Preparing for the Dawn

art by SallyLynn Askins

Worship Resources for the Creative Church - Lent/Eastertide 2022

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
seedseditor1@gmail.com • www.seedspublishers.org.

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.

Preparing for the Dawn

...in this worship packet:

art by Rebecca S. Ward

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.

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

For this Lent/Eastertide packet, our liturgical team—Guilherme Feitosa de Almeida, Erin Conaway, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo—are leading us toward Easter. Following on the sense of active waiting from the 2021 Advent/Christmastide packet, we settled on the theme of "Preparing for the Dawn," although you will also find a number of subthemes (see the theme interpretation on page 4).

As always, we are indebted to a lot of people for their generous contributions to this packet, beginning with the liturgical team. You will find their contributions throughout the packet, although you may not always see their names. Guilherme, a minister and a native of Brazil, teaches in the Baylor University Department of Theatre Arts. He developed the "Theatre of the Oppressed" workshop that is part of Seeds' "Creating Hope" project. He is responsible for the musical portion of our liturgies, as well as the Ash Wednesday liturgy .

Erin is pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where the Seeds offices are housed. In addition to leading the church in its support of the Seeds ministry, Erin wrote calls to worship and calls to action for the first three Sundays in Lent and created the art on page 27.

Alec is pastor of Richfield Christian Church in Waco and is very active in hunger-related and interfaith efforts in the community. He wrote the calls to worship and calls to action for the last two Sundays and Palm Sunday. He also contributed a Tenebrae service for Maundy Thursday or Good Friday.

Scott, the youth minister at Seventh & James, is a divinity student at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco. In addition to his insights for the weekly themes, he contributed the art on page 13.

Sally Lynn Askins is a member of the Seeds Council of Stewards and our resident artist. She created our stunning cover art after pondering the numerous subthemes. We also brought back some of our favorites of Sally's pieces and as well as those from Rebecca S. Ward, René Boldt, Lenora Mathis and Sharon Rollins. All of these artists created these pieces especially for you.

Also, we are pleased that one of our favorite preachers, Brett Younger, has shared two sermons with us. Brett is pastor of the historic Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, NY, and has generously shared many of his sermons over the years for your use and inspiration.

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. And, as always, we are counting on you to adapt these contents to your own needs and resources. We would love to hear about how you use them.

The contents of this packet are your congregation's to use freely and we want you to share them with others. We truly hope that the writings and art will inspire you to enter into a holy and thoughtful Lenten season and come out, as co-pastors and frequent contributors to *Sacred Seasons* April Baker and Amy Mears would say, in the heart of God. May we be inspired to work until all of God's children can see the light of resurrection.

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

art by Lenora Mathis

Theme Interpretation

We are an Easter people, we say, and our song is Hallelujah. But in the last few years, it has been a little hard to say Hallelujah with quite the same gusto. In fact, much of the time, our world seems to be anything but a resurrection morning. Those moments that sparkle seem to be few and far between.

And that is not really a new thing. When we look at what is happening around the world—and that's our job at Seeds—it is easy to become discouraged. Civil conflict, genocide, catastrophic natural disaster, famine and just plain cruelty seem to be on the increase.

At the beginning of Lent, it is fitting to realize that we stand in the rubble of our endeavors, covered in the ashes of our dreams. And then prepare to begin again.

A few years ago, one of my Sunday school students wrote, "Darkness and chaos have to cover the face of the deep before the spirit can brood over it and call out life." I suppose that's as good a description of Lent as I've ever read.

Our liturgical team, while brainstorming for this packet, spent a good deal of time thinking of waiting, watching and preparing. We finally came up with the theme "Preparing for the Dawn," but there are many subthemes at work. For the first Lenten Sunday, we have "Preparing our offering, giving of our bounty." For the second Sunday, we have "Preparing our story to share with others." For the third week, we wanted to emphasize caring for ourselves so that we can care for others.

For week four, we looked at the story of the prodigal son and the ministry of reconciliation. For week five, what stood out for us was Mary of Bethany and the concept of extravagant love. (If you look at Sally Askins' art on this page, you will see these themes literally flowing from the heart of the figure.)

Beginning with Palm Sunday and Holy Week, we followed a more traditional path for the services, but always with the idea of preparing for the resurrection morning.

And now, here we are, on the brink of Lent. We feel that the darkness is deep. But, as frequent contributors April Baker and Amy Mears would say, let us take the hand of Jesus, if we dare. And let us take each other's hands. Let us journey through the darkness together and prepare for a new day.

–Katie Cook

art by Sally Lynn Askins

Preparing Youth and Children for Lent

by Katie Cook

Burning Palm Leaves and Prayers

Here are some ideas from my church, Seventh & James Baptist, where the Seeds ministry is housed, for preparing youth and children for Lent. Just before Lent last year, some of the youth asked a number of questions about Ash Wednesday, and the teachers described the way we save palm branches from the previous Palm Sunday and burn them just before Ash Wednesday for the imposition of ashes.

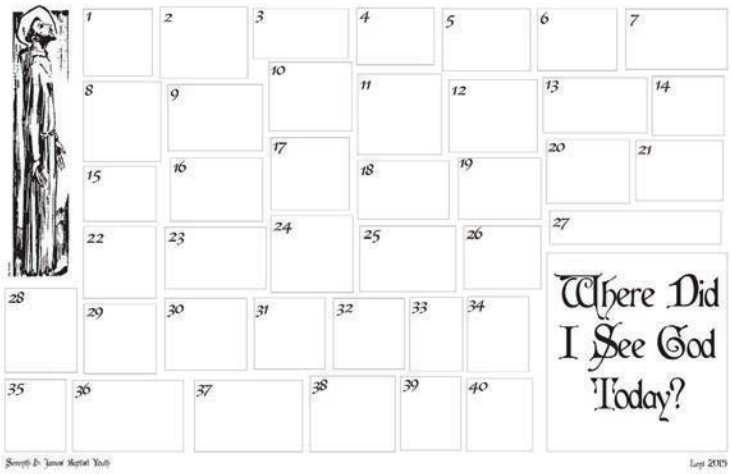
The youth asked if they could help. So, on Transfiguration Sunday—the sixth Sunday after Epiphany and the last Sunday before Lent—our youth minister and I brought out the dried palm branches and let the youth burn some of them. We have discovered, over the years, that it is simpler to burn them, a few leaves at a time, inside a covered alcove. (Maybe it's just Texas, but we have trouble with the wind.)

Before we began, we reminded the students where the nearest fire extinguishers were. We said that the ashes represent our frailty and talked about how sometimes our best efforts go up in smoke and our biggest dreams turn to ashes. Having participated in the burning caused the youth to pay more attention when the ashes were put on their foreheads, and they have wanted to do it again ever since.

We do something else that we think makes the ash ritual more meaningful. In our youth Sunday school classes, we have "burning bowls," and each week everyone takes two small pieces of paper. He or she writes on a small piece of paper a prayer or concern—something he or she wants to release to God. (Each person also writes a prayer request that someone else in the class will take and pray about during the following week, and we exchange these before we leave.) Each person takes the "release" prayer, lights it from the Christ candle, and burns it in the burning bowl, which is a stainless steel bowl sitting on a piece of wood that's about two inches thick.

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

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



Where Did I See God Today?

For years, the senior high Sunday school class at Seventh has chosen a Lenten discipline in which we will all participate. (It can be a little frightening to have one's "fast" chosen by teenagers, but my teaching partner, Donna Kennedy, and I always take a deep breath and carry on.) Individuals choose their own disciplines as well.

