Tearing the Veil between...

Worship Resources for the Creative Church - Lent/Eastertide 2024

Sacred Seasons, *a series of worship packets with a peace and justice emphasis,*
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art concept by Sharon R. Rollins

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.

Editorial Address

The Seeds of Hope ministry is housed by the community of faith at Seventh & James Baptist Church. Contact information: 602 James; Waco, TX 76706; 254/498-4997; seedseditor1@gmail.com; www.seedspublishers.org.

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Tearing the Veil between...

...in this worship packet:

art by Sharon R. Rollins

A Word about This Packet

With this Lent/Eastertide packet, we continue our theme for this liturgical year, the theme of tearing. *(See page 4 for a theme interpretation.)*

This is the first packet in 13 years without our Seeds resident artist, Sally Lynn Askins. She died in November, just as we were finishing up the 2023 Advent/Christmastide packet. In addition to the five new angels she drew for that packet, we counted 13 of her Advent angels in those pages.

For this packet, Sharon Rollins and Scott Turner have stepped up with new art, and we have included some of our old favorites, as well as some more of Sally's work (including angels) from past publications.

You will see many offerings from our liturgical team, which includes Guilherme Feitosa de Almeida from the Baylor University Department of Theatre Arts; Erin Conaway, pastor of Seventh & James Baptist Church in Waco, TX (which is home to the Seeds office); Sharlande Sledge, former associate pastor at Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco and now Lake Shore's resident writer; Ken Sehested, a founding Seeds editor and writer who lives in Ashville, NC; Scott Turner, youth minister at Seventh & James; and Alec Ylitalo, pastor at Richfield Christian Church in Waco.

You will sometimes see their names, but their work is everywhere in this packet.

You will find, in this packet, a sermon by Ken Sehested based on Matthew 11:1-6, the text that gives us the structure we chose for the weeks in Lent. You will find a litany by Erin Conaway and a youth activity by Scott Turner that emphasize our theme. You will find a pastoral prayer for Holy Week by Sharlande Sledge, a "nested meditation" by Sharon Rollins, and a tenebrae service for Holy Friday that is based on the "seven last sayings" of Christ.

We have included a number of quotes and prayers amidst the liturgies. As usual, Guilherme Almeida carefully chose the hymns for all 10 liturgies. We hope these musical suggestions, this art and these writings will be inspiring as you enter into a rich Lenten journey with and for your community.

As always, we are deeply grateful for all of you who subscribe to *Sacred Seasons*, and who make use of these gifts in your worship and work. We are counting on you to adapt these contents to your own needs, resources and inclinations. We would love to hear about how you used them.

The contents of this packet are your congregation's to use freely and we want you to share them with others. May you find resources that will help us guide our congregations into a new year full of hope, peace, joy and love.

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

art by Sally Lynn Askins

Tearing the Veil between...

A Theme Interpretation

by Katie Cook

The Sacred Seasons theme for this liturgical year is tearing. In the 2023 Advent/Christmastide packet, our liturgists chose "Tearing the Fabric between…." When the team began planning for Advent and looked at the first scripture passage for the first Sunday, the words from Isaiah 64:1-9 jumped out at us: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence…."

The vision of tearing open the heavens led to ideas, following the popular themes of Advent, about tearing the fabric between dreams and reality, war and peace, sorrow and joy, fear and love, and, for Christmas, between heaven and earth.

More recently, in planning for Lent, we picked up a sentence from Alec Ylitalo's theme interpretation for Advent: "Note that the small tear at the fabric between heaven and earth begins with the birth of our Lord, but that tear will only continue to grow as we join Jesus in grabbing at the fabric that is a barrier between and start pulling at it."

For Lent, we are concentrating on tearing the veils that separate us from God. For the structure of the weeks in Lent, we looked to the story in Matthew 11:2-5 where John the Baptist sends his followers to Jesus, asking, "Are you really the one?"

We all wonder the same thing sometimes. We are in different kinds of prisons, sometimes for speaking truth to power, as John was, but sometimes they are prisons of our own making. We want to send someone to Jesus and say, "Are you really the one I've been preaching about? Have I missed the mark? Does my ministry have any meaning?"

We wonder, "Was that experience from God? Jesus, is that you? Are you really the one?"

Jesus' answer to John's disciples—like many of his answers—was cryptic, although, as Ken Sehested says in his sermon beginning on page 7, it was "the most christological statement we have from the mouth of Jesus."

He said to those disciples, "What have you seen? What have you heard?" And then he reeled off a litany of healing events. "People who had their eyes closed can now see," he said. "People who were not able to walk are now walking. People who were devastated by disease are healed in body and mind. People whose ears were closed can now hear. People who were dead are alive again. The good news is being proclaimed to the poor."

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

We must become agents in tearing the veils that prevent this healing: the veil over our eyes, the veil of immobility, the veil of sickness, the veil over our ears, the veil of death and despair, and the veil of greed. As we journey through Lent, our goal is to hold each other accountable and also to hold each other up as we meet these challenges. It is our prayer that we will be able to rejoice together as the veil in the Temple tears from top to bottom. As Erin Conaway said in the planning meeting, "God is about to remove any space between us, and we need to prepare for that."

–Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor.

art concept by Sharon R. Rollins

A Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

art by Erin Kennedy Meyer

Call to Worship

From ashes to "hosannas" we follow you.
Walk with us through 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 and Litanies for the Christian Seasons

Meditation of Confession

Revelation. Listening. Humility.
    Remember—
the root word of humble and human
is the same—
    humus: earth.
We are dust. We are created;
It is God who made us and not we ourselves.
But we were made to be co-creators
with our Maker.
—Madeleine L'Engle

Hymn of Repentance

"Wilt Thou Forgive That Sin"
Text: John Donne
Music: *So giebst du nun,* melody
from *Geist und Lehr-reiches Kirchen*
    und Haus Buch, 1694;
harm. Johann Sebastian Bach
The Hymnal 1982 #141

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 Gratitude

"How Deep the Father's Love for Us"
Text and Music: Stuart Townend,
arr. Bruce Greer
Tune: TOWNEND 8.7.8.7.D
Celebrating Grace hymnal #178

Reading from the Epistles

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Hymn of Dedication

"Savior, When in Tears and Dust"
Text: Robert Grant
Music: Traditional Melody, arr. Benjamin Carr
Tune: SPANISH HYMN 7.7.7.7.D
The New Century Hymnal #185

Reading from the Gospels

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Litany

See "Litany of Torn Veils" on page 6.

