Making a Way in the Wilderness

art by Sally Lynn Askins

Worship Resources for the Creative Church - Lent/Eastertide 2023

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.

Making a Way in the Wilderness

...in this worship packet:

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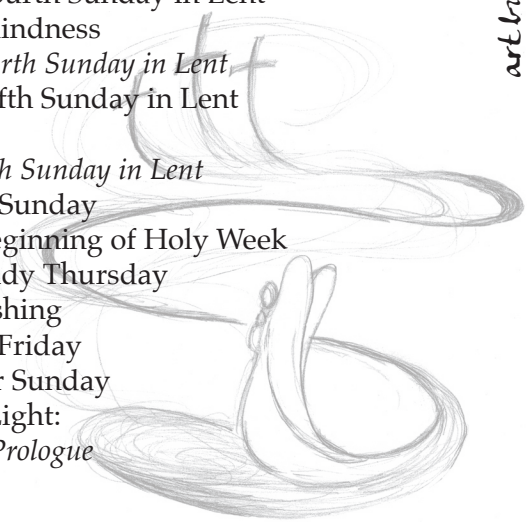


Editorial Address

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

With this Lent/Eastertide worship packet, we continue a wilderness theme from the 2022 Advent/Christmastide packet. A word from the newest member of our liturgical team, Chip Wilson, explains the theme for this packet on page 4. The team endeavored to plot a path through the wilderness, examining the lectionary texts for each week, each choosing a Sunday to write the call to worship and benediction. (You will also see other writings from each of them in different places.)

Chip is minister of youth and of family and community at Grace Lutheran Church in Peoria, AZ, and also teaches third graders at Maryvale Preparatory Academy there. The other members of the team are Guilherme Feitosa de Almeida, Erin Conaway, Ken Sehested, Scott Turner and Alec Ylitalo.

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 all of the hymn selections.

Erin is pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX, where the Seeds offices are housed. Alec is pastor of Richfield Christian Church in Waco and is very active in hunger-related and interfaith efforts in the community. You will see litanies and prayers from both of them throughout the packet.

Scott is a Divinity student at George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco. He is minister to youth at Seventh & James and provides insight to youth and children's content and, often, stunning art. Ken Sehested was a founding Seeds editor and was the founding director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. You will also find his writings throughout the packet.

We are delighted to include sermons this time from Marsha Martie, pastor of the Crossties Ecumenical Church in Waco, TX, and Cindy Weber, pastor of the Jefferson Street Baptist Community at Liberty in Louisville, KY.

Sally Lynn Askins is a member of the Seeds Council of Stewards and our resident artist. She created the cover art for this packet and many others. You will also find art created by some of our favorite artists—Peter Yuichi Clark, Erin Kennedy Mayer, Rebecca Ward, Sharon Rollins, Robert Darden, Sr. Susan Daily, René Boldt and Robert Askins.

We hope this art and these writings will be helpful as you navigate the Lenten season. 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. As always, 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 they guide us all into a blessed and thoughtful Lenten journey and into Eastertide and beyond.

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

art by Sharon R. Rollins

Making a Way in the Wilderness: a Theme Interpretation

Text: Isaiah 58:11-12

by Chip Wilson

Editor's note: One of the readings for Ash Wednesday is Isaiah 58:1-12. We have examined this passage many times in our publications, heeding its admonition that the "fast" God chooses for us is to free oppressed people, to feed hungry people, to welcome homeless people, to clothe naked people. We have reminded ourselves that this, more than the wearing of ashes and giving things up, is what God wants from us during Lent. But, having embraced this as a mandate, what do we do when we bog down along the way? How do we keep living this "fast" year after year? What do we do when we lose our way in the wilderness? Chip Wilson, the newest member of our liturgical team, has some words of comfort from the last two verses of this passage.

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed our realities without warning. All of a sudden, the world we knew was gone, and we found ourselves exiled from our normality. Gatherings were delayed. Communities were distanced. Even our forms of worship were suddenly forced to be modified.

Crossing this vastness without having a path prepared would seem foolhardy at best and deadly at worst. There are mountains and valleys to navigate. There are deadly beasts hoping to consume our very flesh. There is more uncertainty than assurance.

Would our realities ever be the same? Would we ever be able to hug our loved ones again? Would we be able to reunite with our worship communities? With these questions in mind, we sat in our homes and waited for a return to the reality we knew before, while the world around us became a vast wilderness.

The reality was the same for the people of Israel at the beginning of the Babylonian exile. All of a sudden, the world they once knew was no longer available to them and they were forced into a new and uncomfortable reality. Trapped in this sad, new world, God's people began to lose hope of any future restoration. The Children of Israel sat in their new world separated from their longed-for homeland, separated by a vast wilderness. To these exiled people and to us, the prophet Isaiah proclaims that change is coming. God has not forgotten or abandoned us, but rather God is about to restore us to where we belong.

The space between exile and homeland is daunting. It is filled with a multitude of unknowns. Crossing this vastness without having a path prepared would seem foolhardy at best and deadly at worst. There are mountains and valleys to navigate. There are deadly beasts hoping to consume our very flesh. There is more uncertainty than assurance. Despite these challenges, there is hope in moving from exile to homeland through the wilderness. Isaiah shares these words of hope:

> *The Lord will guide you continually*
> *and satisfy your needs in parched places*
> *and make your bones strong,*
> *and you shall be like a watered garden,*
> *like a spring of water*
> *whose waters never fail.*
> *Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;*
> *you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;*
> *you shall be called the repairer of the breach,*
> *the restorer of streets to live in.*
> *(Isaiah 58:11-12)*

That's right! The land between exile and home is filled with uncertainty. However, we have the certainty of the Great Guide, the Creator, Our God! God will make a way for us through the wilderness and, not only will God blaze that trail, but God will stand by us every step of the way. God will supply our need along the way and strengthen our

Please see "Theme Interpretation" on page 10.

A Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship fo r Two Readers

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

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

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

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

Meditation of Preparation

The smells of whispering pines, pre-rain on a summer evening, the scent of our grandmothers, ripe peaches stacked neatly in a crate, coffee slowly dripping into the pot, and so many more pleasant aromas we breathe in and feel content. Refreshed. Loved. But we are not here for pleasant inhalations; we are here for ashes and confession and repentance. Our sins against God, against one another, against our true selves, rise up as a stench from the smoldering destruction left in their wake. Let us brave the smell of our own brokenness that we might make good, honest, and full confessions as we remember we are dust….
–Erin Conaway

Hymn of Adoration

"Eternal Lord of Love, Behold Your Church"
The Hymnal 1982 No 149
OLD 124TH 10.10.10.10.10
Text: Thomas H. Cain
Music: *Pseaumes Octante Trois de David*, 1551, harm. Charles Winfred Douglas

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

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

Reading from the Psalms

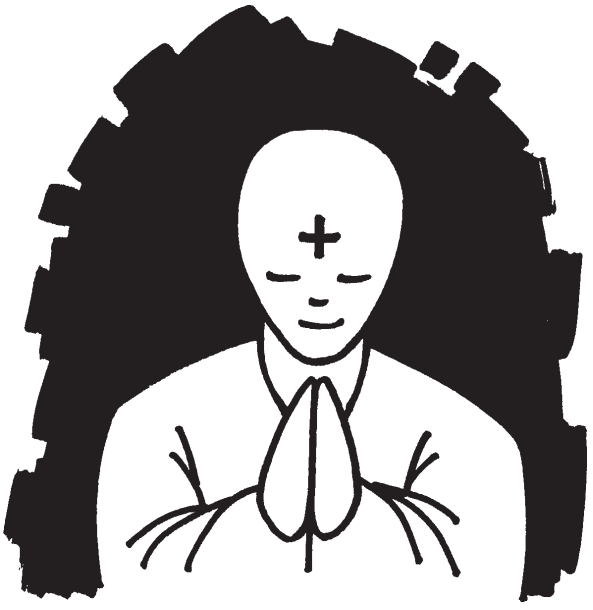
Psalm 51:1-17

Hymn of Gospel Acclamation

"Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive"
Glory to God No 444
DETROIT Common Meter
Text: Rosamond E. Herklots
Music: *Kentucky Harmony*, 1820, harm. Margaret W. Mealy

Reading from the Epistles

2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10



art by Peter Yuichi Clark

Reading from the Gospels
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Litany
"The Fast I Choose" *(see page 7.)*

Hymn of Commissioning
"Dust and Ashes"
Worship and Song No 3098
DUST AND ASHES 7.8.11.14 with Refrain
Text: Bryan Wren
Music: David Haas

Meditation of Commitment
So as you come today to have the sign of the cross placed on your foreheads, rend your hearts. Repent of your self-reliance and self-seeking. Accept the grace and forgiveness that marks you as a redeemed child of God. The good news is that salvation has only begun—it is not finished. Ash Wednesday is only the beginning of Lent and the transformed, resurrection life of Easter is still coming.
–Allen Grant, from "Dust in the Wind—but Wait…"

Imposition of Ashes
LEADER: Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth; Grant that these ashes may be to us a sign of our dependence on you, that we may remember that by your gracious love we are given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, who became dust like us. Amen.
(The congregation forms one or two lines. The leaders begin by making a sign of the cross in ashes on the forehead of the first person in line, who then turns and does the same for the person behind him or her. In this way, the participants are priests to each other. As each person imposes the ashes on a fellow worshipper, he or she says:
By the wearing of these ashes, we offer our suffering and brokenness to God.

