary World*

Art by Rebecca S. Ward

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings



We no longer have to ask ourselves if we are approaching a state of emergency. We are in the midst of it, right here and now, and we expect the future to mirror the past.... It is in the midst of this dark world that we are invited to live and radiate hope.

Is it possible? Can we become light, salt, and leaven to our brothers and sisters in the human family? Can we offer hope, courage, and confidence to the people of this era? Do we dare break through our paralyzing fear? Will people be able to say of us, 'See how they love each other, how they serve their neighbor, and how they pray to their Lord?'

Or do we have to confess that at this juncture of history we just do not have the needed strength or the generosity? How can we live in hope so as to give hope? And how do we find true joy?
—Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*

A deep inner sickness has taken over when we can't feel the suffering of those who are enduring structural violence every hour. We are in the psychological and spiritual condition of Dives who couldn't see Lazarus on his doorstep, with his wounds and sores being licked by the dogs. He went through his whole life, never seeing this person at his doorstep.

How do we awaken? First, by claiming our sickness. "God, I'm sick. I can't feel the pain of another human being created in the image of the same ultimate reality that brought me into being."

Something is very wrong with a mother who can't hear the crying of her baby in the night. And something is very wrong with me when I can't hear the crying of the babies and their parents in Iraq and in the Sudan, and when I can't hear the cries of the babies in my city when 49 percent of them are living in poverty.

God, I'm sick. I need a savior, a deliverer from the inner cancer eating away, not just at my emotions, but at my very soul. Claiming my sickness is the first part of awakening.
—Gordon Cosby, in a sermon

Here's what I've decided: the very least you can do in your life is figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance but live right in it, under its roof.

What I want is so simple I almost can't say it: elementary kindness. Enough to eat, enough to go around. The possibility that kids might one day grow up to be neither the destroyers nor the destroyed.

That's about it. Right now I'm living in that hope, running down its hallways and touching the walls on both sides. I can't tell you how good it feels.
—Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

Your neighbor stands before you as a representative of every human being and of the God who has created and dignified every human being.... Neighborly love is at once an involvement in time and an orientation toward eternity....Nothing human can be alien to those who have hope.
—Glenn Tinder, *The Fabric of Hope: An Essay*

We have made money our god and called it the good life. We have trained our children to go for jobs that bring the quickest corporate advancements at the highest financial levels. We have taught them careerism but not ministry and wonder why ministers are going out of fashion.

We fear coddling the poor with food stamps while we call tax breaks for the rich business incentives. We make human community the responsibility of government while homelessness, hunger, and drugs seep from the centers of our cities like poison from open sores for which we do not seek either the cause or the cure.

We have created a bare and sterile world of strangers where exploitation is a necessary virtue. We have reduced life to the lowest of values so that the people who have much will not face the prospect of having less.
—Joan Chittister, OSB

Art by Catriona Long

A Liturgy for Palm Sunday

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Vitalo

We pray for those with whom Jesus identified himself: hungry, thirsty, homeless and outcast people, the objects of scorn, hatred and violence.

Procession of Palm Branches

"All Glory, Laud, and Honor"
WORDS: Theodulph of Orleans, tr. J. M. Neale
MUSIC: Melchior Reschner
TUNE: ST. THEODULPH - 7.6.7.6. with refrain
SOURCE: *The Hymnal* 1982 No. 154

Call to Worship

One: Who is this who enters the gates with thanksgiving and praise?
Many: This is the prophet Jesus of Nazareth, the cornerstone of justice for the world.
One: We line the streets in anticipation, we wave palms and shout in exuberance,
Many: We celebrate him because he identifies with us, all of us, all of our heartaches.
One: What will these praises turn to, what awaits us this week?
Many: May our hearts shout Hosannas, and witness the example of justice unfold.