Meditation of Preparation

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail;
In thee do we trust, nor find thee to fail.
Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end.
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.
–Robert Grant, "O Worship the King," verse 4

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 ministers

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

As we follow Jesus
through the wilderness,
we look at our hands; we
examine our hearts.
Are they full? Are they
empty?
Precious Lord, take our
hands;
take our hearts
that we may learn
from you and
practice receiving
our daily bread gratefully
with open hands
and open hearts…
and then practice
giving to others out of the
abundance we receive.
On our journey
through Lent,
we pray that we
become more aware
of this rhythm
of emptiness
and abundance,
born of our practice of
giving and receiving.
Let us enter this journey
with open hands
and open hearts.
–Sharlande Sledge

Note: For Ash Wednesday, see also the nested meditation on page 27.

art by Scott Turner

Litany of Torn Veils

by Erin Conaway

One: Veils cover the teary eyes of grieving widows, as if grief required modesty from the unburdened. Veils separate rooms, adorn windows and obfuscate reality when we self-medicate. Vision requires light. Eyes need to be freed. Veils must be torn.
Many: Open our eyes that we may see.

One: Sad-eyed, pig-tailed girls in wheelchairs at the bottom of staircases reveal our cruel indifference. We scoff at accommodations without a care as we saunter on two legs, or hear with two clear ears until our wound becomes yet visible. Then we see them: the obstacles, the inequalities, the unnecessary burdens.
Many: Lord tear down and build up until everyone can see, and access, and listen, and participate.

One: These all too feeble bodies often respond heroically to outside and unnatural intrusions, but sometimes they break. They become ineffective where once they performed mightily. We wonder if the span of your image could possibly include all the illness we suffer.
Many: Heal our broken places; restore our minds; but until you do, let us not be defined and disconnected by our disease and dis-easing.

One: Some of us have been oppressed for so long we've lost our song. Too many of us never wait for the sound of anything other than our voices. Let the privileged ones listen as you crescendo the cries of our neighbors.
Many: Lord, give us ears to hear your still, small voice, and the dreams of our neighbors.

One: Nothing is for everyone like death. It doles itself out to us all in equal measure. The beginning of equality throughout humanity is our end. Along the way, many of us flail in despair at the dawning darkness. We get lost in our own stories and cannot find a way out.
Many: Ignite eternal hope in our hearts and lift our eyes from the shadows to the bursting light pouring through as you overcome the veil of death and despair in our journey.

One: "I betcha can't eat just one." The marketing prophets for Lay's potato chips nailed our wanton greed in one dare. We are so rarely satisfied: with our wages, our positions, our relationships, our safety nets and nest eggs. We can't stop at just one of anything and the stockpiling leaves neighbors across the globe with nothing to fill their bellies but the pods of our pigs' waste and the ever-warmer air of our planet of excess.
Many: Open our hands from their white-knuckled grip on our delusions of scarcity and let radical generosity set us apart as it draws us all together.

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

Go Tell John

A Sermon for Lent

by Ken Sehested

Text: Matthew 11:1-6

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

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

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

Sometimes our knees grow weak and our hearts grow faint. Sometimes our vision grows dim and our resolve wavers. Sometimes we simply want Jesus to leave us alone. The prophets, like the great Elijah, get frightened by the King Ahabs and the Queen Jezebels of this age.

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

The daily news is saturated with evidence that the world's Pharaohs and Herods are still in control, that truth is bartered to the highest bidder, that the wicked will forever prosper, that the land itself shall always be enslaved to ravage, ruin and robbery.

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

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

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

Oh, yes, there is a balm in Gilead, and one of the ways we enjoy it is when we gather, to learn each other's names and hear each other's stories. There are a lot more of us out there than anybody knows, and we need to find more ways to stay connected, to instruct and encourage each other, sometimes to argue with each other, because it's not just the world that refuses to listen—too often our churches refuse to listen as well.

art by Scott Turner

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

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

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

> This text is the most extensive Christological statement we have from the mouth of Jesus: "Go tell John what you see and hear: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."

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

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

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

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

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

Then Mr. Cagle muttered his disgust, loud enough for me to hear. "That Martin Luther King, he ain't no Christian. Everywhere he goes he causes trouble." It occurred to me much later that you could say the same thing about Jesus.

Peacemaking can get you into trouble.

I recall my first trip to South Africa, during the apartheid regime. I was stunned to find out that the word "reconciliation" was a bad word. Not for the white minority rulers, but for those seeking change. What I finally realized is that, in that context, "reconciliation" had come to mean "Once you get reconciled to the fact that we're on top, and you're on the bottom, then we'll have peace."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One of my favorite quotes is from the American novelist Flannery O'Connor, when she paraphrased a line from John's Gospel: "You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you *odd*." The *peace* we are promised is the *Peace of Christ—Pax Christi*, and it is forever at odds with the *peace of Rome—Pax Romana*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Do you remember Jesus' response?

Did Jesus answer in words that are now framed in the Nicene Creed? "I am the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father as only begotten, that is, from the essence of the Father, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father…."

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

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

But he didn't. This text is the most extensive Christological statement we have from the mouth of Jesus: "Go tell John what you see and hear: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."

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

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

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

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

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

Go tell John: We are free to care for those who are useless to the world's political establishments and economic systems. Rome can't threaten us anymore; King Herod's regime cannot take anything from us that is essential.

From this confidence we can pray as Jesus taught us: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Because one day, according to the other John's revelation, "The kingdom of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord" (11:15).

Go tell John, *and Mary, too*. The grace of God is disarming our hearts and will, in time, disarm the nations. The day is coming, says the Psalmist, when we "shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (27:13). *Go tell John.*

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

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

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

–Ken Sehested 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. This sermon is adapted from one he preached at the Global Baptist Peace Conference at a Waldensian church in Rome, Italy, in February 2009.*

art by Scott Turner

Endnotes

1. "Oh Lord, I've Made You a Place in My Heart," music and lyrics by Greg Brown, sung by Dar Williams, Richard Shindell and Lucy Kaplansky from the "Cry, Cry, Cry" album, Razor and Tie label, 1998.

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

A Liturgy for the First Sunday in Lent

Tearing the Veil from Our Eyes

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

art by Lenora Mathis

Call to Worship

Kindred, lend your ears, set your sights, awaken your hearts! Lent's rending work has begun. Your veiled life is destined for the Spirit's tearing. Not for your woe, but for your weal; not for your injury, but for your delivery. The discomfort caused by Lent's disciplines—prayer, fasting, almsgiving—is like that of the soil's disturbance, the necessary rupture as preparation for receiving the seed. Trek with Jesus into the wilderness of risky provision. Venture into the wilderness of your own heart and habitation, where demons are wrestled and angels attend. Sustenance for this perilous journey entails a departing blessing. As you enter this feral landscape, hear Heaven's assurance—as did Jesus, in Jordan's penitential wake—that you are beloved.
–Ken Sehested

Meditation of Preparation

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 Adoration

"I Saw the Cross of Jesus"
Text: Frederick Whitfield
Music: Anonymous
Tune: WHITFIELD 7.6.7.6.D
Celebrating Grace hymnal #167

Reading from the Prophets

Genesis 9:8-17

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 25:1-10

Hymn of Gratitude

"An Outcast among Outcasts"
Text: Richard D. Leach
Music: Dan Damon
Tune: POST STREET 7.6.7.6.D
The New Century Hymnal #201

Reading from the Epistles

I Peter 3:18-22

Litany

One: Veils cover the teary eyes of grieving widows, as if grief required modesty from the unburdened. Veils separate rooms, adorn windows, and obfuscate reality when we self-medicate. Vision requires light. Eyes need to be freed. Veils must be torn.
Many: Open our eyes that we may see.

