

Journey Through Lent

WITH THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

WESTMINSTER UNITED CHURCH, WHITBY
2021



Mike Moyers, "Lenten Labyrinth" from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN

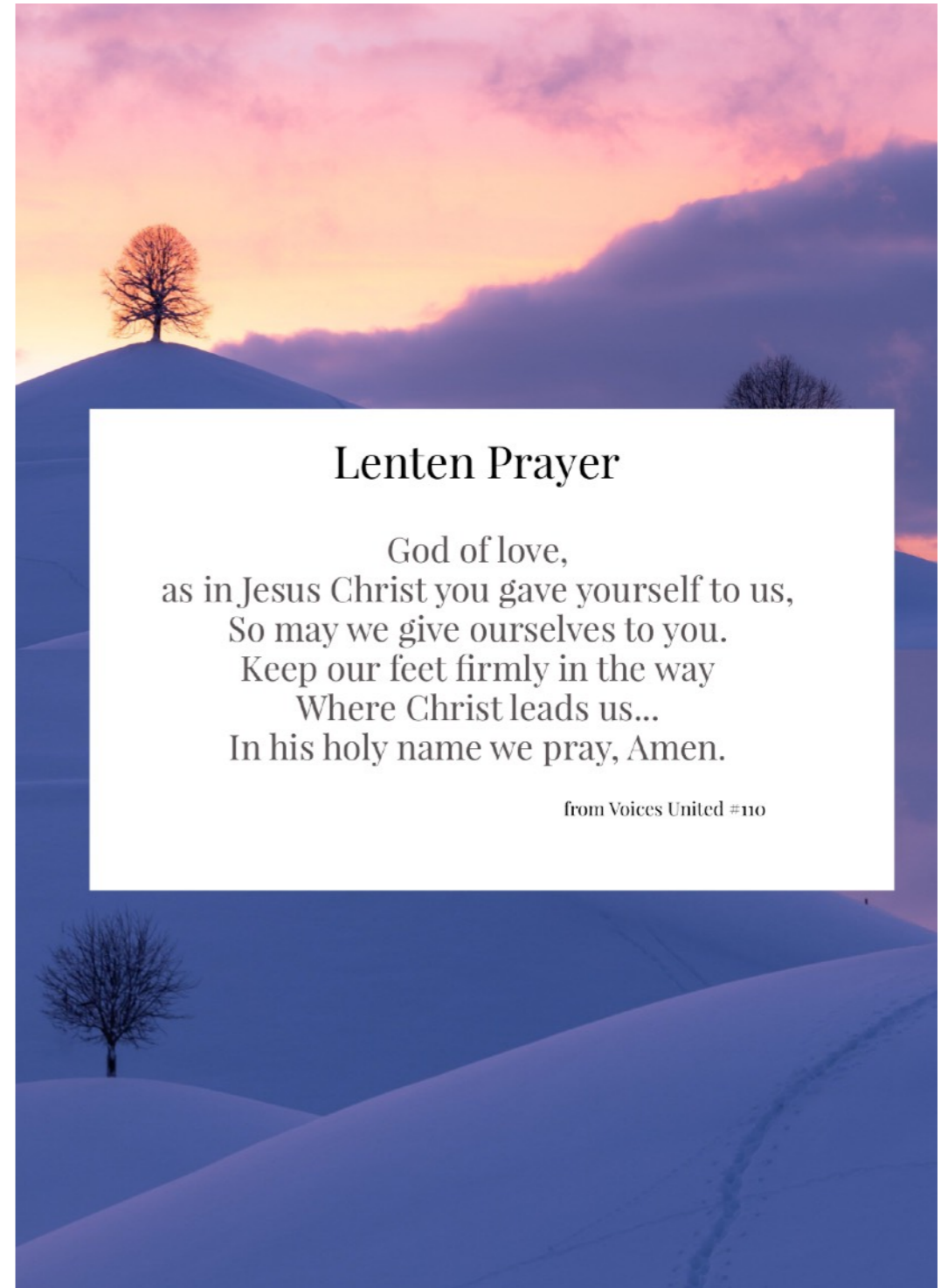
Introduction

The Lenten journey is a personal one but it isn't a solo trek. We travel with a community of faith; we travel in the company of all the saints and in the footsteps of Jesus.

This Lenten reflection booklet has been written by fellow travellers who, with scripture as a guide, are pointing to landscapes and landmarks they have noticed along the way. These reflections are a rich sharing of questions, moments of Christ's presence and absence, challenges and affirmations in a variety of voices from various life stages and perspectives.

Lent is forty days (not including Sundays). Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness, a time of self examination, reflection and preparation for his ministry. You are invited to set time aside each day for introspection, prayer and preparation. Read the daily scripture passage and corresponding reflection; connect with God in Jesus and with the movement of the Spirit in your own life and in the lives of those sharing their reflections. What path are you on? To what are you being called? And where do you see God along the way?

~Rev. Michelle Robinson



Lenten Prayer

God of love,
as in Jesus Christ you gave yourself to us,
So may we give ourselves to you.
Keep our feet firmly in the way
Where Christ leads us...
In his holy name we pray, Amen.

from Voices United #110

Luke 4:1-12

Allowing myself the freedom to 'be' in this passage, the first thing I understand and can now name, is how self-absorbed I have been - always with my own selfish intentions during the Lenten Season. Of course, there is my usual question of "What can I give up this time?" I always intend to give up something 'big,' like going meatless or immersing myself in a new book on theology. Yet, most times I pick something small and safe such as giving up chocolates.

Selfishly, I think about what I can gain after I've given up whatever it is I've decided upon, realizing that sometimes, half way through, I forget and stray, and eat a piece of chocolate anyway. I liken myself to the devil here - shortsighted and self-centered. (He even offered to give up "all the kingdoms of the world" just so Jesus would worship him.) Being so focused on the physical "me" I have lost sight of the many spiritual opportunities that Lent provides. What would have happened if Jesus were as self-absorbed? Things would have been over after His first temptation!

Secondly, I know this is a prayerful 40 day journey, yet, oftentimes, I have forgotten why I am in the wilderness on

the Lenten journey in the first place. I want to bolt through this time just to get to Eastertime. But only in slowing down can I channel my thoughts. I must take the time to persevere and to reflect on God's truths. Only then can I allow God to fill me with whatever it is only He knows I need. Jesus did not hurriedly push the devil aside because He was tired and hungry, instead, He was "full of the Holy Spirit" and He used scripture to timely stave off the devil. Every response to the devil was intentional and purposeful, not by accident and certainly not hurried nor impulsive.

Thirdly, as Jesus is tempted, I observe myself in a balloon, being batted around from side to side -wavering and airborne between the devil and the Son of God. It is so easy to give up sometimes - just floating around, living in the devil's impermanent world of "ifs" and provocations rather than allowing God to take a hold of my wavering, wandering self. Realizing that this empty balloon of mine would eventually deflate, I understand my need to seek out and to dwell in new possibilities of being "full" of His Spirit, to live in His abiding and steadfast world instead. I need to lean into scripture to prepare because the devil will find "an opportune time" to call again.

~Margaret Suepaul

Luke 4:16-30

My immediate reaction on reading this passage is that the world hasn't changed that much in 2,000 years. The privileged want to remain privileged at the expense of the majority of others.

To a certain extent, I somewhat understand the reaction of the privileged. I feel entitled to whatever I have worked all these years to accomplish, however, the majority of my sympathies lie with the oppressed.

In today's terms, Jesus could have started his discourse with the words "I have some good news and some bad news." The good news absolutely delighted the congregation. They knew in their hearts that Jesus was one of their own lads and would treat them appropriately. However, when he



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stated that the focus would be on those that they regarded as pagans their reaction turned to venomous rage, and they threatened to throw him off a cliff.

In this passage, the last sentence is what amazes me the most - "But he

passed through the midst of them and went away." No opinion or explanation is given about this. One can only surmise that his godlike presence and goodness subdued the evil in them.

~John Cooper

Luke 4:38-44



Rembrandt, *Christ Healing Peter's Mother-in-Law*. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57481>

I must admit that I was a bit hesitant when invited to contribute to this Lenten Reflection Booklet. I felt the prospect of doing this a little daunting and challenging. I have always found the Scripture readings at church on Sunday mornings to be absorbing and informative. However, I'm sorry to say that not since I attended Bible classes in my teens have I actually taken the time to sit down to read, and to try to understand and reflect on the deeper meanings of the Scriptures' passages.

This passage of six verses is relatively short but in it, Jesus by his actions, teaches so much about service and humility. After a long day, at Simon's request, He not only heals Simon's sick mother-in-law but He enables her to immediately help others. That evening, He tirelessly heals many more sick people and for this service to others, He has no desire to be praised and acknowledged. He could have decided to remain in this town and indulge Himself in these peoples' accolades but He chose to go forward to relatively unknown places, and to unknown receptions.

Because of this troubled world in which we now live, I believe Jesus's selfless acts of service are so needed to be taken to heart. For me, the lesson in this reading has reminded me of my responsibilities to others. It has reminded me to try to be a kinder, more helpful person to those who never have sufficient food or clothing; those who are out of work; those who don't know the comfort of a clean and warm bed; and to be very grateful to those on whose hard work my health and comfort depend.

~May Cooper

Luke 5:1-11

This passage Luke 5:1-11 is all too relatable to Christians. This passage can be divided into three parts: Luke 5:1-3, where Jesus teaches the crowd from the boat; Luke 5:4-7, where Jesus asks Simon to send his boat into the deep water and to let down the fishing nets; and finally, Luke 5:8-11 where after Simon Peter falls to Jesus' knees they leave everything and follow Jesus. It mentions near the end of this passage that James and John were also present along with their partner Simon.

These are ordinary fishermen, who are in the 'right place, right time' for Jesus to come into their boat and speak. Jesus then tells them to go out into the water and try and catch fish.