Hymn

"At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing"
WORDS: Robert Campbell
MUSIC: Jakob Hintze
TUNE: SALZBURG - 7.7.7.7.D.
SOURCE: *The Hymnal* 1982 No. 174

Meditation of Preparation

Now we've gotten to the part where following Jesus gets tough. And though it was actually dangerous in Bethlehem (what with Herod's paranoid killing spree) it seems more dangerous to us now. There doesn't seem to be much peace around our master. The religious leaders are clearly looking for an excuse to do away with him—and us, if we stand too close to him. The crowds are clamoring for him, but that won't last long. At this point, we mostly want to crawl under a table and hide from the whole thing.
—Katie Cook, "Why Did This Baby Have to Grow Up to Be So Hard to Follow?" *Sacred Seasons*, Lent/Eastertide 2008

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Hymn

"My Faith Looks Up to Thee"
WORDS: Ray Palmer
MUSIC: Lowell Mason
TUNE: OLIVET
SOURCE*: Glory to God* No. 829

Epistle Reading

Philippians 2:5-11

Hymn

"Adoramus Te, Domine"
WORDS and Music: Taizé Community

Meditation of Commitment

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, "What Kind of King is This?" *Sacred Seasons*, Lent/Eastertide 2016

Gospel Reading

Matthew 21:1-11

Hymn

"Come Now, O Prince of Peace"
WORDS and MUSIC: Kon-yong Yi,
adapt. Marion Pope
TUNE: O-SO-SO - 6.5.5.6.
SOURCE: *Glory to God* No. 103

Benediction

Loving Creator, we cry out for the blindness and

Please go to page 18.

Jesus, my brother and Lord,

I pray as I write these words for the grace
to be truly poor before you,
to recognize and accept my weakness and humanness,
to forego the indecent luxury of self-hatred,
to celebrate your mercy and trust in your power when I'm at my weakest,
to rely on your love no matter what I may do,
to seek no escapes from my innate poverty,
to accept loneliness when it comes instead of seeking substitutes,
to live peacefully without clarity or assurance,
to stop grandstanding and trying to get attention,
to do the truth quietly without display,
to let the dishonesties in my life fade away,
to belong no more to myself,
not to desert my post when I give the appearance of staying at it,
to cling to my humanity,
to accept the limitations and full responsibility
of being a human being—
really human and really poor in Christ our Lord.
—Brennan Manning, *Souvenirs of Solitude*

Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

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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*

Hymn

"I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"
WORDS: Horatio Bonar
MUSIC: John B. Dykes
TUNE: VOX DILECTI - 8.6.8.6.8.6.8.6.
SOURCE: *Baptist Hymnal* 1991 No. 551

Gospel Reading

John 9:1-41

Benediction

Lord, when it seems so easy to get where we are going, remind us of the woman waiting for the bus on her way to her second job. When we sit down to eat, bring to our hearts the people whose hands picked our food and whose feet ached as they stood in front of the stove. When we lie down at night, let us remember those who sleep in cars and under bridges. Blind us with the light of your radical inclusion that we might see all of your children and work as we pray to make things on earth as they are and will be in heaven. Amen.

Liturgy for Palm Sunday

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lack of faith of leaders who give priority to weapons. Forgive us when we have waved our palms of hope for earthly kingdoms that can never be, should never be, and were never meant to be. Forgive us when we have waved our palms for leaders riding their huge, white horses of deception and without discernment we became their followers.

Teach us to welcome the gentle visions of peace that come riding into our lives on the donkeys of agony and pain. Help us to discover the cost of such peace and even to know it is often a journey to a cross. Give us the knowledge that your peace was purchased with such pain and anguish and without such sacrifice there is no Easter. Amen.
—Walker Knight, from "Through a Veil of Tears," *Bless This Weary World.*

A Liturgy for Maundy Thursday

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Vitalo

We pray for the grace and courage to wash the feet of those for whom we have prayed during this Lenten season.