One: That we may see your Light
Many: That we may see your Love

One: That we may see your Mercy
Many: That we may see ourselves

All: That we may see each other.
–Erin Conaway

Reading from the Gospels
Mark 1:9-15

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment
The spirit is breathing.
All those with eyes to see,
women and men
with ears for hearing
detect a coming dawn;
a reason to go on.
They seem small,
these signs of dawn,
perhaps ridiculous.
All those with eyes to see,
women and men
with ears for hearing
uncover in the night
a certain gleam of light;
they see the reason to go on.
—Dom Helder Camara, *It's Midnight, Lord*

Hymn of Commitment
"O Love, How Vast, How Flowing Free"
Text: Latin Hymn, 15th Century
Music: "The Agincourt Song," England, c. 1415
Tune: DEO GRACIAS L.M.
The New Century Hymnal #209

Benediction
May the veil that has blinded you to God's presence in the world be torn from your eyes today. Wherever you go from here, may you see God moving in the everyday, acting in the midst of the chaos, and walking alongside you. That you may no longer wonder of God in the here and now, but witness with your own eyes that you are not alone. Amen.
–Alec Ylitalo

Thoughts about the History of Lent

Do not bother looking for Lent in your Bible dictionary, because there was no such thing back then. There is some evidence that early Christians fasted forty hours between Good Friday and Easter, but the custom of spending forty days in prayer and self-denial did not arise until later, when the initial rush of Christian adrenaline was over and believers had gotten very ho-hum about their faith. When the world did not end as Jesus said it would, his followers stopped expecting so much from God or from themselves. They hung a wooden cross on the wall and settled back into their more or less comfortable routines…

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

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

–excerpts from *Home by Another Way* by Barbara Brown Taylor

A Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Lent

Tearing the Veil of Immobility

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Kindred, rouse from your slumber and sleepy-eyed repose! Awaken to Lent's invitation to the storm's squall and the desert's besetting threat. Here, where desolation banishes distraction, set your face against the Tempter's bargain and Mammon's rule. Your detox recovery awaits, with the rough work of separation from addictive illusion and assumptions of privilege. Here the veil of self-sufficiency is lifted, eyes regain their focus, and the heart's fibrillation realigns with the Beloved's desire. Here begins the work repairing the rift between Earth's agony and Heaven's delight. Mind not the brow's sweat, the hands' callous, the arms' ache, the legs' fatigue. Treasure awaits.
–Ken Sehested

Meditation of Preparation

Worship is dangerous. It is not a retreat from reality, but a direct engagement with ultimate reality: God. Genuine worship is a response to God and what God has done; in it we make ourselves vulnerable to the story of Israel and Jesus. Sham worship attempts to manipulate and transform God, but true worship praises God as God is and calls Christians to risk the transformation of themselves and the world.
–Robert Webber and Rodney Clapp,
People of the Truth

Hymn of Adoration

"Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies"
Text: Charles Wesley
Music: Malcolm Williamson
Tune: CHRIST WHOSE GLORY 7.7.7.7.7.7.
The Hymnal 1982 #7

Reading from the Prophets

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 22:23-31

Hymn of Dedication

"Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone"
Text: Thomas Shepherd
Music: Folk Melody, Henry Ward Beecher's *Plymouth Collection*, 1855
Tune: MAITLAND CM
Celebrating Grace hymnal #505

Reading from the Epistles

Romans 4:13-25

Litany

One: Sad-eyed, pig-tailed girls in wheelchairs at the bottom of staircases reveal our cruel indifference. We scoff at accommodations without a care

art by Sally Lynn Askins

as we saunter on two legs, or hear with two clear ears until our wound becomes yet visible. Then we see them: the obstacles, the inequalities, the unnecessary burdens.
Many: Lord tear down and build up until everyone can see, and access, and listen, and participate.

One: Tear down the arbitrary walls that divide us.
Many: Tear down the barriers we build.

One: Tear down the arrogance of ability.
Many: Build up the ramps, lifts, and paths that bring us together.

One: Build up the homes once in rubble.
Many: Build up the neighborhoods in blight.

All: Ignite in us a thirst for equality and radical togetherness in all things.
-Erin Conaway

Reading from the Gospels
Mark 8:31-38 **or** Mark 9:2-9

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment
If you dare, take the hand of Jesus
and go with him to Jerusalem.
Along the way, visit friends and challenge power,
Turn water to wine and be extravagant with praise,
For Jesus bids us live a dangerous love
And, in love, he leads us along the way.
—Amy Mears and April Baker

Hymn of Commitment
"Take My Life, Lead Me, Lord"
Text and Music: R. Maines Rawls
Tune: LANGLEY 6.6.7.D
Celebrating Grace hymnal #494

Benediction
May the veil that has kept you from moving forward into the world be torn from in front of you. Wherever you go from here, may God topple the walls in front, build bridges over the gaps between, and make a way when there is no way to pass. That you may no longer wonder if you'll be able to overcome the obstacles of the world, but press forward, following the one who will make sure you will make it. Amen.
–Alec Ylitalo

West Side Prayer

by Nadine Doughty

God of papered storefronts,
Of gaping paneless windows,
Of littered lots and shattered dreams,
Help those who gave up, who left,
    who wander,
who curse—
Help them to find new homes,
    new prospects,
        new hope.
Inspire us who drive past to notice,
    to care,
        to work for change.

–Dee Doughty worked in soup kitchens and ministries for the poor in Evanston, IL, for many years, and was always generous in allowing Seeds publications to print her words.

art by Sally Lynn Askins

The Veil & the Blindfold

A Lenten Activity for Youth

by Scott Turner

This year for Lent, we are talking about the things in our lives that may separate us from the presence of God. It might be blinders that we keep for ourselves, barriers that others put in front of us, or something as simple as our own greed.

I'm reminded of Peter from Mark 8:31-38. Jesus tells the disciples all that he must endure when they enter Jerusalem. Peter, who obviously has some better ideas about what Jesus should do with his life, politely rebukes Jesus for such a silly prediction.

Jesus offers Peter a harsh rebuttal with the famous "get behind me, Satan!" and then follows this up with a reminder to all his disciples to deny themselves, take up a cross, and follow Him.

Jesus sees Peter's ideas for what they are: blindness and ignorance. It's like Peter is wearing those old ridiculous "shutter shades." He can see what's in front of him, but he's not getting the whole picture.

For our activity, you'll need some decent markers (maybe permanent ones) and a pack of plain craft bandanas. You can buy these in bulk online or at a local craft store.

Make sure each student has a bandana and a marker. Ask the students to sit down on the floor or at a table (hopefully one with a vinyl or plastic tablecloth to keep the permanent marker from seeping through), and write on the bandanas all the barriers or blinders in their life that keep them from the presence of God. This would be a good time to share about one of this year's lectionary passages about a barrier or blinder someone had, like Peter or Abraham.