Several years ago, we decided together that we should give up whining for Lent. We went through the season, and, at the end, we decided that it only made us realize how negative we were. The next year, we change it up a bit. We kept "gratitude" journals. Every day, we jotted down something for which we were grateful that day. This turned out to be a very meaningful discipline, and it changed the complexion of the entire group.

Last year, we changed it again. We made up a calendar that includes the 40 days of Lent, with room to make notes each day, and we asked ourselves the question, "Where did I see God today?"

Lenten Bags for Children

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

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

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

Since we know that no emotion is beyond your care,
no life beyond your reach, none beyond your love,
we turn to you, Holy One.
Forgive us, we ask, for hurtful words, harmful actions,
and unhealthy thoughts; for leaving good deeds undone
and good words unsaid; for allowing so many to live
in the grip of poverty so that a relative few
can enjoy the lap of luxury.
Move us to work for the world as it could be:
A world where abundance is shared and peace is the norm;
a world that knows neither hunger nor homelessness;
a world where all are valued;
a world in which people forgive each other
so that we might live together.
With the patience and persistence to make this world a reality,
please grant us discomfort with easy answers, half-truths,
and superficial relationships.
Help us to preach and teach and write and organize and celebrate
and console and challenge in hope that we can together do what others claim
cannot be done. Amen.

-Rev. Nathan Day Wilson, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Published by the National Council of Churches, shared by the Alliance of Baptists

A Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

by Guilherme Almeida

Prelude

Call to Worship

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord.
–*from* The Book of Common Prayer

Litany of Preparation

ONE: As we embark upon this Lenten journey, we give thanks to God, who receives us in love, again and again, to begin our covenants again and again.
MANY: God's mercy endures forever.

ONE: God creates our hearts afresh, and returns our spirits to the right place.
MANY: God's mercy endures forever.

ONE: God restores the joy of our salvation, and makes each of us a new creation.
MANY: God's mercy endures forever.

ONE: Bless the Lord, who will guide us from this place to newness of life.
MANY: Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me.

Meditation of Preparation

If this is yours Lord, was and still is so—even from the depths of withering disappointment—dare to draw near to us once more, and tenderly. For we are in our deeds sorry for our indifference, our tolerances of injustice, our indulgence with destruction and the proud usurpation of power, before that which we have not done in person, or have not yet committed ourselves to do, but with which we are fearfully familiar. Lord, we are accustomed to what is human and have grown both broken and twisted.
–David Sparenberg, "Earth Is the Lord's"

Hymn of Adoration

"Living, Moving, End and Beginning/
Margam Satyam Jivam Nive"
Words and Music: Joseph Ravela, Vinita Manchala (Telugu, India);
trans. Terry MacArthur
Hosanna! Ecumenical Songs for Justice and Peace #6

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

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

Hymn of Preparation

"Lord, Make Us Servants"
Words: James Quinn
Music: English Folk Melody
Sing! A New Creation #204
LM, O WALY WALY

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 51:1-17

Canticle

"Create in Me"
WORDS & MUSIC: Mary Rice Hopkins
CCLI Song No. 106855

Epistle Reading

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Hymn of Dedication

"When We Are Living"
Words: Roberto Escamilla,
trans. George Lockwood
Music: Spanish Melody
Celebrating Grace #265
Irregular Meter, SOMOS DEL SEÑOR

Reading from the Gospels

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Meditation of Commitment

Emmanuel
You come in silence

to my world of crooked noisy places,
places rough with agendas
that leave me bruised,
spirit light low,
a bare glowing ember.
Emmanuel
I will give you quiet moments,
bits of silence stolen
from the clamor of the streets.
Let my silence straighten
a way for you
to smooth my rough spots,
to heal my bruised spirit,
to fan my faith's faint flame,
to prepare in me a vessel
for your incarnation.
–Lisa Wells Isenhower

Imposition of Ashes

Loving God, you create us from the dust of the earth; may these ashes be for us a sign of our penitence and our mortality, and a reminder that only by the cross do we receive eternal life in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.
–From the New Zealand Prayer Book

Benediction

Let us journey together through this season of Lent.
Let us listen to stories of exile
and hear cries for hope.
Let us reach out
for the hand of Jesus
and walk a path of dangerous love
into the possibility of new life.
–April Baker and Amy Mears

Confession for Ash Wednesday

by Katie Cook & Sherry Castello

ONE: God, we come to you in confession and entreaty. We long to worship you in spirit and in truth.
MANY: But we are too caught up in our comfort and privilege. We have allowed these things to blind us to the needs of others.

ONE: We long to follow in the way that you have shown us.
MANY: But we have become complacent in our quiet neighborhoods. We do not want to be bothered.

ONE: We long for the joy that we once felt in our hearts.
MANY: But we are weighed down by losses, by gains, by material belongings, by unmet needs, by disappointment and disillusion.

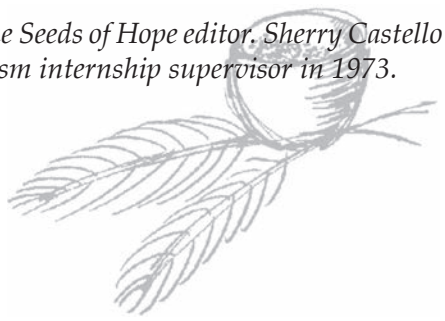
ONE: We are numbed by too many painful experiences, too much work, too little Sabbath.
MANY: Restore the joy of our first encounters with you. Teach us again to bask in your presence, to rest, to re-create ourselves.

ONE: We long for your will to be done on the earth, but sometimes we don't even know what that means.
MANY: Help us to trust you enough to keep following. Give us brave companions for the journey into hope.

ONE: We long to reach out our arms and embrace the world, to heal the brokenness, to dream again of a peaceable reign of God.
MANY: Show us the way to your holy mountain where the lion and lamb lie down together, where wars are ceased and no harm comes to any.

ONE: Help us to join together—people from all neighborhoods, from all faith communities, from all political persuasions, young and old, rich and poor, great and small…
MANY: Embracing one another, working shoulder-to-shoulder, never ceasing, picking each other up, helping each other along, until all your children are fed, all your children are kept warm, and none of your children tremble with fear.

–Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor. Sherry Castello was her journalism internship supervisor in 1973.



art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

A Liturgy for the First Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo

Prelude

Call to Worship

You command us to bring our first fruits to you. The first one is the one we've been watching all season. It was the first blossom, the first appearance of a tiny ball that would grow and ripen under our watchful and hopeful eye. This morning, we want to bring to you the first fruit of ourselves. To worship you with our best thoughts, our finest feelings, our sincere voices and our rugged determination. Forgive us when our offering falls short, and transform the gifts we bring into fruits worthy of your glory.

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

Hymn of Preparation

"We Call Ourselves Disciples"
Words: Jim Miller
Music: Henry T. Smart
Chalice Hymnal #357
7.6.7.6. D, LANCASHIRE

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Hymn of Adoration

"Blest Be the God of Israel"
Words: Michael Perry
Music: Hal Hopson
Celebrating Grace #88
7.6.7.6. D, MERLE'S TUNE

art by Rebecca S. Ward

Epistle Reading

Romans 10:8b-13

Gospel Reading

Luke 4:1-13

Homily

Meditation of Commitment

No act of virtue can be great if it is not followed by advantage for others. So, no matter how much time you spend fasting, no matter how much you sleep on a hard floor and eat ashes and sigh continually, if you do no good to others, you do nothing great.
–John Chrysostom

Hymn of Commitment

"When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"
Words: Isaac Watts
Music: Lowell Mason
Celebrating Grace #186
LM, HAMBURG

Benediction/Call to Action

Children of God, like a toddler bringing fresh artwork to hopefully pin on the refrigerator door, give your gifts and your work, your laughter, your agony, your dreams, your failures, and your very beloved self to God who receives you with proud, loving, and always open arms. ■

A Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo

Prelude

Call to Worship

In an age where the world's information rests at the ready in our purses and pockets through our phones, the only unique thing we have to offer is our own story. You inhabit the world in ways no one else has or will. You see with eyes and hear with ears only belonging to you. You are individually loved and cherished by God. Bring your story, your life experience, your whole self into this moment of worship today and hear what God has to say to you.