Jesus' instructions seem weird or even wrong. Simon Peter resists Jesus' instructions. Then they catch a lot of fish.

Simon Peter falls to Jesus' knees. He's aware of his unworthiness, his sinfulness. Jesus then tells Simon Peter and his partners that he will "from now on be catching people."

This passage tells us a lot about how Jesus commands us.

Jesus doesn't come into these fishermen's lives when they are ready. Just like Simon does, we tend to resist Jesus because what he is asking of us and Simon seems impractical. We are too aware of our faults. We believe that these faults preclude God from using us.

Jesus doesn't wait until we are ready. Our faults are no obstacle to him. If we set aside our doubts and fears we can catch people as Jesus has caught us. I don't think any Christian who is honest with themselves won't remember a time when he or she has thrown aside God because God is impractical, or even because of the stability of his or her life. It's not always practical to turn the other cheek. It is easy to sit comfortably in our stable lives and not make a difference in the world. It might seem weird or even wrong to love thy enemy.

Despite all of this, the Bible is clear, we need to follow Jesus' commandments so that Christ can work through us and catch others.

~ **Brock Fielder**

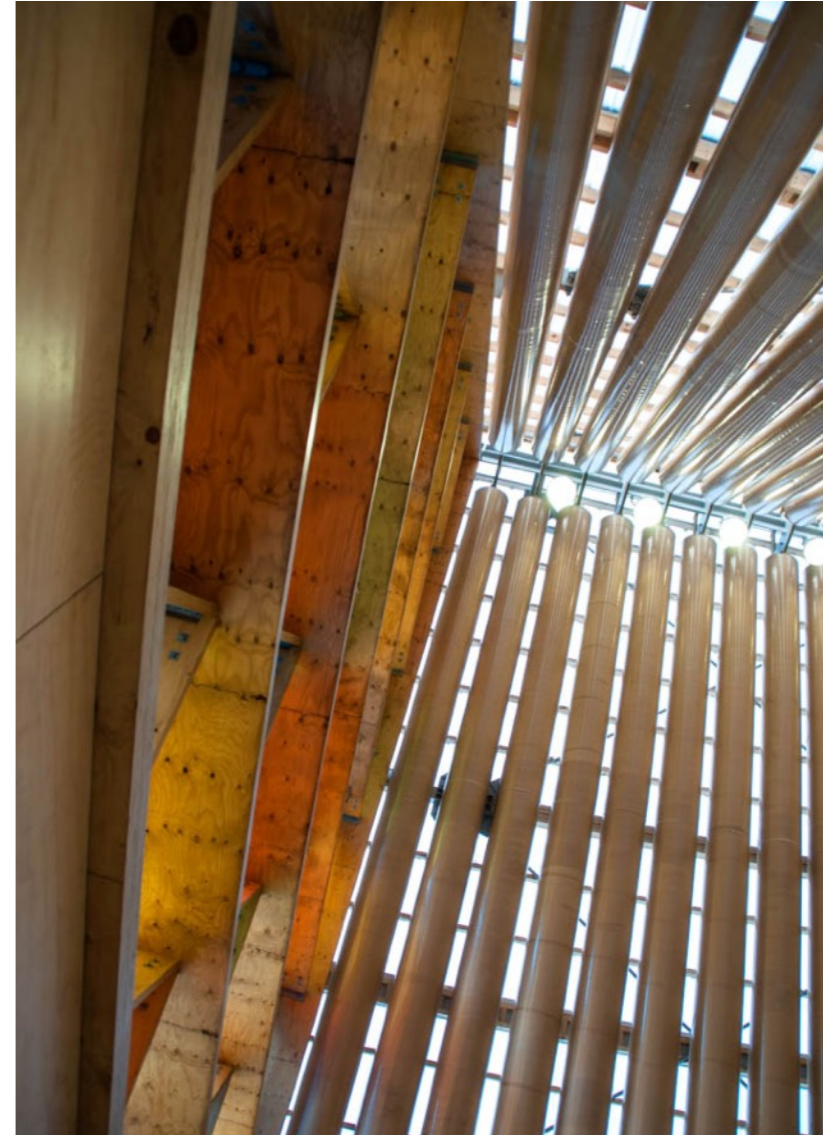
Luke 5:17-26

In this passage I see a group of very dedicated and industrious friends. They, as well as their friend the paralytic, had great faith to take the initiative to do what they did. Lowering this man down through the tiles of the roof into the middle of a crowd right in front of Jesus was quite risky. They had no idea what they would encounter.

I identify with the paralytic man in this passage. Four years ago I lost my son. My church friends lifted and carried me. They ministered to me by their great love by bringing food, visiting and sitting with me, praying for me, mourning with me. I do not know how I would have gotten through such an ordeal without them. They picked me up and carried me....they gave me the strength to stand up and walk again.

The second part of this passage refers to the Pharisees and teachers of the law. I feel these people are modern day society, the sceptics and naysayers. They don't have a church home, believe in religion or think that God exists. I am eternally grateful for my church family and my strong faith that continues to sustain and carry me without fear or doubt.

~**Dianne Nofle**



*Ban, Shigeru, 1957-. Light from roof of Cardboard Cathedral, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.*

Luke 6:12-19 - Cathy Shaw

What's in a name? Today's scripture tells us that Jesus calls his disciples together - and there were many of them - and chooses twelve to be his apostles. And then the scripture names them for us. There are the apostles with uncommon names, the ones who have their name changed or nicknames given, and the ones who have the same name and so have to be differentiated from each other.

I wonder what it would have been like in that moment to have your name called by Jesus and to respond to the call to be an apostle? Would you have been surprised and said "Who, me? Is there someone else here with that name?" Or maybe Jesus had already talked to you about it so that you had a heads up and this announcement was just to make it "official." Would you be ecstatic and jump at the chance to become even closer to Jesus, or would you want to run away, not

knowing what lies ahead? Honestly, I'm not sure how I would respond.

"I wonder what it would have been like ...to have your name called by Jesus..."

I imagine that there must have been a moment of amazement for those first apostles. Out of all those who were following him as disciples, Jesus chose them. Jesus saw them. Jesus called them. Jesus loved and valued them.

I also imagine that was a similar feeling for those who drew near to Jesus and were healed by him. In a world where those with disability or disease often found themselves on the margins, removed from community and ignored, ridiculed, or forgotten (and let's be honest, that is the reality of our world as well) Jesus saw them, loved and valued them. Jesus healed them. But it was not only the restoration of sight or limb; it was also the reminder that they were

worthy of time, respect, and care. It was not only the removal of disease; it was also the recognition that they are a whole person - both before and after the cure - who was loved and known by God and called by name.

The saying goes that “the sweetest sound in the world is the sound of your own name” and our names still ring from the heavens if only we will listen. God knows our name and calls us by it. We are invited to be a disciple and apostle - those who learn and follow, and those who are sent out into the world to share the good news. God calls to us in our everyday living. Whispering our name in the stillness of the night, God says “I love you.” Reminding us



Photo by Chang Duong on Unsplash

that we are known, valued and worthy, God calls our name with tenderness that breaks through all barriers.

Can you hear your name being called by God today?

~ Cathy Shaw

Luke 6:27-36

When reading this section of scripture, I initially struggled with the first line: "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you." I realized that I needed to continue reading the entire passage to understand what was being asked of me.

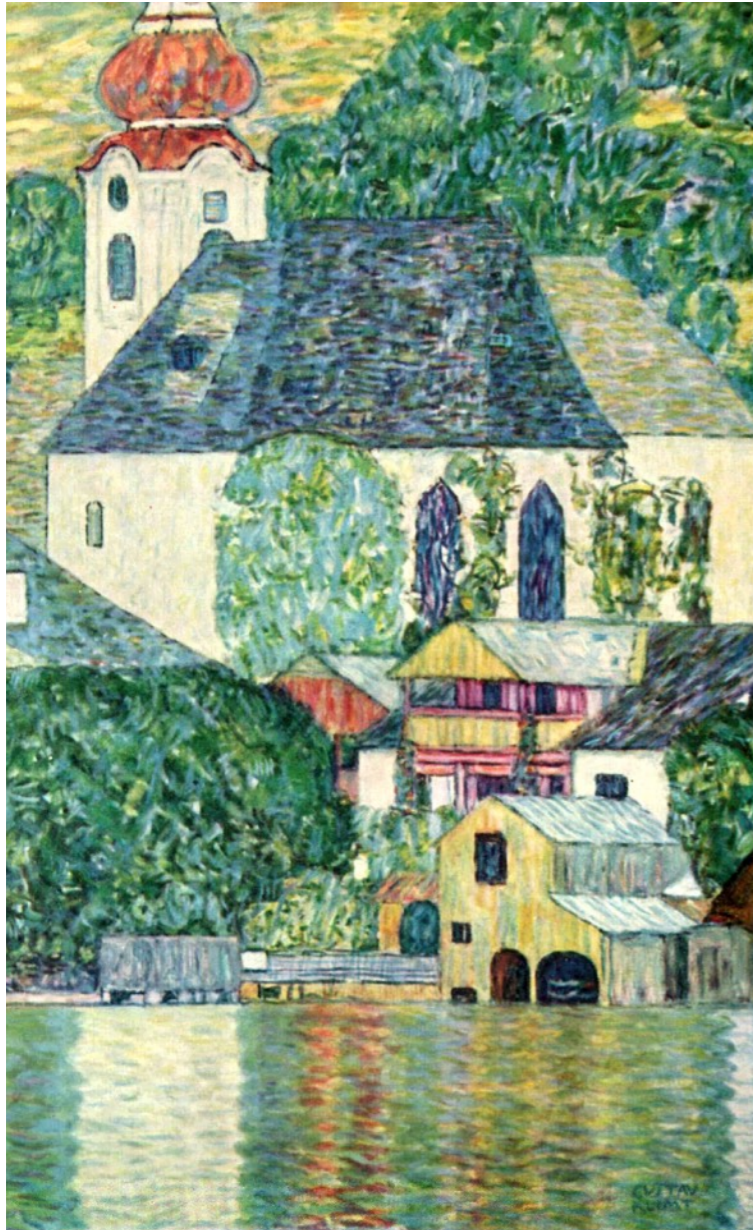
At first I visualized who I considered to be my enemies. The fellow student who tried to humiliate or embarrass me; the math teacher who insisted I stand at the blackboard when I wasn't feeling well causing me to faint and strike my head (I required a week of hospitalization); the manager who tried to hinder my career development for fear that I might take over her position?