Maybe you could share with the students about blinders that you've worn over the years: self-doubt, depression, relationship trouble, addiction, or something similar. The point is to get students to meaningfully and honestly engage in a bit of self-inventory and hopefully realize that there are some things in their life that they can work on to move closer to God.

art by Scott Turner

After the students have had plenty of time to engage with the assignment, pair them off and set up a small obstacle course in your activity area. This doesn't need to be a real obstacle course; just lay down some barriers all over the floor that the students will need to navigate though (cushions, books, a small piece of furniture or recreational supplies).

Ask one student from each pair to turn their bandana into a blindfold and stand at the edge of the course, while their partner in the activity lines up across from them. When you say "start," the students will try to navigate the course while their partners lead them, using their voices only. No physical contact. If a blindfolded student steps on or bumps into an obstacle, they go back and begin again. After the students cross over to the other side, have the partners switch and try again.

It's a great activity that should help us realize that the Christian life is full of barriers and obstacles. There are things in our path that we can't control. But at the same time, we wear our own blinders while trying to navigate this mortal plane. We have to listen to the trustworthy voices around us and rely on the things we know to be true to get us to the end. It won't be easy, but neither were the events that led up to the veil in the Temple being torn in two.

–Scott Turner grew up in Georgetown, TX, and earned a degree in youth ministry from Howard Payne University. At this writing, he is an MDiv student at Truett Theological Seminary and minister to youth at Seventh & James Baptist Church, where the Seeds offices are housed. He also serves as a member of the Seeds Liturgical Team.

Quotes, Poems & Pithy Sayings

I imagine Lent for you and for me as a great departure from the greedy, anxious antineighborliness 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*

At no point in the Gospel does Jesus tell us that if we follow him our lives will be filled with success or that people will like us for it. Quite the contrary, actually! We follow a man who came to share the love of God with the world through healing and forgiveness, but was rejected by the religious elite, betrayed by his closest friends, and murdered as a common criminal.

This is not simply Jesus's fate many years ago, but ours today. "Take up your crosses daily," he tells us. While there is nothing wrong with hoping for success in our lives, our faith is destined for problems if it becomes an expectation we cannot live without. The road of discipleship is filled with failure; if we demand that our lives be successful, we won't make it very far.
–Casey Cole, OFM, *Let Go: Seven Stumbling Blocks to Christian Discipleship*

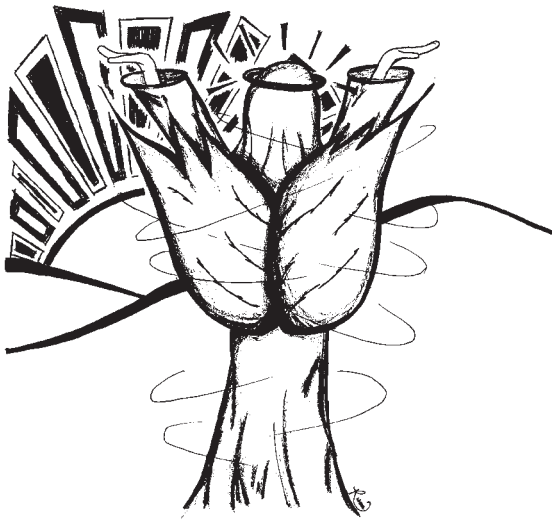
God, grant us peace. Whatever bitterness we hold towards another human being, let us give that up into your hands now. Whatever enmity poisons our hearts, let us release into the cross of Christ. Whatever guilt clouds our judgment, whatever grief grips our souls, whatever past corrupts the present, help us be freed from it by your forgiveness.

Let the peace that passes understanding well up from within our souls and spread within our families and associations and communities until through us you touch the world with peace, in the name of Christ. Amen.
–Larry Bethune

On Easter, death has not been removed from our lives. Each and every one of us sitting here will die someday. But God has shown at Easter that it is not the final word. Suffering has not been taken from us. All of us will face suffering in our lives and those around us.

But God has entered into our suffering and pain and shared it. But God has entered our lives and shares in our suffering and pain. God has shown at Easter that death is not the final word. "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here." Jesus has gone on ahead of us to be present in all the Galilees of our ordinary living.
–Lanny Peters, "Terror, Amazement and Fear: A Real Response to the Resurrection"

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



art by Rebecca S. Ward

So, refusing to look back,
and joyful with infinite gratitude,
never fear to outstrip the dawn,
praising, blessing, and singing,
to Christ your Lord.
–Brother Roger of Taizé

A Liturgy for the Third Sunday in Lent

Tearing the Veil of Sickness

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Kindred, Lent's invitation is to move beyond prudence and discretion to a life on back roads, across furrowed fields and through tangled forests, at the summons of an eccentric vagabond like Jesus, escort on the migration out of slavery, hastening under cover of darkness with nothing but the stars as compass, uncertain provisions, no cushy pillow for to lay your head, knowing there are bloodhounds tracking your scent and rough men on your trail, destination uncertain, caution to the wind and risks galore, with only the whiff of freedom to assuage muscle ache, parched throat, and bloodied feet. Lift the veil on every sin-sick soul to the Light of God's healing countenance.
–Ken Sehested

Meditation of Preparation

God of wholeness and healing,
We come to you
With our only plea being
That you accept us
As the paradox of people we are—

alone together
familiar
diligently at ease
wholly scattered
extravagantly ordinary
anxiously hopeful
simply complicated
Clearly mysterious
Strongly fragile

That's who we are, God—
A little bit of this and a little bit of that.
In your mercy, Lord,
You see the whole of us
Not one part of us,
And still you call your creation good.
We are grateful beyond words.
Bring us together in the
Wholeness of our Spirit.
Heal us with your love.
–Sharlande Sledge

art by Sally Lynn Askins

Hymn of Adoration

"Haitian Kyrie"
Text and Music: Haitian Traditional (Feuilles-oh), arr. Andrew Donaldson
Hosanna! Ecumenical Songs for Justice and Peace #67

Reading from the Prophets

Exodus 20:1-17

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 19

Hymn of Faith

"You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd"
Text: Sylvia Dustan

Music: French Melody, 17th century
Tune: PICARDY 8.7.8.7.8.7.
Sing! A New Creation #182

Reading from the Epistles
I Corinthians 1:18-25

Litany
One: These all too feeble bodies often respond heroically to outside and unnatural intrusions, but sometimes they break. They become ineffective where once they performed mightily. We wonder if the span of your image could possibly include all the illness we suffer.
Many: Heal our broken places; restore our minds; but until you do, let us not be defined and disconnected by our disease and dis-easing.

One: Keep using the gifts of healing to cure our brokenness.
Many: Fill us with patience and courage where we face the long goodbyes.

One: Enflame our empathy for each other.
Many: Help us embody your healing presence beside beds and in the dark places.