Meditation of Preparation

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

Hymn of Preparation

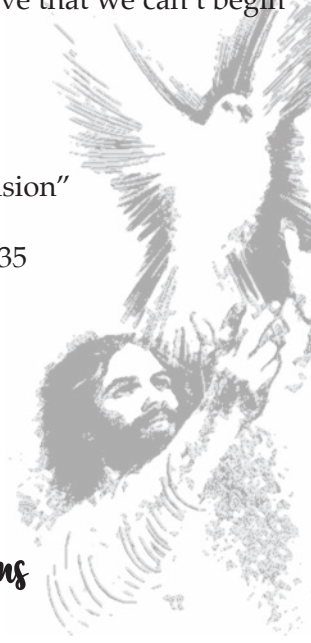
"What Was Your Vow and Vision"
Words: Brian Wren
Music: *Southern Harmony*, 1835
Chalice Hymnal #177
7.6.7.6. D, COMPLAINER

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 27



Note: We suggest that you ask two readers to take turns reading each stanza, or ask the congregation to do so.

Hymn of Adoration

"Be Still, for the Presence"
Words and Music: David Evans
Sing! A New Creation #11

Epistle Reading

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Gospel Reading

Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)

Homily

Meditation of Commitment

I imagine Lent for you and for me as a great departure from the greedy, anxious anti-neighborliness of our economy, a great departure from our exclusionary politics that fears the other, a great departure from self-indulgent consumerism that devours creation. And then an arrival in a new neighborhood, because it is a gift to be simple, it is a gift to be free; it is a gift to come down where we ought to be.
–Walter Brueggemann, A Way Other than Our Own: Devotions for Lent

Hymn of Commitment

"We Have Been Told"
Words and Music: David Haas
Sing! A New Creation #136

Benediction/Call to Action

Beloved ones, go forth from this place, from this transformational act of worship as one who is embedded in a community but not lost in one. You are an exceptional part of a whole with your story of God's love to remember, to share, and to live. ■

A Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo

Prelude

Call to Worship

"Everyone who thirsts come to the waters." You are hereby cordially invited through the prophet Isaiah, to the banquet of the presence of God.

Where you are lost, to be found
Where you are broken, to be healed
Where you are hungry, to be filled
Where you are abandoned and alone, to be gathered into the family of God.

There is nothing you can bring to this party. Don't worry if you forgot to make a reservation; your seat has been saved and your place set from the beginning of time. Just come, in whatever you are wearing, however you may feel, with all of your doubts and wonder…come.

Meditation of Preparation

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

Hymn of Preparation

"These Tables Divided"
"Las Mesas Partidas"
Words and Music: Collective Creation
(Caminando con el Dios de la vida), Mexico
Hosanna! Ecumenical Songs for Justice and Peace #81

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 55:1-9
Note: We suggest that you ask two readers to take turns reading each verse, or ask the congregation to do so.

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 63: 1-8

Hymn of Adoration

"How Deep the Father's Love for Us"
Words and Music: Stuart Townend
Celebrating Grace #178
8.7.8.7. D, TOWNEND

Epistle Reading

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Gospel Reading

Luke 13:1-9

art by Rebecca S. Ward

Homily

Meditation of Commitment

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

Hymn of Commitment

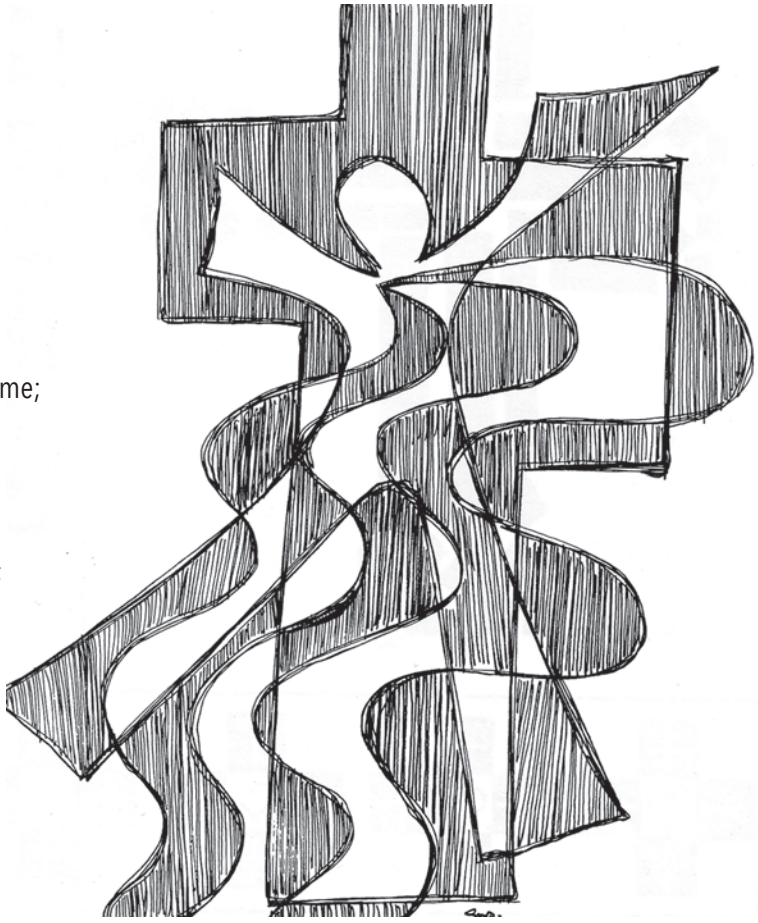
"Christian Hearts, in Love United"
Words: Nicolaus L. von Zinzendorf,
trans. Frederick W. Foster
Music: *Erbaulicher Musicalischer Christen-Schatz,* 1745
Celebrating Grace #270
8.7.8.7. D, CASSELL

Benediction/Call to Action

Friends, this party is not complete. There are still empty chairs at God's table and in our community here. Go and share the invitation, forward the Good News to anyone and everyone you meet. By your love and kindness they will know they are sought after and welcome here in God's Grace. ■

Giving Away Our Lives

Giving our lives away may mean:
turning the other cheek;
standing with the people who are losing;
doing good that will receive no applause;
sitting in a home where someone has died;
treating discarded people as children of God;
shopping for someone else's groceries;
baking cookies that we won't eat;
reading stories to someone else's children;
taking flowers to someone who's not our type;
visiting someone else's mother in the nursing home;
walking someone else's dog;
watering someone else's plants;
washing dishes we didn't dirty;
discussing current events that don't interest us;
sending cards when we don't know what to write;
talking about faith
when we would rather be silent;
doing good for people who will do
no good to us in return;
weeping when others weep;
praying not for an easier life,
but for strength to give our lives away;
discovering that if there's nothing
for which we would die,
then we don't have enough for which to live.
–Brett Younger



art by Mary Daily, IBVM

The Invitation
A Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent

by Brett Younger

Text: Isaiah 55:1-9

I used to live in Texas, and about this time every year it started to get warm and we started thinking about baseball. When I think of baseball in Fort Worth, I remember John Hunter, a vendor in his late forties. His specialties were hot dogs and making people smile. He wasn't what we normally expect from vendors. He walked slowly up and down the aisles shouting in a unique way. He would yell, "Hawt dawgs" in a monotone. You would get the feeling that if he were selling a gourmet dinner it would sound the same.

