



Journey to Easter



A Disciples Seminary Foundation Devotional



An Invitation: This year, as DSF celebrates 60 years of ministry and service, we invite you to journey with us through Lent. Lent is the sometimes uncomfortable time where we sit with hopelessness, wrestle with doubt, try to let go, are challenged, make sacrifices, are called to forgiveness, and hopefully grow in our relationship with God. As we anticipate the promise of resurrection and new life, we invite you to use these devotions for personal reflection and/or a starting point for conversation. There are words from DSF staff, students, graduates, friends, and board members representing diverse theological, cultural, and social perspectives.

Schedule

Page

Wed., Feb. 26	Rev. Leah Laird • Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21	3
Thurs., Feb. 27	Safue Ulufaleilupe • Isaiah 58:1-12	4
Fri., Feb. 28	Rev. Matthew Harris-Gloyer • Psalm 51:1-17	5
Sat., Feb. 29	Rev. Dr. Tim Burnette • 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10	6
Sun., Mar. 1	Rev. Laura Jean Torgerson • Matthew 4:1-11	7
Wed., Mar. 4	Pastor Courtney Stanton • Romans 5:12-19	8
Sun., Mar. 8	Eunice Villaneda • John 3:1-17	9
Wed., Mar. 11	Liz Murphy • Romans 4:1-5, 13-17	10
Sun., Mar. 15	Rev. Amanda Henderson • John 4:5-42	11
Wed., Mar. 18	Rev. Louise Sloan Goben • Romans 5:1-11	12
Sun., Mar. 22	Tesa Hauser • John 9:1-41	13
Wed., Mar. 25	Drak Druella • Ephesians 5:8-14	14
Sun., Mar. 29	Rev. Vinnetta Golphin-Wilkerson • John 11:1-45	15
Wed., Apr. 1	Rev. Lori Tapia • Romans 8:6-11	16
Sun., Apr. 5	Rev. Chung Seong Kim • Matthew 21:1-11	17
Mon., Apr. 6	Dr. Timothy James • Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29	18
Tues., Apr. 7	Dr. Marvin A. Sweeney • Isaiah 50:4-9a	19
Wed., Apr. 8	Rev. Dr. José F. Morales • Matthew 27:11-54	20
Thurs., Apr. 9	Rev. Dr. Robert Welsh • John 13:1-17, 31b-35	21
Fri., Apr. 10	Rev. Nancy Fowler • John 18:28-19:17	22
Sat., Apr. 11	Rev. Dr. Eric C. Smith • John 19:28-42	23
Sun., Apr. 12	Rev. Belva Brown Jordan • Matthew 28:1-10	24

¹ “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁵ And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matt. 6:1-6)

Matthew 6, should I take this personally? Yes, but not for the reasons we think. Whether working for a non-profit organization, a ministry of the church, or as a pastor of a congregation, many of us regularly do our *righteous* work out in the open. Jesus says: be charitable in secret, make prayer private, fast without testimony. Of course, this section of the text is a natural fit to open the Lenten season. As we move into a time of devotion it helps to have a reminder to be cautious of the potential displays of self-pride that can come in discussing Lenten practices. This, though tertiary a good take away, does not seem to be the head of the pin here.

While it is easy to miss the connection between the Matt 6:1-18 and 19-21, this is all one thought; do not appear publicly righteous while storing up wealth. This is the same warning given by the prophets - do not worship YHWH openly while going against divine commands. “But storing up wealth isn’t against the commands!” says everyone reading this, *I imagine*. That thought would be true. However, the majority of the prophets had messages rebuking the elite of Israel and Judah concerning wealth inequality (from wage theft to abandonment of justice, mercy, and protection for the poor, the orphan, the migrant). While Jesus was kinder in his rebuke of false piety and lack of trust in God than say, Ezekiel, it is the same warning.

When we allow a scarcity mindset to control our actions, we break confidence with God. When thoughts of scarcity lead us to deny our siblings basic human rights (food, shelter, freedom, health), we break confidence with God. And there is no amount of publicly display of righteousness that can overcome that private breach. As we come this season to reflect on Jesus’s message, may we remember that this includes prayer and fasting, doing charitable acts, but also to having faith in God’s abundance and to letting go of the fear of scarcity that can break our relationship with our creator.