One: Reveal yourself as we visit you where you are locked away and forgotten.
Many: Remove the arrogance of wellness that too often keeps us apart.
–Erin Conaway

Reading from the Gospels
John 2:13-22

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment
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*

Hymn of Commitment
"There Is a Balm in Gilead"
Text and Music: African American Spiritual
Tune: BALM IN GILEAD Irregular Meter
Chalice Hymnal #501

Benediction
May the veil that has encumbered your body, mind and soul in sickness, be torn asunder. Wherever you go from here, may God heal the wounds the world has caused, cure the ailments you put upon yourself, and rejuvenate the weariness of life itself. That you may no longer wonder if you can be made whole again, but know of the healing nature of God—a God who makes you whole once again. Amen.
–Alec Ylitalo

art by Kathe Kollwitz

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

How do we awaken? First, by claiming our sickness. "God, I'm sick. I can't feel the pain of another human being created in the image of the same ultimate reality that brought me into being." Something is very wrong with a mother who can't hear the crying of her baby in the night. And something is very wrong with me when I can't hear the crying of the babies and their parents in Iraq and Sudan, and when I can't hear the cries of the babies in my city when 49 percent of them are living in poverty.

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

A Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Tearing the Veil over Our Ears

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Kindred, Brazilian theologian Odja Barros, when asked to speak of where she saw God at work in the world, said instead: "I confess that the first thing that comes to mind is to say where I see God's absence," detailing a few of those places, where the landscape is afflicted. *Deus absconditus.* "The hidden God." Or, more literally (and more shockingly), the "absconding God." "Truly, you are a hidden God" (45:15), Isaiah complained. "Why have you forsaken me," cries the psalmist (22:1) and, later, at the last, cried Jesus (Matt. 27:46). Is this daring act of interrogating the Most High too impertinent to consider? Imagine instead if God could be contained by human forecast, held in check by creedal rigor, ritual purity, devotional sanctity, or moral precision. Thereby, as many prefer, God becomes a mascot, a butler, an amulet—ornamentation to disguise blood lust. In the end, our Lenten prayer concludes, "Abba, into your hands I commend my spirit."

–Ken Sehested

Meditation of Preparation

By the waters of luxury
we sat and tried to sing again;
Hung our harps on the traffic signs
Because the music would not come.
In our capital captivity
Heated and cooled by central air
In an alien land that we made for ourselves
We tried to remember home.
Did we really forget so soon
We were strangers in a foreign land
Sent as insurgents by the Prince of Peace
To work for Kingdom come?
Were we seduced by the enemy
And taught to play in the oppressor's band?
And did the wrangling and the jangling drown
The sound of the songs of home?
—Ken Medema, *Kingdom in the Streets*

Hymn of Contrition

"Lord, Have Mercy"
Text and Music: Swee Hong Lim
Tune: SINGAPURA Irregular Meter
Chalice Hymnal #299

Reading from the Prophets

Numbers 21:4-9

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

art by Helen Siegl

Hymn of Gratitude
"When Love Is Found"
Text: Brian Wren
Music: Traditional English Melody, harm. Martin West
Tune: O WALY WALY 4.4.4.4.D
Chalice Hymnal #499

Reading from the Epistles
Ephesians 2:1-10

Litany
One: Some of us have been oppressed for so long we've lost our song. Too many of us never wait for the sound of anything other than our voices. Let the privileged ones listen as you crescendo the cries of our neighbors.
Many: Lord, give us ears to hear your still, small voice, and the dreams of our neighbors.

One: Come quiet the distracting noise that rages all around us.
Many: Inhabit the efforts of our gentle listening.
–Erin Conaway

Reading from the Gospels
John 3:14-21

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment
Open my ears that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear,
and while the wave notes fall on my ear,
ev'rything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my ears, illumine me,
Spirit divine!
–Clara H. Scott

Hymn of Commitment
"We Have Been Told"
Text and Music: David Haas
Sing! A New Creation #136

Benediction
May the veil that has kept you from hearing the Good News be torn from your ears. Wherever you go from here, may God open your ears to hear love spoken into existence, to listen to grace be poured upon you, and understand that there is nothing that can stand in between you and God. That you may no longer wonder if you'll hear God's voice, but hear the Divine speak words of wisdom to your heart. Amen.
–Alec Ylitalo

I don't like Lent.

by Sharon R. Rollins

I don't like Lent. I don't like it at all. I don't want to sink into the darkness. I don't want to give anything up. I don't want to struggle with temptation and doubt. I just want to go from the moment of joy at the birth of a newborn baby and time travel straight to Easter Sunday morning with the dawn of hope and life. But instead, we slog through the darkness, the heartache, the despair.

I guess that's the whole point. If I don't know temptation, how can I know I have overcome? If I don't make sacrifices, how can I soak up the fullness of blessings? If I don't humble myself and remember my sometimes dark nature and impulses, how will I know I have been redeemed? If I don't know the pang of heartache and sorrow, how will I know the true sweetness of joy and peace? Maybe I walk the path to the cross in order to truly experience the journey toward full and vibrant living.

I don't like Lent. Will you walk this journey with me? Somehow, it's better if we don't walk alone.

–Sharon Rollins is the executive director of the Family Counseling division of Waco Family Medicine. She has written and created art for Seeds for more than 25 years. The cover art for this year's Lent/Eastertide packet is her concept.

A Liturgy for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

Tearing the Veil of Death and Despair

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Kindred, in our secret prayers we demand to know: Why, Beloved, have you led us from the prosperous land of shopping and homeland security to this discomforting and inconvenient place where death's scent is strong and life's failures are on display? Know this, pilgrim: Lent's labor may be disconcerting but it is never demeaning. The relinquishment God asks of us—the desert into which Jesus guides us—is not a kind of spiritual immolation. Nor is the bent-kneed posture of Lent 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 unleashed from our shriveled little egos. The fruition of Lent's labor has less to do with what you *give up* than with what you *take up*. May the promise of the season's eventual delight be sufficient to endure its demands.
–Ken Sehested

art by Helen Siegl

Meditation of Preparation

This, then, is our desert:
to live facing despair, but not to consent,
to trample it down under hope in the Cross.
To wage war against despair unceasingly.
–Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*

Hymn of Adoration

"Eternal Lord of Love"
Text: Thomas H. Cain
Music: *Pseaumes octante trois de David*, 1551, harm. Charles Winfred Douglas
Tune: OLD 124th 10.10.10.10.10.
The Hymnal 1982 #149

Reading from the Prophets

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Reading from the Psalms

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

Hymn of Remembrance

"When We Are Living"
Text: Roberto Escamilla
Music: Spanish Melody, arr. Hal Hopson
Tune: SOMOS DEL SEÑOR Irregular Meter
Celebrating Grace hymnal #265

Reading from the Epistles

Hebrews 5:5-10

Litany

One: Nothing is for everyone like death. It doles itself out to us all in equal measure. The beginning of equality throughout humanity is

our end. Along the way, many of us flail in despair at the dawning darkness. We get lost in our own stories and cannot find a way out.
Many: Ignite eternal hope in our hearts and lift our eyes from the shadows to the bursting light pouring through as you overcome the veil of death and despair in our journey.