It took a long time before I could see the self-interest behind each of their actions. Now on reflection, these individuals, whom I considered enemies at the time, had a little bit of God in each of them, even though I disliked their actions.

By developing patience and showing empathy I learned to listen and found ways in which I might help another person. The hardest part was to look behind the facade people often presented so I might realize the true needs of each one. Seeing beyond the obvious made me understand what this all-encompassing "Love" was all about. This was the "Love" that was being described in this passage. True love which goes beyond providing the necessities of life.

As an indigenous teacher once stated " We belong to each other" therefore we need to be able to practice "Radical Inclusion." Unconditional Love for every person as human beings not just those people we cherish as part of our lives. The need to practice all inclusive love in my life. A love that does not see race, sex, colour, age, sexual orientation, poverty or social status. A love that sees God in each of us.

~ John Bowman



Klimt, Gustav, 1862-1918. Church in Unterach, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

Luke 6:46-49

Reading the passage started me thinking of my upbringing within the church environment.

The physical church-school was at the front of the house where I was born. Being so close to the church ensured I built a strong relationship with God, stemming from the early years of my life attending Sunday school and having parents and grandparents who instilled in me the teachings of God. The foundation was built slowly but strong as I attended church every Sunday. This strong foundation has helped me weather storms throughout my life as being human tends to makes you doubt that you will get through some of the difficult situations. However, with the strong foundation of God we always come out stronger in faith and outlook.

Also, as we get older that strong faith that we built over the years keeps getting stronger and we in turn feel the need to pass on this faith experience to the younger generation and people around us. Jesus gave his followers a firm foundation which built that strong faith, and his followers have sunk their roots into solid ground. Some are willing to die for him and his teachings.

~Shane Suepaul

Luke 7:36-50

I can see myself in either person - the Pharisee or the woman.

The woman comes to Jesus seeking forgiveness for her sins. She does everything possible to show her love for Jesus. She offers the gifts that she has in abundance.

The Pharisee judges the woman to be a sinner and cannot understand why Jesus does not see this and send the woman away. The Pharisee also uses this situation to question whether Jesus is a prophet.

Jesus teaches by relating a story of two people who owe different amounts of money that neither can repay. When their debts are forgiven, Jesus asks which of the debtors would love the moneylender more.

He shows the Pharisee that the woman offered everything she could and by doing so showed her great love for Jesus. She was able to overcome her shame of being a sinner and was willing to demonstrate her love. Jesus forgave her sins.

"Jesus shows us that we can look for the good in others rather than judge them."

This passage speaks to me because it is telling us that we are all on a journey with a goal of learning to be more Christ-like; we should judge less, listen and observe more, feel less shame and love abundantly in this life. Jesus shows us that we can look for the good in others rather than judge them. We have a choice to stay in our societal role or to come out of ourselves. Jesus shows us that anyone is welcome in the kingdom of God.

~Ava Tomlinson

Luke 8:1-15

Jesus, a Rabbi and teacher, uses stories to demonstrate His ideas. They are usually set within the communities He was visiting, or by a dusty road He was travelling.

The allegory in Luke 8 verses 1 to 15 is a garden and He asks me to sow seeds among those around me. The seeds are the word of God. He encourages me to see, hear and cultivate them as new faith and hope with intention and attention.

As Jesus' words fall upon many of us, perhaps like stone, hard and dry, others on fertile loam, some will grow, some will not. It is my responsibility to tend, care and cultivate these words as they become a constant in my family, friends and community. Let me seek out others of culture, colour and creed... to share our commonalities within a sense of belonging as we become disciples too.



Gogh, Vincent van, 1853-1890. Sower, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

*In your business God,
it is often the little things in life that give us charm,
give us love, give us grace to be awed.
Let us give thanks to know you are here with us Lord.*

~Cori Mayhew

Luke 8:22-25

I imagine what it would be like if I were on the boat with Jesus and the disciples.

Jesus was tired. He had preached all day and was weary, so he finds a quiet place on the boat to sleep. After a while the wind picks up, and then all of a sudden the wind is howling. The waves are so high they are coming over the edge of the boat, and the wind is getting even stronger. I am terrified because if this keeps up we will surely perish.

Someone goes to wake Jesus from his sleep. Is it just to let Jesus know that he should be ready to be swept overboard, or does the disciple hope that Jesus could save us somehow? Either way, I am not ready for what happens next.

Jesus looks into the storm and commands the wind to calm. The wind



Kathleen Peterson, "Tempest" from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. Nashville, TN

becomes a soft breeze, and the waters calm. I am awestruck! This man, this teacher, can calm a stormy sea. He rebukes us for not having faith.

Faith in what? Faith in him, that with him I will not come to harm? Faith in God that no matter my storm God is always with me? Is Jesus the one who

will save us from Roman occupation? Is he the Promised One?

I have no answers, but after witnessing this, I will follow this man.. I will help him with his quest and do what he asks of me because what I do know is that he is special among us all.

~Eileen Whitney

Luke 8:40-56

I grew up in the Christian tradition and I am quite familiar with these stories yet I find myself looking at them with new eyes.

Why did Jesus want to know who touched him? In fact, He was extraordinarily persistent. When the poor woman owned up, what did Jesus do? He assured her that she was responsible for her healing because of her faith and wished her peace.

I am sure if Jesus had not reassured her, she would forever have felt guilty and ungrateful. Her health issue might have been resolved but she would not have been happy.

Jairus came completely believing that Jesus would heal his daughter and then the situation changed. Again, Jesus reassured him. "Don't be afraid. Just trust me and she will be alright."

In both cases, Jesus was acknowledging the efforts these two had made to reach that point of absolute faith in him.

I believe faith is not something thrown in our lap.

The prophet Habakkuk said in 600 BC "The righteous will live by their faith" (Hab. 2:4)

Paul says: "This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the scriptures say, 'It is through faith that a righteous person has life.'" (Rom. 1:17)

The next question is: How do we do "righteousness"?

Paul says we should become devoted followers of Christ by embracing the gospel and fully trusting in Jesus. We must not just "be right with God" but "do right."

Within Lent, how are we, as individuals and as a community, going to achieve this?

It seems to me, we have to do away with old habits, move away from wrong attitudes and actions.

We have to become Christ-like and then faith-ful.

~Angela Odei

Luke 9:1-6

“Okay guys let’s go. You’ve got all you need to do this. Don’t let any negativity get you down. What you are doing is important. Remember that I’m with you all the way.”

I can imagine Jesus encouraging his disciples as they set out on this adventure.

By sending the twelve out to spread the good news Jesus is demonstrating his willingness to share his power. This can only be good as it demonstrates an extension of his ministry. At the same time he asks them to rely completely on God by taking nothing in the way of material belongings. What a risk but at the same time how exciting!

Like the disciples, we are asked to be Christians in community. It is in community with others that we spread the good news that Christ is still among



Photo by Rafael Barquero on Unsplash

us . It is through our actions that we are known as Christians. During this time of Lent we have the opportunity to think about what really matters to each of us.

What do I truly need?

Do my words and actions reflect Christ?

How can I be a messenger for Christ in my community and the community at large?

Am I able to take the risk of new adventures?

~Maureen Dingman

Luke 9:10-17

Today's scripture lesson is a story that appears in all four gospels (Matthew 14: 13-21, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:1-15).

What is so compelling about this story?

For me, it was that there was such a large group of men (not including women or children) and everyone was fed until they were satisfied (vs 17) and then the disciples gathered up twelve baskets of leftovers.

Prior to COVID-19, having an unexpected guest or two for a meal would have not presented a problem to me, but having a family of four or several friends drop in at the same time and stay for a meal would have been a challenge.



*Loaves and Fish, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**,
a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.*

MARCH 4 (CONTINUED)

Yet as a child, I remember my parents, my aunts and uncles, and my grandparents having no problems inviting my family and/or others to stay for the next meal if we unexpectedly dropped in to visit them.

What would be your reaction to having unexpected people for a meal?

Being part of the UCW catering committee, we have a “food to people” guide that we use to buy groceries, supplies and how to prepare for the catering. Yet, there is always some anxiety on the day of the event: do we have enough food for everyone but we have never run out of food for the guests?

Jesus blessed and offered the five loaves and two fish to God and was able to stretch this gift to feed the multitude. How might Jesus bless your gifts - your abilities - your resources to stretch and multiply to share within your family - church - community?

I would like to close with sharing Mary Oliver’s poem about the feeding of the 5000.

Logos by Mary Oliver

Why wonder about the loaves and the fishes?
If you say the right words, the wine expands.
If you say them with love
and the felt ferocity of that love
and the felt necessity of that love,
the fish explode into many.

Imagine him, speaking,
and don’t worry about what is reality,
or what is plain, or what is mysterious.
If you were there, it was all those things.
If you can imagine it, it is all those things.

Eat, drink, be happy.
Accept the miracle.
Accept, too, each spoken word
spoken with love.

~ Susan Pleasance



Photo by Hedgehog Digital on Unsplash

Luke 9:18-27

I often wonder how Jesus felt knowing that when the time came he would face great suffering and death for our transgressions. Surely, he must have experienced times of fear and thought about the possibility of saving his own life? That would have been the easy, more appealing, and a safe choice to make. But that also would have been ignoring his identity as the Messiah (“Who do you say that I am?”) Jesus knew his fate, he accepted it, and he prepared his disciples to follow him into the kingdom of God.

