

A stained glass window featuring a central figure, possibly a saint or Christ, with a serene expression. The figure is set against a background of vibrant blue and purple hues, with intricate leaded glass patterns. The overall composition is framed by dark, geometric lines.

Is not this

the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke? *Isaiah 58:6*

Becoming Beloved Community this Lent
saint mark's episcopal church, palo alto

LENT 2022

The season of Lent is a season of humility, confession, and courage. It is a time to acknowledge our brokenness, and admit to God and each other that we cannot do the work of healing by ourselves. During Lent, we confess our lostness in the face of oppression, injustice, inequity, and loss. We face our fear of pain and death. We repent of the harm we have done, and grieve over the good we've left undone. We express our need for a God who will conquer the graves we stand in, and fill us with the power of the resurrection. In short, we seek the heart of Christ, which is to say, we seek justice, mercy, compassion, and love. We cry out to God to restore us, both individually and as a people seeking to become true neighbors, true siblings – a true and vibrant “beloved community.” Our hope at St. Mark's is that this booklet of Lenten meditations will help you pursue a “holy fast” for justice and healing this season. May the love of God hold you close in the Lenten wilderness, and may the power of the Spirit fill you with a passionate desire for God's justice, wholeness, and peace.



Beloved Is Where We Begin

*If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.*

*Do not leave
without hearing
who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has traveled this path
before you.*

*Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find
it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what
this journey is for.*

*I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger,
from fear,
from hunger
or thirst,
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall
of the night.*

*But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.*

*I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.*

*I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid
only on a road
such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort
and strength,
that come alongside us
for no other cause
than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their
curious insistence
whisper our name:*

Beloved.

Beloved.

Beloved.

—Jan Richardson



ASH WEDNESDAY

March 2, 2022

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 or Isaiah 58:1-12

Psalms 51:1-17

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Preacher: Debie Thomas

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the penitential season of Lent. Today, as we submit to the imposition of ashes on our foreheads, we contemplate our mortality, our frailty, our brokenness, and our sinfulness. We remember all the beauty, potential, and life that has “burned” to ash as a result of our collective human failure to love our neighbors as ourselves. We grieve the violence of our history, and confess the complicity that has kept us silent in the face of human suffering. At the same time, we remember that we are held in the embrace of a God who loves us, and promises to restore both oppressor and oppressed 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. 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 an essential and transformative question: “What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

Changer: A Prayer Poem for Ash Wednesday

*Cover me with ashes,
the thick-smoke soot of the earth.
Make my breathing like the journey
from death into life — second by second,
prayer by prayer.*

*Cover me with a cloak —
bring me low to the earth,
your justice whispering to me
like the gleam of red rocks,
the colors dancing in the darkness.*

*Let me know the power of
sage and cedar in my bones,
not that I may trap them there,
but bring them forth in words.*

*Cover me with darkness —
with the presence of my elders,
their tears falling around me,
reminding me of why we are here —
sighing, groaning with our singing,
longing to hear us into being,
stretching us beyond breathing
and praying and weeping.*

*Cover me with mercy —
let the bones you have crushed rejoice,
like the woman who channeled
every ounce of courage and dignity
to touch your cloak and find new life.*

Breathe unto me life anen,

*of possibility,
of beauty,
of balance,
of grace.*

*Cover me with mud —
bring me to my lowest state, so that in my
weaknesses*

*I see your strength —
the reflection of your eyes
in the brokenness around me,
the fullness of your love
in the depths of our hearts.*

*Cover me with ashes —
the ashes of my grandmother,
who in living her days knew no strangers,
worked tirelessly with worn hands
and lifted grandchildren high into the air.*

*Cover me with mercy —
let my cheek come to rest on the cold earth,
its faithful presence a call to walk humbly
beyond myself
beyond my fears
and ever on to the red road
that leads to your love.*

χάγας — Changer

Cover me.

Cover me with ashes.

Change me.