Call to Worship

One: The journey has been long, our feet are sore, tired, and dirty with the travel,
Many: And yet Jesus washes our feet, relieving our pains, and goes to prepare a place for us at the table.
One: For there are many who are also sore, tired, and dirty from life's journey, hoping there's a spot for them as well,
Many: And so we wash one another's feet, that all of those that we meet along the way may know that they are God's beloved too.
One: And we pull up another chair, for the table of grace has been set.
Many: May our hearts reflect our humble host, and point us towards exemplifying justice.

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

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

Hymn

"Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness"
Words: Johann Frank; transl. John Caspar Mattes and Catherine Winkworth
TUNE: SCHMÜCKE DICH - LMD
SOURCE: *Glory to God* No. 514

Meditation of Preparation

Loved as we are, now let us love as
visitors to the sick,
givers of compassion,
blessers of children,
advocates for youth,
comforters of the crying,
makers of peace,
feeders of the hungry,
workers for a new world,
friends of the rejected,
speakers for those who have no voice.
Blessed as we are, now let us bless,
in the name of Christ, who is the face of costly love.
—Sharlande Sledge, from "Mission," *Prayers & Litanies for the Christian Seasons*

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

Hymn

"Beloved, Let Us Love One Another"
WORDS and MUSIC: Samuel Batt Owens
TUNE: GOD IS LOVE - 10.5.10.4
SOURCE: *Lift Up Your Hearts* No. 305

Epistle Reading

I Corinthians 11:23-26

Meditation of Commitment

When love beckons to you, follow him,
Though his ways be hard and steep.
And when his wings enfold you, yield to him
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you.
And when he speaks to you believe in him,
Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the

Please go to page 20.

Art by René Boldt

Art by Jenora Mathis

Thoughts on the Origin of Lent

Do not bother looking for Lent in your Bible dictionary, because there was no such thing back then. There is some evidence that early Christians fasted forty hours between Good Friday and Easter, but the custom of spending forty days in prayer and self-denial did not arise until later, when the initial rush of Christian adrenaline was over and believers had gotten very ho-hum about their faith.

When the world did not end as Jesus said it would, his followers stopped expecting so much from God or from themselves. They hung a wooden cross on the wall and settled back into their more or less comfortable routines.

...

Little by little, Christians became devoted to their comforts instead: the soft couch, the flannel sheets, the leg of lamb roasted with rosemary. These things made them feel safe and cared for—if not by God, then by themselves. They decided there was no contradiction between being comfortable and being Christian, and before long it was very hard to pick them out from the population at large. They no longer distinguished themselves by their bold love for one another. They did not get arrested for championing the poor. They blended in. They avoided extremes. They decided to be nice instead of holy and God moaned out loud.

...

So the church announced a season of Lent, from the old English word Lenten, meaning spring—not only a reference to the season before Easter, but also an invitation to a springtime for the soul. Forty days to cleanse the system and open the eyes to what remains when all comfort is gone. Forty days to remember what it is like to live by the grace of God alone and not by what we can supply for ourselves.

—Editor's note: The writings above are excerpts from Home by Another Way *by Barbara Brown Taylor.*

Liturgy for Maundy Thursday

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north wind lays waste the garden.
—Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

Hymn

"I Come with Joy to Meet My Lord"
WORDS: Bryan A. Wren
MUSIC: Annabel Morris Buchanan
TUNE: LAND OF REST - 8.6.8.6.
SOURCE: *Baptist Hymnal* 1991 No. 371

Gospel Reading

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Benediction

Lord, you search us and know us. How strange and mysterious are your ways. Continue to send those of us already captive to free others from their chains. Continue to send those of us who are hurt to bind one another's wounds. Let us know again that the light we bring to others will be dawn to our own darkness. Teach us again that in giving, we receive. In releasing from bondage, we know liberation. In rebuilding ruins, in bodies broken, in blood spilled, we are made whole thorugh the word made flesh in Christ Jesus, Liberator and Lord. Amen.
Nancy Hastings Sehested, from "We Are Waiting," *Bless This Weary World*

A Liturgy for Holy Friday

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Ytitalo

We pray that we can, like Christ, enter into the suffering of others for the healing of the world.