At this particular time in our history, the entire world is faced with uncertainty. We are all stuck in a sort of limbo...just waiting...with nothing but time to think. But what are we thinking about? I know I spend most of my time thinking and dreaming about life post pandemic; when I can see family and friends, travel, and start to enjoy all of the things I took for granted before. That is when I think my life will start to feel fulfilled again. But what about life right now? The kingdom of God is not in the future...it is today. When we lose our lives to follow Jesus, we can live beyond ourselves and be present to experience God’s glory. So instead of waiting for better days ahead, let us use this quiet time in our lives as a gift to re-examine our discipleship as we follow Jesus.

~Emma Cullen

Luke 9:57-62

After we read this text once, or maybe another couple times, Jesus makes some radical demands on His followers. Does Jesus mean that to follow Him, we must sell our homes, deny ourselves all comforts in life, and become itinerant jungle missionaries? If so, very few would qualify! We have all heard about cult/sect followers that sell and give up everything, including family and friends, to follow an ideology and way of life.

Or should we view these verses in a wider context? How differently do we act because of our Christian experience and commitment?

These verses are addressed to everyone who would consider being a follower of Christ, a disciple. Following Jesus must be more important than just our personal comfort. Growing in God's grace is a journey and a never-ending quest. We should not be satisfied with anything less. We should not put self-imposed limits on that journey.

Maturing and progressing as a Christian takes more than a casual interest. It takes self reflection and honesty, as we respond collectively and individually during this season of Lent.

There is a difference between interest and commitment. Jesus is talking about Christian commitment. One with no beginning nor end - with no limits or boundaries. One that always involves searching, pondering, spiritually growing. One that is indeed radical versus comfortable and casual. **~Paul Kneebone**

Luke 10:38-42

The story of Mary and Martha! Don't we all want to be Marys, sitting at Jesus feet and learning from him? Jesus had so much to teach his followers and it must have been such a blessing to have him visiting as a personal friend.

Over the centuries, Martha has had a bad rap for her domestic diligence. I've always felt a bit sorry for Martha. She was trying hard to be a good hostess. Does this passage then mean it has to be one way or the other?

Jesus had been up-front with his followers that he would not always be with them. I believe that he was telling Martha that the opportunity to listen and learn from him while he was still with them physically was most important at that time. Like Martha, I sometimes think that a task has to be done right now, even if what I really need is to pray, meditate or just rest. Jesus was prioritizing Mary's time NOT demeaning Martha's work.

In this season of Lent, we all need to pause, take a breath and look at our agendas and priorities. Being in lockdown has perhaps forced us to do just that. Make time for God/Jesus each and every day. We can even have a chat with God while we do the dishes. God/Jesus lives within each of us just waiting for our attention. I, personally, aim to make time to listen and learn.

~Helen Bowman



Kathleen Peterson, "Mary, Martha and Jesus," from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library,



Luke 11:5-13

On my first read through of this text, I was thinking literally about kinds of friends. I related to the friend that gets bothered late at night and then gives in and helps his or her friend. I've felt like this before and have wanted to be the needy one for a change.

But looking closer and reading the previous verses (as I'm learning is needed to better understand certain passages) I believe prayer is the subject. Perseverance in prayer. When praying it's not just a one time ask and it happens. The part about, "ask, search and knock" I feel is not as simple as it may sound. *Ask* but it may not be given right away or in the exact way you thought. *Search* but you may find something different than what you were looking for and *knock* but a different door maybe opened than what you expected.

We need to be open to all things. Maybe just praying for the Holy Spirit to be in us would be all we need.

~ **Joanne MacPherson**

Vuillard, Édouard, 1868-1940. Artist's Mother Opening a Door, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

Luke 12:13-21

In this parable Jesus is teaching the disciples about a farmer who has an abundance of grain and decides to store the surplus for himself by building a larger barn instead of sharing his wealth.

God then speaks to the farmer and tells him that he is going die and asks him who will get what he has prepared for himself.

You can't take it with you when you go.

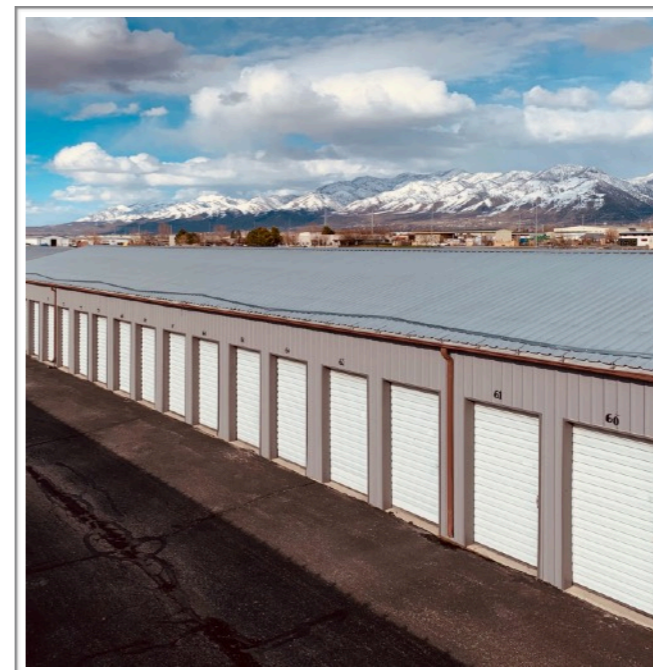
The parable is teaching us that when all is said and done the wealth we have accumulated is left behind. Life isn't about possessions or money but about your lasting impact. This stored wealth could have been used to help someone in need.

We are asked to adjust our focus to what is important. We can easily become focused on our possessions and cash flow, like the cartoon character with the dollar signs for eyes.

With COVID there has never been a more critical time to take this parable to heart, to grow as a community, to reach out to our fellow man and provide aid when and where we can.

As Christians, we must use our resources to help whenever we have the ability to do so. This is how as a community we can survive and thrive as a whole instead of as individuals.

~ **Sarah Baker**



Self Storage, Photo by Adam Winger from Unsplash



Luke 12:22-34

As I read this passage, I am instantly reminded of other verses I often turn to when I feel overwhelmed, Philippians 4:6, Isaiah 41:10, and Psalm 55:22, for example. Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about what they will eat or what they will wear, for God feeds the ravens and clothes the grass.

We all face uncertainty in life and it is sometimes easy to become consumed by the fear of how we may handle some future situation. When I worry, I am thinking that I am alone and must manage everything myself, when instead I should be praying and asking for God's guidance.

Jesus calls his disciples "little flock." We are God's sheep, and God will provide for us. It is a very comforting image. The passage plainly tells us how useless it is to worry.

Instead, we should focus on the kingdom of God and put our full trust in Him, because we are valuable to Him. He knows what we need, and He will take care of us.

~ **Michael Molnar**

Luke 13:10-17

Jesus is teaching about the kingdom of God (how God hopes that we will live together and with God.)

Years ago, I learned that “a call of God is a need that you can fill”. When God nudges our heart with a person or an action do we act IMMEDIATELY, as Jesus does? Or, do we hesitate, think twice, wonder if someone else, or another time, would be better?

The leaders of the synagogue had a very strong reaction to Jesus illustration of the kingdom by healing on the sabbath. They insisted on following the rules, no deviations. They are rebuked by Jesus quite sharply. He highlights their hypocrisy.

Living in the kingdom presents a blank slate. We listen for a nudge on our hearts opening us to new, thoughtful, caring responses to people in need. And there will be much rejoicing!

~Mary Shepherd



David P. Flores. "Helping Hand," from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville,

Luke 13:18-21

Jesus frequently used parables, analogies, metaphors to help people understand and internalize the Gospel message. They were contextual to his audience - shepherds and sheep, farmers sowing seeds, mustard seeds and yeast. I want to speak to a couple of metaphors - or similes - that I think could be useful in our context- dandelions and raccoons.

You don't see dandelions in manicured gardens. They don't have pride of place in lovely floral displays. You see dandelions at the edge of construction sites. You see them growing in tiny strips of grass by roadsides. You see them growing out of tiny cracks of concrete or cement. The tiniest of cracks and a dandelion or one of its colleagues and kin will spread their life through it. Any opportunity anywhere, and a dandelion will grow.

"I think we could do far worse than to be considered as 'persistent pests' for the Gospel message in our world."

Raccoons, too. When human beings began to take away their habitat, to change their entire world, they adapted. They may live in the inner margins of our towns and cities, but good gosh do they thrive there! Because they're intelligent, adaptable and incredibly determined. They do not give up. And they will adapt to and go with whatever comes their way.

And yes, dandelions and raccoons are considered "persistent pests" by many people. But so was mustard. So were the prophets. So was Jesus for that matter. And as the church, I think we could do far worse than to be considered as "persistent pests" for the Gospel message in our world. To be like raccoons and dandelions - on the margins, but ubiquitously, boldly, tenaciously so - for the Gospel.

(continued next page)

The reality is that the metaphors we use are in and of themselves, unimportant. There are lots of different metaphors and parables we can use. Here Jesus spoke of yeast and mustard seeds.

The metaphors are only important insofar as they help us to internalize and proclaim what Jesus points us toward: abundance and the unexpected; toward hope, possibility and joy in our world.

The question is: do we believe in our core that the message of the kingdom is relevant and true in our world? And if so how will we proclaim it?



Unidentified. Parable of the Mustard Seed, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN

~ **Rev. Laura Springate**

(excerpts from a theological reflection shared at Lakeridge Presbytery, November 2017. Used with permission.)



Pittman, Lauren Wright. Mother Hen, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

Luke 13:31-35

Jerusalem, how often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.

This sounds warm and cosy and maternal and definitely comforting. The rest of the passage is anything but. I can feel the ominous foreshadowing music enter here.