One: Like Lazarus, your friend, call us from our tombs of anguish.
Many: That we may say powerfully together with Paul:

One: Oh Death, where is your sting?
Many: O Grave, where is your victory?

One: For you have overcome anything that would keep us apart.
Many: Even death.

All: Let us live as people who believe…
–Erin Conaway

Reading from the Gospels
John 12:20-33

Sermon

Meditation of Commitment
Sometimes at that moment (in despair)
a wave of light breaks into our darkness,
and it is as though a voice were saying,
"You are accepted.
You are accepted by that
which is greater than you."
–Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*

Hymn of Commitment
"Because the Road Is Hard (Canción de Caminantes)"
Text and Music: Maria Elena Walsh (Argentina)
Hosanna! Ecumenical Songs for Justice and Peace #7

Benediction
May the veil of death and despair that hangs over life itself be torn from your understanding. Wherever you go from here, may God bring life into the valley of death, hope into the worries of the future and resurrection into what you think is finality. That you may no longer wonder if you can emerge from the pit, but know that God will bring light and life no matter the depths you find yourself. Amen.
–Alec Ylitalo

Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for Him at all, Christ comes uninvited. But because He cannot be at home in it, because He is out of place in it, and yet He must be in it, His place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world. He is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst.… It is in these that He hides Himself, for whom there is no room.
–Thomas Merton,
from "The Time of the End Is the Time of No Room," *Raids on the Unspeakable*

art by Sally Lynn Askins

A Liturgy for Palm Sunday

Tearing the Veil of Greed

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

Kindred, we stand on the cusp of Jesus' final confrontation with Rome's rulers and temple bouncers. We ourselves wish *getting right with God* were a more civil, emotionally satisfying affair. Instead, Lent beckons us to peer into the face of history's tragedies, including those in our own hearts. Not because God is a sadist and has need of masochists. But because mercy is available—the opportunity to reverse the brutal momentum of enmity's sway. Then to reestablish neighborliness, to realign life to its accurate plumb. What Lent asks of us is not for the faint of heart. It's rending entails a kind of scouring, a veil shredded, and a frightful vulnerability. Soon, we submit to ashen dust—not of humiliation and stigma but as a blaze marking the way to the New Jerusalem, where death will meet its match. So "let the heavens hear it: the penitential hymn. / Come healing of the spirit, come healing of the limb."
–Ken Sehested; quote from Leonard Cohen, "Come Healing"

art by René Boldt

Meditation of Preparation

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"

Hymn of Adoration

"Ride On! Ride On in Majesty!"
Text: Henry Hart Milman
Music: Graham George
Tune: THE KING'S MAJESTY LM
The Hymnal 1982 #156

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 or Psalm 31:9-16

Hymn of Celebration

"Hosanna, Jesus Is Hosanna (Hosanna Jesu ndi Hosanna)"
Text and Music: Patrick Matsikenyiri (Zimbabwe)
Hosanna! Ecumenical Songs for Justice and Peace #2

Reading from the Epistles

Philippians 2:5-11

Litany

One: "I betcha can't eat just one." The marketing prophets for Lay's chips nailed our wanton greed in one dare. We are so rarely satisfied: with our

wages, our positions, our relationships, our safety nets and nest eggs. We can't stop at just one of anything and the stockpiling leaves neighbors across the globe with nothing to fill their bellies but the pods of our pigs' waste and the ever-warmer air of our planet of excess.
Many: Open our hands from their white-knuckled grip on our delusions of scarcity and let radical generosity set us apart as it draws us all together.

One: As we lay down the palms of our praise
Many: Help us include our cloaks of selfishness.

One: Loosen the ties that bind us to our things
Many: As you knit us together in sacrificial love.

All: Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed be the name of the one who withheld nothing from us…not even his life.
–Erin Conaway

Reading from the Gospels
Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16

Sermon

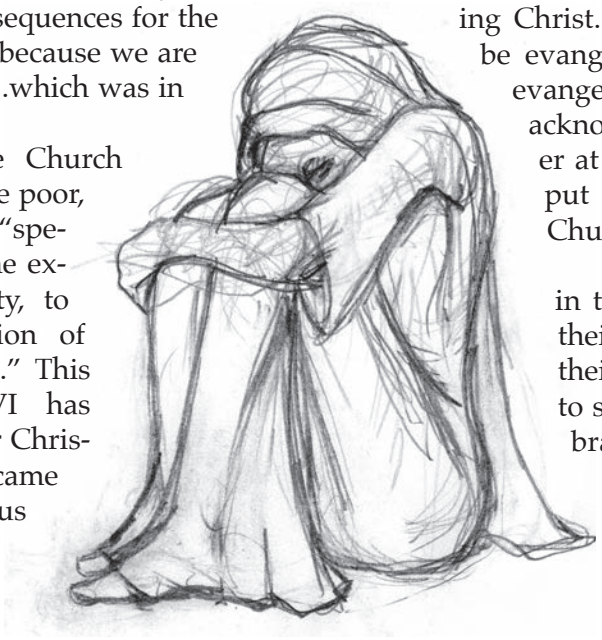
Meditation of Commitment
We must choose whether we will focus on making as much money as we can, or whether we will focus our earthly lives on that which will be sure to bring tears to our eyes. Our lives can center on those who are sick and dying, on the hungry and homeless, and on the victims and perpetrators of hate. That's the kind of weeping and mourning to which Jesus calls us, and that, he says, is blessed. That's good mourning! It's good because it's the first step in making a difference in a world of injustice. It's the first step towards loving our neighbor as ourselves.
–Charley Garrison, "Good Mourning"

Hymn of Commitment
"Filled with Excitement (Mantos y Ramos)"
Text and Music: Rubén Ruíz Avila, transl. Gertrude C. Suppe
Tune: HOSANNA 10.10.10.10. with refrain
The New Century Hymnal #214

Benediction
May the veil of greed that hangs over your desires of worldly things be torn from your hands. Wherever you go from here, may the God of prosperity let you know you have enough, remind you that you already are enough, and exclaim that the world is better when we all have enough. That you may no longer wonder if you need more to find happiness, but know that God will provide and that God's provision is an abundance for all that have needs. Amen.
–Alec Ylitalo

For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political, or philosophical one. God shows the poor "his first mercy." This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, because we are called to have "this mind...which was in Jesus Christ" (Phil. 2:5).

Inspired by this, the Church has made an option for the poor, which is understood as a "special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness." This option—as Benedict XVI has taught—"is implicit in our Christian faith in a God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty."



art by Sally Lynn Askins

This is why I want a Church that is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them. The new evangelization is an invitation to acknowledge the saving power at work in their lives and to put them at the center of the Church's pilgrim way.

We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom that God wishes to share with us through them.
–Pope Francis I,
The Church of Mercy

Prayer for Holy Week

by Sharlande Sledge

Bless us, O Blessed One, as we enter the days ahead.
Spirit of Love and Life, stay close.
Jesus, just as you set your face toward Jerusalem and walked alongside those who suffer, be our guide. Show us how to walk the way of compassion.