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

Ashen Complaint
(Inspired by Psalm 27)
by Ken Sehested

Fretfully does my heart drag its heels into the sanctuary of delight. For my wanton days and weary praise reveal the toll taken by life's relentless demands.

To where shall I appeal for release from such encumbrance? To whom shall I turn to lay these burdens down?

Attend the sighs of your world-weary children, O Father of fealty, O Mother of mercy.

Yoke us to provident release from sin's increase, unburdening strain and stress. Grant rest and relief from heartache and grief; grant power to praise and to bless.

Wait, wait for the Lord, O child of cherished morrow, you whose heart is pledged to the tender of days and destiny's grace. *Be strong, take heart.*

All ashen complaint will modulate into praise:

The goodness of God shall resound in the land of the living!

–Ken Sehested was one of the founding editors of the Seeds ministry in Decatur, GA. He is now a member of the Seeds Board of Advisors and the Sacred Seasons *liturgical team. He was the founding director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. He is the curator for the online journal* Prayer&Politiks.

art by Erin Kennedy Mayer

The Fast I Choose

An Interpretive Reading for Youth

by John Garland and Katie Cook

Authors' note: The following is an interpretive reading for two people. It is written with youth in mind, but could also be done by adults. The reading should begin with the playing of an audio or video recording of a bustling, brightly lit downtown scene (Times Square or Las Vegas would be appropriate). The noise plays for perhaps a minute and then is slowly lowered in volume as the first reader begins.

You may want to allow the recording to continue in the background (perhaps 10 minutes); if you do so, make sure it stops by the time the Second Reader begins with "This is the fast I choose." You might want to replace the noise with the instrumental version of a familiar hymn or sacred song, also played softly. Please feel free to adapt this to your congregation's needs—or do without the music altogether. (Scripture references are included for your convenience and are not meant to be read aloud.)

When we did this reading in worship, we had the First Reader at the pulpit and the Second Reader in the back of the sanctuary. This seemed to be effective.

art by Rebecca S. Ward

FIRST READER: I find myself, feeble person that I am, prone. I find myself bound fast to the swollen, swaying belly of downtown. It's a loud world downtown, but the music can be pleasant, soothing, even enticing. The music of this world can draw me in with its undulating rhythms; it can blind me and make me feel whole and happy, content with my bonds.

SECOND READER: Is not this the fast that I choose, to loose the bonds... (Isaiah 58: 9)

FIRST READER: Bonds can be so comfortable, a snug part of my arms and legs, and dusk is so pleasing to my eyes. So my eyes get heavy, my arms grow weary, and sleep seeps into my heart because that is how I want it to be. It all seems so untroubled.

SECOND READER: And God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31a)

FIRST READER: It's *overwhelmingly* good, almost too beautiful to behold. So I sleep. It is a deep, soothing sleep with a firm, sterile pillow of marble, sheets of artificial realities, blanket upon blanket of furry, fuzzy luxury.

SECOND READER: [Jesus] came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. (Mark 14:40)

FIRST READER: And that swollen belly of a world sways and rocks so that my dreams come quickly, filled with visions and tastes of success, productivity, effectiveness, brilliance, legacy, love, religion. My dreams are hazy, my God is hazy, like a faded memory.

SECOND READER: Will no one stay awake with me? Peter? John? James? Truly, the spirit is willing, but the flesh, the flesh is weak.

FIRST READER: So an evening of indifference oozes into my veins and seeds of injustice are sown, seeds that my drowsy senses never notice taking root.

Pitifully, I don't recognize my effect on the world, the crushing effect of my ignorant sleepwalking. Then, in a nightmarish flash, I hear an eerie voice...

SECOND READER: You—yes, you—are my servant, in whom I will be glorified. (Isaiah 49:3)

FIRST READER: What a ruinous, startling, uncomfortable voice! *I've* got responsibility?! "What do you want from me?" I shout. I want to scream it out over and over.

SECOND READER: You have been told what the Lord desires. What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice…

FIRST READER: I want to do justice, if I only knew how.

SECOND READER: …and to love mercy…

FIRST READER: I want to love mercy, if I could recognize it.

SECOND READER: …and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

FIRST READER: I *want* to walk with God, if I could keep up. But I'm bound, a slave lying prone on filthy, sun-scorched asphalt, longing for a break in the relentless heat.

SECOND READER: God will make you to lie down in green pastures and lead you beside still waters. (Psalm 23:2)

FIRST READER: But I feel exposed, bound to the belly of the marketplace, longing for a covering, a protection from the elements.

SECOND READER: Put on justice like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on your head. (Isaiah 59:17)

FIRST READER: I long to hear a voice declaring:

FIRST AND SECOND READERS: For yours is the Commonwealth of God!

FIRST READER: I want the prophet to come to me on his knees, drawing revelations for me in the dirt, because the world is scary and I'm unsure, unsure half to death, that I've done it all in vain, that all of my strength, all of my being, has been devoted to a shadow, that I've been enacting the wrong story, that my story is not God's story. I hunger for God's story.

SECOND READER: Seek first the Reign of God, and God's righteousness. (Matthew 6:23)

FIRST READER: But I'm afraid. I'm afraid of loneliness, of not being effective, of being wrong about all of this. Sometimes I'm even afraid that I'm a goat, and not a sheep.

SECOND READER: God has not given you a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of sound mind.

FIRST READER: But I'm still afraid. And I'm afraid to let go of my fears. I'm afraid of not being in control. But am I really in control? I'm afraid of finding out. I'm afraid to even think about all of this.

SECOND READER: My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in your weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

FIRST READER: Okay; I know all of that. I've memorized those verses. But I can't do this on my own. I can't make it to where you are. You have to meet me here. In the underbelly. Where my bonds are.

SECOND READER: Jesus took the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And so the Word became flesh and lived with us. (Philippians 2:5-8; John 1:14)

FIRST READER: My story—it seems, sometimes, so fixed, so moldy—molding me. I'm standing on a plot, a theme, a premise that seeks, is bound to, cultural gods… Sometimes I feel the mortality of those gods. Sometimes I feel my own mortality. Sometimes I feel like I'm walking through a life, a valley, of dry bones—dry, windswept, chalky bones.

SECOND READER: These bones—these dry, chalky bones— can these bones live again? (Ezekiel 37:3a)

FIRST READER: O Lord, God, you know whether they can live again. (Ezekiel 37:3b) Only you know. You do know…don't you?

SECOND READER: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live. (Ezekiel 37:5-6)

FIRST READER: Live? Life? Yes, life in the womb of God, where all I can hear is my Mother's heartbeat, the rhythm of Truth and Grace. That's what I'm hungry for.

SECOND READER: Choose that fast.

Please see "Fast I Choose" on page 10.