Killing - specifically, Jesus - is mentioned three times. Herod is called a fox. There is danger in that hen house. This radical Jesus continues to disturb the fox - *I'm just healing minds and bodies. I'll be around another three days. I'm in no rush to leave.*

Not being a farm girl, I googled videos of hens gathering their broods. It's like herding kittens and doesn't work well, especially if there is a feeling of unrest in the air.

Aren't we all chicks?

What's going on? What do I do?

Where am I going? What's next?

Who is this Jesus?

~Margaret Motum

Luke 14:16-24

Jesus tells this parable to explain that entrance to the Kingdom of God is by invitation but not everyone who is invited will accept (especially those who think they are “in”).

I was first and foremost struck by the excuses. These were so laughable, so obviously an indication that the invited guest had no desire to come. (Who would buy a field without first seeing it?) And these were only three samples, because they ALL alike began to make excuses.

Jesus said other things about the kingdom:

*The kingdom is at hand, it is here, it is yet to come;
it is within you, yet without us;
it can come to this world but it belongs to another world;
it is available to all but only a few will enter it;*
And so on.

It has been summed up as “the kingdom of right relationships” (Shafto). Leslie Weatherhead, an English theologian whose writings have had a great influence on my thinking, builds on this when he writes that here on

earth at least, we can enter and leave the kingdom many times throughout our lives. We experience the kingdom as we are in touch with God and in right relationships with those around us. *As we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Micah), or love our neighbour as ourselves (Jesus), or look after orphans and widows in their distress (James) we find ourselves in the kingdom of God.*

With that in mind, it seems to me that as we are confronted with opportunities to do any of these, or in some other way to follow Jesus’ example, we are invited to enter the kingdom.

Thinking of the kingdom in this way, it is easier to identify with the excuse givers. I certainly don’t respond to all opportunities to help others with a resounding yes. Rather I, too, am very creative in coming up with excuses why I can’t help just now, why I can’t accept that invitation.

And I don’t think I’m alone.

The last line of our daily morning prayer is “Open our hearts to respond to the needs of others”. May this be the prayer in each of our lives during this season of Lent.

~ **John deBruijn**

Luke 15:1-10

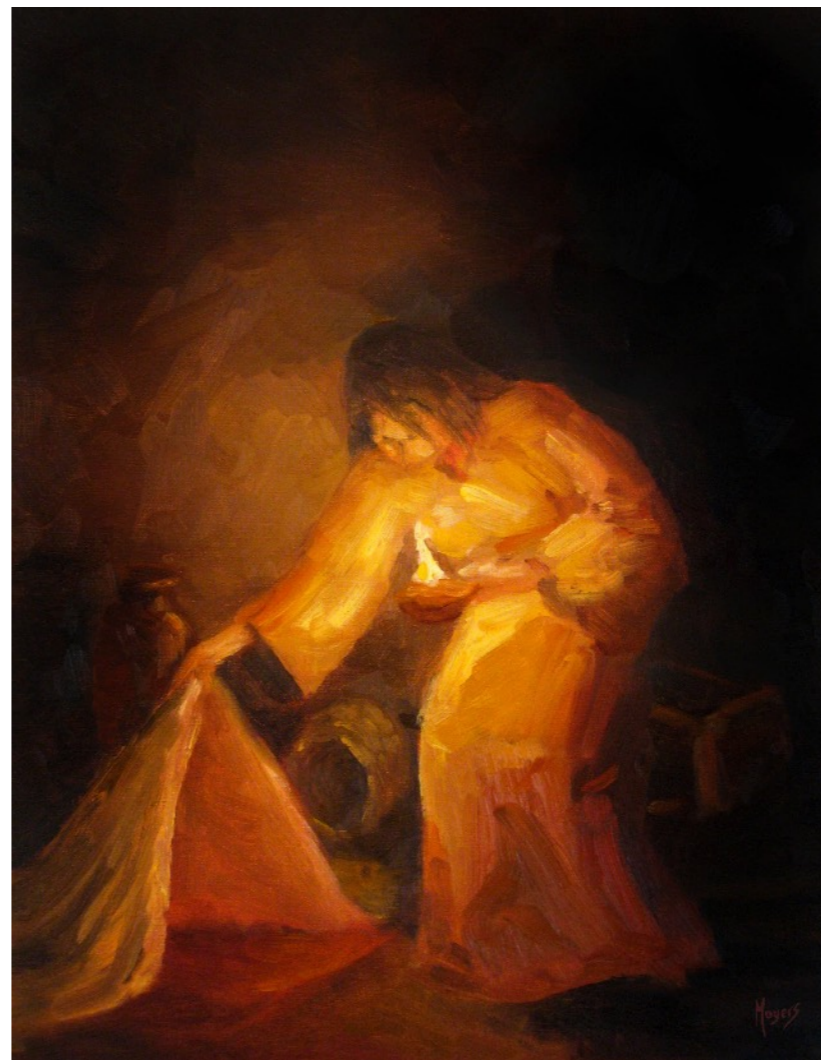
In the passages the lost sheep and the lost piece of silver both represent a lost soul.

God loves lost souls and longs for that soul to come to him and be found (accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.)

A lost soul should trust and not be afraid to follow Jesus' teachings for salvation. The abundance of help is there for the asking of help, through prayer.

With proper prayer, God's responses will become clear through a thought at a moment of recognition, perhaps in a physical way like feeling uplifted, or upon reflection.

~ **Terry Johnstone**



*"The Seeker" Moyers, Mike from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.*

Luke 15:11-32

The very first thing that comes to mind is the utter irresponsibility on the part of the younger son.

The second thing to mind is the sheer audacity of that son, on returning home.

The third thing is the "logic" of the older son in his jealousy and contempt for his father to honour his derelict younger brother.

However, as we know (or should know) it's never just quite that simple.

The younger son eventually realizes the "errors of his ways" and returns home with a humble attitude. He is greeted with gratitude by his father for having "returned from the dead," and with dismay (to say the least) by his older brother who can't grasp the fact that he has, in fact, received a Blessing with his brothers' return.

"How is that a Blessing," you may well ask?

The reuniting of family is something to be cherished, not derided, however that may come to pass.

Family, in this context, I believe, goes far beyond our own immediate family and extends to the wider community—our extended family, if you like. We see them, we dismiss them because they've "erred." They need to be brought back, or walk back themselves into the fold, as it were, so everyone can heal.

We need to look beyond the obvious derision and division and celebrate what we can, when we can, as a single family or as a wider family.

God and life challenge us to be restorative, not dismissive of those around us.

Is it easy? Of course not.

The harder the family challenge, the greater the reward for us all.

We Are Family.

"Family, in this context, I believe, goes far beyond our own immediate family and extends to the wider community"

~Larry Laycock



"Lazarus Waiting at the Door"
Fresco, 11th Century

Luke 16:19-31

This parable is jammed packed with little ah-ha moments for me. It takes me immediately to the individuals I work with every day. They call themselves the "lepers" of today's society.

We step over or cross the road to avoid "those covered in sores," yet go to church every Sunday and say we are Christians and listen to the Word. These individuals are all children of God and have been created in that image the same as we have.

I feel it is a gift from God to be able to work with the people that I talk to. They have taught me so much about what it means to actually "see" someone. Like the rich man we choose every day to see what we want to see, not what God puts before us.

What difference would it make if we chose to see, really see, those in front of us who we usually pass by? If we can open the gates between us, the message is hard to miss. Our true value lies in Who loves us and Who keeps hoping against hope that we will learn to love each other too.

Amen.

~ **Carol O'Neil**

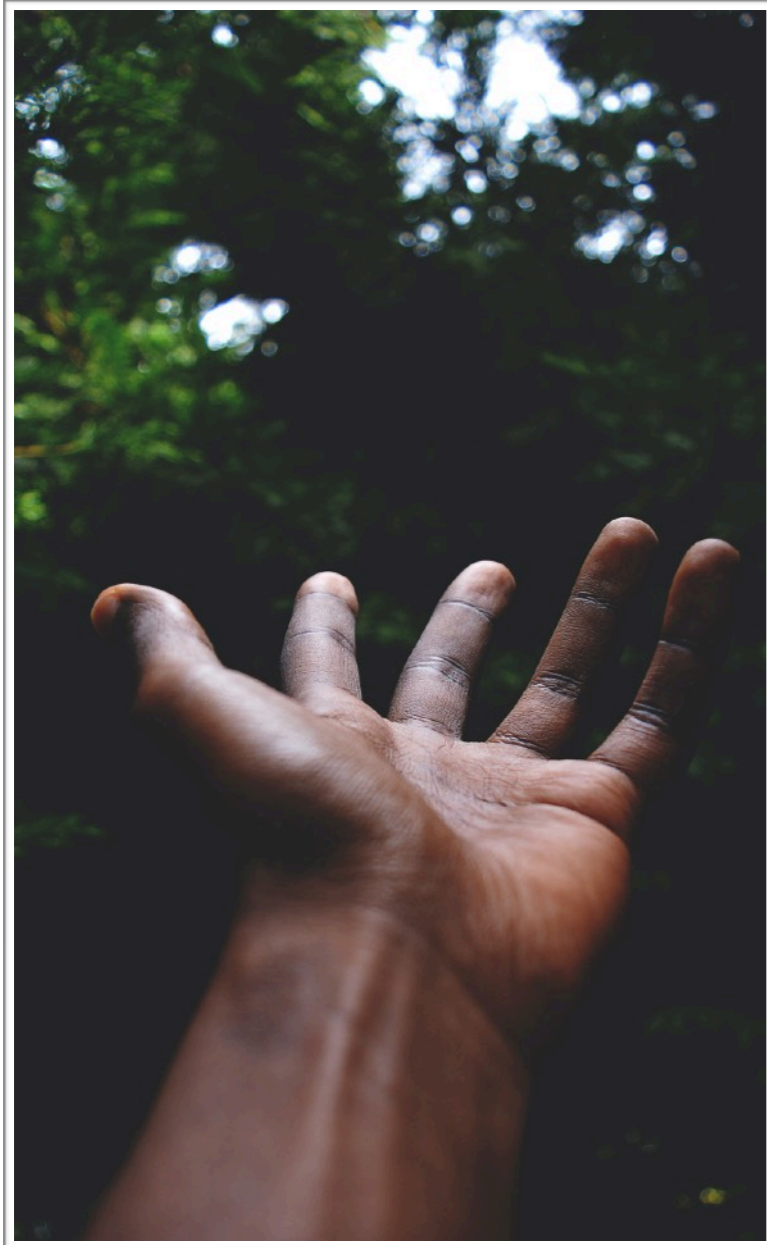


Photo by Rui Silvestre on Unsplash

Luke 17:11-19

As I read this passage of Jesus' healing of the ten lepers, several questions arose, including the one posed by Jesus: why did only one leper return to offer thanks and to praise God for his healing?

