



**OH GOD, WILL YOU RESTORE US,
AND GRANT US YOUR SALVATION?**

SEEKING THE HEART OF GOD THIS LENT

saint mark's episcopal church, palo alto

LENT 2021

Once again, the holy season of Lent finds us in the midst of a global pandemic. Surrounded by loss and crisis, we come before God in sorrow, tiredness, desperation – and hope. Like the prophets of old, we ask our Creator our hardest questions: Where are you? How much longer? How shall we live now? Why is this happening? The gift of Lent is that it is a season of honest and unflinching surrender. A time to say, “We cannot do this on our own.” During Lent, we confess our lostness in the wilderness; our fear of death and pain; our helplessness in the face of our own sin; and our utter need for a God who will conquer the graves we stand in, and fill us with the power of the resurrection. We travel from lament to hope, from death to life, from despair to celebration. We seek the heart of God, which is to say, we seek justice, mercy, compassion, and love. We cry out to God to restore us, and we participate with God in the magnificent work of salvation. May this booklet of meditations, prayers, and poems nourish you during this season. After taking time to reflect, we invite you to turn your focus and attention outward, to neighbors in need in our community. May the love of God hold you close in the wilderness, and enable you always to practice resurrection.

Go to the Limits of Your Longing

Rainer Maria Rilke

Translated by Joanna Macy

Listen

God speaks to each of us
as he makes us,
then walks with us silently
out of the night.

These are the words we dimly hear:

You, sent out beyond your recall,
go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me.

Flare up like a flame
and make big shadows I can move
in.

Let everything happen to you:
beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don't let yourself lose me.

Nearby is the country they call life.
You will know it by its seriousness.

Give me your hand.

See saint-marks.com for a digital version of this booklet with live links.

CREATING A HOME ALTAR

Your home is sacred – the God in whom you live, move, and have your being is with you always; your home is a place where the Holy One already resides. Making a beautiful, peaceful place for prayer, silence, meditation, and remembrance can be a tangible way to draw nearer to God. We invite you to try this practice during Lent, adapting it as best suits your environment.

Choose a surface where you will collect items (a tray table, a coffee table, a window sill, a bookshelf; even an area on the floor can do). Some do this in an out of the way place, where it is easier to be quiet; others, in the center of their home. If you have children at home, consider picking a low table or somewhere that they can reach.

Gather items that bring you peace and help you focus on Christ and the mysteries of the Passion. Some ideas (use whatever you have on hand! There's no 'right' way):

Bible, Book of Common Prayer, and/or Hymnal

Cloth – a simple sheet, placemat, tablecloth, scarf, etc; perhaps purple (the color of Lent)

Cross – Reminding us of the sacrificial life, death, resurrection, and love of Jesus. Any kind will do; if you don't have a cross, make one!

Candle – Lighting a candle reminds us that God is always near, lighting our path, pouring the light of love, grace, mercy, and hope into our lives, illuminating what is frightening, hidden, or difficult

Stones – There are many verses in the Bible that describe God as our “rock,” our “fortress,” our “foundation,” or our “cornerstone.” Having a stone to hold in your hand is a reminder of God's steadfastness.

Nature – During Holy Week, try having something sparse; maybe on Easter adding greenery or flowers

Incense – The fragrance can remind you of God's sweetness and enfolding care. The rising smoke can help you to visualize prayers ascending to God.

Notebook – You might use a journal to write down petitions, to help cultivate a practice of thanksgiving, or to write down thoughts and questions that arise.

Other special items – prayer beads, statues, *in memoriam* cards; anything that speaks to you.

AGAPÉ MEAL

We invite you to try taking on the practice of holding a weekly Agapé Meal during Lent. You might do this on your own, with those in your household, or with others virtually.

PRAY OVER THE MEAL

Over Bread

Blessed are you, Lord our God,
Ruler of the universe. You bring
forth grain from the earth to
nourish us. Let us be fed again soon
with the bread of life, the Body of
your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Glory to you forever and ever.
Amen.

Over Wine / Juice

Blessed are you, Lord our God,
Ruler of the universe. You create
the fruit of the vine to refresh us.
May the time come quickly when we
can share the cup of salvation again,
even as you are with us now in our
very thirst for you. Glory to you
forever and ever. Amen.

Over Other Foods

Blessed are you, Lord our God,
Ruler of the universe. Through your
Word, all things come into being.
You have given us this food to eat,
which earth has given and human
hands have made. Glory to you
forever and ever. Amen.