Prayer: *LORD, remind us to have faith that you love us more than the birds of the air and flowers of the field. When you give to us, remind us to lift up those around us by giving to them what was once withheld from us, rather than perpetuating the abuse of withholding. Remind us to trust in your abundance more than our own savviness.*



Rev. Leah Laird is the Director of Strategic Initiatives at DSF. Leah has successfully defended her dissertation and will graduate with her Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible from Claremont School of Theology in May.

⁶ “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? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, ¹⁰ 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.” (Isaiah 58:6-10)

In the Book of Isaiah chapter 58, it almost seems like a conversation between God and the people of Israel has taken place. It seems as if Israel has lost hope and were debating God in how they would worship God. They are facing difficult times because they feel as if God won't hear their prayers. They feel like they have been faithful to God and now there is no answer to their suffering.

This was an instruction in chapter 58 from God to Israel, on what would happen if they fasted and prayed. Regardless of them trying to justify how they have been faithful, God is giving them instructions on how many blessings they would receive if they just fasted and prayed faithfully.

In today's context, we find ourselves in similar situations. We sometimes ask, especially during times of struggle and oppression, “Where is God?” “Why does God not answer my prayers?” We sometimes want an answer at that very moment and time. We want an answer that fits our situation. Most of the time, we want an answer that very day. The Bible says, “God will not give us more than we can handle.” Therefore, God knows God's time.

We have to learn how to be patient. We have to know how to rely on God to fix things for us. We have to learn how to follow directions from God even when it seems like it does not fit our situations.

During this Lenten season, we are reminded of the suffering of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for all of us. We are reminded of the unconditional love of God for the world, and we are reminded that everything is possible through fasting and praying faithfully. Therefore, we shall not try and justify our struggle or oppression but follow instructions. Follow the instructions that were given to us so that we too can be blessed by God. Let us not ever doubt the love of God and remember that God will be there through all of our struggles in God's time.

Prayer: *You are the God of all things. We pray for strength, knowledge, and wisdom. Let this season remind us of your importance to the world. Let us serve you to the best of our ability. Bless us O Lord. Amen.*



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¹⁰ “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit...” (Psalm 51:10-12)

You are beloved. God loves you just as you are.

You are welcomed into full inclusion in the everlasting embrace of the Eternal One whose *hesed* (loving-kindness) shall be forever bonded to you.

You can change. If you have done wrong, there is a way to reconciliation.

Even when it is beyond our believing, there is nothing that separates us from the *raham* (abundant mercy) of the God of love. Even in our deepest despair, when we are convinced that we are unlovable, irredeemable, and unforgivable for the wrongs we have done, God is the most moved mover. God is eternally for us because God has *rehem* (womb love) for all people; the love a mother feels for her child is how God loves us at all times. In our desperation for relief from the guilt of real or perceived wrongdoing, God receives us and walks with us through repair and healing.

The word *hesed* (steadfast love, loving-kindness) appears 100 times in Psalms, and the word *raham* (abundant mercy, compassion) appears 22 times in Psalm. The root of *raham* is *rehem*, which means “womb.” Thus, one possible meaning is closely connected to the concept of “womb love,” God’s overflowing, eternally-connected love that a mother has for her child.

Sometimes, people deceive ourselves into thinking that there are “unforgivable” sins. This sense of guilt or shame can lead us into a downward spiral of depression/despair. In moments like that, what is it that we need to hear? What helps us to pull out of the spin? What helps us to remember who we are and to whom we belong?

You are beloved. You are welcomed.

The Eternal One’s *hesed* shall be forever bonded to you.

Psalm 51 is not written for the unrepentant sinner. For a person who has fully deluded themselves into thinking that all they do is “perfect,” there is no guilt or shame. Psalm 51 was written by an author who is cognizant of their sin, knows the hurt that their wrong had upon others, and is spinning into the despair of *feeling* irredeemable. Scripture and tradition inform us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. And, sometimes people feel hopeless in their guilt; Psalm 51 is for them to know that there is a way forward.