I also wondered about Jesus' reaction. Was he annoyed? resigned? surprised? when only one - a Samaritan - returned.

All were equally afflicted. All were healed. Yet as the ten went on their way, one broke away from the group and returned to Jesus. The other nine lepers followed Jesus' instructions and went to show themselves to the priests - healed, and ready to be restored to society.

When the focus shifts to Jesus and the Samaritan, the atmosphere also shifts. The leper who returned to Jesus is rejoicing and praising God for being restored to wholeness. And I think Jesus is both surprised and delighted that this Samaritan has recognized the miracle of his healing, and he affirms that it is this leper's faith that has made him well.

And now we can ask ourselves: Am I one of 'The Nine' who follows instructions and societal expectations, and carries on with my daily routine or will I be 'The One' who will be different; who will stop and take time to give thanks for prayers answered?

This story is a reminder to have faith, to trust in God, and to acknowledge our blessings.

~ Bev Crumb

Luke 18:9-14

This is a parable of two people going to the temple to pray who are complete opposites to each other. My initial reaction was 'don't be a pompous fool - it will get you nowhere!' But there is more to this story. It is a reminder to be honest in our relations with God and with each other and to avoid judging others.

Staying humble, open and honest with God and others who touch our lives will make us whole and keep us whole.

~Teena Morrow

**"Maybe in time, I can let go
Of my need for certainty
And my need to look good
My need for busyness,
And my need to numb pain:
The trivial ways I measure my self-worth,
Or the hurtful ways I measure yours..."**

**excerpt from a poem by Sarah Are
from A Sanctified Art**

Luke 18:15-17

A Conversation with a Four Year Old

Q. *What do you think this story tells us about God?*

A. Children are important to God. Jesus loves each and every one of us.

Q. *Why did the disciples want to stop the children from going to Jesus?*

A. They thought he was too busy. The disciples forgot what Jesus' directions were so they accidentally stopped them. But Jesus will never forget. Jesus blessed them.

Q. *What do you think the kingdom of God is?*

A. It's love and the Holy Spirit.

Q. *Tell me more about that.*

A. Love, kindness, behave...

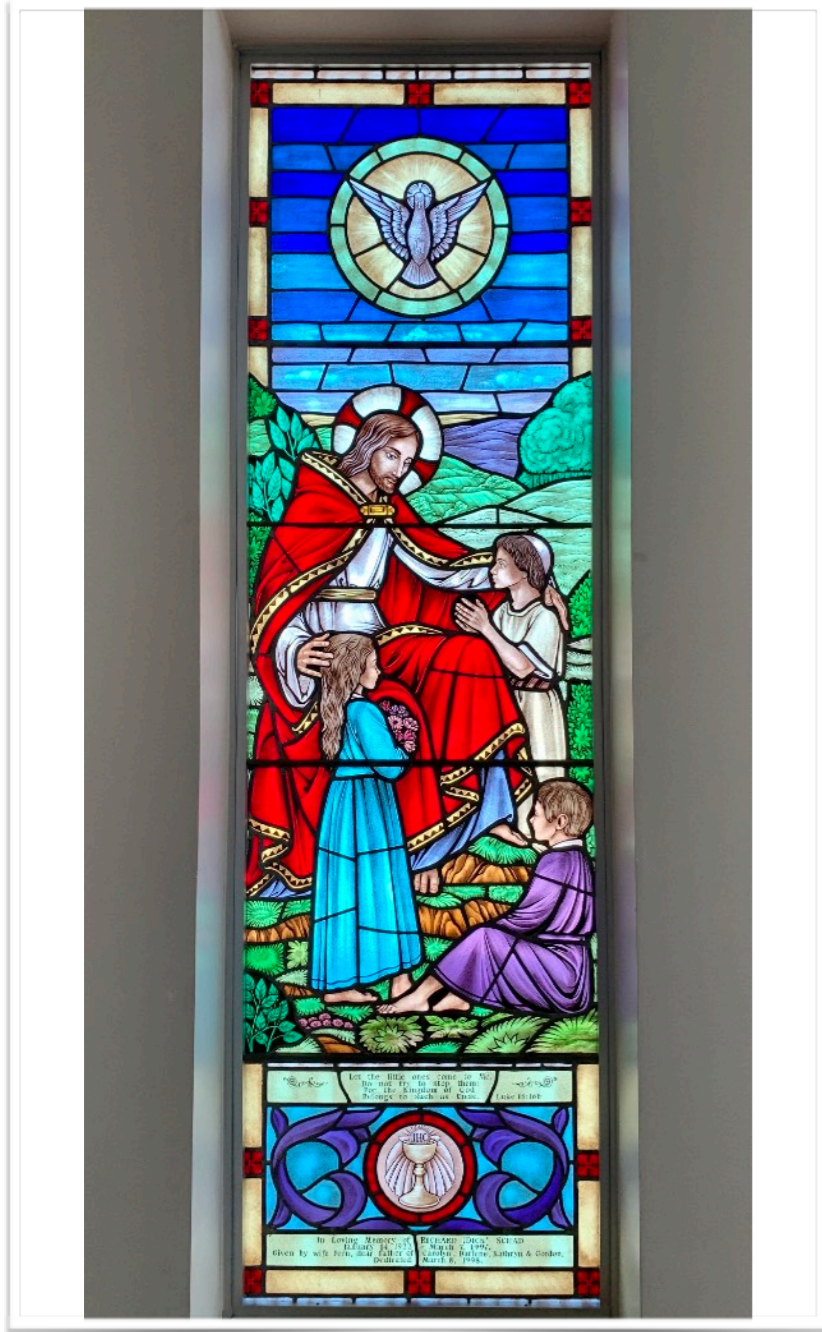
Q. Behave?

A. Yes, you know, self-control...

Q. Oh! The gifts of the Spirit.

A. Yes! That.

~ Opaline Robinson



Stained Glass window in Westminster UC sanctuary. Dedicated March 8, 1998 in loving memory of Richard (Dick) Schad

Luke 18:18-26

A wealthy ruler asks Jesus how can obtain eternal life. The ruler implies that given his wealth and obedience to all the laws it should not be too hard to do.

Why is the ruler seeking eternal life? Is he missing something in his life? What does he mean by eternal life?

How often have we found ourselves feeling we are missing something? Wealth comes in many ways, it can be money, it can be physical assets, it can be leisure activities, or it just be time to do things we want. How many times have you said, "If I only had/could do..... I will be happy, life would be complete." Yet when you do get that next thing, the missing feeling persists. I know I have fallen into this trap.

When I think of eternal life and the kingdom of God, I envision a life free of burden, fear, conflict and worry. I envision a life of contentment, hope, peace, and love.

Jesus makes it clear that the key to eternal life is not a series of tasks that you complete and or accumulation of wealth.

How do you get eternal life? Jesus' words for the ruler, and us, is very simple: give up the focus on wealth, share your wealth with the poor. Let your focus be on following him and his teachings, much like the disciples did.

Unfortunately for the ruler, and probably for many of us, the idea of letting go of what we deem very important today to focus on something more promising, more fulfilling, is challenging. We might even find it so challenging that it would be easier for a "camel to pass through the eye of a needle."

Let us not be so focused on hanging on to what we deem important today, that we miss the opportunity to focus on following Jesus and his teachings; to have a life of contentment, hope, peace and love.

~ Paul Pierson

Luke 19:1-10

I'm short! And as I age, I'm getting even shorter! I can relate to Zacchaeus; always looking for an aisle seat or someone short to sit behind. But climbing a tree? I've never gone that far.

So I think about how desperate he was to catch a glimpse of Jesus in spite of, or perhaps because of his "outsider" status. I think about how he found the vantage point he needed, how his determination paid off and how he was noticed. More than that, how he was recognized as a son of Abraham, a child of God. And I think about his response.

I wonder: how many "outsiders" are seeking to be included in our community of faith? How eager are we to notice them, call them by



JESUS MAFA. Zaccheus welcomes Jesus, from Art in the Christian Tradition

name, recognize the child of God within them?

I also ask myself: how intentional am I in tending to my own spiritual needs? I mean *really* tending to them. To what lengths will I go? How open am I to hearing my name called and responding?

Pandemics and Lent have much in common. They offer us the opportunity to reflect on what really matters, what strengthens and supports us. For people of faith, they remind us of our calling to see possibilities and to embrace the lost in our time.

~ Gail Brimbecom

MARCH 26

Luke 19:41-48 Debbie Joyce

Jesus was indeed upset at the temple activity. People were destroying holy ground at the temple.

We must keep our place of worship sacred.

During our lenten walk here at Westminster and beyond its walls, may we experience Gods love, peace and mercy;

AND

may what takes place inside the walls and out be welcoming to all.

May we show love to all. Amen.

~ Debbie Joyce

“Let us build a house where
prophets speak
And words are strong and true
Where all God's children
dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew...”

from Let Us Build a House by Marty Haugen
found in More Voices, #1

Luke 13:18-21

I identify with the rich man, because it is much easier to give a lot out of abundance than to give a little (actually everything) out of poverty.