—Adrienne Trevathan



1ST SUNDAY IN LENT

March 6, 2022

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:

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16

Romans 10:8b-13

Luke 4:1-13

Preacher: Rev. Matthew McDermott

Jesus's struggle in the wilderness brings the ancient story of human temptation full circle. "Can you be like God?" is the question the serpent poses to Adam and Eve in the lushness of Eden. "Will you dare to know what God knows?" In the wilderness, the devil offers Jesus a clever inversion of those primordial questions: "Can you be fully human? Can you exercise restraint? Abdicate power? Accept danger? Can you bear what it means to be mortal?" What do these questions mean for us as we begin our Lenten journeys this year? Maybe they invite us to stay in the barren places and look evil in the face. Maybe they challenge us to hear evil's voice, recognize its allure, and confess its appeal. Through his arduous time in the wilderness, Jesus learns the weight and meaning of his sacred vocation. He learns what it means to walk in the shoes of the weak, the hungry, the desolate. Now it's time for us to do the same. It's time for us to decide who we are and whose we are. Remember, Lent is not a time to do penance for being human. It's a time to embrace all that it means to be human. Human and hungry. Human and vulnerable. Human and beloved.

"I do not ignore the theological and metaphysical interpretation of the Christian doctrine of salvation. But the underprivileged everywhere have long since abandoned any hope that this type of salvation deals with the crucial issues by which their days are turned into despair without consolation.

The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus. "In him was life; and that life was the light of men." Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred, the three bounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them."

—Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT

March 13, 2022

“I have longed to gather you”

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 15:1-12, 17-18

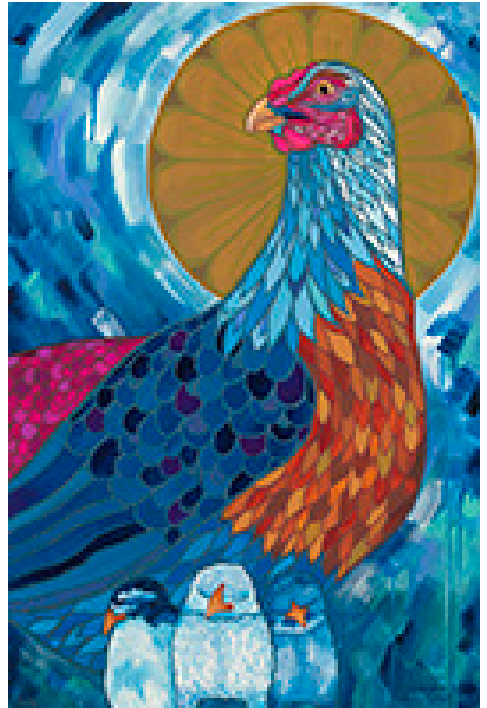
Psalm 27

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 13:31-35

Preacher: Rev. Dr. Rebecca Lyman

On this second Sunday in Lent, Luke’s gospel invites us to contemplate Jesus as a mother hen whose chicks don’t want her. Though she stands with her wings wide open, offering welcome and shelter, her children will not come home to her. This, in other words, is a mother bereft. A mother in mourning. A mother struggling with failure and futility. What would it take for us to embrace Jesus’s vulnerability as our strength? What would it take for us to practice such brave vulnerability in our pursuit of justice and healing? What Jesus the mother hen offers is not an absence of danger, but the fullness of his unguarded, open-hearted, wholly vulnerable self in the face of all that threatens and scares us. What he gives us is his own body, his own life. Wings spread open, heart exposed, shade and warmth and shelter at the ready. What he



promises — at great risk to himself — is the making of his very being into a place of refuge and return for his children. For all of his children — even the ones who want to stone and kill him. Maybe what we need most this Lent is not a fox-like divinity who wields his power with sly intelligence and sharp teeth, but a mother hen who calls to us with longing and desperation, her wings held patiently and bravely open. A mother hen who plants herself in the hot center of her children’s terror, and offers refuge there. There at ground zero, where the feathers fly and the blood is shed, our mother God gives herself for us.

The Christian community, therefore, is that community that freely becomes oppressed, because they know that Jesus himself has defined humanity’s liberation in the context of what happens to the little ones. Christians join the cause of the oppressed in the fight for justice not because of some philosophical principle of “the Good” or because of a religious feeling of sympathy for people in prison. Sympathy does not change the structures of injustice. The authentic identity of Christians with the poor is found in the claim which the Jesus-encounter lays upon their own life-style, a claim that connects the word “Christian” with the liberation of the poor. Christians fight not for humanity in general but for themselves and out of their love for concrete human beings.”