Call to Worship

One: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Many: We echo Jesus' words, we feel them too.

One: His pain is our pain, his suffering is our suffering, his death is our death,

Many: And yet we're the ones yelling, "Crucify him," we're the ones holding the nails.

One: Christ gives himself up for the healing of the world,

Many: May our hearts understand that sacrifice, and turn towards justice to continue the healing that Jesus began.

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Hymn

"The Power of the Cross"
WORDS and MUSIC
TUNE: OH, TO SEE THE DAWN - 10.8.10.6. with refrain
SOURCE: *Celebrating Grace* Hymnal No. 190

Meditation of Preparation

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.
—John S. Ballenger

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 22

Hymn

"Dios Mío, Dios Mío" ("My God, My God")
WORDS and MUSIC: Marty Haugen
TUNE: [All Who See Me Laugh at Me]
SOURCE: *Oramos Cantando - We Pray in Song* No. 30 - GIA Publisher, 2013

Epistle Readings

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

Meditation of Commitment

Rather than interpreting the cross as an expression of God's wrath, for instance, it would seem to be more in character with the New Testament message to see it as the ultimate expression of God's love. The wrath actually revealed on Calvary is our human wrath, the high-handed rejection and mockery of God's love as revealed in Christ. From this perspective, the miracle of Calvary is God's loving acceptance of this rejection by humanly bearing the full weight and mystery of it, thereby transforming its burden and shame into an act of forgiveness.
—*John Habgood*

Hymn

"Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow"
WORDS: W. J. Sparrow-Simpson
MUSIC: John Stainer
TUNE: CROSS OF JESUS - 8.7.8.7.
SOURCE: *The Celebration Hymnal* No. 239

Gospel Reading

John 18:1-19:42

Benediction

The way is before us as it was for you—when you dragged your cross up to Golgotha, thorns piercing your head and the spit of those taunting you still on your face. The way is before us, perhaps not with cross and nails, for our suffering will be different in nature and form. But our way is united with yours in purpose if we will allow ourselves to suffer for others. If we open our hearts to feel the pain of the world, perhaps healing for all of us can continue… in your name…as we follow your way. Amen.

Art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

The Way Jesus Died

A Meditation for Holy Friday

by Lanny Peters

Text: John 19:25-27

Art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

During Holy Week, we look at the way Jesus died to see what we can learn about living. The Gospel of John tells us a story about a conversation Jesus has with his mother while he is dying.

The last story prior to this, about Jesus and Mary recorded in John's gospel, occurred about three years earlier. They were together at a wedding in Cana. She asked him to use his special powers to deal with a shortage of wine so that her friend, the host, would not be embarrassed.

"Woman," he had said back then, "what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." I am not sure what tone Jesus used, but it did not seem to bother Mary in the least. She ignored him and called the servants over. Jesus said something like "Aw, Maw," and then did as she had asked. He changed the water into wine so the party could go on.

Now, in today's passage, as Jesus hung on the cross, his time had come, though it had come in a way his mother could not have imagined. Fortunately, she was not alone. Her sister was there, along with Mary Magdalene and another friend named Mary.

Another man was there whom the gospel writer does not name, but calls the Beloved Disciple. The only thing we know about this person is that he was dear to Jesus, perhaps having to do with the fact that he was the only male disciple who did not run and hide when Jesus was arrested. The women were not in nearly as much danger as he was. They were far less likely to be stopped and questioned as collaborators.

There has been a lot of focus during recent years on how horrible the crucifixion was, with movies like Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and other passion plays. However you feel about that, most of us agree that Jesus died in a violent, horrible, dehumanizing way.