HEAR THE WORD

Some read before eating, others find it helpful to pray the blessings and hear/discuss over the meal.

Read: The weekly lessons are listed in the pages that follow; you could also read the reflection, poem, or another passage of Scripture.

Reflect:

What word stood out to you?
What else did you notice?

PRAY FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

Prayers are offered for:

Faith communities,

especially St. Mark's

The nation and all in authority

The welfare of the world

The concerns of the local
community

Those who suffer

Those in any trouble

Those who have died

A prayer during pandemic:

O God our refuge and strength,
in these challenging and uncertain
times, keep us under the shadow of
your mercy. Sustain and support the
anxious, grant your healing grace to
those who are sick, be with those
who care for others, and bring to
your eternal rest all who have died;
in Christ our Lord. Amen.

SHROVE TUESDAY

Shrove Tuesday evolved as an opportunity to enjoy pleasures prior to the fasting days of the Lenten season. People played sports outside or had pancake races (originally in Olney, England back in 1445). Pancake suppers, using eggs, sugar, flour, milk, butter, syrup, etc., were used up prior to more austere eating habits in the penitential season. In an ironic way, Shrove Tuesday reminds us today of the need to celebrate and enjoy life while we can – not at the expense of others, but in balance with our own struggles and challenges. This past year of pandemic, anxiety, and uncertainty connects us with a medieval past filled with more of the same. As we have our suppers this night, face to face, virtually with others or even in isolation, let us remember our blessings and pleasures. Even in the midst of difficulty we can be fortified by the practice of gratitude and be ready to face those challenges once again!

Enjoy this Trivia Game or test each other during your “Breakfast for Dinner” to learn about the evening’s historic rituals:

saint-marks.com/shrovetues/

LENTEN REFLECTION GROUPS

7pm February 24, March 3, 10, 17, and 24th. Join us on Wednesday evenings during Lent to share your thoughts, wrestlings, insights, and questions. What is arising for you as you pray, read, reflect, and act during this season? Come to one or all!

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87477918387>

Zoom call: (669) 900-6833
Meeting ID: 874 7791 8387

ASH WEDNESDAY

Feb. 17, 2021

This day marks the beginning of Lent. We remember our mortality with ashes, and we enter into a season of repentance, reflecting on our dependance on God.

The liturgy that follows provides an option for observing this day on your own or with your household. "We" is appropriate even when alone, because the Church marks this day together, across time and place. St. Mark's will also have a service on zoom at 12:15p: we will reflect and you will have an opportunity to bear the words of imposition of ashes one-on-one with a clergy member.

Open in Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing you have made
and forgive the sins of all who are
penitent: Create and make in us new
and contrite hearts, that we, worthily
lamenting our sins and
acknowledging our wretchedness,
may obtain of you, the God of
all mercy, perfect remission and
forgiveness; through Jesus Christ
our Lord, who lives and reigns with
you and the Holy Spirit, one God,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Read

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.

If you remove the yoke from among
you, the pointing of the finger, the
speaking of evil, if you offer your

food to the hungry and satisfy the
needs of the afflicted, then your
light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched
places, and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered
garden, like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations
of many generations; you shall be
called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

Psalm 103: 8-14

You are full of compassion and
mercy, slow to anger and of great
kindness.

You will not always accuse us,
nor will you keep your anger forever.

You have not dealt with us
according to our sins, nor rewarded
us according to our wickedness.

For as the heavens are high above
the earth, so is your mercy great
upon those who fear you.

As far as the east is from the west,
so far have you removed our sins
from us.

As parents care for their children,
so do you, O Lord, care for those
who fear you.

For you yourself know whereof we
are made; you remember that we are
but dust.

Reflect

Consider what you have just heard.

Step into Lent

We begin the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.

To make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, we now humble ourselves before the Lord, our maker and redeemer.

Impose the Ashes

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 mortality and penitence, that we may remember that it is only by your gracious gift that we are given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Mark the sign of the cross on your forehead, or on the foreheads of those you are gathered with, saying:

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Pray

Psalm 51: 11-13

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence and take not your holy

Spirit from me.

Give me the joy of your saving help again, and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

Confess

Most holy and merciful God:

We confess to you and to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Invoke God's forgiveness

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen.

Conclude

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.