A Liturgy for the First Sunday in Lent

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Invocation

Beloved, whose bewildering ways confound the vain verdicts of the arrogant and confounds the brawn of the ruthless, draw near to us regardless of how our faith is compromised by our fear, despite the mix of hope and despair that divides our minds and confuses our hearts. Assure us again that your invitation to penitential living is neither threat nor terror but the portal to flourishing and freedom. Coax us, with beatific vision, from hardhearted ways and transgressive habits. Lift us from the silence of resignation, from the groans of misery's bed, from the swelter of withered limbs. Confirm that still, small voice that says another world is possible; that, in fact, it is coming and bids us to join the insurrection against all deceit and terror.
–Ken Sehested

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

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

Meditation of Preparation

The relinquishment God asks of us—the desert into which Jesus guides us—is not a kind of spiritual immolation. The open-handed posture of Lent is not a form of groveling, as a beggar to a patron. The flame of the Spirit's igniting presence does not scorch us. It makes us radiant. The ascetic practices of spiritual discipline are training for life lived unleashed from our shriveled little egos.
–Ken Sehested

Hymn of Adoration

"Guide My Feet"
African American Heritage Hymnal No 131
GUIDE MY FEET 8.8.8.10
Text and Music: Spiritual,
harm. Dr. Wendell P. Whalum

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 32

Epistle Reading

Romans 5:12-19

Hymn of Gospel Acclamation

"Jesus Walked this Lonesome Valley"
Chalice Hymnal No 211
LONESOME VALLEY 8.8.10.8
Text and Music: Spiritual, arr. Bill Thomas

Gospel Reading

Matthew 11

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

It is a commonplace of all religious thought, even the most primitive, that the man seeking visions and insight must go apart from his fellows and love for a time in the wilderness.
–Loren Eiseley

Hymn of Commissioning

"Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God"
Glory to God No 175
LAFFERTY Irregular Meter
Text and Music: Karen Lafferty

Benediction

Kindred, can you comprehend this benediction? The Beloved's arms encircle you; the Spirit's breath fills your lungs and exhales glad tidings of deliverance; Jesus offers you his hand and his assurance: be of good cheer. Your penitential exercise creates buoyancy in the midst of stormy seas. The receipt of Heaven's forgiveness empowers you to engage

Please see "First Sunday" on page 10.

Theme Interpretation,
continued from page 4

bodies for the journey. God will bring us back to our homeland, and though the reality can never be exactly the same, God will transform us—who were once blighted exiles—into repairers and restorers. Through God's power and presence, meaning will return to our lives.

Yes, the pathway looks daunting, but I am reminded of the words of the old gospel song: God is standing by. There is no need to cry or fear, for God is with us. God will transform our sorrow into singing. God will transform our suffering into celebration. God will transform our shame into salvation. Get ready! God is making a way for us!

–Chip Wilson, the minister of youth and of family and community at Grace Lutheran Church in Peoria, AZ, also teaches third graders at Maryvale Preparatory Academy there. At this writing, he is a postulant in the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

The Fast I Choose,
continued from page 8

FIRST READER: What do you require of me? How can I hear that heartbeat? How can I loose my bonds?

SECOND READER: This is the fast I choose, says God: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke.

FIRST READER: Not only their yoke—but also my yoke. Not only their bonds—my bonds as well.

SECOND READER: To let the oppressed go free—

FIRST READER: Let them go free. Let me be free. (Isaiah 58:6)

SECOND READER: Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly…your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom shall be like the noonday. (Isaiah 58: 8,10)

FIRST READER: The light, our light, my light, shall rise in the darkness. The gloom shall be dispelled. The light shall shine, and the darkness will never overcome it. (John 1:5)

FIRST AND SECOND READERS: This is the fast I choose…

–John Garland is pastor of San Antonio Mennonite Church, which has, among other things, a thriving ministry with and for asylum seekers. This reading was written in 2000, when John was a Baylor student and a Seeds intern. Katie Cook is the Seeds editor.

art by Robert Darden

First Sunday,
continued from page 9

in the holy work of unraveling knots of enmity amid Earth's travails. Your contrite heart does not mark you for revenge but for resurrecting work in the domain of death. Only the forgiven can be forgiving; and only the forgiving can reverse the tide of rancor's history and foreclose a destiny of malice. Go from this house of meeting to become repairers of the breach, abolitionists of the bonds of injustice, protagonists for the hungry and the homeless, befriending and amending the aggrieved and disgraced. Let your light shine.

–Ken Sehested

Voices in the Desert

A Reading for Youth and Others for the First Sunday in Lent

by April Baker

FIRST READER: A voice called out in the desert,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FIRST READER: The love you demand is too dangerous.

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

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

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

SECOND READER: Passionately,

THIRD READER: Abundantly,

SECOND READER: Recklessly,

THIRD READER; Dangerously.

FIRST READER: That we too might find our salvation.

—based on Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-11

–April Baker is co-pastor of Glendale Baptist Church in Nashville, TN. Our readers will have seen many of her sermons and meditations in past Sacred Seasons *packets.*

art by Sally Lynn Askins

A Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Lent

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

One: We've confessed our shortcomings but Lord we admit we cannot do it all on our own.
ALL: We look to the hills, we gaze at the horizon, we hope help is on the way.
One: Our journey to overcome the obstacles of ourselves is fraught with pitfalls.
ALL: Yet our feet find good footing, and somehow shade follows our way.
One: Our Keeper and Guide helps us find rest, rejuvenation, and renewal.
ALL: That we may make a way through the wilderness into reconciliation.
–Alec Ylitalo

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis 12:1-4a

Meditation of Preparation

Since the day that Jesus first appeared on the scene, we have developed vast theological systems, organized worldwide churches, filled libraries with brilliant Christological scholarship, engaged in earthshaking controversies, and embarked on crusades, reforms, and renewals. Yet there are still precious few of us with sufficient folly to make the mad exchange of everything for Christ; only a remnant with the confidence to risk everything on the gospel of grace; only a minority who stagger about with the delirious joy of the man who found the buried treasure.
–Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel*

Hymn of Adoration

"Adorámus Te Dómine"
GIA Edition 3619
Text: Taizé Community
Music: Jacques Berthier

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 121

Epistle Reading

Romans 4:1-5,13-17; 17:1-9

Hymn of Gospel Acclamation

"Transform Us"
Chalice Hymnal No 182
PICARDY 8.7.8.7.8.7
Text: Sylvia Dunstan
Music: Traditional French Melody (17th Century), harm. *English Hymnal*, 1906

Gospel Readings

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

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

One of the things we must cast out first of all is fear. Fear narrows the little entrance of our heart. It shrinks up our capacity to love. It freezes up our power to give ourselves. If we were terrified of God as an inexorable judge, we would not confidently await God's mercy, or approach God trustfully in prayer. Our peace, our joy in Lent are a guarantee of grace.
–Thomas Merton

Hymn of Commissioning

"You Are Our God; We Are Your People"
Lift Up Your Hearts No 35
JANNA Irregular Meter
Text and Music: David A. Hoekema

Please see "Second Sunday" on page 15.

A Prayer for the Second Sunday in Lent

by Lynn Tatum

Text: Matthew 17

O God of Mercy and Compassion,

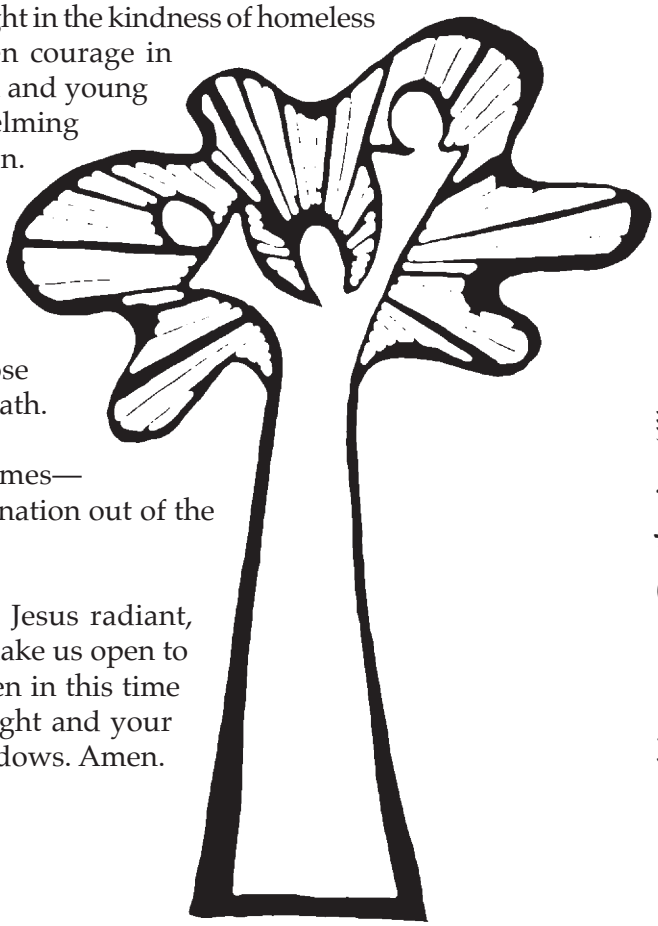
For the past year, our world has been darkened by shadows of war all over the world. European cities with smoking buildings and smoldering tanks were, we thought, a thing of a century past. We have seen refugees fleeing in fear and civilians huddling in makeshift bomb shelters. The smoke of war dismays and frightens us.