Prayer: *Eternal One of love, I believe that you are always for my good and that you always welcome me back into right relationship. It’s just that sometimes it’s so hard to believe it. Help my unbelief. When I feel the despair of unremitting gloom, may I be mindful that this too shall pass and may I be reminded that you shall never leave me nor forsake me. May I then be such a presence for another in the fog. Amen.*



Rev. Matthew Harris-Gloyer is a DSF/PSR graduate (M.Div.), is husband to Michelle, a soon-to-be-daddy, Pastor of FCC Riverside, Vice President of Family Promise Riverside, a PSWR Youth Leadership Team shepherd, a PSWR Nom Com member, and has a BA in History & Religious Studies from Allegheny College.

5:20 “So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 6:1 As we work together with God, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.... 8b We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” (2 Cor. 5:20-21, 6:1, 8b-10)

“Christ” is the name of that deep center of reconciliatory, transformative wholeness that sustains every aspect of our becoming lives. It’s always right there, even in the midst of our felt fragmentations and divisions. Christ reminds us that we are permeated by a *polyphilic*, life-giving, and creative love. The author of the letter to the Colossians (1:19-20) has elsewhere reminded us that this reconciliation is not only a possibility but has and is already always happening within all things and everywhere. This means that although we all endure evil and suffering at various points in our lives, we are encouraged not to forget that Christ holds all things together in a reconciliatory process of transformation.

So then, why does Paul remind us here in 2 Cor. 5 that we are to “be reconciled to God?” Doesn’t that make it seem like our current state is unreconciled? Well, perhaps the implication is rather that we all have a tendency to fail to let love have the final say in our lives. We are thus being ever invited to renew the adventure of deepening our awareness of that reconciliatory union that sustains us. The Greek word Paul uses for reconciliation in 2 Corinthians is *katallassó*, which has connotations of a change wherein two become one. So if we are already in a state of union, and we are also always being lured to become more conscious of our inherent oneness with God, then perhaps there is no better time to contemplate this than the season of Lent.

Lent is a 40-day period where we learn, for a season, what will become the inner posture of a lifelong journey — the journey of a deepening wholeness that is already ours. Moments of reflection can lead us to learn how to do the difficult work of detaching from our egos, or what Paul often called “the flesh,” so that we might live from our center, which is reconciliation — or unity. Think of the paradoxes laid out at the end of this passage: unknown/known, death/life, sorrow/joy, poor/rich. How is it that those places of sorrow and death can be transformed? In short, it is through this liberating presence of Christ that is continually reconciling all things in love and invites us to remember that now — now is the time to become what you already are.

Prayer: Opening repetition prayer (repeat as many cycles as you like until you come to inner rest): *Christ our life, Christ our breath, Christ our sorrows, Christ our loves, Christ our death.*



Rev. Dr. Tim Burnette is a DSF/CST graduate (D.Min./2019) and the Pastor and Curator of a Disciples of Christ community called the Way Collective in Santa Barbara, CA. He writes and teaches on process theology, contemplation, and philosophy of religion. He is a partner to Cara and a father who needs more sleep to their three amazing kids.

☞ **Sunday, March 1, 2020** ☞
Matthew 4:1-11

¹ “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him.... ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.” (Matt. 4:1-3a, 10-11)

One of our scriptural models for the Lenten season is the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness after he was baptized, led there by the Holy Spirit and tempted by the devil. The gospel of Matthew presents a dialogue between Jesus and the devil that specifies the kinds of temptation Jesus faced.

This tempter’s first two challenges have to do with proving that Jesus is Son of God, through material provision (“command these stones to become loaves of bread”) and spectacle (“throw yourself down” and the angels of God “will bear you up”). When Jesus responds, he unmaskes the dangers of these temptations: forgetting the importance of spiritual as well as physical nourishment and needing God to prove something to us. By the time we get to the third temptation, power over all the kingdoms of the world, it seems like the devil should know better. Jesus has already twice declined the invitation to use his power to prove his divinity.

When we set apart the 40 days of Lent as a time of prayer and spiritual discipline (which may include actual fasting), we follow Jesus into the wilderness. Does it open us to temptation? Or does it clarify the ways we are being tempted all the time? We each face our own particular challenges, but the temptations Jesus faced and resisted can still be seen in our personal and communal lives today.