The poor widow gave all she had, including her faith and self-reliance. In giving everything, she has set an example of how we should live our lives by relying wholly upon God.

One day I would like to have enough faith like the poor widow to wholly depend upon God in everything I do. That is my prayer for myself and for our community of faith.

~ **Erik Veenstra**



*Hedley, Ralph, 1848-1913. The Widow, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.*

Luke 22:7-23

On the surface, bread and wine are quite common and mundane. Simple fare that was commonly available in biblical times. And yet, they are both amazing. From the pre-scientific perspective bread and wine are both examples of spontaneous life.

Imagine living before germ theory and the discovery of yeast. You take flour and water and mix them together and in a few hours you have a breathing, living miracle. New life where none existed! This newfound life takes an ordinary ingredient (flour) containing nearly no nutrients and turns it into something which contains ample nutrition.

Similarly, wine is simply grape juice which has spontaneously become home to abundant life. In Jesus' time they may not have known about the wild yeast that started this process. However, knowing the scientific origin of this transformation does not lessen its miraculousness for me.

Take flour and water and leave it exposed to the environment and life will spontaneously

occur. This makes me mindful that when we take communion, we are quite literally taking new life and imbuing our body with it.

"This is my body, which is given for you."

Life.

Christ brought a way of perceiving and living that was infectious and spread like wild yeast. As followers we're invited to taste that with communion and remember the one who, on the night before he died, shared life.

~ Jake Robinson



Photo by Kate Remmer on Unsplash



Christ's Agony in the Garden, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN

Luke 22:39-53

In our lives we all experience times of darkness when fear and despair can take hold and cause us to lash out at God and each other. It is in these times that we need to be steadfast in prayer and abide in the presence of God. The light and love of God will attend to us.

Jesus models this in the Gethsemane story. He had just finished the Passover meal and went to the garden to pray. These events prefigure his impending death as darkness descends upon him. It is a time of sadness, uncertainty, fear and despair. He grieves and sweats intensely and prays fervently. Jesus prays that this suffering might pass but if not, then God's will be done. An angelic presence comes to strengthen him. Jesus sees his disciples are weary and have fallen asleep. The power of darkness is at hand so he tells them to get up and pray so that they do not fall into temptation. Suddenly a crowd appears and Judas, one of his disciples, betrays him with a kiss while others take up arms to strike at the menacing crowd. Jesus will have none of this. He heals an injured slave and then calls out the temple officials, who had come for him, as being pious in the day but evil-minded in their hour of darkness.

This passage shows us that the power of prayer is an antidote to the power of darkness.

~Clarence MacPherson

Luke 22:31-34, 54-62

This passage about Peter's denial of Jesus is a very moving one which says a great deal about the human condition. Peter could be any one of us and the time could be now.

We recognize Peter's total undoing when, after several opportunities, he denies even knowing Jesus. When he weeps "bitterly" we know those tears. We may have shed similar tears through those dark times when we have doubted our faith and felt abandoned, or harboured feelings of shame and sorrow because we failed to do what we believed to be the right thing.

Why is it so hard for us to accept the fact that we are imperfect beings living in an imperfect world? This does not mean that we should surrender to this fact, but is a reminder that we have much that we can learn if we are open to such awareness.

Peter is so sure of his loyalty, bravery and total devotion to Jesus that he is blind to the idea that he could fall short of these expectations. It is as if he believes his faith will be his protective shield and that he will be able to hold it high for all to see. He weeps "bitterly" because he is completely levelled when he fails to live up to his expectations.

What strikes me here is that Jesus said beforehand that this is what would happen but Peter did not accept this truth. Maybe the lesson for us here is that faith is no guarantee that difficult times won't come, but faith that is internalized has more power than faith that is worn as a protective boastful banner.

The irony is that although having humility requires us to lose our sense of power, it also makes us strong when coupled with faith. We are not promised that a life in Christ will be free from suffering and sorrow. In fact, being human means that it is inevitable that there will be moments when darkness will take hold of us, of those we love, or of the world in which we live and, when feeling helpless, we will question WHY. That being said, there are three references in this passage that I believe offer comfort and provide reassurance in the face of this rather bleak reality.

1. After Peter denied knowing Jesus, "the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter." Even in the midst of betrayal, Jesus sees Peter, understands all that Peter is and what he has done and does not turn away in disgust or disappointment. This reminds us that even when we are at our lowest moments, we will never be abandoned. Jesus's love for us is absolute and unwavering.

MARCH 31 (CONTINUED)

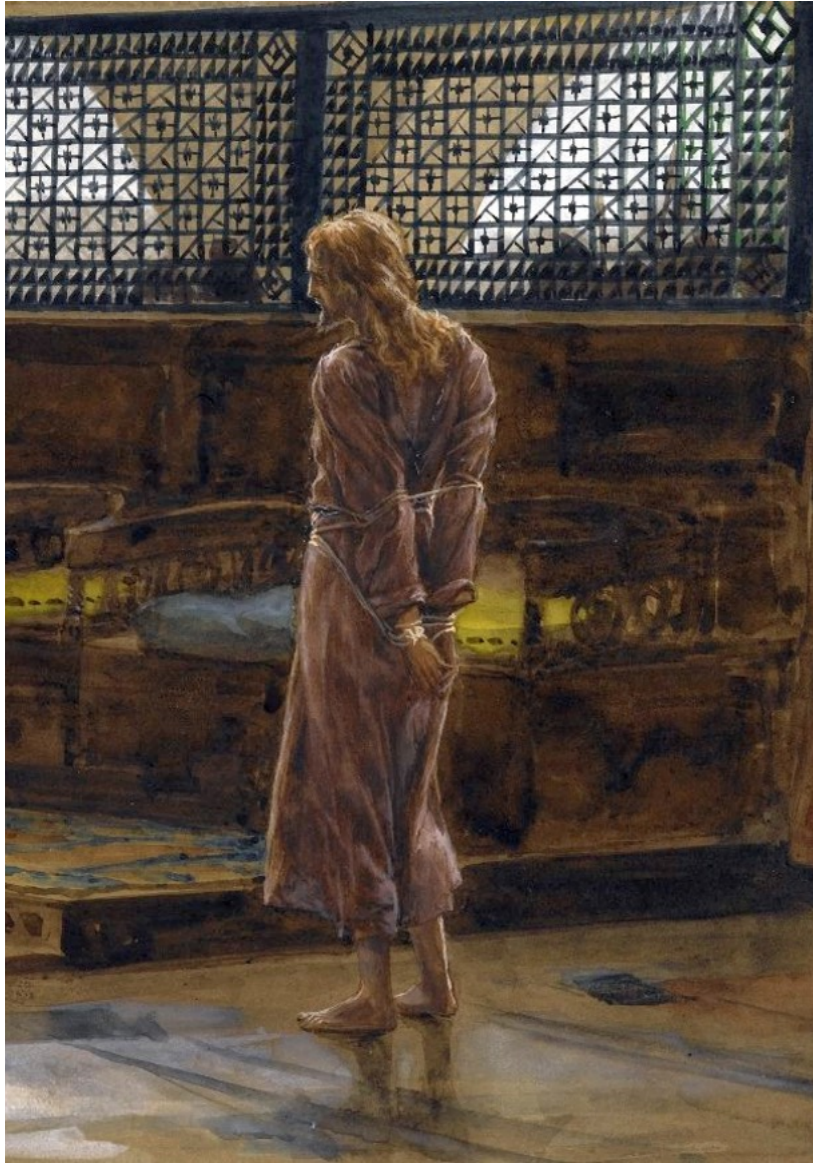
2. In verse 31 Jesus says to Peter “I prayed for you...that your faith may not fail.” Jesus prays for all of us without exception. We are not told that faith will prevent suffering but are reminded that there can be times when it will be difficult to hold on to faith, but also that the struggle is worth it. Faith has the power to support us if only we can trust this fact.
3. Jesus goes on to say, “And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers”. He says “when” not if, so there is certainty that once faith prevails, then one will be able to move forward to face what comes next no matter what that entails. As well, there is the reminder to acknowledge and humbly share personal experience so that others may gain strength. This underlines the idea that we are not alone, but are part of a wider community. We are meant to forget ourselves and be of service to others.

This passage certainly provides a lot to think about.

~ **Joanne Gibb**



Photo by Andrik Langfield on Unsplash



Tissot, James, 1836-1902. Jesus Before Pilate, First Interview, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN.

Luke 23:1-25

Oh, you bet I know where I see myself in this passage. On the top of the steps of a government building, looking down on a mob that does not even know why it is there, whipped up by the slogan of the day. And I want to wash not just my hands, but my whole body of the lot of them.

Pilate gets very little out of his meeting with Jesus. He doesn't even get told off like the pharisees. I guess that if Pilate and I are politely bored by Jesus, it is because we can't get past those images others paint of him. So we end up overlooking the one person in the picture who neither takes sides in the brawl nor turns away in disgust. In the thick of it, Jesus is completely and confidently himself, no more and no less. I need to find a way to engage with the man himself again.

~ **Jan Hendrikse**

Luke 23:26-49

This section, dealing with the crucifixion and death of Jesus, is hard to read. I know that without Good Friday, there is no Easter Sunday, but there's cruelty in these verses that is difficult to engage with—the people casting lots for his clothes, the soldiers mocking Jesus, the awful act of the crucifixion itself.

There's sadness. At the end the crowds disappear, and then only those who knew Jesus are left. Not weeping and wailing—watching, unable to leave. It feels as if they're frozen in their grief.

But there's also kindness.

Two criminals are being crucified alongside Jesus. The first insults Jesus, challenging Jesus to save himself and them as well if Jesus is who he says he is. The second chides the first and defends Jesus as having done nothing wrong.