Vendors peddling their products usually focus on the quality of the product: "Hot dogs, get your hot dogs, hot mustard, hot relish, spicy stadium frankfurters, get your scrumptious, mouth-watering delectable dogs, get 'em right here." The best peddlers make a wiener on a bun sound like a seven-course meal. The hot dog itself is often disappointing.

The vendor in Isaiah 55 has a product that lives up to its billing. The song begins with a street corner vendor shouting "Ho," for which we may need a new translation, but which was for them the ancient equivalent of "Get 'em right here." With running water as close as the nearest faucet we don't need water vendors, but in Palestine, water was precious and expensive, a commodity bought and sold in the street.

But this vendor wasn't *selling* water. God was giving it away, "Come, everyone who's thirsty—here's water! Come you that have no money—buy grain and eat! Come! Buy wine and milk—it costs you nothing! Come! Drink your fill! It's free!"

Those who heard were astounded. No grocery store ever used this slogan in their newspaper ad: "And you who have no money, come get wine and milk, no charge."

We've all gotten phone calls that begin, "Hi. We'd like to give you a subscription to *Newsweek, Sports Illustrated*, or *Martha Stewart's Living Behind Bars*."

We respond, "Thank you. I'm not interested."

"We'd like to send you on an all-expenses paid trip to the Bahamas."

"Thank you. I'm not interested."

"We'd like to give you a year's supply of hot dogs."

"Thank you. I'm not interested."

We know nothing is free. We may like *Newsweek* and the Bahamas and sometimes a hot dog hits the spot, but if we need it, we'll get it for ourselves.

That's what makes it hard for us to accept that our deepest need is one that we can't take care

art by Sally Lynn Askins

of on our own. This hymn in Isaiah is for people who are hungry and thirsty for joy and hope, who are tired and need rest, who aren't satisfied with their lives, who recognize that they need something that they can't create, something to think about, something to love, something that's missing.

The Israelites were missing something important. They were a conquered nation in exile. Their enemies had destroyed the temple. One commentator put it, "The Hebrew people don't even know where God's dining room is—much less whether there's food on the table." They are far away from home, living with strange people with peculiar beliefs. Something is definitely missing.

This hymn in Isaiah is for people who are hungry and thirsty for joy and hope, who are tired and need rest, who aren't satisfied with their lives, who recognize that they need something that they can't create, something to think, something to love, something that's missing.

None of us want to confess the emptiness we feel, to admit that, left to our own devices, our own devices aren't enough. We do our best to fill our lives. We work for the promotion that promises success. We look for the spouse who'll make everything right. We plan to lose 10 pounds and walk every day. We'll fill our schedules with time management activities, but, at the end of the day, it's not what we've dreamed. We drink from the fountains at which we wait in line and come away with parched throats. We still hunger to be known and understood. We hunger to be loved. We hunger to be at peace inside our own skin.

The Israelites had to decide what to do with their deepest longings. They had been in captivity for 50 years, but the Babylonians treated them well. They allowed them to buy property and engage in business. The Israelites had been successful.

So, when King Cyrus told them that they could go home, he knew they wouldn't. They didn't want to leave what they had gotten or what they had gotten used to. They didn't miss the home they'd never known. Though the king said they were free to go, they were captive to a way of life. They knew it wasn't who they were meant to be, but it was what they knew. They knew that they weren't really at home, but they had given up on ever really being at home anywhere.

We keep working for the day when we feel completely at home, but we recognize that the fulfillment we can create is temporary at best. Some of the people who have the job we think will make us complete, the family that's almost perfect, the success we want, the life we want, are still empty inside. The Israelites sang, "Why do we spend money for what is not bread, and wages for what does not satisfy? Why do we work for what doesn't matter?"

Today is the Third Sunday in Lent—the season given to honesty about our longings and God's peace. All who are weary, come home to God. All who are thirsty, come to the waters. All who hunger, eat what is good. Give up the security of a foreign land for the glorious journey home.

Most of the Israelites decided to stay in Babylon. They wouldn't part with what they had or who they'd become. But a few decided that God's offer was too good to refuse. They went home and rebuilt the temple and sang this hymn giving thanks for God's grace.

In Horton Foote's play, *The Trip to Bountiful*, an elderly widow recognizes that she will die soon. Mrs. Watts lives with her son and daughter-in-law in a small apartment in Houston. Her heart's desire is to return to her hometown, Bountiful, one more time. She ends up stuck in a bus station twelve miles from Bountiful waiting for morning to come, hoping that someone will take her the rest of the way. She's happy just to be this close to home.

Today is the Third Sunday in Lent–the season given to honesty about our longings and God's peace. All who are weary, come home to God. All who are thirsty, come to the waters. All who hunger, eat what is good.

She says: "Why is it that on some days everything goes right, and on other days, nothing goes right? I guess the Lord's just with me today. I wonder why the Lord's not with us everyday. Well, maybe then

we wouldn't appreciate it so much those days when God is with us. Or maybe, God's with us always, and we just don't know it. Maybe I had to wait twenty years cooped up in the city before I could appreciate going home."

We all long to go home, to always feel the grace of God. Deep down we know that it's when we find our home in God's grace that we'll find peace with who we are. It's in God's grace that we'll learn how to live in the world that makes us long for home in the first place. The Lord is with us every day. When we're hungry and thirsty, God offers bread and the cup. At this table, God gives grace to the ambitious, rest to the weary, comfort to the hurting, peace and joy to us all.

–Brett Younger is a generous and frequent contributor to Sacred Seasons. *He has pastored a number of churches in Indiana and Texas, and now serves as pastor of the historic Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, NY. Before moving to Brooklyn, he taught homiletics at McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University in Atlanta, GA. He has written numerous books and is much sought after for his thoughtful editorial writings.*

Deep down we know that it's when we find our home in God's grace that we'll find peace with who we are. It's in God's grace that we'll learn how to live in the world that makes us long for home in the first place.

Invitation to the Table

Note: The sermon by Brett Younger on pages 11-12 was originally preached as a communion sermon. The invitation below is the one that followed.

Invitation

This table is the invitation to God's love. You are welcome in this community of grace learning to give thanks for God's goodness.

At the Bread

Jesus said, "God's kingdom is like a king who threw a wedding banquet for his son. He sent out his servants, instructing them to tell the guests, "Everything is on the table, supper's ready. Come to the feast." God invites us to share the bread of life. This is a gift for which we give thanks together.

At the cup

Isaiah shouted, "Hey, everyone who's thirsty, come to the water. Are you penniless? Come anyway—buy and eat. Come, buy your drinks. Buy wine without money—everything's free." The central truth of the Christian faith is that everything's free. God offers this cup of grace. This is a gift for which we give thanks together.

art by Scott Turner

Communion Blessing

God of bread and cup, love and mercy, create in us clean hearts, renew a right Spirit within us. We are too reluctant to set aside our hurt and disappointment. Open our eyes to the power of your grace. Restore in us the joy of your salvation, the hope of your mercy, your love, your generosity. Amen.