We are still tempted to prioritize material over spiritual nourishment, investing time in work and busyness to the neglect of prayer, bible study, worship, Sabbath rest, and spiritual friendship. It is still difficult to trust God rather than testing God, looking for signs to prove that we are God’s children. We see so many examples of the misuse of power and people neglecting the call to serve only God, as destructive and discriminatory policies place the “gods” of nation, race, and profit above care for the earth and the human family. If we are honest, we notice that we ourselves are tempted to do the same on a smaller scale.

The very human Jesus who suffers these temptations challenges us to follow his example. He shows us another way to wield power than wealth, spectacle, or domination. The power we have as children of God can be used with humility, spiritual discipline, trust in God, and a commitment to putting God first.

Prayer: *God of the wilderness, may we be led by your Spirit to be humble, disciplined, trusting, and faithful in your service. Show us the dangers of the temptations we face and keep the example of Jesus ever before us. Amen.*



Rev. Laura Jean Torgerson is DSF’s Director of Education and Mission in Northern California, serving as mentor to theological students in the Bay Area. She is also a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate Theological Union, studying how Pentecostal churches in Nicaragua interpret the Bible and the ways that interpretation conflicts with the academic approaches Pentecostal students encounter in seminary. She and her husband Tim Donaghy are raising two awesome girls in Oakland, CA.

¹² “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned — ¹³ sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law... ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷ If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹ For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

“Grace is everything for nothing to those who don’t deserve anything.”^[a]

As we enter this season of reflection and repentance, I could not help but recall the images of people I see living in tents or makeshift dwellings on the sides of the road and those standing with signs on the exits of freeways soliciting for assistance to relieve them temporarily from the pain of the moment. The signs often tell their story (or tell a story), whether true or not, that impacts those who drive by and are often compelled to act.

God saw humankind, like the beggar on the side of the road telling a story of sin, in need of help. God’s grace for the sinner is expressed in his love for creation, which included you and I and resulted in the life of Jesus Christ, who paid the debt of one man’s sin that spread to all. As we enter this season of remembering and reflecting on the grace of God, we become increasingly aware that we deserve nothing. Like the beggar by the side of the road holding their sign at the mercy of those who drive by, we are holding our signs of sin at the mercy of God, who came to save us from our condition of desperation.

“If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man,” said Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17 NRSV). We who have accepted God’s unconditional love given to humankind so freely through Jesus’ charitable act of death on the cross acquits us from all of our debt with God. It was **paid in full**.

Prayer: *Dear God, as we reflect on the gift of grace that you so freely gave to us in the person of your son Jesus Christ, make us to remember and never forget your act of charity toward us. We are sinners saved by grace and we ask for forgiveness of our sin as we recall the ultimate price, paid in full on our behalf that we might live and reign with him. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*



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^[a] (Precept Austin. “Grace- Charis (Greek Word Study).” https://www.preceptaustin.org/grace_charis (accessed February 15, 2020.)

⁵ “Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.’ ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?’” (John 3:5-12)

As Christian scholars, we are constantly faced with the difficulty of spiritual interpretation. For instance, when I was asked to expound on these verses, I went straight to the commentaries, which weren't very helpful in my desire to understand what God is revealing to me through them. Then, I saw myself in Nicodemus.

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and expert of Jewish Law, first appears to Jesus at night and declares that there is no doubt of him being sent from God. But when Jesus says that only those who are “born from above” (v.3) can see the kingdom of God, Nicodemus does not understand. Having taken Jesus's message literally, Nicodemus, a learned teacher of Israel, cannot understand the profundity of Jesus' message. When the scene closes, Nicodemus still does not understand and even when he appears later in the gospel we are never told if he was ever “born from above.” What we do know, however, is that he is still there and that he still believes until the very end.

Jesus says, “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (v.8) Is He talking about Nicodemus? Is He saying those born of the spirit don't understand either? These verses reveal that being born of the spirit is believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that through his sacrifice, we are saved and have eternal life. Being born in the spirit is allowing the unpredictable wind of His grace to blow us according to His will. The simplicity of this revelation evades the learned teachers of Israel, and sometimes, it even evades us as Christians.

In this time of Lent, let us ask God to give us the patience to understand that we do not always need to understand. Let us ask Him to open our hearts so that He may reveal himself through our spirit and not our intellect.