Yet, in the shadow of the smoke and in the dimness of the bomb-shelters, we still see glimmers of light and glimpses of hope. We see the light in the kindness of homeless refugees helping homeless refugees. We have seen courage in the faces of those resisting tyranny. We see old men and young women standing steadfast in the face of an overwhelming force of evil. And may they rest under your protection.

We have been saddened to see our brothers and sisters, while air raid sirens blare, fleeing into crowded, dimly lit, underground bomb shelters. But which of us was not moved when we saw images of a new born babe birthed in one of those shelters—a promise of new life in the shadow of death.

And that has often been how your revelation comes—glimpses of light in the shadow of darkness; illumination out of the midst of the cloud.

Like the apostles at the Transfiguration who saw Jesus radiant, and yet enveloped in a cloud, so we ask that you make us open to your revelation, your light, your illumination—even in this time beclouded by the darkness of war. Give us your light and your guidance as we move forward in this season of shadows. Amen.



art by Susan Daily, IBVM

Lynn Tatum teaches in the Baylor University Department of Religion and in the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core. A Hebrew language and scriptures professor, he has spent much of his career on archaeological digs in the Middle East.

A Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Lent

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

ONE: Let our ears be attentive.
MANY: We come to listen so we may live.

ONE: Let our lips be clean.
MANY: We come to drink so we may thirst no more

ONE: Let our bonds be pure
MANY: We come to eat so we may hunger no more

ONE: We worship You who knows no division
MANY: We worship You who knows neither beginning nor end

ONE: We worship You who knows no scarcity
MANY: We worship You who knows no boundaries. Amen.
–Guilherme Almeida

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Exodus 17:7

Meditation of Preparation

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

Hymn of Adoration

"Lift High the Cross"
Celebrating Grace Hymnal No 415
CRUCIFER 10.10 with Refrain
Text: George W. Kitchin, alt. Michael R. Newbolt
Music: Sydney H. Nicholson

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 95

Epistle Reading

Romans 5:1-11

Hymn of Gospel Acclamation

"Come to the Water"
Sing! A New Creation No 234
O LET ALL WHO THIRST Irregular Meter
Text and Music: John Foley

Gospel Reading

John 4:5-42

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

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 Commissioning

"He Leadeth Me"
The Celebration Hymnal No 690
HE LEADETH ME Long Meter with Refrain
Text: Joseph Gilmore
Music: William B. Bradbury

Please see "Third Sunday" on page 15.

Second Sunday,

continued from page 12

Benediction

May you recognize you're never alone in this life, not in your going out or your coming in, that your journey is not one you have to push through by yourself. This week, may you glimpse help arising over the hills, may you find sure footing on the road of life, and may you feel the coolness of the shade following you. That you may trailblaze a path forward through the wilderness while still following the Way laid out before you, together with God from this time on and forevermore.
–Alec Ylitalo

Third Sunday,

continued from page 14

Benediction for Two Readers

FIRST READER: We are called to see God in the face of our neighbors.

SECOND READER: Remind us, God, that we see you most clearly in the face of the weak and the vulnerable.

FIRST READER: We are called to teach love, not hate.

SECOND READER: Strengthen us, O God, in your love and embolden us, O God, in your hope.

FIRST READER: We are called to imagine, welcome, and embrace the kingdom of God.

SECOND READER: Let us see the reality of your kingdom in the poor, the merciful, the hungry, the peacemakers, the persecuted, and the mourners whom You bless.

BOTH READERS: Remind us, strengthen us, illuminate us, O God, we pray. Amen.
–Guilherme Almeida

A Cross Theology...

by Deborah Lynn

when we are told to take up our cross and follow Jesus, could that mean to take up, to embrace the very thing that is fear to you, that is shame to you, that signals your very death...take that/those things up and bring them with you as you walk and live the teachings ascribed to Jesus A. Christ.

Have I decided to follow Jesus?

there is a cost to this discipleship.
Have I decided to follow Jesus?
this will cost.

Have I decided to follow Jesus?

nothing less than my heart, my soul, my life.

Have I decided to follow Jesus?

there is no turning back.
there is no going home.
there may well be no home.

Just what have I decided?

–Deborah Lynn is a poet and chaplain who lives in Nashville, TN.

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

Lenten Thoughts

Crucifixion, Good Friday, Easter, Resurrection.
I once thought it was a once-in-a-lifetime.
But Jesus is shot on the streets of St. Louis
and it is Good Friday in Kyiv.
–adapted from Catherine J. Wright,
New Testament scholar, 1999

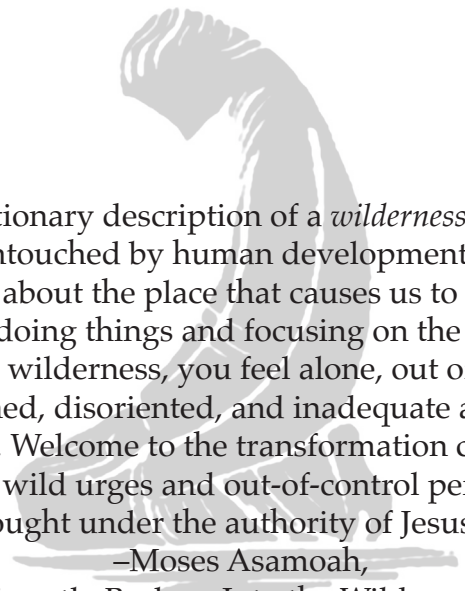
Lord, you search us and know us. How strange and mysterious are your ways. Continue to send those of us already captive to free others from their chains. Continue to send those of us who are hurt to bind one another's wounds. Let us know again that the light we bring to others will be dawn to our own 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 through the word made flesh in Christ Jesus, Liberator and Lord. Amen.
–Nancy Hastings Sehested, from "We Are Waiting," *Bless This Weary World*

If our primary goal in life is to enjoy it to its fullest, then we're going to be spending a lot of time in denial of those who are in need around us. But if our goal is to love others as God has loved us, then we're going to be spending a lot of time crying over the inequities in our world.
–Charley Garrison, "Good Mourning: A Meditation for Holy Friday"

I always wondered why it took "three days" for significant things to happen in the Bible—Jonah spent three days in the belly of the whale, Jesus spent three days in the tomb, Paul spent three days blind in Damascus—and now I know. From earliest times, people learned that was how long they had to wait in the dark before the sliver of the new moon appeared in the sky. For three days every month, they practiced resurrection.
–Barbara Brown Taylor, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*

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

Perhaps concentrating on the theme of love can somehow help us to begin thinking out of the liturgical box. We don't need to wait until Pentecost to celebrate the beginning of the church. We certainly don't need to fall into a post-Easter lethargy. The lilies and balloons and Easter dramas may be past, but the excitement is not over. Wonderful things are just around the corner. We are to share this love with the world. There is much work to be done to this end, and many adventures to discover.
—Katie Cook, from "What It Means to Believe"



The dictionary description of a *wilderness* is a wild place untouched by human development. There is wildness about the place that causes us to reconsider ways of doing things and focusing on the priorities. In the wilderness, you feel alone, out of place, abandoned, disoriented, and inadequate and not in control. Welcome to the transformation chamber! Here, all wild urges and out-of-control personalities are brought under the authority of Jesus Christ.
–Moses Asamoah,
"Sweetly Broken: Into the Wilderness"

A Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

One: Child of God, you are welcome in this place. We call one another into a moment of transformation as we worship.
Many: Ephesians calls us to be children of Light. May God's light in Christ guide us now.

One: There are so many shadows lurking in our hearts, creeping around the corners of our relationships, looming in our world, and tempting us to despair.
Many: Cast down the shadows and warm the way with your bright love and steady presence.