Quotes, Poems and Pithy Sayings

When Jesus says "love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "love your neighbor as yourself," these simple instructions tell me that love should guide everything that I say or do. When he forgives the people who are crucifying him because they have no idea that what they are doing is wrong, he shows me how to forgive people who hurt me. When he tells me to pray for my enemies and to repent of my own failings, he gives me instructions on how to follow him into the realm of God. He never said that it would be safe.
–Deborah Sokolove, "Being Saved," from Inward/Outward Together

Jesus calls us to be unpopular, to go against the grain, and to give away what we have worked for. He said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?"
—Charley Garrison, "Good Mourning: A Meditation for Holy Friday"

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

Jesus does not romanticize his way of life. He is homeless, so his followers, too, can expect to wander the earth as pilgrims on a mission to proclaim God's nonviolent reign.... Jesus insists that his mission has a life-and-death urgency. The end of the old world is at hand—and so is God's reign. Get with it, stay with it, and don't give up.
–John Dear, Jesus the Rebel

The body of Christ should live out, for all to see, the meaning of being trustworthy stewards of God's creation. This will be seen in how we view our possessions, in our style of living, in how we respond to global economic injustice and in how we show love for one another by sharing ourselves and what we own. If we belong to one another spiritually, then economic bonds must join us. And if we have been deeply touched by God's compassion, we will naturally feel a call to help the hurting world God so loves.
–Senator Mark O. Hatfield

We are simply asked
to make gentle our bruised world
to be compassionate of all
including one's self
then with the time left over
to repeat the ancient tale
and go the way of God's foolish ones.
—Jim Strathdee

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, A Keeper of the Word

A Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo

Prelude

Call to Worship

We come to worship in confession, for too often we represent the brother who is angry and refusing to welcome the prodigal son back with open arms. We have caused the cracks in humanity, we encourage the deep fissures to grow into chasms, and we outright refuse to reach out and pull the other back towards us. May we see that all that is lost in this world is found by God, may we understand that all that has died in relationship will rise again to life in reconciliation, may we fling our arms wide and welcome all of humanity with the same mercy and same celebration that the father did for the brother we despised and rejected.

art from an old Seventh and James worship guide

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

Hymn of Preparation

"There Is a Redeemer"
Words and Music: Melody Green
Sing! A New Creation #145

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Joshua 5:9-12

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 32

Hymn of Adoration

"Holy, Holy, Holy"
"Santo, Santo, Santo"
Words and Music: Latin American Hymn
Chalice Hymnal #111
6.7.6.7, SANTO

Reading from the Epistles

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Gospel Reading

Luke 15:1-32

Homily

Meditation of Commitment

For most of my life I have struggled to find God, to know God, to love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the Scriptures—and to avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair. Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me.

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

Hymn of Commitment

"Nearer, My God, to Thee"
Words: Sarah F. Adams
Music: Lowell Mason
Chalice Hymnal #577
6.4.6.4.6.6.6.4, BETHANY

Benediction/Call to Action

God who reconciled the world to yourself, entrust us with that same ministry of reconciliation with one another, that we may be ambassadors of the Word for all who need to catch a glimpse of hope in a fractured and hurting world. As we leave where we have worshiped as one body, may we go out as individual hands and feet to embrace our role to mend those separations, speak for justice in unity, and reach out to pull near those who keep getting pushed further towards the margins.■

Litany of Lost and Found

by Erin Conaway

One: When Jesus walked the earth, the sinners and tax collectors gathered near to listen to his teaching and the pious people turned up their noses and said, "Of course, he even eats with them."
Many: God, deliver us from our perceived piety and the myth of "them."

One: you didn't start an argument about the sameness of sin or the fact that we're all stained and disfigured by it; instead you told a story about a little lamb who wanders off and the good shepherd who finds him.
Many: Help us to see how far we have wandered from your fold.

One: Lost sheep are pursued, misplaced coins are found, and spiteful sons are welcomed home with loving embraces. Your grace wraps us firmly in your loving embrace, and you clean us with your jealous hand.
Many: Turn us back to your love and mercy; lead us down the path of righteousness for your name's sake; find us where we are lost.

–Erin Conaway is the senior pastor at Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where the Seeds offices are housed.

Caring Together

A Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

by Brett Younger

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Have you ever had this conversation?

"Where did you go?"

"I went to the coffee shop, Key Food, and the cleaners."

"Did you see anyone?"

"No. I didn't see anybody."

It sounds impossible to go to three public places without seeing anyone, but it is often true. We were oblivious to the people around us long before we had masks and social distancing. I live in Brooklyn, NY, a city that specializes in not looking, that prides itself on not making eye contact. For reasons of self-preservation, comfort and dread, we keep walking. Too much to do, too little time, too many of them, too much pain—where would you start?

So keep walking and, whatever you do, don't look. Not seeing people is how we keep our distance. We have learned to be aloof. We are not sure who lives three doors down. We can't remember the name of the person who delivers the mail. We see our relatives once a year, and after two days it's time to go. We keep our distance.

We don't really talk. "How are you?" means "Keep it brief. I'm in a hurry." We chat about whether we should tell people we are watching Squid Game, whether we are starting to understand why Superman never married Lois Lane, and why Emily Blunt would be a better James Bond than Idris Elba. We are more likely to talk about something on television than about the loneliness we feel, the joy of being loved, or the hope of believing. Most conversations are dueling soliloquies. We think about what we will say next while we wait for our turn.

Laurence Peter said, "A bore is a fellow who can change the subject back to his topic faster than you can change it back to yours."

We keep our distance by allowing our prejudices to make judgments for us. We don't have to get to know people if we think we already know them. We assume the worst about those who are different. Labels make things easy: conservatives, liberals, rich, poor, friends, enemies, us, them. We see what is on the surface, and judge by that.

Have you heard the term *fundamental attribution error*? It is a concept from psychology. It is the tendency to over-attribute personality as an explanation when someone else does something wrong, and under-attribute situational explanations. We do the opposite when we do something bad.

For example, if someone else is in the way when we are getting off the train, he is a jerk. When we are hurrying to get on the train, we are in a hurry. If someone else is short with us, she is rude. If I am short with someone, I am tired. We have trouble seeing that other people's lives are as complicated as ours. We find it hard to respond to others the way

art by Rebecca S. Ward

we want them to respond to us—with compassion and understanding.

The fundamental attribution error is habit forming. We get comfortable judging others, and it is not good for our souls. We expect everyone to make their own way, live in their own little worlds and hardly see each other.

Paul calls it "regarding one another from a human point of view." The people at Corinth kept their distance. They did not feel responsible for one another or for Paul.

> We have trouble seeing that other people's lives are as complicated as ours. We find it hard to respond to others the way we want them to respond to us–with compassion and understanding.

After Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, opponents who didn't think much of Paul joined the church. Paul came back to the church to try to undo the damage, but it was a painful visit. There was a distance between Paul and the church that Paul couldn't overcome on his own.

Paul thought we keep our distance from one another, because we keep our distance from God. We are hesitant to pray with all that we are, or give ourselves to worship, because we are afraid of how thinking about God will change the way we treat one another.

We are able to stay away from each other because we stay away from God. The distance we protect is evil. One of the best definitions of sin is separation from God and each other. Sin is keeping our eyes and hearts closed. God hopes that we will treat God and each other with trust and love. Jesus didn't keep a safe distance from God or God's people. But we do, and with the smallest excuses.

Soren Kierkegaard tells the story of a professor of Asian languages. This scholar had been trying to translate a particular text for hours. The professor was in his study at home, and his wife was calling him to dinner. He was concentrating so hard that he didn't hear her. He was stuck on the translation because of a strange mark over one of the characters. He didn't have the slightest clue as to what it meant. This tiny mark had made it impossible for him to make any sense of the text.

His wife got frustrated, so she went to the study, put her hand on his shoulder and said, "Come to dinner now."

As she spoke, her breath blew the mark—the mark the professor had worried over—off the page. It wasn't part of the text. It was a piece of dirt. Although just a speck was removed, the entire situation changed. The problem that seemed so impossible wasn't there anymore.