ASH WEDNESDAY DEVOTION

Out of the Ashes

Collect of the Day

Almighty God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Psalm 52:1-17

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Reflection: On this day, we hold in tension two profound truths: God hates nothing God has made, and we are made of dust, and to dust we will return. We are beloved and we will die. Neither truth cancels out the other. Instead they deepen and enhance each other. In this year of pandemic, we accept the imposition of ashes with both sorrow and hope. We contemplate our mortality, our frailty, our brokenness and our sinfulness. At the same time, we remember that we are held in the everlasting embrace of a God who loves us, and promises to forgive, remake, and restore us to wholeness. As we move into an extended period of examination and repentance, we ask the Spirit of God to accompany us into the places of shadow, and show us the ways of hope and peace, even in the wilderness. In both humility and confidence we engage in the “fasting” God desires: a fast that loosens the bonds of injustice, feeds the hungry, and sets the prisoner free. In the words of poet Mary Oliver, we ask ourselves the essential and transformative question: “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

Longing, Lenten *Brett Foster*

The walk back, more loss.
When I open the door it's over,
so I set to piddling: tidy
end tables, check the mail, draw a bath.
The restless energy finally settles
as I pass the mirror. I peer into it.
My nose touches glass. Not much left,
already effaced, not even a cross
to speak of. A smudge. A few black soot stains
like pin points on the forehead. The rest
of the blessed ash has vanished to a grey
amorphousness, to symbolize... not much.
Except a wish for those hallowed moments
to be followed by sustaining confidence.
Except spirit, which means to shun its listless
weight for yearning, awkward if not more earnest
prayer and fasting in the clear face of dust.

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT *Feb 21, 2021*

Into the Wilderness



Collect of the Day:

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalm 25:1-10

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:9-15

Preacher: The Rev. Nikky Wood

Reflection: “The wilderness is a dangerous place. You only go there if you have to.” This is one of the key phrases teachers use in “Godly Play,” a popular Sunday School curriculum designed for young children. As kids run their fingers through large, wooden sandboxes, Godly Play teachers invite them to picture the scorched landscapes Biblical characters encountered as they sought to follow God. Fierce heat, jagged rocks, wild animals, blistered feet. On this first Sunday in Lent, we read in St. Mark’s Gospel that the Spirit of God “drove Jesus” into the wilderness. These are hard words to consider, but they ring true to the lives we find ourselves in this year: sometimes, we don’t choose the wilderness. We don’t volunteer for its many challenges and hardships. But the wilderness happens, anyway. Whether it comes to us in the guise of a hospitalization, a thorny relationship, a troubled child, a sudden death, or a global pandemic, the wilderness appears, unbidden and unwelcome, at our doorsteps. Does this mean that God wants bad things to happen to us? No. Does it mean that God can redeem even the most barren periods of our lives? That our deserts can become holy even as they remain dangerous? That the questions we ask in the wilderness – questions borne of pain, grief, desperation, and fear – can open us to the saving work of the Spirit? Yes. This is our hope. The wilderness is a dangerous place, but even in its shadowy corners, God abides.

Social Justice Meditation This week, we consider this article from the New Yorker, which tells the stories of several unhoused people in San Francisco. Reflect on what wilderness means for people like Zach, D., and Martin:

“A Window Onto an American Nightmare: As the homelessness crisis and the coronavirus crisis converge, what can we learn from one city’s struggles?” by Nathan Heller, May 25, 2020
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/06/01/a-window-onto-an-american-nightmare>

Disgraceland *Mary Karr*

Before my first communion at 40, I clung
to doubt as Satan spider-like stalked
the orb of dark surrounding Eden
for a wormhole into paradise.

God has first formed me in the womb
small as a bite of burger.
Once my lungs were done
He sailed a soul like a lit arrow

To inflame me. Maybe that piercing
Made my howl at birth,
Or the masked creatures
Whose scalpel cut a lightning bolt to free me—

I was hoisted by the heels and swatted, fed
And hauled through rooms. Time-lapse photos show
My fingers grew past crayon outlines,
my feet came to fill spike heels.

Eventually, I lurched out to kiss the wrong mouths,
get stewed, and sulk around. Christ always stood
to one side with a glass of water.
I swatted the sap away.

When my thirst got great enough
to ask, a stream welled up inside;
some jade wave buoyed me forward;
and I found myself upright

In the instant, with a garden
inside my own ribs aflourish. There, the arbor leaves.
The vines push out plump grapes.
You are loved, someone said. Take that

and eat it.