One: We want the light of your Grace to not only shine on our faces, but to reflect out to the world like stars in the night sky.
–Erin Conaway

Meditation of Preparation

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

Reading from the Hebrew Scripture

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Hymn of Adoration

"My Shepherd Will Supply My Need"
Glory to God No 803
RESIGNATION Common Meter Double
Text: Isaac Watts
Music: Walker's *Southern Harmony*, 1835

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 23

Epistle Reading

Ephesians 5:8-14

Hymn of Gospel Acclamation

"Christ Is the World's Light"
Worship and Rejoice No 121
CHRISTE SANCTORUM 10.11.11.6
Text: Fred Pratt Green
Music: La Feillée, *Méthode du plain-chant,* 1782

Gospel Reading

John 9:1-41

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

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

Hymn of Commissioning

"I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light"
Glory to God No 377
HOUSTON 10.7.10.8 with Refrain
Text and Music: Kathleen Thomerson

Benediction

Children of Light, go forth into the outer and inner darkness to shine in hope. Love your neighbor near and far away. Make peace where there is vitriol, cast joy with reckless abandon, and take another step deeper into redemption.
–Erin Conaway

Overcoming Our Blindness

A Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

by Marsha C. Martie

Text: John 9:1-41

As we come to the fourth week of Lent, we are given the Gospel story in John 9:1-41 to spend time with. This story comes on the heels of a series of questions and controversies that rise up between Jesus and the Pharisees. The latter, the very religious, ask him, "Are you the one?" And in words similar to those used by the tempter earlier in the desert, they say, "If you are, prove it."

In a way uncharacteristic of the other gospels, Jesus answers them pretty directly saying, "Yes I am, but you don't believe it." In the end they get so furious with him that they pick up rocks to stone him with, but Jesus manages to get away.

The fact is all of us have tragedy, loss and sorrow for various reasons. Most of it I think comes because that's the way life is. But when it comes, we must keep in mind that this is also an opportunity for God to work.

Then there is another story—a story about blindness. It begins with the apostles. Upon seeing a man who was blind from birth, they ask, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Blinded themselves by traditional thought, these who were closest to Jesus still held ideas that were not in keeping with God's character.

Back then, people believed that tragedy was always someone's fault—always the result of someone's sin. If a child was born with a birth defect, someone had to be at fault—so who sinned? His parents? Or did this infant somehow commit a sin? Jesus calls them on their blindness and tells them, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned. But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

These are sometimes difficult ideas for us to reconcile. Surely much tragedy is caused by sin. A child can be terribly handicapped because the mother chose to drink or consume drugs during the pregnancy. Fathers have damaged their children *in utero* by beating their pregnant mother.

Children have been born with defects because some government has poisoned them in war or in harmful testing—thereby genetically altering the parent. Children have been damaged at the time of birth because a doctor wasn't paying attention because of arrogance, or tiredness or simple lack of care.

Certainly, children are harmed by adult sin, but not all people who have tragedy come into their lives have it arrive because they or someone else has sinned. Sometimes, things just are.

The fact is all of us have tragedy, loss and sorrow for various reasons. Most of it I think comes because that's the way life is. But when it comes, we must keep in mind that this is also an opportunity for God to work. It is a joyously ironic truth that often our call proceeds from our deepest pain. That somehow out of our worst wounding, God molds us into who we best are. God causes us to become an extension of God's healing in the world by transforming our darkness into light and our wounds into wellsprings of joy. The blind man receives his sight, and God is glorified.

But understand that this is not work that either we or God does alone. Notice the "we" in the next verse: "As long as it is day, WE must do the work of the one who sent me. Night is coming, when no one

can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." What is always true is that life is a joint effort—it is "we." It is you and me and Christ in us. "While I am in the world," he said. And surely he is in the world, by means of his spirit at work in us.

That which he says of himself is extended to you and me. In Matthew 5:14, he says, "You are the light of the world…let your light shine before people, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven." Surely our light is a reflection of the light of Christ. It is only with him that we can shine in the world.

Then, the man—blind from birth—with mud on his face—had to make his way to Siloam's pool. Probably he was followed by a buzzing crowd as he tapped his way down the narrow street, counting his steps, trying to keep track and trying to hold down both his excitement and his fear. What if he went through all of this humiliation and it didn't work?

We come to project his light into the world and thereby to extend his healing to all those who still suffer under the misguided thinking that they are worthless, sinners from birth, beyond the pale of any help or hope. To them we go, with Jesus, to say that, working together, we can realize our healing and accept the gift that God brings.

Now this is not to say that it's going to be easy. Certainly it wasn't for this man. Look at what he went through to regain his sight. He was most likely in a public place because he was a beggar. We know that Jesus was in Jerusalem and had been at the temple, but we don't know precisely where this took place. I'd guess it was in Jerusalem. The pool of Siloam was on the southern edge of Jerusalem.

So, in a public place, Jesus mixed spit and dust to make mud. He put it on the man's eyes. Then, the man—blind from birth—with mud on his face—had to make his way to Siloam's pool. Probably he was followed by a buzzing crowd as he tapped his way down the narrow street, counting his steps, trying to keep track and trying to hold down both his excitement and his fear. What if he went through all of this humiliation and it didn't work?

But he wanted to see so badly that he did what it took. He made it to the pool of Siloam, and he washed the mud from his eyes, and he could see! He went through a great deal. He did what it took to cooperate with Jesus for his healing, and he was so changed that his neighbors didn't recognize him.

Now I think we have to ask ourselves: What are we willing to do to be healed? I think one of the things we must do is to give up our comparing minds and rely on the fact that what Jesus is doing for me is right for me, and that may not be what he did for someone else. What if this guy had said, "But Jesus, why do I have to go down to Siloam's pool? I heard you healed blind Bartimaeus on the spot. He didn't have to go through all of this!

"Then there's that other guy—it took two times to heal him, but he didn't have to go through this pool thing. You spit on him, yeah, but then you touched him and that was it. Why can't you do that for me?" We too often say to Christ, "I don't want your unique gift given to me for my healing. I want what you did for *her*." It is important that we be willing to lay aside our comparing minds and receive what Jesus has uniquely prepared for our healing. We must concentrate on our own lives and then we must willingly walk the way Jesus has prescribed for our healing.

Today, we often have difficulty knowing what that is but I believe if we will listen to the voice inside us, we will know. The voice that I'm referring to is the Spirit that is also our conscience. That voice is placed within us to guide us. It will tell us our path to healing, for it knows with whom we are unreconciled. Our healing can be stopped because we will not do the work of reconciliation. This is difficult work—work that must be done if we are to be freed, if we are to see.

This is because we are most often blinded by the pain of our past. I am blinded to a person's uniqueness because they subconsciously or consciously remind me of someone with whom I have pain. It could be simply the way they lift their eyebrow. So, because of that, I can't see them. I am blinded to my path to freedom because I tried it once before, or tried something like it, and I got hurt. So now I can't see the way to try again. I am blinded to entering into Christ's Body because of my fear. I can't see the joy of it because my fear blinds me in a blizzard of "what ifs" and "I'll nevers." Our healing awaits us in our journey, but we must be willing to walk the path Jesus prescribes for us.

If we will let go of our comparing minds and walk the path that Jesus prescribes for us, then we will be healed of our blindness.

But know this. With seeing comes responsibility. Just as this man was called to account for his seeing, so are we. You see, when we begin to see through the lies, folks start getting uncomfortable. This is because the thing most folks want is not the healing for others, but *status quo* for themselves. Seeing got this man in trouble—not just the physical sight, but seeing through the thin veil of the overly righteous into their clutching hearts of fear. He began to see their slavery to the very sin they tried to claim was his.

Seeing got this man in trouble—not just the physical sight, but seeing through the thin veil of the overly righteous into their clutching hearts of fear. He began to see their slavery to the very sin they tried to claim was his.

The result of seeing for this man is he was thrown out of the synagogue. He was shunned by the religious establishment. We need to remember that this is often what happens to one who sees. Jesus knew that truth early on; so, to those with a single eye and a pure heart, he said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So here we are in this third Sunday in Lent, and we are challenged to see—to work with Jesus—to reflect his light into a world longing to be healed. In these next few weeks, I challenge us to put aside our comparing minds and accept the path that Jesus has uniquely chosen for each of us to regain our sight. And then, as we come to see beyond the thin veil of the lie, let's rejoice and be glad even in the midst of difficulty, because we are focused on the one who always calls us forward.

Oh—and by the way—notice that the guy that got thrown out of the synagogue was thrown out to where Jesus was. And Jesus—also thrown out of the synagogue—went and found him and brought him comfort and even deeper seeing.

–Marsha Martie is the pastor of Crossties Ecumenical Church, a small church in an impoverished neighborhood of Waco, TX, where its members and partners have set up a number of innovative ministries.