God removes the marks that keep us from seeing one another. Forgiveness sets us free to move past the problems that stump us. What keeps us distant from one another is only a speck. When God removes the speck from our eyes, we recognize those around us. We no longer see from "a human point of view," but with God's perspective.

We learn to be amazed at what people have to carry, rather than pass judgment on how they are carrying it. When we accept God's forgiveness, we see in the light of forgiveness. The old ways of seeing will no longer do. We give up the labels. We stop seeing others as problems to be avoided. We are our relationships. We are not self-contained. When we add a new friendship or restore an old one, we become more.

Emily Peach was a couple of years ahead of me in elementary school. When she was eight years old, a young couple who had adopted her sight unseen came to her orphanage to pick her up. When the couple got there the school choir was performing. They had never met their new daughter. They were told that she was singing, but they did not know which one she was. Her parents later described how odd and wonderful it was, watching and knowing that one of those singers was their daughter.

The message of God's grace is that every crowd is filled with members of our family.

Johann Janacek, a seminary student in Montreal, tells a story from his work as a hospital chaplain. A patient named Jacques was deteriorating rapidly. His companion of fifteen years, Louis, was finding it hard to say goodbye to this one with whom he had shared his life.

Louis came and sat with Johann and Paul, another staff worker. As they cried together, Louis asked, "Why are you here? Why do you do this?"

Without thinking about it much, Paul said, "Because we're Christians."

Johann thought, "This is the first time I've realized why I am here."

Louis said, "You know, I always believed there was a God out there somewhere, but I was wrong.

God isn't out there. God is here, right here. I see God in the way you care."

God is with us in the way we care. We are ministers of reconciliation in a variety of ways: being real friends and not just using one another when it is convenient, listening instead of thinking about what we are going to say next, sharing a word of hope with those who do not feel God's love, praying for

> When we accept God's forgiveness, we see in the light of forgiveness. The old ways of seeing will no longer do. We give up the labels. We stop seeing others as problems to be avoided.

people we do not know that well, offering kindness to those who have little kindness to return, speaking uncommonly good words, doing unusually good deeds, and acting like the church.

At Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, where I am pastor, we try to act like the church. The congregational care team checks in with those who might feel left out. The History Ministry looks for ways to tell our good story. The Racial Justice Ministry looks for ways to keep writing our good story. The Underground Thrift Store raises money for anti-human trafficking. We share mission projects like Habitat for Humanity, the Hope Program, Bloom Again Brooklyn and the East New York Garden.

A retired cab driver tells this story:

Thirty years ago—when I drove a cab for a living—I responded to a call from a quiet part of town. I assumed I was being sent to pick up some partygoers, or someone who had just had a fight with her husband.

When I arrived at 3:30 a.m., the building was dark except for a single light in a ground floor window. Most drivers honk once or twice, wait a minute, then drive away, but I had seen too many impoverished people who depend on taxis, so I walked to the door and knocked.

A frail, elderly voice answered, "Just a minute."

I could hear something being dragged across the floor. After a long pause, the door opened. A small woman in her eighties was standing there. She was wearing a print dress and a pillbox hat with a veil pinned on it, like somebody out of a 1940s movie.

The apartment looked as if no one had lived in it for years. The furniture was covered with sheets, no clocks on the walls, and no knickknacks on the counters.

"Would you carry my bag out to the car?"

I took the small nylon suitcase to the cab, then went back to help the woman. She took my arm. We walked slowly. She kept thanking me for my kindness.

I told her, "It's nothing. I try to treat my passengers the way I'd want my mother treated."

She said, "You're such a good boy."

When we got in the cab, she gave me an address, then asked, "Could you drive through town?"

"It's not the shortest way."

"Oh, I don't mind. I'm in no hurry. I'm on my way to a hospice."

I looked in the rearview mirror. Her eyes were glistening.

"I don't have any family left. The doctor says I don't have long."

I quietly reached over and shut off the meter.

"What route would you like me to take?"

For the next two hours, we drove through the city. She showed me the building where she once worked as an elevator operator. We drove through the neighborhood where she and her husband lived when they were newlyweds. She had me pull up in front of a furniture warehouse that had once been a ballroom where she had gone dancing as a girl. Sometimes she would ask me to slow down in front of a particular building and we would sit staring into the darkness, saying nothing.

At the first hint of the sun rising, she said, "I'm tired. Let's go now."

We drove in silence to the address she had given me. It was a small convalescent home, with a circular driveway. Two orderlies came out to the cab as we pulled up. I opened the trunk and took the small suitcase to the door. The woman was already in a wheelchair.

She asked, "How much do I owe you?" reaching into her purse.

"Nothing."

"You have to make a living."

"There are other passengers."

Almost without thinking, I bent and gave her a hug. She held on to me tightly.

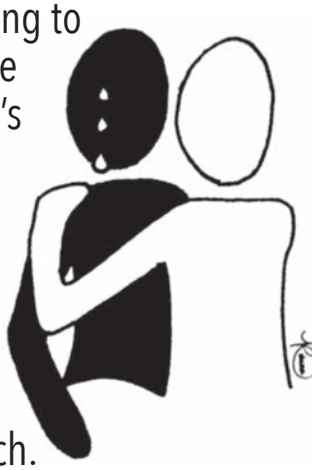
"You gave an old woman a moment of joy. Thank you."

I squeezed her hand, and a door shut behind me. It was the sound of the closing of a life. I didn't pick up any more passengers that shift. I drove aimlessly, lost in thought. What if I had refused to take the call, or had honked once, then driven away? I don't think that I have done many more important things in my life.

We don't do anything that is more important than living with God's love. So we ask ourselves: Did I bring a smile to someone's face today? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my resentment? Did I forgive? Did I love?

–Brett Younger is a generous and frequent contributor to Sacred Seasons. *He has pastored a number of churches in Indiana and Texas, and now serves as pastor of the historic Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, NY. Before moving to Brooklyn, he taught homiletics at McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University in Atlanta, GA. He has written numerous books and is much sought after for his thoughtful editorial writings.*

God is with us in the way we care. We are ministers of reconciliation in a variety of ways: being real friends and not just using one another when it is convenient, listening instead of thinking about what we are going to say next, sharing a word of hope with those who do not feel God's love, praying for people we do not know that well, offering kindness to those who have little kindness to return, speaking uncommonly good words, doing unusually good deeds, and acting like the church.



art by Rebecca S. Ward

We become more human as we discover we are able to love people. And when I say "love people," I mean to see their value and their beauty, to love people who have been pushed aside, humiliated, seen as having no value. Then we see that they are gradually being changed. At the same time, sharing our lives in community with the weak and the poor, we come in touch with our own limits, pain and brokenness. We realize that we, too, have our handicaps which are often around our need for power and the feeling that our value lies in being powerful—a power that frequently involves crushing other people. So we're confronted by two visions of society: a vision of a pyramid, where you have to have more and more power in order to get to the top, or a vision of a body where every person has a place.

–Jean Vanier

A Liturgy for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo

Prelude

Call to Worship

We come to worship in confession, for too often we dwell on the past: our own, others', the world's. We hold onto former things even in their death, we create idols out of what is old, and we perceive nothing but what is past. May we see a new thing springing forth, may we find the way that is made through the wilderness, and may we declare God's praise and anoint Christ's feet like Mary while looking toward the extravagant love that awaits us.