—James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*

3rd SUNDAY IN LENT

March 20, 2022

“Unless you repent”

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:

Isaiah 55:1-9 Psalm 63:1-8

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 Luke 13:1-9

Preacher: Lily Dodge

When the unspeakable happens, what default settings do we revert to? “Nothing happens outside of God’s perfect plan.” “The Lord never gives anyone more than they can bear.” “Buck up — other people have it worse.” The problem with every one of these answers is that they hold us apart from those who suffer. They inoculate us from the searing work of solidarity, empathy, compassion, and justice. They keep us from embracing our common lot, our common brokenness, our common humanity. In our Gospel reading for the third Sunday of Lent, Jesus challenges his listeners’ cultural assumptions about suffering, and tells them to repent and bear fruit before it’s too late. He insists that any question that allows us to keep a sanitized distance from the mystery and reality of another person’s pain is a question we need to un-ask. Any assumption we make about suffering that excuses our own indifference and inaction, is an assumption we must challenge, with God’s help.



Kindness

*Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.*

*What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.*

*How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.*

*Before you learn the tender
gravity of kindness
you must travel where
the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.*

*You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.*

*Before you know kindness
as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow
as the other deepest thing.*

*You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.*

*Then it is only kindness
that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into t
he day to gaze at bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.*

– Naomi Shihab Nye

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT

March 27, 2022

Lost and found

Collect of the Day:

Gracious Father, 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:

Joshua 5:9-12

Psalm 32

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Preacher: Rev. Matthew McDermott

A son who runs away. A son who stays home and seethes. A father who loves them both. On this fourth Sunday in Lent, we are invited to ponder the famous parable of the Prodigal Son, and consider our own journeys of wandering and return within the family of God. Are we like the younger son, whose hunger for fulfillment leads him to imagine an exotic Elsewhere, a supposedly perfect nourishment miles away from God's too-familiar table? Or are we like the elder son, whose pride causes him to become hardened and resentful, mistaking obligation and duty for love and righteousness? In Jesus's beautiful parable, the forgiveness of the father is wide enough to embrace both sons. Is our capacity for forgiveness anything like this extravagant father's? Is our welcome as unconditional? Our hospitality as sacrificial? Our awareness of our common humanity as generous?



In our African weltanschauung, our worldview, we have something called ubuntu. In Xhosa, we say, “Umntu ngumtu ngabantu.” This expression is very difficult to render in English, but we could translate it by saying, “A person is a person through other persons.” We need other human beings for us to learn how to be human, for none of us comes fully formed into the world. We would not know how to talk, to walk, to think, to eat as human beings unless we learned how to do these things from other human beings. For us, the solitary human being is a contradiction in terms. Ubuntu is the essence of being human. It speaks of how my humanity is caught up and bound up inextricably with yours. It says, not as Descartes did, “I think, therefore I am” but rather, “I am because I belong.” I need other human beings in order to be human. The completely self-sufficient human being is subhuman. I can be me only if you are fully you. I am because we are, for we are made for togetherness, for family. We are made for complementarity. We are created for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence with our fellow human beings, with the rest of creation. I have gifts that you don’t have, and you have gifts that I don’t have. We are different in order to know our need of each other. To be human is to be dependent.

– Archbishop Desmond Tutu, “Ubuntu: On the Nature of Human Community”

5th SUNDAY IN LENT

April 3, 2022

“While you still have me”

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:

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalms 126

Philippians 3:4b-14

John 12:1-8

Preacher: Debie Thomas

In our Gospel reading for the 5th Sunday of Lent, Mary anoints Jesus with expensive perfume. What is it about Mary's extravagance that merits Jesus's blessing, and what is it about Judas's criticism that earns Jesus's rebuke? Mary responds to the call of love in the moment. In the now. Knowing what Jesus is about to face; knowing that he's in urgent need of companionship, comfort, and solace; knowing that the time is short to express all the gratitude and affection she carries in her heart, Mary acts. Given the choice between an abstracted need (the poor "out there") and the concrete need that presents itself at her own doorstep, around her own dinner table, Mary chooses the here and now. She loves the body and soul who is placed in her presence. In doing so, she ends up caring for the one who is denied room at the inn — even to be born. For the one who has no place to lay his head during his years of ministry. For the one whose crucified body is laid in a borrowed tomb. In other words, it is the poor Mary serves when she serves Jesus. Just as it is always Jesus we serve when we love without reservation what God places in front of us, here and now.