Lord, you stopped to heal the sick and tend to those broken in body, mind or spirit. We give thanks this morning for all who are physicians, caregivers, friends, and agents of your healing from the brokenness we all experience in this life. We give thanks and pray for everyone who tends wounds of body and spirit both here in Waco and in regions of the world where we cannot go. Teach us all to both give and receive care and give again, assured of your grace. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Jesus, you said the first shall be last and the last first. Humble us to accept your ways of kindness and justice and not the ways of the world. Make us strong so that we too may work toward your realm—when the marginalized and oppressed will be raised up and know that they are indeed beloved children of God. Help us all in your worldwide community of faith to tend the displaced and disheartened. May we see everyone as a child of God. May we affirm the value of those who have been told they have no worth. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Jesus, you journeyed through a world in turmoil, with voices clamoring for places of power. O Lord, we know this is not the realm you envisioned for the disciples in Jerusalem with you or for all the people who were powerless. And we know it is not the world you envision for our world today. When we follow you on your journey, we know that we are called to give when we think we have already given as much as we could; we are called to heal systems that are broken; we are called to welcome the strangers, to work together with others in the world to create safe places for those escaping violence and oppression. O, Lord, give us courage and strength to take the next step…and then the next…and the next. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Jesus, you took the time to pray and to be silent. During this Holy Week, help us to silence the noise around us and the fears within us. Help us focus on your journey to Jerusalem and notice the signs that bring us closer to you and your people—a palm branch, a bowl of soup, water and a towel, the bread we break and the cup we drink—your cross. May we not rush through the week on our journey to Jerusalem but recover the story and its meaning for us. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Bless us, O Blessed One, as we enter the days ahead. Spirit of Love and Life, stay close. When we are exhausted, raise us to walk again. When we stumble, help us up. When we want to turn back, keep encouraging us. Grant us hope that we may not be weary in working for your peace for all people. *Lord, hear our prayer today. Amen.*

–Sharlande Sledge, the newest member of the Seeds liturgical team, recently retired after serving for many years as associate pastor for Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, TX. She is now serving as Lake Shore's writer in residence.

art by Peter Yuichi Clark

A Liturgy for Maundy Thursday

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

One: The journey has been long, our feet are sore, tired, and dirty with the travel,
Many: And yet Jesus washes our feet, relieving our pains, and goes to prepare a place for us at the table.

One: For there are many who are also sore, tired, and dirty from life's journey, hoping there's a spot for them as well,
Many: And so we wash one another's feet, that all of those that we meet along the way may know that they are God's beloved too.

One: And we pull up another chair, for the table of grace has been set.
Many: May our hearts reflect our humble host, and point us towards exemplifying justice.

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

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

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

Hymn

"I Want Jesus to Walk with Me"
Text and Music: African-American Spiritual;
arr. J. Jefferson Cleveland (1937 – 1986), Verolga Nix (b. 1933)
Tune: SOJOURNER
Source: *Sing! A New Creation* # 130
[Arr. c. 1981, Abingdon Press,
admin. The Copyright Company]

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 166:1-2, 12-19

Hymn

"'Abba, Abba, Hear Us,' We Cry"
Text: Andrew Donaldson (b. 1951),
based on Romans 8
Music: Korean Traditional
Tune: ARIRANG
Source: *Sing! A New Creation* # 211
[Text c. 1996, 2001, Andrew Donaldson]

Epistle Reading

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Gospel Reading

John 13:1-17, 31b-35
See the Gospel Reading interpretation on page 27.

Hymn

"As Your Family, Lord"
Text: Anonymous

art by René Boldt

Music: African-American Spiritual
Tune and Meter: KUM BA JAH 8 8 8 5
Source: *Sing! A New Creation* # 246

Invitation to the Table/Communion

Hymn

"Lamb of God"
Text: *Agnus Dei* (John 1:29)
Music: The Iona Community
Source: *Sing! A New Creation* # 253
[c. 1995, WGRG the Iona Community (Scotland), admin. GIA Publications, Inc.]

Meditation of Commitment

When we experience exhaustion, failure, and despair, God doesn't sympathize with our suffering from a safe distance; God shares it by entering our lives. For Christians, the central truth of the cross is that God suffers with us.
–Brett Younger, "Weeping with God"

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."
–Katie Cook

Interpretation for the Maundy Thursday Gospel Reading

Here's an idea for an interpretation during the gospel reading for Maundy Thursday. Before the service, choose two people who are willing to wash each other's feet. In a central place in the worship area, place a chair, a bowl, a pitcher of warm water and several towels. When the gospel reader begins reading verse 3 ([Jesus] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself), the two volunteers will come to the chair, one will sit, and one will immediately start washing the feet of the other. When that is done, they change places and repeat the process. They do this without speaking. This should be finished by the time the reading is over.

Ashes

A Nested Meditation

by Sharon R. Rollins

Author's note: Below you will find my Lenten/Holy Week attempt at "nested" meditation, inspired by Kevin Anderson's Divinity in Disguise. *The layering and repetition of the words and phrases bring new and added meaning with each reading. Anderson recommends they be read aloud with pause for reflective breaths between the stanzas. He also suggests drawing meaning from each layer as well as the whole.*

Ashes, Ashes, we all fall down.

Ashes, Ashes, we all fall.
Down with temptation, the sacrifices
lingering too long.

Ashes, ashes, we all fall down.
With temptation, the sacrifices,
Lingering too long in self-examination.

Ashes, ashes.
We all fall down with temptation,
The sacrifices lingering too long.
In self-examination we become intimately
aware of our shadow sides.

Ashes, ashes, we all fall down
with temptation.
The sacrifices lingering.
Too long in self-examination.
We become intimately aware of our shadow
sides, and we long for hope.

Ashes, ashes, we all fall down.
With temptation, the sacrifices,
Lingering too long in self-examination, we
become intimately aware of our shadow sides.
We long for hope and redemption
on the horizon.

–Sharon Rollins is the executive director of the Family Counseling division of Waco Family Medicine. She has written and created art for Seeds for more than 25 years. The cover art for this year's Lent/Eastertide packet is her concept.

A Liturgy for Holy Friday

Tearing the Veil in the Temple

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

On this holy day, we sit in darkness.
The one whom God loves is dying.
The one with whom God is well pleased
is suffering.

Meditation of Preparation

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 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 Adoration

"Ah, Holy Jesus"
Text: Johann Heermann
Music: Johann Crüger
Tune: HERZLIEBSTER JESU 11.11.11.5.
The New Century Hymnal #218

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 22

Song of Awe

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

Epistle Reading

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

Meditation of Commitment

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 in *A Keeper of the Word*

Hymn of Commitment

"My Song Is Love Unknown"
Text: Samuel Crossman
Music: John D. Edwards
Tune: RHOSYMEDRE 6.6.6.6.8.8.8.
The New Century Hymnal #222

Gospel Reading or Tenebrae

John 18:1-19:42
Note: As an alternative to the gospel reading, we offer the tenebrae service "Journey into Darkness" on page 29. This might be most effective if it is done last, with the congregants leaving the worship area in silence.