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT *Feb 28, 2021*

Out of death, life



Collect of the Day:

O God, whose glory it is to always have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalm 22:23-31

Romans 4:13-25

Mark 8:31-38

Preacher: The Rev. Liz Milner

Reflection: In our Gospel reading for this second week of Lent, Jesus predicts his death for the first time. Standing on this side of resurrection history, we can easily miss the bombshell effect these words must have had on Jesus's disciples. Their great hope was that he would lead them in a revolution to overthrow their Roman oppressors. He was their longed-for future. Their cherished dream. So what could be more disorienting, more ludicrous, than the news that their would-be champion was determined to walk into a death trap? To surrender without a fight to a common criminal's death? Jesus's acceptance of the cross challenges us to take a hard look at our own hopes and expectations for this life. What if Jesus's call is for us to stop clutching at security so desperately? To step out of the vicious cycles of denial, acquisition, terror, and violence that seek to cheat death, but in fact rob us of the abundant life Jesus came to give us? To take up a cross as Jesus did is to stand, always, in the hot white center of the world's pain. To identify ourselves wholly with those who are aching, weeping, hurting, and dying. Taking up the cross means recognizing Christ crucified in every suffering soul and body that surrounds us, and pouring our energies into alleviating that pain — no matter what it costs us. Accepting — against all the lies of our culture — that we will die, and trusting in Jesus's assurance that we will also rise again, we make choices about the time that remains. Will we hoard our lives in fear, or give them away in freedom? Will we protect ourselves with numbness and apathy, or experience the abundant life Jesus offers to those who ache, weep, and bleed alongside the world's suffering?

Social Justice Meditation This podcast is a conversation with Jennifer Loving, CEO of Destination: Home, a public-private partnership that uses collective impact strategies to work towards ending homelessness in Santa Clara County. Homelessness is a messy, multifaceted issue — and often an uncomfortable one. What does it mean to come together as a community to end homelessness? How does this goal impact you? How does it reflect the heart of Jesus?

“Destination:Home”

Silicon Valley Community Foundation Podcast, July 31, 2019

<https://svcfpodcasts.libsyn.com/destination-home>

For the Interim Time

John O'Donohue

When near the end of day, life has drained
Out of light, and it is too soon
For the mind of night to have darkened things,
No place looks like itself, loss of outline
Makes everything look strangely in-between,
Unsure of what has been, or what might come.
In this wan light, even trees seem groundless.
In a while it will be night, but nothing
Here seems to believe the relief of darkness.
You are in this time of the interim
Where everything seems withheld.
The path you took to get here has washed out;
The way forward is still concealed from you.
“The old is not old enough to have died away;
The new is still too young to be born.”
You cannot lay claim to anything;
In this place of dusk,
Your eyes are blurred;
And there is no mirror.
Everyone else has lost sight of your heart
And you can see nowhere to put your trust;
You know you have to make your own way through.
As far as you can, hold your confidence.
Do not allow confusion to squander
This call which is loosening
Your roots in false ground,
That you might come free
From all you have outgrown.
What is being transfigured here is your mind,
And it is difficult and slow to become new.
The more faithfully you can endure here,
The more refined your heart will become
For your arrival in the new dawn.



3RD SUNDAY IN LENT *March 7, 2021*

Zeal for your house

Collect of the Day:

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

John 2:13-22

Preacher: The Rev. Matthew McDermott

Reflection: We don't hear much about righteous anger in mainline churches these days. After all, there's something unseemly about rage, right? Something unsophisticated, something crude? It's not polite to get angry, and it's positively insupportable to stay angry. But in our Gospel reading this week, Jesus — the temple of God — burns with zeal for God's house. Seeing that the poor and needy are suffering, he doesn't use love and forgiveness as palliatives; he allows a holy anger to move him to action on behalf of the voiceless. He interrupts worship for the sake of justice. He moves from compassion, to righteous anger, to decisive action, because he will not stand for any version of cruelty towards the most vulnerable and beleaguered people in his society. In this story, there is nothing godly about responding to systemic evil with passive acceptance or unexamined complicity. If all human bodies are temples — holy places where heaven and earth meet — then we must work, as Jesus did, to preserve and protect these holy places from every form of abuse and exploitation. We must let go of the comfortable belief that our highest calling as Christians is to niceness. During this holy season, how can we participate with God in the restoration of dignity and wholeness to all bodies?