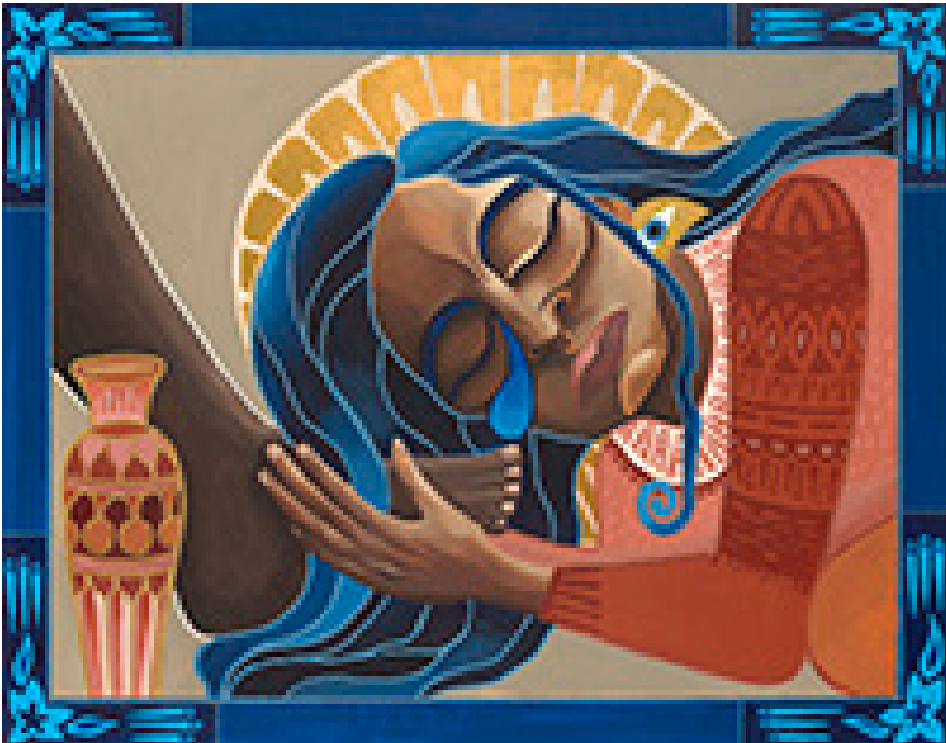
Touched by an Angel

*We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.*

*Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.
Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.*

*We are weaned from our timidity
In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.
Yet it is only love
which sets us free.*

—Maya Angelou



PALM/PASSION SUNDAY

April 10, 2022

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

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Luke 22:14-23:56 or Luke 23:1-49

The Jesus we encounter on this last Sunday in Lent is a Jesus who suffers in utter vulnerability, nakedness, and isolation. When he processes into Jerusalem, he does so on a humble donkey. When he prays in Gethsemane, he “throws himself on the ground,” and pleads for his life. As he dies on the cross, his last word is hardly a “word” at all; it’s a howl. A wrenching cry of defeat and abandonment: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Embracing this shamed and suffering God — much less following him — is not easy. On the cross, Jesus bears the violence, the contempt, the pain, and the humiliation of the entire world and absorbs it into his own body. He declares solidarity for all time with those who are abandoned, colonized, oppressed, accused, imprisoned, beaten, mocked, and murdered. He bursts open like a seed so that new life can grow and replenish the earth. He takes an instrument of torture and turns it into a bizarre vehicle of hospitality and communion for all people, everywhere. As Christians, we love because the cross draws us towards love — its power is as compelling as it is mysterious. The cross pulls us towards God and towards each other, a vast and complicated gathering place. Whether or not we want to see Jesus shamed and wounded, here he is, drawing us closer and closer to the darkness where light dwells. This is the solid ground we stand on. Stark, holy, brutal, beautiful.