Journey Into Darkness

A Tenebrae Service Based on the Seven Last Sayings of Christ

by Katie Cook

Author's note: This tenebrae is offered to use in the place of the gospel reading for Holy Friday. Long ago, I researched the readings below from the gospel accounts and, having no chronological guide, arranged them in the order of "The Seven Last Words of Christ" in the Dubois cantata.

The Setting

The setting should be a darkened room, with seven candles lit, as well as a Christ candle. (We use the Christ candle from the previous Advent wreath.) You may want to make the candles uniform, or you may not. I have used candlesticks with graded heights and uniform candles. One international group chose candles that were all different shapes, sizes, and colors. Sometimes we add a candle to the side for readers, or for a musician or person operating the music player. You will also need a snuffer of some kind.

If possible, make the candles the only light source. Try to make it as dark as possible. You may choose to observe communion just before the readings; this adds a sense of shared experience to the service. Keep the elements and dishes simple—rustic if possible. Break the bread and pour the wine in silence, and then begin the passing of the elements. Involve as many of the congregation as possible in passing. The cello prelude to John Michael Talbot's *The Lord's Supper* makes an appropriate accompaniment to the communion.

Assign seven readers ahead of time and give each a copy of one of the sayings. Each will read his or her portion and then snuff out one candle.

The First Saying

The gospel of Luke is the only manuscript that tells us about the first thing that Jesus said from the cross. When the Roman soldiers had taken Jesus up to the place that was called Skull Hill, and when they had nailed his hands and feet to the wood and set the cross upright in its hole, Jesus is said to have cried out, "Father, forgive them. They do not realize what they are doing."

The Second Saying

There were two criminals there also, to be put to death at the same time. The religious leaders and others in the crowd were jeering and cursing at Jesus, and the Romans put up a sign over his head, saying "This is the King of the Jews." The Jewish leaders told them to change it, to make it say, "He said he was king of the Jews." But the Romans refused to change it.

The book of Luke says that one of the thieves, suspended on a cross beside Jesus, joined the crowd in mocking him. The thief said, "Why don't you save yourself? and us, too, while you're at it." And Jesus didn't say a word.

But the other thief said, "Shut up, you fool! Don't you fear God at all? We deserve to die, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered this time. He said, "You

Please see "Tenebrae" on page 31.

A Liturgy for Easter Sunday

by the Seeds Liturgical Team

Call to Worship

One: The stone is rolled away, the tomb is empty, light pierces the shadows.
Many: Oh death, where is your sting?

One: If God can overcome the law of sin and death, then God can meet us in all of our sufferings,
Many: And guide us beyond the crosses that we bear into the light of Christ that reveals the resurrection.

One: There is hope for us and for the world, but that hope shouldn't just be here at the tomb,
Many: May our hearts be renewed with new light and life, and inspire us to continue the action of the resurrection daily, with an eye toward justice for all.

Meditation of Preparation

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

Hymn of Celebration

"Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"
Text: Charles Wesley
Music: *Lyra Davidica*, 1708
Tune: EASTER HYMN 7.7.7.7. with alleluias
The New Century Hymnal #233

Reading from the Prophets

Isaiah 25:6-9

Reading from the Psalms

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Hymn of Life Eternal

"The Day of Resurrection"
Text: John of Damascus, 8th century
Music: Henry T. Smart
Tune: LANCASHIRE 7.6.7.6.D
The New Century Hymnal #245

Reading from the Epistles

I Corinthians 15:1-11

Reading from the Gospels

John 20:1-18 **or** Mark 16:1-8

Reading from the Acts

Acts 10:34-43

Sermon

art by Sally Lynn Askins

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?
–Terrence Moran

Hymn of Commitment

"Listen to Your Savior Call"
Text: William Cowper
Music: French Melody, early 13th century, arr. Richard Redhead
Tune: ORIENTIS PARTIBUS 7.7.7.7.
The New Century Hymnal #250

Benediction

Christ is risen in power and wonder. Christ is risen out of the shambles of death and terror and doubt and fear. Christ is risen to turn the world to peace and justice and freedom and well-being. Christ is risen with healing wings to cure our diseased hurts and our public pathologies. Go into the world and live this truth.
–adapted from a quote by Walter Brueggemann from *Inscribing the Text*

Tenebrae,

continued from page 29

can be assured that this very day you will be with me in Paradise."

The Third Saying

The fourth gospel, traditionally attributed to the apostle John, is the only manuscript that recorded the third saying of Christ from the cross. While the soldiers were casting lots for Jesus' robe, he looked down and saw his mother Mary standing nearby with Mary Magdalene and a third woman referred to as "the other Mary." John was also standing nearby—he was the only one of the twelve who had ventured near the execution site that day. Jesus said to his mother, "Woman, this is your son," indicating John. And to John, Jesus said, "This is your mother." And from that day on, John took Mary into his own home and treated her as if she were his own mother.

The Fourth Saying

The gospels of Matthew and Mark tell us that, during the sixth hour—which, according to most scholars, would be midday, or noon—there was a darkness over all the earth. This darkness lasted for three hours. At the end of that time, Jesus cried out with the words that the king and psalmist David had once cried into the darkness: "My God, My God; Why have you forsaken me?"

This story shows us that even the one whom we call Lord experienced the feeling of utter despair.

The Fifth Saying

The fourth gospel recorded for us the account of the fifth saying of Christ from the cross. Jesus had been suspended on the cross for several hours. Those who have studied the practice of crucifixion say that victims found it difficult to breathe. We may assume that Jesus was feeling this loss of breath. His hands and feet were bleeding from the nails that were pinning him to the wooden beams. Blood was running down his face from the places where a crown made of thorns had cut his head. He said, "I'm thirsty."

Someone lifted up to his mouth a sponge filled with sour wine that, we are told, they sometimes used to dull the pain. Jesus drank from it.

The Sixth Saying

The gospel of Luke tells us that, when darkness had been over the land for three hours, the veil in the temple—the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple—was torn right down the middle. Jesus knew that death was very near.

He said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

The Seventh Saying

In the gospel of John, we are told that, after all of the events of this cruel day, Jesus simply said, "It is finished," which we are told means "I have accomplished and completed all that I came here to do." And having spoken these words, he bowed his head and died.
–Katie Cook is the Seeds of Hope editor. A tenebrae service using these sayings was printed in a very early Sacred Seasons *packet.*

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May the Lord shine the divine countenance upon you.
May the Lord give you peace, but may that peace
be a disturbing peace,
A peace that calls you to long for the peace
of all humankind.
May you find in the blessing of God,
The blessing of sharing in the service of God
And bearing the cross of Christ.
As you go forth from this place,
Go forth in the power of the spirit of God
To make a difference in the world.
–Raymond Bailey

art by Scott Turner