Social Justice Meditation This podcast from KQED and StoryCorps highlights everyday people. Three sisters share their experience growing up in a cramped house with multiple families under one roof. College students talk about balancing tuition, rent, and groceries. Put yourself in their shoes, and reflect on what you would do if you were in their situation. What would God have to say about their struggles? What does that mean for you?

“Episode 6 - BONUS: Stories from Inside the Housing Crisis”

StoryCorps and KQED, October 20, 2020

<https://www.kqed.org/news/11843278/storycorps-and-sold-out-present-stories-from-inside-the-housing-crisis>

Christ Loved Being Housed

Linda Gregg

The time of passion is younger than us.
It does not live in memories
or metaphors, but in living things:
quail, bay trees, the sun leaving
and returning. Going and being there.
Dark, rain, and colors spreading
through the late sky afterwards.
So much like the Apache and Tarahumara
who live differently now, as I do.
But I want to ask you about the nature
of love. Do you think it is unearthly?
I want to tell you it is, and more.
Christ did not want to leave the body.
Love resides entirely in the part of us
that is the least defended or safe.
In the part that has no alternative
to loss, defeat, and dying. Our tragedy
of being. All else is tested by its flint
in what it strikes upon in darkness.

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT *March 14, 2021*

Help our unbelief



Collect of the Day:

Gracious God, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Numbers 21:4-9

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Ephesians 2:1-10

John 3:14-21

Preacher: Debie Thomas

Reflection: This week's Gospel promises that "everyone who believes in Jesus" will not perish but have eternal life." But what does it mean to believe in Jesus? Often, we stop at believing certain propositions or facts about Jesus. As if the Christian life is only a matter of intellectual assent. But

“belief” is not merely a matter of the head. To believe in Jesus is to trust him with our whole lives. To hold onto him. To orient our lives around him – his story, his heart, his passion, his vision. It’s not a decision made once – it’s a path we walk. The way of faith the Gospel points to is as vast and mysterious as all the workings of a human heart reaching out for God’s. That’s why we can trust it; its challenge corresponds to reality. No love as rich, demanding, costly, and free as God’s love for us can ever be reduced to a formula. As Christians, we are called to far more than a rote recitation of the sinner’s prayer; we are called to fall in love, and stay in love. Why is belief important to God? Because love is. To believe is to be-love.

Social Justice Meditation: “Ear Hustle” is created by people who are currently or formerly incarcerated at San Quentin prison in Marin County, our neighbors. What might “belief in Jesus” mean for someone who is incarcerated? How does this perspective affect your own understanding?

“Ear Hustle” multi-episode podcast: <https://www.earhustlesq.com/>

The Wild Geese

Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

5TH SUNDAY IN LENT *March 21, 2021*

The desires of your heart



Collect of the Day:

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:1-12

Hebrews 5:5-10

John 12:20-33

Preacher: The Rev. Nikky Wood

Reflection: This week's Gospel reading begins with a desire: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." On its face, this request from a group of Greek worshippers sounds simple and straightforward, but in fact, it cuts to the heart of so many kinds of spiritual growth, stagnation, and defeat in our own lives today. Do we want to see Jesus? During this season of Lent, are we asking to see

the Jesus we've heard so much about? If yes, which Jesus do we wish to see? The teacher? The healer? The peacemaker? The troublemaker? Why are we interested? Or, if we're not asking and seeking, then the question shifts, and we have to ask it differently: why is Jesus not on our radars? Does "seeing" him feel impossible right now? Uninteresting? Irrelevant? Has he become so familiar to us that he's faded away entirely? The great mercy of the Christian story is that Jesus's desire for us is far steadier than ours for him. Jesus loves whether we love or not. His wholehearted longing for us is the ground upon which all of our desires – however abundant or stingy – rests. If we love Jesus, it is only because the cross draws us towards love. The cross pulls us towards God and towards each other, a vast and complicated gathering place. Whether or not we want to see Jesus, he is here, drawing us. This is the solid ground we stand on. Stark, holy, strange, and beautiful.

Social Justice Meditation: The "Uncuffed" podcast is made by people behind bars in California's prisons. "We share intimate stories of our struggles and triumphs, and of the heartache and forgiveness taking place within these walls," the description says. "If you can see the humanity in us, you can see the humanity in everyone." How do you see Jesus in the stories of these incarcerated individuals?