Staggered by the brink of war
and the unyielding demonic,
Distracted by the daily daily
and committee commitment,
We come crawling to the God
of the prophets.
We would beg
for some
scintillating
answer.
But you answer,
God of the
prophets,
that we are to
be the prophets.
We didn't come
crawling for
this,
didn't want to
be prophets.
But there's this
word in our
mouths
wanting out.
And we're
weary with
holding it in.
Okay.
–George
Williamson,
from
"A Service of
Commitment to
the Prophetic
Calling in a
Demonic Time"

A Liturgy for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

One: Blessed be the Holy Trinity, Creator, Christ and Comforter.
Many: Amen

One: From the depths of despair, we cry for help.
Many: O Lord, we cry to you.

One: We cry for the rule of your justice.
Many: O Lord, we cry to you.

One: We cry for wholeness and healing.
Many: O Lord, we cry to you.

One: We cry for reconciliation between neighbors.
Many: O Lord, we cry to you.

One: We cry for the healing of creation
Many: O Lord, we cry to you.

One: We cry for your peace to reign here on earth
Many: O Lord, we cry to you.

One: Hear our cry, O Lord. May your ears hear our prayers. Let your peace be known and your love be spread among us here in this place as it is in glory. Supply our daily needs. Teach us how to forgive as you have forgiven. Lead us away from that which destroys and deliver us from that with devours. In your hands is all of creation, all the authority, all that is awesome now, always and forever.
All: Amen.
–Chip Wilson

Reading from the Prophets

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Meditation of Preparation

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

Hymn of Adoration

"With the Lord There Is Mercy"
GIA D-1036112
Text and Music: Marty Haugen

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 130

Epistle Reading

Romans 8:6-11

Hymn of Gospel Acclamation

"And Can It Be"
Worship and Rejoice No 366
SAGINA Long Meter Double
Text: Charles Wesley
Music: Thomas Campbell

Gospel Reading

John 11:1-45

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

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 Commissioning

"Lead Me, Guide Me"

Please see "Fifth Sunday" on page 26.

Revive!

A Sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

by Cindy Weber

Text: John 11:1-45

Editor's note: This sermon was originally written in 2020, at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, but its wisdom is still stunningly relevant. The craziness, sadness and desperation of which it speaks are still with us.

This is a good story for these crazy, sad, desperate days. Because there's lots of uncertainty and frustration in this story. The disciples are confused when Jesus doesn't head off to heal Lazarus right away, and then, because they know that he and they will be in danger once they do head back to Judea, they are frustrated when he does.

"Don't do it," they say. Martha, upon seeing Jesus, expresses her frustration, too. "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother would not have died." As does Mary, who repeats these same words. "Lord, if you would have been here, my brother would not have died."

And then there are the religious leaders. Some of them there to support, to grieve; some of them here to judge, to spy, to report on Jesus. You can see why Jesus wept. So much frustration, so much confusion, so much grief.

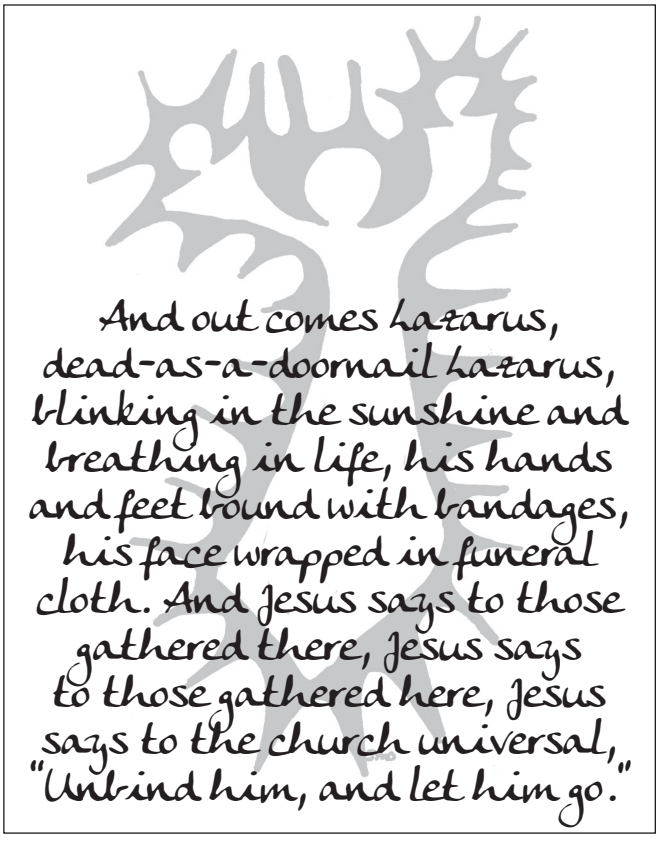
Jesus wept. We think of it as the shortest verse in the Bible. And it is. But I wonder, how can something so small be so very powerful? Jesus wept. It's powerful because, while we have a hard time understanding many of the things that Jesus said—due to the fact that we live in such a different culture and don't know the history of what he may have been referring to in some of his parables—what we do know is what it's like to cry.

His weeping connects us to him in a very deep way, because, no matter why he wept—grief over what Lazarus has been through, maybe; fear in knowing that what he's about to do will lead to his own death, maybe; fear for his disciples, maybe; heartbreak for Martha and Mary, maybe—no matter why he wept, we get that. We don't need to understand exactly why. This story of his weeping connects us to him. Jesus wept.

And we are weeping, too. Or will be, along with communities who have been torn apart by mass shootings, victims of floods and fires, refugees fleeing war and famine, people all over the world. As we are surrounded by frustration and confusion and fear during this time, I hope that we will remember this deep connection with Christ, who wept.

But he didn't just stop there. He plunged ahead and raised Lazarus from the dead. Which of course isn't anything that we're able to do—not physically, anyway. But we are able to restore, rejuvenate, rebuild, relieve, reanimate, refresh, reactivate, renew, recharge, rekindle, resuscitate, revitalize and revive.

It was hard to choose a word for this sermon, because all of those words I just said express what



art by Susan Daily, IBVM

Jesus was always going about doing, and what he was doing in today's story. All of those words also express what we hope to see done and what we hope to be able to do. Here they are once again: restore, rejuvenate, rebuild, relieve, reanimate, refresh, reactivate, renew, recharge, rekindle, resuscitate, revitalize and revive.

Because I—and some of you—grew up singing a Baptist hymn that uses the word "revive," I chose that one. "Revive us again, fill each heart with thy love, may each soul be rekindled with fire from above…"

How can God use me to revive someone I love, or someone I barely even know, to help them flourish again? To revive their spirits, to revive their health, to revive their energy, to revive their laughter?

Revive: to return to consciousness or life: to become active or flourishing again….

I wonder, what part of you needs reviving right now? What part of those you love needs reviving? What part of our church community needs reviving? Who in our church community needs reviving? What part of our city needs reviving? And how do we go about that? How can we revive anything, given how crazy and overwhelming everything is?

Well, one thing that we see in the story is that it's not done alone. Yes, Jesus is the one who hollers, "Lazarus, come out!" And out comes Lazarus, dead-as-a-doornail Lazarus, blinking in the sunshine and breathing in life, his hands and feet bound with bandages, his face wrapped in funeral cloth. And Jesus says to those gathered there, Jesus says to those gathered *here*, Jesus says to the church universal, "Unbind him, and let him go."

In John's gospel, notice, resurrection happens through the power of God AND in conjunction with the community. It is the community who unbinds, who unloosens, who sets free.

We've got a lot of reviving to do, don't we? And a lot of unloosing in this time when so many people are being so very bound. Not physical unloosing, but the unloosing of spirit, the unloosing of fear (go ahead; cry), the unloosing of anger (go ahead; express yourself), the unloosing of selfishness (go ahead; share), the unloosing of the gifts that we have in us in order to serve others. What gift do you have that you can unloose during this crazy time?

"I am the resurrection and the life," said Jesus to Martha. "Do you believe this?"

Robert Linthicum asks this question:

> *Do you believe this, Martha? Do you believe this, Church? This is what it comes down to. Do you believe this? If you believe this, then you have become an unstoppable force for the transformation of the world through Christ. You have become unstoppable because you can no longer be intimidated by anything the political, economic or values-maintaining systems of the dominant culture can threaten to do to you. Both as a community and as an individual, you have become an uncompromising, unintimidatable revolutionary. And you will eventually conquer in the name of Christ…. You and the gospel will live on.*

This is easier said than done, but Christ *is* our resurrection and our life. God *is* our resurrection and our life, and God will use us to revive this world, not just when all the coronavirus is gone, but *today* in some way and *tomorrow* in some way. Every day this week, God will use us to revive and re-flourish this world.