To him, Jesus offers a promise that this very day they'll be together in paradise. I think this piece of the story feels important.

Jesus has already told the crowd not to weep for him but rather for themselves and their children. He knows that humankind is entering into a dark chapter. I feel as if Jesus' words here could be read with some bitterness: "You think what they're doing to me is bad? Just wait and see what's coming for you." But he also seems to be mourning the choices humankind has made.

Later, after he was put up on the cross, Jesus asked God to forgive the ones who did this to him. He must have been in pain but, again, he thought of others ahead of himself.

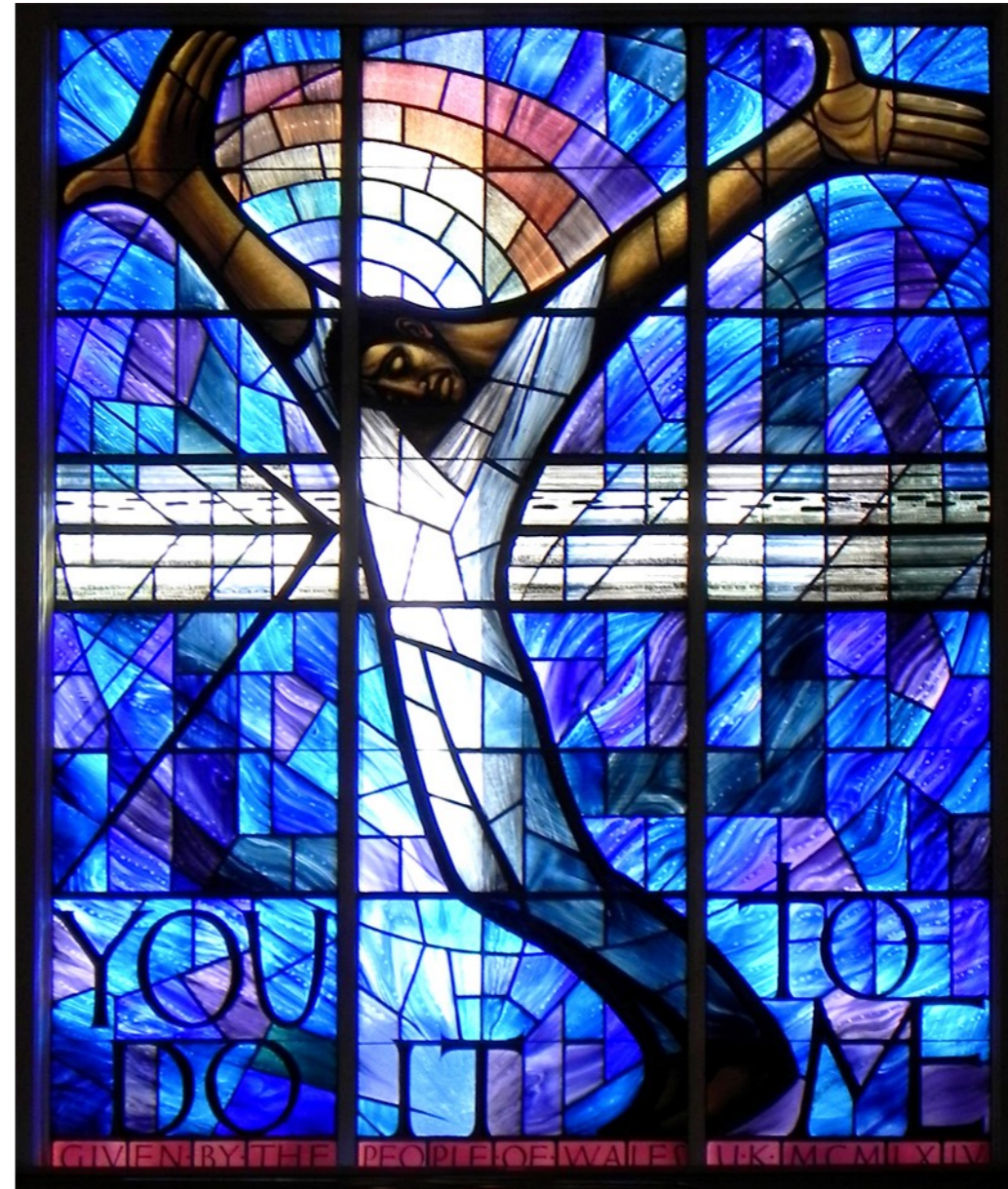
And now we come to Jesus' promise to the second criminal—the third time he speaks in this section. By now, some time has passed. Part of what makes crucifixion so awful is its slowness.

Jesus doesn't react to any of the mockery. He doesn't respond to the words of the first criminal. But when the second criminal asks to be remembered, Jesus makes him a promise. He offers the one thing he has left to offer, now that even his life is being taken. Kindness.

Jesus' final words are for God, but the last words he speaks to another human being offer comfort to a dying man.

That's the example that's set. Concern for others, always. Kindness, even when things are at their worst. It's a lot to ask, and not an easy example even to try to live up to, but it's a piece of the Good Friday story that I want to keep close.

~ Erin Thomas



Petts, John, 1914-1991. *Christ Crucified*, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57342> [retrieved February 11, 2021]. Original source: <http://christianchurchestogether.org/letter-from-birmingham-jail/>.

Luke 23:50-56

I'm not sure what kind of man I am. I missed the meeting. No one told me about it. I should have been there.

They wanted to get rid of Jesus and the vote was unanimous. If I had been there, I would have spoken up. The vote would have been different. But, what difference can one person make?

One person can, speak, love, encourage, help or question. So, I asked Pilate for Jesus' body. I took Jesus down from the cross. This is not what I was hoping to be doing.

I feel very late to the party, but I can still honour Jesus and be faithful. With the help of those women from Galilee, I will do what I can to show love.

Somehow it doesn't seem to be enough. It doesn't seem complete. There should be something more.

How can this be the final chapter for Jesus and us?

~ **Rev. Dan Yourkevich**

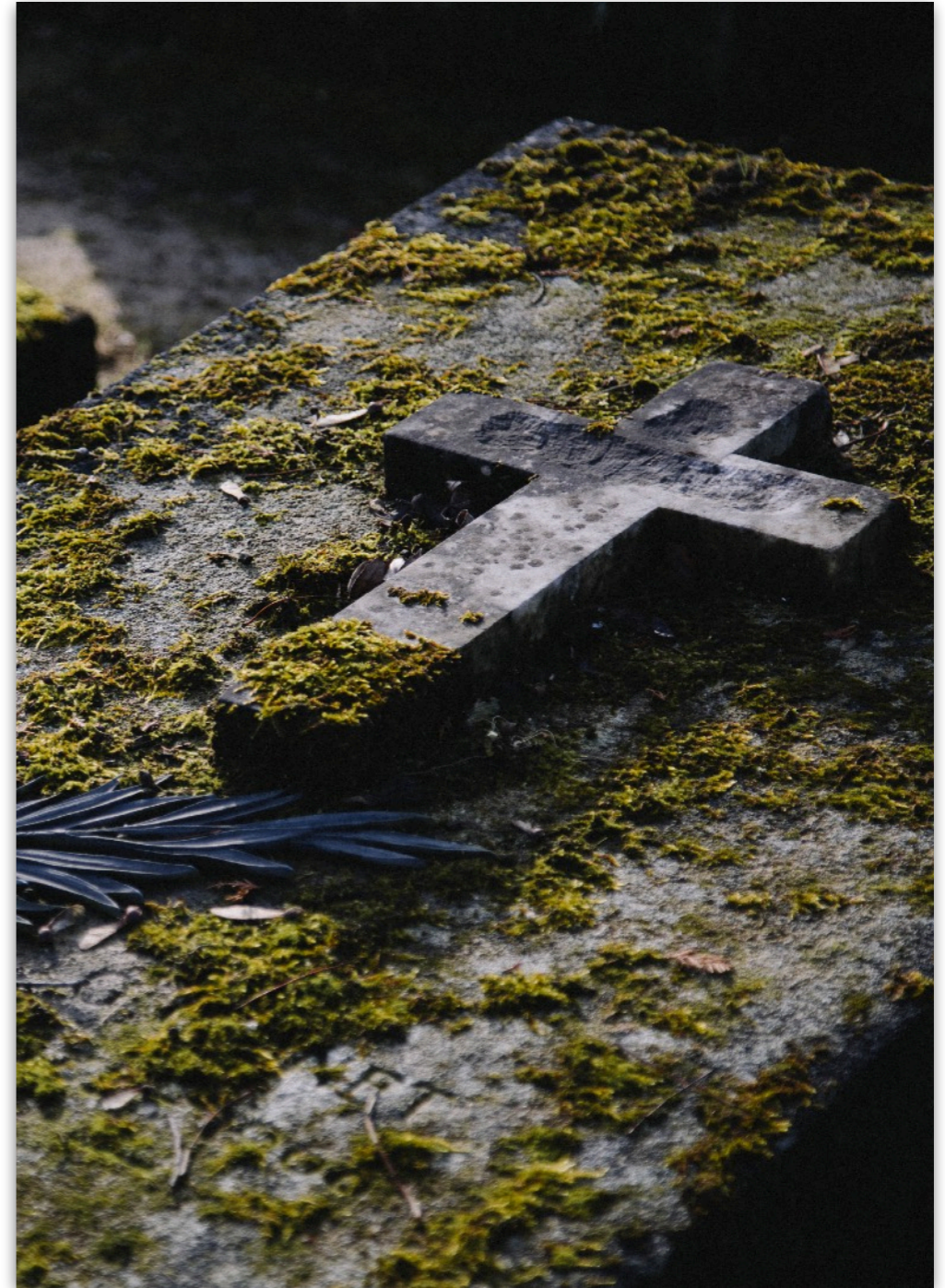


Photo by Kenny Orr on Unsplash

Thank you

Sincere thanks to each writer for participating in this Lenten Project.

Westminster United Church

2021