"Uncuffed" multi-episode podcast. NPR, from KALW
<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/772030875/uncuffed>

The Hereafter

Andrew Hudgins

Some people as they die grow fierce, afraid.
They see a bright light, offer frantic prayers,
and try to climb them, like Jacob's ladder, up
to heaven. Others, never wavering,
inhabit heaven years before they die,
so certain of their grace they can describe,
down to the gingerbread around the eaves,
the cottage God has saved for them. For hours
they'll talk of how the willow will not weep,
the flowering Judas not betray. They'll talk
of how they'll finally learn to play the flute
and speak good French.

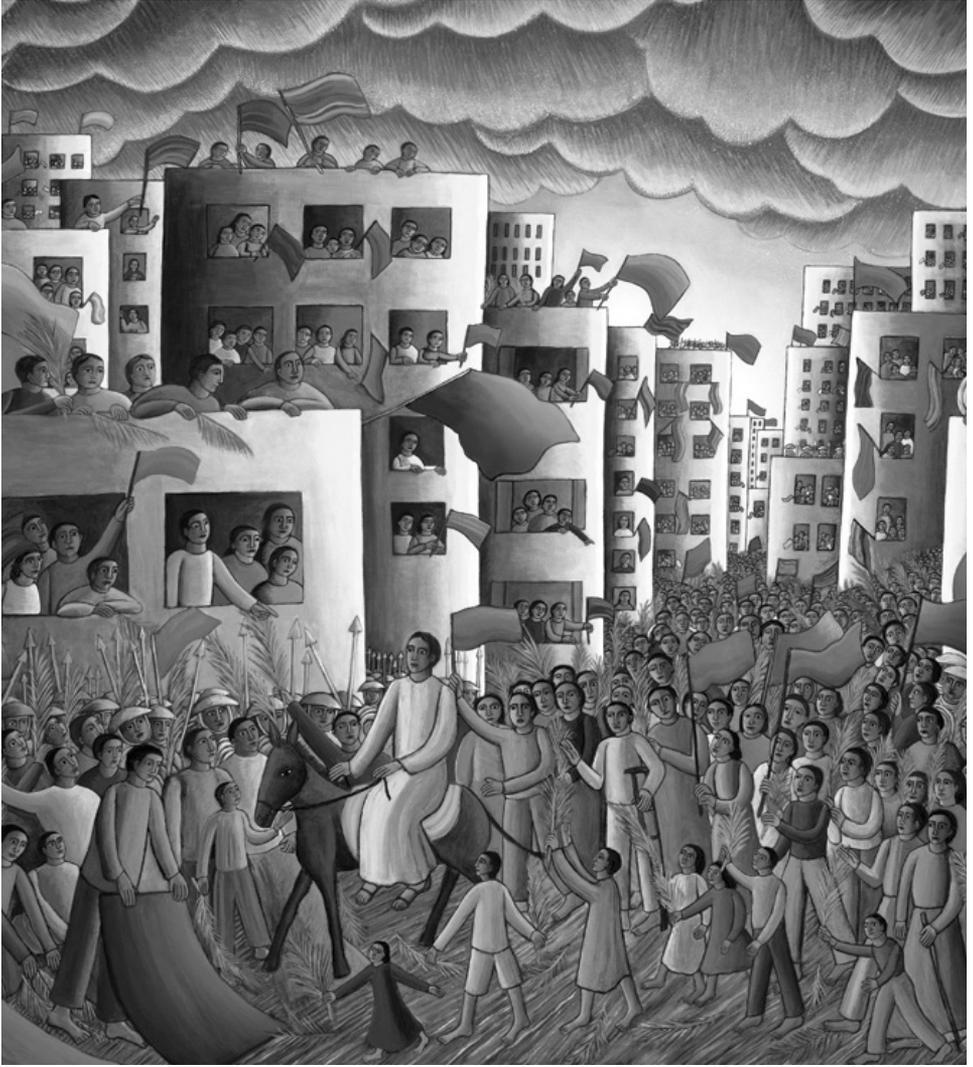
Still others know they'll rot
and their flesh turn to earth, which will become
live oaks, spreading their leaves in August light.
The green cathedral glow that shines through them
will light grandchildren playing hide-and-seek
inside the grove. My next-door neighbor says
he's glad the buzzards will at last give wings
to those of us who've envied swifts as they
swoop, twist, and race through tight mosquito runs.