The first words he spoke from the cross, recorded by John, were, "Woman, here is your son." It was a terrible fulfillment of the words of old Simeon (Luke 2:25-35), for it was indeed like a sword that pierced Mary's own soul. Then he looked at the Beloved Disciple and said to him, "Here is your mother."

We see, in this passage, that Jesus died in a way that was consistent with how he lived.

Barbara Brown Taylor says:

> *Since his hands are not free, he has to do a lot of work with his eyes, indicating which woman and which man. When he is through, the adoption is final. From that hour, John says, the Beloved Disciple took Jesus' mother into his own home. It is a gesture of surprising sweetness, and yet you have to wonder which way it went. Was Jesus*

looking out for his mother or his disciple? Who needed whom more? …It was merciful of Jesus to give her a new son. But it is also merciful to give that son a new mother, especially this one.…

*When the beloved disciple takes her home, and when the other disciples come crawling out from under their rocks, they will find themselves in the presence of someone whose contact with the Holy Spirit has been far more intimate than theirs. She has seen things they have only heard about. She has felt things inside her own body they cannot even imagine. Perhaps that is why she stayed put while they fled. Perhaps that is what let her look full into the ruined face that no one but her (and her new son) could bear to see. While the principalities and powers believe they are tearing his family apart, Jesus is quietly putting it together again: this mother with this son, this past with this future. Although his enemies will succeed in killing him, he will leave no orphans behind. At the foot of the cross, the mother of the old becomes the mother of the new. The beloved disciple becomes the new beloved son. (*Home Another Way, *Cowley Publications, 1999, p. 99.)*

There has been much to ponder in the weeks of Lent as we looked at the lectionary stories of Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. We see, in this passage, that Jesus died in a way that was consistent with how he lived. Even in the midst of being crucified, he was concerned with those he was leaving behind. Even from the cross, he was still about creating the Beloved Community of God.

—The above is adapted from a sermon written by Lanny Peters for the Sacred Seasons *Lent/Eastertide 2007 packet, "Dangerous Love." At that time, Lanny was the pastor of Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, GA, where the Seeds ministry was born.*

Friends Who Need Us

A Children's Sermon (based on Matthew 25:31–40)

by John S. Ballenger

Before the service, engage the help of three people in the congregation. (Try to vary the gender, age, and ethnicity as much as possible.) When the children's sermon time begins, give the children a few adhesive bandages, some animal crackers, and a container of water. (Let them eat some of the animal crackers, if necessary. Then give them more.)

Tell them that you think these things might be useful before too long. Then take them for a walk around the sanctuary. Lead the children to the first person you've previously enlisted, who is sitting somewhere in the midst of the congregation.

Introduce the children to this person. You might say something like, "This is Charles. Charles, how are you today?" Charles's answer should be something like, "I'm not doing too well. I cut my finger. See?"

Then ask the group if anyone has anything that could help Charles. The children with the bandages will, hopefully, respond to their cue and give him a bandage. After he thanks them, continue your walk.

The second person should tell the children he or she is hungry, and you then prompt the children who carry the animal crackers. The third person will tell the children he or she is thirsty, and the children should give him or her water to drink.

When you have returned to the place normally reserved for children's sermons, explain that this is exactly what Jesus asked us to do—to help people like our friends in the congregation, any time we can.

—John Ballenger is a pastor in Baltimore, Maryland. For many years, he served as the drama and poetry editor for Sacred Seasons.

Art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

Thoughts for Holy Saturday

by Bruce Kay

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. (James 5:7-8)

Editor's note: The reflection below was originally written for the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans. Bruce Kay's professed name is Bruce James. His wife, Susan Kay, took the name Shoshanah at her profession.

James's words here ring so true for Holy Saturday. Our daughter Emma was admitted to a psych unit in a big hospital in New York City on the first day of last October, having been thrown by her tumultuous life into a deep psychosis, totally paranoid, suspicious of everything and everyone, especially herself.