Prayer: *Father, overwhelm us with the winds of your grace and lead us to your light. While your revelations at times are unclear, we place our faith in the promise that we are saved through your sacrifice.*



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⁴ “Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵ But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.... ¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.... ¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations’)—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” (Romans 4:4-5, 13, 16-17)

Every summer growing up, my family and I road tripped to the beaches of North Carolina, spending a few days relaxing by the ocean and soaking up the sun. Most mornings, I would make the two-mile walk from one end of the beach and back. It’s one of my favorite traditions – spending the early morning hours watching the sun rise, feeling the tide rolling under my toes, and listening to the sounds of wildlife surrounding me.

The halfway point was marked by a large wooden fence, marking one beach boundary with another. It is a stark and awkward sight. The worn fence feels artificial, out of place. It’s a human-made division within the grand interconnectedness of creation all around it.

Boundaries, fences, lines in the sand: We face these artificial divisions constantly in our everyday lives. Whether it’s a line of barbed wire around a neighborhood building, an unfair partition in our workplace aspirations, or an unjust separation of human beings at our borders, these divisions seem ever-present.

But no more. In our passage, Paul reminds us that division, separation, and fencing-off has no place in our promise from God. All people, all beings have access to – are called into – the covenant of unceasing grace and love of God. With faith, division dissolves. With belief, separation ceases. With an embrace of the love that surrounds us all, exclusion meets its end.

Our human ideas about “the law” – about what some deem as right and proper – are turned upside down when we live with faith, when we live into the promise that all are welcome into God’s family that is founded on compassion, justice, and connection.

Lent provides us space to meditate on these questions: Where have I placed fences in my life? Who have I placed unjust boundaries around? What might my life look like if I take up as a mantle the “righteousness of faith”, rather than focused on worldly expectation?

Prayer: *Gracious God, give us the fortitude to tear down the unjust fences in our lives. May we spend this Lenten season growing in our faith, spreading the good word of love, of compassion, of a grand interconnectedness among us all.*



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⁵ "So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar.... ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' ⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' ¹¹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?'.... ¹³ Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' ¹⁵ The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'" (Jn 4:5-7, 9-11, 13-15)

Sometimes, this time of year, I get a little salty. Maybe it's the cold temperatures that seem to have settled into my bones or withdrawal symptoms from the lack of sunshine I seem to depend on. Winter days can drag on and feel monotonous as the kids get restless without enough time to play outside. In the midst of it all, I find myself a bit more irritable, a bit less patient, and trapped in my own loop. In John 4:5-42, everyone seems a bit salty. Jesus is tired in the noon heat, so he sits down to take a rest. A Samaritan woman comes to do her daily chore of drawing water when she is interrupted. The woman is irritated that a Jewish man, with no regard for social order, asks her for a drink. To make things worse, he seems to know all of her secrets, and he reminds her of them. He speaks in riddles and claims to have access to an eternal spring of water. Even the disciples are salty as Jesus refuses to eat or drink and instead speaks of nourishment beyond food and water. And yet, in the mystery of the conversation, in the middle of the irritation, exhaustion, thirst, hunger, and memories of the messy-ness of life, the woman sees something more. The woman sees in Jesus the offer of living water that quenches our thirst, satisfies hunger, and dissolves our salty-ness. She sees the living water and goes to share the living water with others so they too may thirst no more.

In the dark days of winter, the season of Lent interrupts and reminds us that from ashes we came and to ashes we will return. The irritations, frustrations, thirst, and hunger of our daily life will pass. The sun will shine again, the warmth will return. There is life beyond our immediate desires that will truly satisfy. This is the knowing that settles into our bones and calms our fears and makes us whole. This is the knowing of Jesus in the midst of the winter.

Prayer: *God, may we experience your living water. May we meet you in the midst of the long dark days and be assured that the sun will shine again. With you all will be fed. No one will go thirsty. May we set down our 'salty-ness' and feel your peace settle into our bones.*



Rev. Amanda Henderson is a Ph.D. student at the University of Denver and Iliff School of Theology and the Executive Director of The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado.

¹ “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

As a pastor, I find it interesting when two or three people will come to me with a similar concern, a life circumstance or question of faith that troubles them and would like some guidance. This has been the case recently as a teenager, a young adult, and a woman of some maturity have all sought me out for conversation. The burning question or concern is why doesn’t God answer my prayer? Where is God in my need?