Pay attention to how that is happening and to how that can happen through you and through our community. How can God use me to revive someone I love, or someone I barely even know, to help them flourish again? To revive their spirits, to revive their health, to revive their energy, to revive their laughter? How can God use me? How is God using me? How is God using us, as a community?

We will weep in the coming days with Jesus, but we will not stop there. We will revive with him, too. Revive and re-flourish our world through the grace, love and new life that God gives to us.

Closing Prayer

In the words of the old hymn, "Revive us again, fill each heart with thy love. May each soul be rekindled, O God, with fire from above. Hallelujah, thine the glory. Hallelujah, amen. Hallelujah, thine the glory. Revive us again."

–Cindy Weber is the longtime pastor of the Jefferson Street Baptist Community at Liberty (affectionately known to peacemakers all over the world as "Jeff Street") in Louisville, KY.

A Liturgy for Palm Sunday

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Procession of the Palm Branches

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

Invocation

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

Liturgy of Palms

ONE: God, we had a moment when we got it. We greeted you as a king and laid down our cloaks and palm branches to create a path for you to ride into the Holy City of Jerusalem and take your throne. We knew that our king should be honored, revered, and cherished.
MANY: But your throne was higher than Jerusalem and greater than anything we could imagine.

ONE: Loud Hosannas rang from our throats and sang in our hearts. We cheered our procession and joined in the festivity of glee and merriment—our chance to see the inauguration of a new king!
MANY: There were some who tried to stop us, but you said the rocks would cry out this truth we thought we knew, so we felt right and good.

ONE: To this day, we seek to create a path from your throne on high into our hearts and minds as we lay down objects that symbolize our worth and prestige.
MANY: Trample beneath your feet all that would stand between us, even our achievements and possessions, that we might come before you, stripped of delusion and ready to receive you just as you are—Christ our Lord.
-Erin Conaway

Reading from the Psalms
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Meditation of Preparation
Jesus' ministry was clearly defined, and the alternatives to the illusion and temptations of the desert were spelled out. A choice was made—life abundant, full, and free for all. Make no mistake about it, the day that choice was made, Jesus became suspect. That day in the temple he sealed the fate already prepared for him. How was the world to understand one who rejected an offer of power and control?
–Joan B. Campbell

Hymn of Gospel Acclamation
"My Faith Looks Up to Thee"
Glory to God No. 829
OLIVET
Text: Ray Palmer
Music: Lowell Mason

Gospel Reading
Matthew 21:1-11

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment
Jesus refused to conform to the expectations of the people. He chose to travel around, hanging out with riffraff, healing and feeding people, and preaching about peace. The reign of which he spoke was crazy, topsy-turvy. His entry into the city of his royal forefathers was an absurd parade. His whole ministry was like a Feast of Fools. Whoever was in power should be out of power, he said. Whoever is up should be down. Whoever is first should be last…. Perhaps our reaction today, after reading the story of Jesus' absurd parade, should be to seek out marginalized folks, to do something that doesn't make sense, to find a way to turn something upside-down.
–Katie Cook, "The Absurd Parade"

Hymn of Commissioning
"Come Now, O Prince of Peace"
Glory to God No. 103
O-SO-SO - 6.5.5.6.
Text and Music: Kon-yong Yi, adapt. Marion Pope

Benediction
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 towards the 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.
–Erin Conaway

Loving Creator, we cry out for the blindness and 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

Thoughts for the Beginning of Holy Week

by Ken Sehested

art by Robert Askins

It's important to remember that the first Holy Week was not upbeat, chocolatey, nor an occasion for spring fashion. The disciples did not want to be in Jerusalem. They knew the dangers for Jesus, and for themselves, since both the Temple elite and the Roman rulers were lying in wait for an opportunity to nab Jesus.

It was the Passover season, recollecting the Hebrew freedom march out of Egypt. During this time of year, nationalist sentiment ran especially hot. Rome always brought in extra security forces during this period. The crowd that welcomed Jesus waved palm branches—symbols of victory which, then as now, implied military engagement.

And they shouted "Hosanna"—"God save us!"—not so much for heaven but from Rome's colonization. Both the palms and the hosannas had an undercurrent of insurrection. Given Jesus' notoriety, many hoped—or feared—he was there to ignite a violent insurgency against Roman tyranny and Temple collaboration.

Palm Sunday was a dangerous provocation, which Jesus struggled to clarify in Maundy Thursday's footwashing. As the disciples feared, the authorities arrested, tortured and lynched Jesus by crucifixion, a form of capital punishment reserved for political subversives. The disciples went into hiding. No one had an inkling of what was to come next.

–Ken Sehested was one of the founding editors of the Seeds ministry in Decatur, GA. He is now a member of the Seeds Board of Advisors and the Sacred Seasons *liturgical team. He was the founding director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America. He is the curator for the online journal Prayer&Politiks.*

Fifth Sunday,

continued from page 21

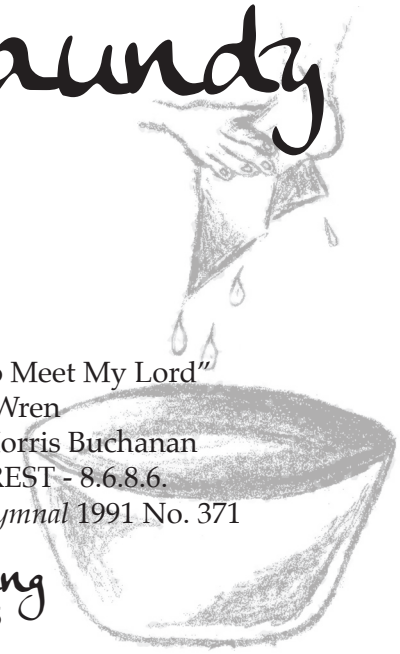
African American Heritage Hymnal No. 474
I AM WEAK AND I NEED YOUR STRENGTH AND POW'R Irregular Meter
Text and Music: Doris M. Akers,
harm. Richard Smallwood

Benediction

Now to the one who resuscitates, rejuvenates and restores; to the one who brings forth joy from sorrow, light for the shadows, life from death; to the Triune God be all glory, majesty, dominion and power now and forever. Amen.
–Chip Wilson

A Liturgy for Maundy Thursday

by the Seeds Liturgical Team



art by Lenora Mathis

Call to Worship

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Exodus 12:1-4

Meditation of Preparation

One must learn to make the transition from "let this cup pass from me" to "nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done." And God grant that as you face life with all of its decision—as you face the bitter cup which you will inevitably face from day to day—God grant that you will learn this one thing and that is to make the transition from "this cup" to "nevertheless." …This, you see, is the thing that determines whether you go through life devoted to an eternal cause or whether you go through life depending on your own finite answers, which really turn out to be no answers. This is the thing that determines whether you can rise out of your egocentric predicament to devotion to a higher cause. This is what Jesus was able to do and this is the lesson that he presents to us today.
–Martin Luther King Jr.,
"Garden of Gethsemane" sermon

Hymn

"Beloved, Let Us Love One Another"
Lift Up Your Hearts No. 305
GOD IS LOVE 10.5.10.4
Text & Music: Samuel Batt Owens

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

Epistle Reading

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

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

Litany of Footwashing

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.
–Alec Ylitalo?

Ritual of Footwashing

See "A Ritual of Footwashing on page 28.

Meditation of Commitment

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,

Please see "Maundy Thursday" on page 28.

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*

Hymn of Commitment

"What Shall I Render unto God for All His Mercies?"
African American Heritage Hymnal No. 389
Text & Music: Margaret Douroux

Benediction

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

A Ritual of Footwashing

Suggestion 1: Before the service, arrange a chair, a bowl, a pitcher of tepid water and a towel in the center of a platform or area where your worship leaders stand. You will need one person to lead the Litany of Footwashing and two to wash each other's feet. Just before the litany begins, your footwashers should go to the front and begin removing their shoes. They should begin washing each other's feet as soon as the litany is read. While this is going on, you could play contemplative music or ask another reader to read the gospel passage (John 13).

Suggestion 2: Have several footwashing stations (each with a chair, a bowl, several towels and a pitcher of tepid water) prepared in the front of the worship area. As soon as the Litany of Footwashing is read, invite all those who would like to do so to come and wash each other's feet. It would be good to arrange pairs of volunteers to go to the stations and model this. While this is going on, you could ask someone to read the gospel passage (John 13) at the beginning and play contemplative music for the remainder of the time. Give the congregants time to think about this. Don't put pressure on them.