In the almost two months she was in that state, on that unit, Shoshanah and I visited her as often as we could—which, given that we live five hours away in Connecticut was about every six days, a total of 10 times for each of us. Until her breakthrough back to reality shortly before discharge, her progress was painfully slow, seemingly nonexistent at times.

I gathered with some fellow Franciscans shortly after she was admitted, and Holy Saturday came up in the conversation. "We sit in darkness, doing nothing, while Jesus does what he does."

As you can imagine, this really resonated with me. Supposedly he went to hell to be with those there. And who knows what else? Probably more than can be written in all the books in the world.

But sitting in the darkness, who could know that? Who knew that the next day the tomb would be empty? Who knew that Emma would come out of her darkness? I feared that she wouldn't, even knowing that she was in excellent hands, even knowing that I came out of a similar break when I was young, and that her brother did likewise.

Thank God that she did. But the waiting was hard, very hard. It is always hard when you don't know the outcome. Letting go of what we wish for the outcome is even harder.

Having done this for about 2,000 years, we know the outcome. We know that there is something to wait for. But after Jesus died, how could the disciples have known that anything good would come of it? What outcomes must they have had to let go of?

And it's really not much different today. We live in dark times, we always have, and we always will. (I don't mean to sound so dismal, but have things really changed that much in human history?) We keep waiting for the light to come. It is SO hard.

The Light HAS come into the world. According to Matthew, Jesus's answer to John the Baptist was definitive:

> *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. (Matt. 5:7-8)*

Whenever these signs are present, the Light has come. It has come over and over, and keeps on coming. Unfortunately, we keep finding ways of stepping out of the Light, back into the darkness. We keep thinking that God has abandoned us.

During Advent in 2015, Emma was hospitalized after a suicide attempt, her first hospitalization for psych issues. Shoshana and I rushed to her side in Manhattan as fast as we could. Walking around the city, Shoshanah and I came upon a big church that was celebrating our Lady of Guadalupe. As they were setting things up, in silence, we joined the large group of people already sitting in the pews for some much-needed prayer.

The darkness felt so deep. What would Emma's fate be? Would I lose a child to the darkness, as I had lost a grandfather, a college roommate, and a brother—all to suicide? As I sat there, these words came to me: *You have no idea what I have in store for you, but I promise, it's all good, and I will always be there with you.*

To be honest, sometimes I have a hard time with the "it's all good" part, but I have no doubt about his being there. Even in the darkness. Even in the waiting. Even, or perhaps especially, when I have no idea what's next.

God is waiting. With us. Never forget it!

Peace and all good,
Brer Bruce James, OEF

A Liturgy for Easter Sunday

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook & Alec Vitalo

We recognize that resurrection was just the beginning of the story. We pray today that we will be empowered to continue our journey toward justice.

Processional

"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"
(Only 3rd Verse)
WORDS: Liturgy of St. James,
adapt. Gerard Moultrie
MUSIC: Traditional French Carol
TUNE: PICARDY - 8.7.8.7.8.7.
SOURCE: *Celebrating Grace* Hymnal No. 81

Call to Worship

One: The stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty, light pierces the shadows.
Many: Oh death, where is your sting?
One: If God can overcome the law of sin and death, then God can meet us in all of our sufferings,
Many: And guide us beyond the crosses that we bear into the light of Christ that reveals the resurrection.
One: There is hope for us and for the world, but that hope shouldn't just be here at the tomb,
Many: May our hearts be renewed with new light and life, and inspire us to continue the action of the resurrection daily, with an eye toward justice for all.