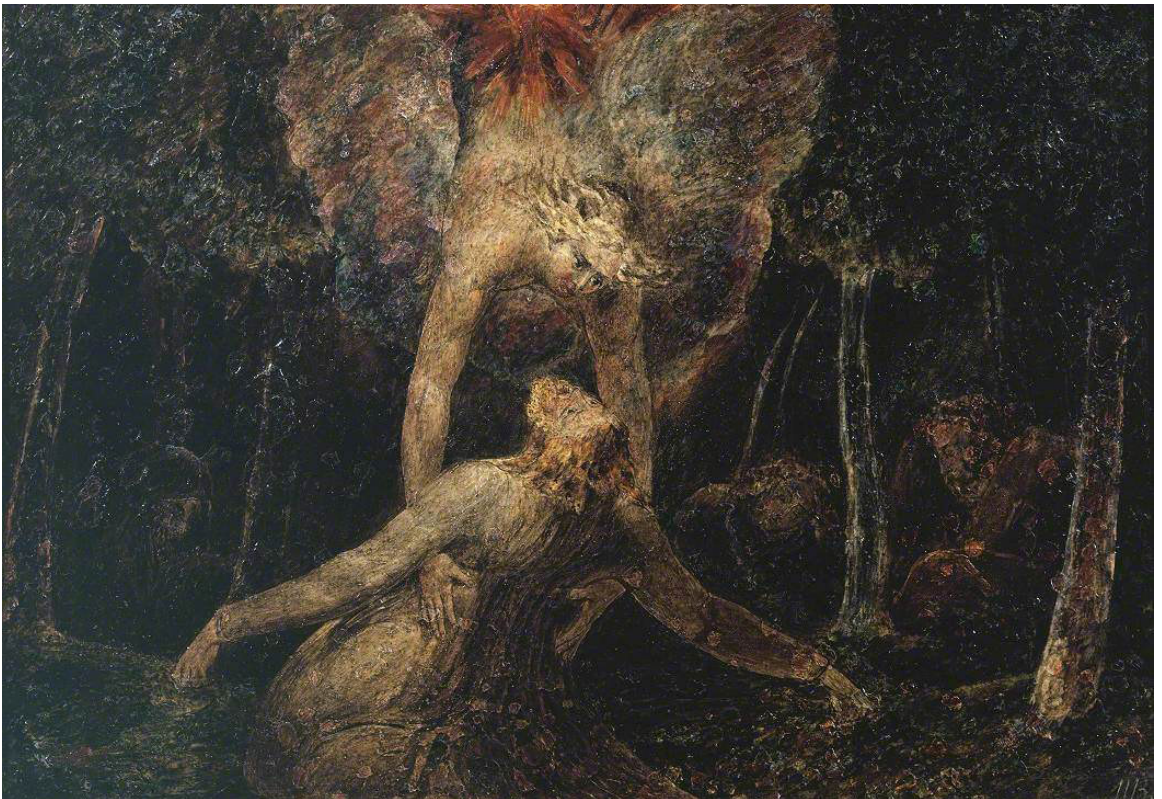


“Was not Jesus an extremist for love: ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.’ Was not Amos an extremist for justice: ‘Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.’ Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: ‘I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.’ Was not Martin Luther an extremist: ‘Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.’ And John Bunyan: ‘I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.’ And Abraham Lincoln: ‘This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.’ And Thomas Jefferson: ‘We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal . . .’ So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary’s hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime--the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment.

–The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

MOVING INTO HOLY WEEK

Holy Week holds within it our entire human story, all of the hope, tragedy, love, and joy that shapes our days. It reveals to us the horrors of evil, violence, injustice, and death, and it simultaneously shows us the depths of Christ's self-giving love. As we move through the momentous events of this week – the intimacy of the Last Supper, the agony of Gethsemane, the desolation of Golgotha, and the triumph of the empty tomb, we see a God who accompanies us in our suffering, and at the same time defeats injustice, conquers death, and renews all things. However your Lent has gone, wherever you find yourself at this time, walk into Holy Week trusting in the one who longs to answer your heart's cries. Join your story to the story of the cross, the tomb, and the resurrection, because the author and finisher of this sacred story is the Christ who loves you, and invites you to participate in the enlivening of all things. Because of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, we are and will continue to become the Beloved Community, a people moved by compassion to bring God's justice and wholeness to all of creation.



For the Interim Time

*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 in 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.*

—John O'Donohue



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