In particular, I was very moved by the twenty-something that confessed that a giant hole had opened up in her theology when she came to an understanding that she can’t change God. She can’t manipulate God and her prayer has not been particularly effective in getting God to do what she wanted. She had been praying for some time for her sister, who was dealing with addiction issues, and she couldn’t understand why, with all of her heartfelt prayer and pleading, God was not healing her sister! Is it a lack of faith? If so, whose faith is at stake? Perhaps she was praying wrong, or she wasn’t pure in her intention. She was raised with an understanding that if one is sincere in faith and consistent in love, God would answer prayer. “I’ve done everything I know to do! Why doesn’t God heal my sister?”

I think that most of us at some time in our faith journeys have bumped into this, either with others or even for ourselves. The big questions of why? Or “how come, God?” I have lived long enough to understand that no life is ever without its own “dark wood.” And I suspect we learn that the true gift of prayer is that God will offer us peace, comfort, and strength to walk forward even when we can’t see the road. From time to time, our hearts are broken by the circumstances of life, and we know there is no platitude or simple answer to the pain that is part of our living. So we trust that God is present, and sometimes that must be enough.

Prayer: *In all things God, we offer thanksgiving. And in times that are uncertain and filled with worry, we ask that you offer us your peace. Amen.*



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¹ “As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ³ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world’.... ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ ³⁶ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ ³⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ ³⁸ He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped him.” (John 9:1-5, 35-38)

Each morning, the sun makes its appearance in the sky, even when it’s covered by the clouds, its impact cannot be hidden. The sun’s light signifies and invites us into a new day. Those first rays of soft pink, bright orange, and glowing yellow slowly transform the world. The light is dim at first, but it slowly begins to grow until the earth is overwhelmed by the light of the sun. The light brings understanding and clarity and shares the possibilities available in this new day.

This story in John helps us understand the impact of Jesus, God incarnate, coming into the world. Jesus says in John 9:5 that as long as he is in the world, he is the light of the world. His arrival transformed history and created new possibilities and opportunities. Jesus is a beacon of love, hope, and faithfulness in a difficult world. His life and ministry embody God’s abundant grace and invites us all into covenant relationship with God.

In the story, Jesus restores the eyesight of a man blind since birth, but the main miracle of this story is not that his sight is restored. The main miracle is that the man encounters the Son of God and believes. Many, including the Pharisees in the story, saw Jesus perform miracles and heard about God’s abundant grace and still did not believe. The man who was once blind has one encounter with the living God and believes.

Through Jesus, God has invited all people into covenant relationship with Godself. Accepting the invitation means accepting the call to do God’s transforming work in the world. When it is unclear how we do that, we look toward Jesus’ life and ministry for guidance and clarity. Jesus’ life shone God’s abundant grace on those who were seen as undeserving of this grace. Jesus makes it clear in John that all people are deserving of God’s grace. As people who believe, we are instructed to go out into the world as beacons of hope and love. We are called to invite others to encounter the redeeming grace found in the living God.

May God’s grace and love shine upon us this day as we share this good news to all people, especially to those who are seen as undeserving of this grace.

Prayer: *Light of the world, we give thanks for your transforming love and abundant grace. Remind us that we have been called to do you work in the world and to be beacons of hope in a hurting world. Amen.*



Tesa Hauser is a 3rd-year M.Div. student at Claremont School of Theology. She lives in San Diego with her husband, Matt, and they are members of Vista La Mesa Christian Church.

☞ Wednesday, March 25, 2020 ☞
Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸ “For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light— ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

‘Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.’”

When I look up the word “light” online, it is defined as “the natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible,” while the definition of “darkness” is “the partial or total absence of light.” What I like about this verse in Ephesians is that it can remind us of how when we have a relationship or connection with God, we become more “light” inside. God is the natural agent that wakes us up to see the truth of who we ultimately are – beings of light. Jesus seemed to understand this implicitly when he said that your eye is a lamp into your body, and when your vision is clear, you will have light within. I think it is our natural birthright to have an intimate connection with God and to experience the light of God’s presence within ourselves.