Suggestion 3: If your group is small enough, arrange the chairs in a circle. Have several sets of bowls, pitchers and towels ready. Before you begin, make sure you have found someone willing to be the first to have their feet washed. Tell the participants to take their shoes and socks off if they want their feet washed, and to leave them on if they don't. Make sure there's no judgment implied. Read the litany. Begin by washing the first person's feet. Then that person will go to another to wash their feet. While this is going on, you could ask someone to read the gospel passage (John 13) at the beginning and play contemplative music for the remainder of the time. –Katie Cook

art by René Boldt

A Liturgy for Holy Friday

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Editor's note: This liturgy includes nine scripture passages that can be used as Stations of Prayer. These are inspired by the Stations of the Cross we see in many churches, but the readings begin earlier in Holy Week and also include a reading from the prophet Isaiah. We encourage you to be creative in the use of these. You could set up stations in different areas, using art, sculpture and/or photography and ask the worshippers to stand at each one as the scripture is being read.

You could include nine readers of various ages and stages of life. You could print the scriptures on worship guides that can be carried and include silent periods in which the congregants move from station to station, reading the passages to themselves. You could ask people to dress in first-century clothing and tell the events of each passage in their own words, as if they were witnesses. You could have a candle at each station, to be snuffed out when that passage is read, leaving the worship area darker with each passage.

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.
–Alec Ylitalo

Meditation of Preparation

I think that the rain falls on the just and on the unjust and that God doesn't go around giving out umbrellas to the just. And I think that God is out there in the storm, getting soaked to the skin like the rest of us.
–Richard Groves

Hymn of Preparation

"The Power of the Cross"
Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 190
OH, TO SEE THE DAWN 10.8.10.6. with refrain
Text & Music: Keith Getty & Stuart Townsend, 2005

Nine Stations of Prayer

I. Jesus Weeps For His City
Matthew 23:37-39

II. The Last Supper
Matthew 26:26-30

III. Gethsemane
Matthew 26:36-46

IV. Betrayal
Matthew 26:47-50

V. Despised and Rejected
Isaiah 53:1-3

VI. Man of Sorrows
Isaiah 53:4-9

VII. Forsaken
Matthew 27:45-46

VIII. Forgiving
Luke 23:33-34

IX. Submission
Luke 23:44-47

Meditation of Commitment

I believe that at the center of the universe there dwells a loving spirit who longs for all that's best in all of creation, a spirit who knows the great potential of each planet as well as each person, and little by little will love us into being more than we ever

Please see "Holy Friday" on page 32.

A Liturgy for Easter Sunday

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Prologue

See "From Darkness to Light: An Easter Morning Prologue" on page 31.

Processional Hymn

"Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"
Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 194
EASTER HYMN 7.7.7.7 with alleluias
Text: Charles Wesley, 1739
Music: Lyra Davidica, 1708

Meditation of Preparation

On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways, they hardly realized that the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new haven and a new earth; and in a semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but the dawn.
–G. K. Chesterton

Reading from the Prophets

Jeremiah 31:1-6

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

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

Gospel Readings

John 20:1-18
Matthew 28:1-10

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment

There's a lot of…chatter about what we give up for Lent. I suggest that it doesn't matter so much what you give up for Lent. Much more important—what are we going to take up for Easter? What are we willing to risk for Easter? How are we *hope* for the body of Christ that is George Floyd, or a trans teenager, or women marginalized by the Church they love, or the people whom our economy routinely throws into its capitalist gears? How will we be a witness? How will we not think about Easter but taste it? How will we enter into that great yes? *"I have seen the Lord."*
–Terrence Moran

Hymn of Commitment

"Faith Begins by Letting Go"
Sing! A New Creation No. 172
LUX PRIMA 77 77 77
Text: Carl P. Daw, Jr. (b. 1944)
Music: Charles F. Gounod (1818 – 1893)

art by Susan Daily IBVM

Please see "Easter Sunday" on page 32.

From Darkness to Light:
An Easter Morning Prologue

by Katie Cook

Note: The following is a reading for two people. You could simply ask them to read or recite the parts, or you could add costumes from New Testament times. As the testimonies begin, the "stage" should be dark and the light should gradually be raised as the testimonies go on. Years ago, when this was used at the Bible Methodist Church in Shamrock, TX, we left the Lenten colors on the pulpit and altar. We also had Lenten banners. After the testimonies were over, the lights were all the way up and "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today" began, the youth came forward and replaced the parament and altar cloth with white ones. They also replaced the Lenten banners with lilies and balloons.

JOHN: All day Saturday we sat huddled together, hiding in the upper room of a house. We jumped at every sound; we were terrified that the Temple guards would come for us, too. We spoke little, and only when it was necessary. Most of us sat and wept. It all seemed so final.

(pause; light comes up faintly)

JOHN: On Sunday morning, the Sabbath had passed, so some of the women set out to anoint the Master's body.

MARY MAGDALENE: We had not been able to do it before, because of the Sabbath. But now we could go. So we walked to the garden where Joseph's tomb was located. As we got closer, we all started weeping again.

JOHN: The rest of us stayed behind. It was not long afterwards that Mary came running back to the house and almost beat down the door with her knocking. We were alarmed and tried to quiet her, but she would not be silenced.

(light continues to come up, slowly)

MARY: I could not get them to listen. They thought I was hysterical. They were so afraid of the Temple guards, they only wanted me to be quiet. I was sobbing. I had gone to the tomb, and it was empty! The huge stone that the Romans had placed in the opening was rolled to one side, and the soldiers were asleep! All I could think was that the high priest had sent someone to steal the body.

I had been thinking, you see, that our anointing of the body would help me to realize that the Master was really gone. It would be my way of saying goodbye to him. And now that horrible Caiphas had robbed me even of this comfort. I was beside myself with grief. This was too much to bear.

JOHN: When we let her into the house, she could only say, over and over, "The Master is not there; they have stolen his body." Peter and I finally grasped what she was trying to say. Peter, being

art by Susan Daily IBVM

Holy Friday,
continued from page 29

dreamed possible. That loving spirit would rather die than give up on any one of us.
–Fred Rogers, *Life's Journeys According to Mister Rogers*

Hymn of Commitment
"Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone"
Celebrating Grace Hymnal No. 505
MAITLAND Common Meter
Text: Thomas Shepherd
Music: Folk Melody, Henry Ward Beecher's *Plymouth Collection*, 1855

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.
–Erin Conaway

Easter Sunday,
continued from page 30

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*

Easter Prologue,
continued from page 31

Peter, immediately ran out the door and toward the tombs, forgetting all precautions. I was not far behind. I followed him and outran him.

When I got to the tomb, I saw that Mary was not hysterical. The massive stone was rolled away from the entrance, the seal that Pilate ordered the soldiers to place there was broken, and the tomb was empty. I stood there, wondering. What on earth could be happening?

Peter soon caught up with me. He went on into the tomb, and I followed him, still puzzled. We found only the grave clothes, lying in a peculiar manner. It was then that I remembered something the Master had said about being raised on the third day. But no, that couldn't be true. What was I thinking?

We went back to the upper room and told the others what we had seen, but we still weren't sure what to make of it. A little later, Mary came back, more excited than ever.

MARY: I had seen him! He had spoken to me! I went back to the tombs after Peter and John left the house. I saw a man there, and, thinking that he was the gardener, I asked him if he knew where they had taken the Master's body. And then—then he spoke to me and called me by name! I knew his voice at once. Then I recognized his face! He said, "Go back to the others. Go tell them that you have seen me and spoken to me. Go tell them that I am alive."

(The lights are completely up now. The reading is followed immediately by "Christ the Lord is Risen Today.")

–Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor. This reading was inspired by narrations from the musical Celebrate Life! *by Buryl Red and Ragan Courtney.*

Benediction

art by Sally Lynn Askins

Come, let us go into the wilderness,
Knowing we have been called by God to this journey.
Let us go into the wilderness,
For God will be with us.
There we can better hear the voice of God.
There we are most likely to see bushes that burn.

Let us go into the wilderness,
Even though we are more than a little afraid,
For there we are most likely to stand on holy ground.
There we will find strength for the mission to which we are called.

Let us begin our journey in hope,
That we might arrive at Easter morning with a new song,
Ready to bring the light of God to the darkness that surrounds us;
Ready to bring the peace of God where there is violence and chaos;
Ready to bring the love of God to shattered hearts;
Ready to bring the joy of God to a joyless world.

–Katie Cook