And some—my brother's one—anticipate
the grave as if it were a chair pulled up
before a fire on winter nights. His ghost,
he thinks, will slouch into the velvet cushion,
a bourbon and branch water in its hand.
I've even met a man who says the soul
will come back in another skin—the way
a renter moves from house to house. Myself,
I'd like to come back as my father's hound.
Or something fast: a deer, a rust-red fox.

For so long I have thought of us as nails
God drives into the oak floor of this world,
it's hard to comprehend the hammer turned
to claw me out. I'm joking, mostly. I love
the possibilities—not one or two
but all of them. So if I had to choose,
pick only one and let the others go,
my death would be less strange, less rich, less like
a dizzying swig of fine rotgut. I roll
the busthead, slow, across my tongue and taste
the copper coils, the mockingbird that died
from fumes and plunged, wings spread, into the mash.
And underneath it all, just barely there,
I find the scorched-nut hint of corn that grew
in fields I walked, flourished beneath a sun
that warmed my skin, swaying in a changing wind
that tousled, stung, caressed, and toppled me.

PALM SUNDAY *March 28, 2021*

Hosanna in the Highest



Collect of the Day:

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

John 12:12-16

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Mark 14:1-15:47

Reflection: In reference to Palm Sunday, Frederick Beuchner writes this: “Despair and hope. They travel the road to Jerusalem together, as together they travel every road we take — despair at what in our madness we are bringing down on our own heads and hope in him who travels the road with us and for us and who is the only one of us all who is not mad.” Beuchner is right: we are mad with despair and hope, both, so much so that we don’t know what to do with the story of this momentous week. For those of us who struggle to reconcile the role of God’s will in the death of Jesus, Palm Sunday offers us a terrible, beautiful, please-pay-attention clue: it was the will of God that Jesus both declare and embody the coming of God’s kingdom. A kingdom of peace; a kingdom of slow, self-emptying love; a kingdom of radical embrace, radical patience, and radical risk that demands from us a degree of trust, vulnerability, and courage that empire can’t even imagine. Jesus died, not because a furious “Father” in heaven needed to kill his son in order to love us, but because Jesus unflinchingly fulfilled the will of God. He died because he exposed the ungracious sham at the heart of all human kingdoms, holding up a mirror that shocks us at the deepest levels of our imaginations. Even when he knew that his vocation would cost him his life, he set his face “like flint” towards Jerusalem. Even when he knew who’d get the last laugh at Calvary, he mounted a donkey and took Rome for a ride. Welcome to Holy Week. Here we are, and here is our God. Here are our hosannas, broken and unbroken, hopeful and hungry. Blessed is the One who comes to die so that we will live.

Coming to a City Near You

Carol Penner

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.
Jesus comes to the gate, to the synagogue,
to houses prepared for wedding parties,
to the pools where people wait to be healed,
to the temple where lambs are sold,
to gardens, beautiful in the moonlight.
He comes to the governor's palace.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you,
to new subdivisions and trailer parks,
to penthouses and basement apartments,
to the factory, the hospital and the Cineplex,
to the big box outlet centre and to churches,
with the same old same old message,
unchanged from the beginning of time.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you
with his Good News and...
Hope erupts! Joy springs forth!
The very stones cry out,
"Hosanna in the highest,
blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
The crowds jostle and push,
they can't get close enough!
People running alongside flinging down their coats before him!
Jesus, the parade marshal, waving, smiling.
The paparazzi elbow for room,
looking for that perfect picture for the headline,
"The Man Who Would Be King".

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you
and gets the red carpet treatment.
Children waving real palm branches from the florist,
silk palm branches from Wal-mart,
palms made from green construction paper.
Hosannas ringing in churches, chapels, cathedrals,

in monasteries, basilicas and tent-meetings.
King Jesus, honored in a thousand hymns
in Canada, Cameroon, Calcutta and Canberra.
We LOVE this great big powerful capital K King Jesus
coming in glory and splendor and majesty
and awe and power and might.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.
Kingly, he takes a towel and washes feet.
With majesty, he serves bread and wine.
With honour, he prays all night.
With power, he puts on chains.
Jesus, King of all creation, appears in state
in the eyes of the prisoner, the AIDS orphan, the crack addict,
asking for one cup of cold water,
one coat shared with someone who has none,
one heart, yours,
and a second mile.
Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.
Can you see him?

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