Reading from the Prophets

Jeremiah 31:1-6

Meditation of Preparation

The resurrection is not a denial of the past,
It is a sacrament of tears shed, pain sustained,
and death remembered…
to celebrate the sacrament of life
in the face of death
is an act of faith.
to believe in life resurrected
from the ruins of human conflict
comes from God who is
the power of transformation
And to work toward change
in the human condition
is a calling in response
to the vision of God's reign.
—C. S. Song

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Hymn

"The Day of Resurrection!"
WORDS: St. John of Damascus, tr. J. M. Neale
MUSIC: Henry Thomas Smart
TUNE: LANCASHIRE – 7.6.7.6.D.
SOURCE: *Glory to God* No. 233

Epistle Reading

Colossians 3:1-4

Reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Acts 10:34-43

Meditation of Commitment

We are told that we will meet Jesus in the ordinary places of life. He will meet you on your home turf, in the midst of your daily routine. God has entered into our suffering and pain and shared it. God has entered our lives and shares in our suffering and pain. God has shown at Easter that death is not the final word. "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised, he is not here. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going on ahead of you to Galilee." Jesus has gone on ahead of us to be present in all the Galilees of our ordinary living.
—Adapted from "Terror, Amazement and Fear: A Real Response to Resurrection" by Lanny Peters, *Sacred Seasons*, Lent/Eastertide 2007.

Hymn

"Cristo Vive" ("Christ Is Risen")
WORDS: Nicolás Martínez, tr. Fred Kann
MUSIC: Pablo Sosa
TUNE: CENTRAL - 8.7.8.7.D.
SOURCE: *Lift Up Your Hearts* No. 197

Please go to page 26.

Always the Women

by Louis Mazé

Art by Robert Askins

Why is it always the women? I recently realized that it was to the women that the message of his resurrection was granted, just as it was to Mary that the first news of his coming was announced—not to any man.

> But it was the women who stayed and who went to the tomb. I supposed they could have been arrested, too, but they went anyway.

Yes, we men lit out for the hills, after our Master was taken from us—we were sure we'd be next, and yes, we were afraid, and our minds were perplexed. That, at any rate, is our story, and, for the record, we are sticking to it.

But it was the women who stayed and who went to the tomb. I supposed they could have been arrested, too, but they went anyway.

It was their work, after all, their duty.

Oh, all right, I have to admit, they were not afraid—or at least not so afraid as to shirk.

In a word, they were *stronger*.

Our Lord taught us that we are all alike, men and women, which isn't how I was raised, and I accept that teaching now. We complement each other, we make a unity, both of us created in God's image.

And yet, we are different. And I want to know how, and in what ways, and why it is that it was to the women that the message was vouchsafed—why they were chosen, for there is a reason for everything.

Try as I may, I can never know what it is to bear a child, to give birth to a new life in pain, to love that new life with a love that can only come from that pain and joy.

Nor can I understand what it must be then to see that life snuffed out, much less extinguished in torture and torment, degradation and agonizing death.

And yet she, the mother, stood at the cross with a strength that I, a man, have not.

There is in each man something of a woman, and in each woman a man, and if I am to understand my Lord's message, I must somehow find the mother in me, the wife, the lover, sister, daughter—the one who cares beyond caring, who bears beyond bearing, who carries on when there is no dawn. Only then will I see what our Savior meant and love all people and accept that he truly died for me, who ran away.

—Louis Mazé is a professor at Texas State Technical College in Bellmead, Texas.

Liturgy for Easter Sunday

continued from page 25

Gospel Readings

John 20:1-18

or

Matthew 28:1-10

Benediction

And so we ask, Creator God, that as we leave this place of worship and return to what it pleases us to think of as our individual lives, you will keep us attuned to the power that binds us to one another and to you. Keep us strong in faith, humble in worship and active in love. Make us receivers of your word, strong and free of static. Your word that is powerful above all other. Make us your instruments, God, and attune us to the power and the glory and the responsibility that is the Kingdom of God within us and among us. Attuned to your harmonies, may we face the world with the alleluia that you have given us to sing. Amen.