Meditation of Preparation

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

Hymn of Preparation

"Beneath the Cross of Jesus"
Words: Elizabeth C. Clephane
Music: Frederick C. Maker
Chalice Hymnal #197
7.6.8.6.8.6.8.6. ST. CHRISTOPHER

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 43:16-21

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 126

Hymn of Adoration

"Lord, Have Mercy upon Us"
Words: *Kyrie Eleison*
Music: Healey Willan
Chalice Hymnal #300
Irregular Meter, WILLAN KYRIE

Epistle Reading

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Gospel Reading

John 12:1-8

Homily

Meditation of Commitment

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

art by Sally Lynn Askins

with her own scandalous behavior. When God's grace overwhelms us, we don't carefully weigh the alternatives.
–Brett Younger, "Extravagant Faith"

Hymn of Commitment

"I Would Be True"
Words: Howard Arnold Walter
Music: Joseph Yater Peek
Chalice Hymnal #608
11.10.11.10.10, PEEK

Benediction/Call to Action

God who makes a way out of no way, guide us through the final stretch of wilderness and desert that hinders our paths to the empty tomb, that we may find *the way* that you have established through Christ's journey to come. As we leave this worship, may we remember to look forward towards the new thing that you are about to do instead of behind us, follow the streams winding in the desert, and prepare our hearts to receive an extravagant love that knows no bounds.

Pray that God will empty you of everything that isn't love.
Speak an extravagant word of grace to someone. Look for words so lavish that their face and yours will turn red.
–Brett Younger, "Extravagant Faith"

art by Sharon R. Rollins

A Liturgy for Palm Sunday

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo

Note: The Hebrew Scripture reading and Epistle Reading are from the Liturgy of the Passion. The Gospel and Psalms readings are from the Liturgy of the Palms.

Prelude

Call to Worship

ONE: Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.
MANY: God's steadfast love endures forever.

ONE: Our Lord enters on a colt, that in triumph he may begin the way towards the cross.
MANY: We welcome him with palms, with praises, and with shouts of Hosanna!

ONE: For even as we grow silent this week, even the very stones themselves will cry out.
MANY: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!

Meditation of Preparation

The God we proclaim and worship will not be domesticated, "homebound," shut in, confined by our temples, and stagnated by our stories. God does not quietly accept our own well-worn narratives, smoothed over and sweetened by complacency and comfort. [Jesus creates] a new narrative that is ours to follow AND to re-create. This is a dynamic, raucous God who jars us to wrath or to faithfulness, and who simultaneously provides us the opportunity to partner in the creation of a new narrative, woven with edge-people in edge-places, and in the particularities of daily living and daily people.
–David L. Ostendorf

Hymn of Preparation

"Now Behold the Lamb"
Words and Music: Kirk Franklin
Sing! A New Creation #144

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Hymn of Adoration

"Hosanna"
Words and Music: Simei Monteiro, Brazil
Hosanna! Ecumenical Songs for Justice and Peace #1a

Epistle Reading

Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel Reading

Luke 19:28-40

Homily

Meditation of Commitment

Each of us is called to prophetic agony—to speak the Word, to do justice and righteousness. We are most truly ourselves when we live within God's insecurity, acknowledging Yahweh's sovereignty over creation, taking full responsibility as contingent creatures who yet must decide and act. Future is created out of past by those who live the present. Wherever history is unfolding, faith demands response. In the face of God-encounter, indifference does not suffice.
–Martin Bell

Hymn of Commitment

"Lift Up Your Heads"
Words: George Weissel
Music: Thomas Williams' *Psalmodia Evangelica*, 1789
Celebrating Grace #173
LM, TRURO

Benediction/Call to Action

God who humbled yourself and took human form that we might understand grace upon grace, lead us beyond the path of palms, feast with us and the disciples at the table of grace, share with us your cries of agony and pain, and forgive us as our hosannas transform into chants for crucifixion. As we take our next steps in a Holy Week of worship, may we live in each moment and story as the days progress towardsthe inevitable, take every thoughtful word of Christ to heart, and journey alongside him as the world awaits the coming of the dawn breaking through the overwhelming shadows that gather around the cross. ■

A Palm Sunday Confession

by Burt Burleson

art by René Poldt

Come, Lord Jesus, come now into our midst
and hear our hosannas.
Hear the confident hosannas offered this day…
from bright and peaceful places,
from mountain tops and green pastures.
From these places where vision is clear
and presence is known,
hear our quiet but joyful praise.
And hear the hesitant hosannas offered this day.
Hear them too…
from dark and unsettled places,
beneath looming mountains,
in shadowed valleys.
From these places where direction is uncertain
and longing is real,
hear our quiet but hopeful praise.

–Burt Burleson is the University Chaplain and Dean of Spiritual Life at Baylor University in Waco, TX.

A Service of Tenebrae for Maundy Thursday or Good Friday

by Alec Ylitalo

Note: A Tenebrae is a religious service, generally associated with Western Christianity, that is usually held during Holy Week, often on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday. In the service, a number of candles are lit—sometimes 12, sometimes 15, in this case eight (not counting the Christ candle[1]). They are then extinguished one by one as prayers or scripture passages about Christ's last week are read. The Christ candle remains lit, unless you hold the service on Good Friday.

The setting should be a somewhat darkened room, perhaps the church's sanctuary or a smaller room. The lighting of the candles is also a part of this service, so you may want to keep some lights on until they are lit. Bear in mind also that your final readers will need a little bit of light for reading, and, if you include congregational singing, your congregants will need to be able to read the hymnal. Otherwise, the darker you can make it, the better.

The whole point of the service is to make the congregants aware of the dimming of the light and the starkness of the dark. If you want it to be really dark, you might consider having the hymns played or sung by an instrumentalist or singer (or ensembles). Also bear in mind that you will need to leave enough light for the congregation to get to the exits.

Set aside eight readers ahead of time (nine if you're doing it on Good Friday). Each will read his or her portion and then snuff out one candle. After the benediction, if you hold the service on Maundy Thursday, you may conclude by leaving the Christ candle in its place or by processing out with it. If you hold the service on Good Friday, you should add a reading and snuff out the Christ candle (see below).