—Leslie Withers, from "All We Get Is Static," *Bless This Weary World*

A Monologue for Easter Morning

by Katie Cook and D. Bruce Pate

Editor's note: The following was written to be delivered by a woman. It was originally used, in an outdoor Easter sunrise service, as the call to worship. If you use it inside, we suggest a dark stage or pulpit area when the woman begins, and a gradual lighting until her features are clear at the end. We suggest that she be in period costume, although this is not necessary.

The man whom they crucified?
Yes, I remember him,
standing beside us,
walking beside me,
talking,
touching,
hugging,
loving…

If you could have seen him
you would have loved him, too.
We all loved him.

He was kind and gentle and caring—
even to women.
It was as if we really mattered.
I guess that's why so many women followed him
from place to place.

He was especially approachable to poor people—
and even more so to widows
and children without parents.
He worried all the time about defenseless people.

He had this ability
to look inside us…
to somehow know our pain,
all our brokenness;
And we knew—I don't know how;
we just knew, somehow—
that he felt it, too…
that he cared about each one of us.
I knew that he loved me
for who I was…
in spite of who I was.
He understood loneliness, rejection,
cold, hunger…
He experienced those things himself.

He was wonderful.
There was something unearthly about him,
but I never felt that he was out of my reach.

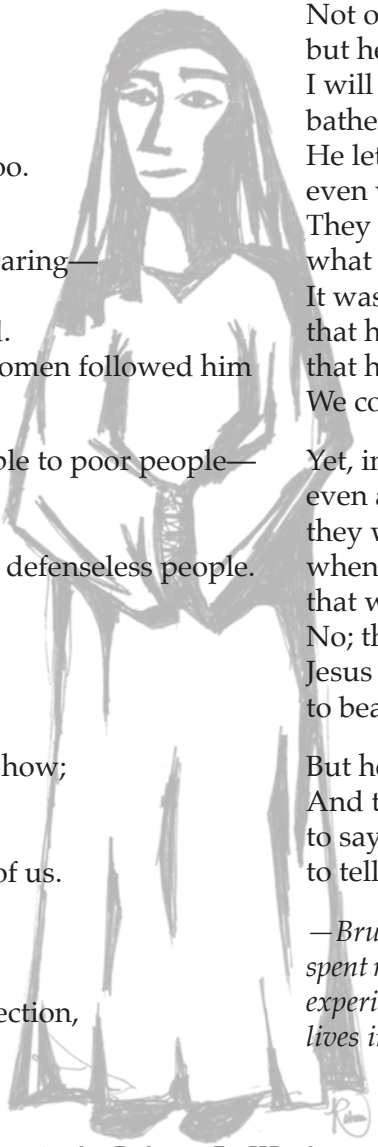
Most of the time, I remember,
at least toward the end,
he was exhausted.
But it was as if his greatness
came out of his weakness—
out of his needs.

Not only did he love us,
but he allowed us to love him back.
I will always remember when he let me
bathe his feet with perfume…
He let me serve him
even when the men objected.
They never quite understood
what Jesus meant to us—
It was amazing to them
that he would speak and explain things to us,
that he would listen to our thoughts;
We couldn't believe it ourselves!

Yet, in spite of how he treated us,
even after his death
they wouldn't believe us
when we told them that he was alive,
that we had seen him—
No; they had to go and see for themselves.
Jesus wouldn't have called upon a woman
to bear such a message…

But he did.
And that's why I am here now—
to say that I have seen him;
to tell you that *he is alive.*

—Bruce Pate was trained in religion and drama and has spent many years incorporating the dramatic into worship experiences for churches in Texas and Kentucky. He now lives in Missouri. Katie Cook is the Seeds editor.



Art by Rebecca S. Ward

Benediction

Art by Susan Daily, TBOM

You are risen in power and wonder,
You are risen out of the shambles
of death and terror and doubt and fear;
You are risen to turn the world
to peace and justice and freedom and well-being;
You are risen with healing wings
to cure our diseased hurts
and our public pathologies.
–Walter Brueggemann,
Inscribing the Text