Prelude

Explanation of the Tenebrae Service

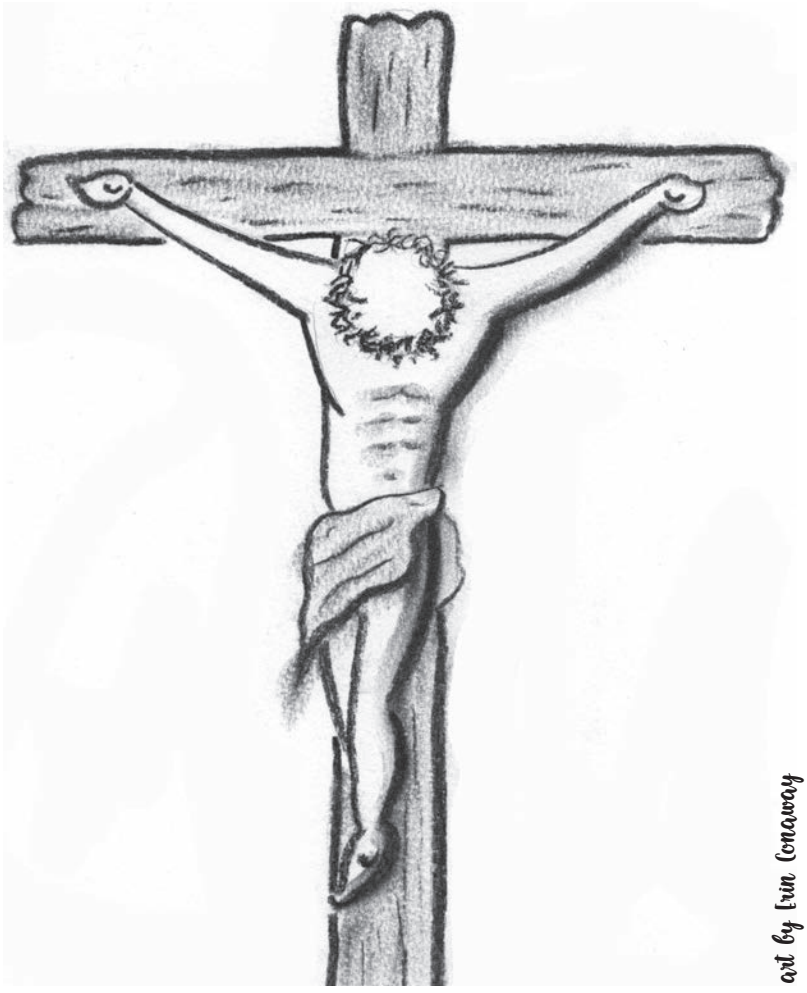
Hymn and Lighting of Candles

"Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"
Words: Walter Chalmers Smith, 1867
Music: Welsh Folk Melody
Chalice Hymnal #66
11.11.11. 11 ST DENIO

Candles are lit during the hymn.

Call to Worship

One: We gather in the light of love.
All: Together we share that light with the world.



art by Erin Conaway

One: The shadows approach.
All: The world grows dim.

One: We hold on to hope.
All:That God's light will shine through and dispel the shadows. Amen.

First Reading

Matthew 26:6-13
Evening Prayer

First candle is extinguished.

Second Reading

Matthew 26:20-25
Communion Hymn
"These I Lay Down"
Words and Music: John Bell, 1989
Chalice Hymnal #391
88.84 LAYING HANDS

Lord's Supper

Second candle is extinguished.

Third Reading

Matthew 26:31-35
Here you may have a reading about Peter, such as "A Sonnet for St. Peter" by Malcolm Guite.

Third candle is extinguished.

Fourth Reading

Mark 14:32-42
Hymn:
"Go to Dark Gethsemene," verses 1 & 2
Words: James Montgomery, 1825
Music: Richard Redhead, 1853
Chalice Hymnal #196
77.77.77

Fourth candle is extinguished.

Fifth Reading

Matthew 26:47-52
Here you may have a reading such as "The Betrayal" by Janet Martin, or another reading that evokes the sense of betrayal at Jesus' arrest.

Fifth candle is extinguished.

Sixth Reading

Luke 22:54-62
"O Jesus I have Promised," verse 1
Words: John E. Bode, 1868
Music: Arthur H. Mann, 1881
Chalice Hymnal #612
76.76D ANGEL'S STORY

"Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross," verse 1
Words: Fanny J. Crosby, 1869
Music: William H. Doane, 1869
Chalice Hymnal #587
76.76 with refrain NEAR THE CROSS

Sixth candle is extinguished.

Seventh Reading

John 18:33-38
Silence (perhaps with instrumental music) or personal prayer

Seventh candle is extinguished.

Eighth Reading

Matthew 27:20-26
"What Wondrous Love is This"
Words and Music: Appalachian folk hymn
Chalice Hymnal # 200
12.9.12.12.9 WONDROUS LOVE

Eighth candle is extinguished, leaving only the light of Christ.

Closing for Maundy Thursday

The worship leader stands near the Christ candle and says:
"The Light of Christ remains, still shining for now. We go in silence and prayer in preparation for Good Friday."

-or-

The worship leader takes up the Christ candle, moves toward the exit, and says,
"The Light of Christ leaves, with the congregation following in silence for preparation for Good Friday."

Closing for Good Friday

A ninth reader reads John 19:16b-19, 23-30 and then snuffs out the Christ candle.

The worship leader says, "The Light of Christ has been extinguished. We now go in silence and hold these readings and hymns in our hearts."

–Alec Ylitalo, Senior Minister at Richfield Christian Church in Waco, TX, is a member of the Sacred Seasons *liturgical team. He is active in supporting local social assistance programs and in interfaith efforts.*

Endnote

1. The Christ candle is the white candle in the middle of the Advent wreath, lit on Christmas Eve. In many churches, the same candle stays in the worship area and is lit for every worship service until Good Friday. It is then lit from Easter Sunday until the next Advent, when a new white candle is placed in the new Advent wreath and isn't lit until Christmas Eve.

art courtesy of the Franciscanos de Cruz Blanca

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

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

A Liturgy for Easter Sunday

by Guilherme Almeida, Erin Conaway, Katie Cook, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo

art by Susan Daily, IDVM

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

Prelude

Call to Worship

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

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

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

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

Meditation of Preparation

Easter is not a time for groping through dusty, musty tomes or tombs to disprove spontaneous generation or even to prove life eternal. It is a day to fan the ashes of dead hope, a day to banish doubts and seek the slopes where the sun is rising, to revel in the faith which transports us out of ourselves and the dead past into the vast and inviting unknown.
–Author unknown, quoted in the *Lewiston Tribune*

Hymn of Preparation

"O God, Unseen Yet Ever Near"
Words: Edward Osler
Music: William Gardiner's *Sacred Melodies*, 1815
Chalice Hymnal #399
CM, BELMONT

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 65:17-25

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Hymn of Adoration

"We Welcome Glad Easter"
Words: Anonymous
Music: John Roberts' *Caniadau y Cyssegr*
Celebrating Grace #197
11.11 with refrain, ST. DENIO

Epistle Reading

1 Corinthians 15:19-26

Meditation of Commitment

The resurrection does not solve our problems about dying and death.It is not the happy ending to our life's struggle, nor is it the big surprise that God has kept in store for us. No, the resurrection is the expression of God's faithfulness to Jesus and to all God's children. Through the resurrection, God has said to Jesus, "You are indeed my beloved Son, and my love is everlasting," and to us God has said, "You indeed are my beloved children, and my love is everlasting." The resurrection is God's way of revealing to us that nothing that belongs to God will ever go to waste. What belongs to God will never get lost.
—Henri J. M. Nouwen

Hymn of Commitment

"Rejoice, the Lord Is King"
Words: Charles Wesley
Music: John Darwall
Celebrating Grace #215
6.6.6.6.8.8, DARWALL

Benediction

Congregations greet each other with "Christ is risen," and with the response, "Christ is risen indeed."

Responsive Declaration for Easter

art by Mary Daily, IBVM

ONE: Through these doors have stumbled pilgrims, outcasts, sin-wounded sisters and brothers, people with the learning of the ages, and children with only the word of love at their command, Abrahams, Sarahs, Ruths, Davids, Jonathans, Marys, Simon Peters, Priscillas, and Aquilas, all searching for a story to call their own.
MANY: We are a colony of heaven, a redeemed people, a royal priesthood, a ministering body of God's healing grace, and a beacon of hope in a broken and suffering world.

ONE: God has chosen and formed a people. The earth may pass away. Kings and presidents may rise and fall.
All: But God's church shall never be defeated, the church shall rise again and again and again, living the story of God's love until the hosannas of our thanksgiving rise unto the heaven forever and ever.

–From a worship guide from Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York.

Benediction

art by Sally Lynn Askins

Lord, we long for righteousness within and without.
We pray for the church we love to be the church as it's meant to be.
Hear our prayer. Empower us with vision and courage.
Redeem us, your body, from that which tears us asunder, ripping the fabric
of your flesh and blood over and over, in nonsacramental ways.
Bring healing, help and hope as only you can, Lord Jesus.
It begins within me now, and within each of my brothers and sisters.
Thank you for working your work, and remake the church. Amen.
–David Delacroix, OEF