Still, the reality is that we are living in a country in which our natural inclination for such a connection is not fostered through our culture. Movies, commercials, social media, and even some of our social circles in which we communicate with people in-person do not encourage compassionate or kind communication with one another, let alone any form of divinity. Movies often depict vengeful violence and dishonesty as the social norm, while current politics seem to give people the greenlight to behave disrespectfully toward one another.

Given this, how do we foster the indwelling of God’s light within? From a practical standpoint, it translates into taking care of ourselves. This means filling our minds and bodies with that which invites God’s light to manifest in us: a healthy diet, positive music and social media, solid friendships, and movies or television that depict reality compassionately. Almost every night before I go to bed, I visit Instagram to watch videos or read testimonies of people doing acts of kindness or healing in their lives. This is how I bring light within, before I go to sleep. It is a simple act and a conscious decision. When we nourish ourselves with the things in which God’s immanence are present, we are able to facilitate the expression of God’s loving light through us toward others. It is easier to bear the fruit of light such as goodness, righteousness, and truth, as Paul put it, when we lovingly allow God’s light to nourish us first.

Prayer: *Gracious God, open me to Your nourishing light and compassion so that I may bear the fruits of Your love and, in turn, nourish others.*



Drak Druella is a student at Claremont School of Theology pursuing a Master of Divinity in Interfaith Chaplaincy. He works at Upland Christian Church (DOC) as Music Director and resides in Pomona with his wife, the rector at St. Ambrose Episcopal Church, their dog, Jonas, and cat, Zendo.

³⁹ “Jesus said, ‘Take away the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, ‘Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.’⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me.’⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.’⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’” (John 11:39-45)

John tells this story to the first century church to encourage and advise them to recognize God as the source of their hope. When John writes, the post resurrection church has experienced waves of change and distress. The post-Pentecost church has evolved into a loosely connected diaspora of faith communities flung across the various cultures and ethnic groups of the Roman Empire. Paul, hero of the New Testament church, is dead. John is likely the last living disciple who walked with Jesus.

John recognizes that the great faith force destined to be the legacy of Christ’s resurrection is on the verge of either worldwide influence or becoming a footnote in history. The circumstances that John’s audience faces are like ours today. The 21st Century Faith Force that should be reflecting God’s love for humanity and palpable presence in the world is being buffeted by division, anger, pain, and fear within its ranks. Our mission as a faith force for God has disintegrated into a witness for scarcity, timidity, nostalgia, and xenophobic isolation.

John points to the story of Lazarus to remind us, that in God, the possibilities for life and renewal are beyond our limited sight and experience but not beyond our faith or God’s power. In the text, John shows how our limited perspective binds us and blinds us to seeing the potential for God at work. In the story he notes several binders that restrict our movement and vision: entitlement, unfocused purpose, fear, lack of clarity, coexisting anger and hope, and the hard and messy work of change.

John shows the New Testament Church and 21st Century Faith Force, that when God’s purpose is the center of our focus and our faith, we will see God call new life from what is presumed dead. God invites us to remove the grave clothes that prevent us from seeing the possibilities and opportunities God’s presence provides. When we remove the strips of fear and doubt that bind us, we are free to live into New Resurrection Life. Thus freed, we bear authentic witness to the people around us. Our communities need to see a living and relevant God glorified and active in our world, the real source of our hope and faith.

Prayer: *Lord God, we lay at your feet the grave clothes we cling to, recognizing that only by relinquishing them can we bear witness to your love and glorify you. Amen.*



Rev. Vinnetta Golphin-Wilkerson is Pastor of Granger Community Christian Church in West Valley City, Utah and serves as Moderator of the Central Rocky Mountain Region. She enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry in Prophetic Leadership program at Iliff School of Theology.

⁶ “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For this reason, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law—indeed it cannot, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.”

Think about Jesus’ triumphal entrance, the crowds shouting “Hosanna!” and praising with palm branches. (John 12:12-13) The lives of those present had been touched in unforgettable ways by the very presence of Jesus. The focus of their minds had shifted because of what they saw and experienced through the life and presence of Jesus. His presence created hope for a new way of life. Like Jesus, there are people who come in and out of our lives to create a lasting impact. They touch our lives in unforgettable ways. They help us in our own desires to be better persons. The Apostle Paul had this exact experience with Jesus and was forever changed by it. Filled with the Spirit of Life, he spent the rest of his days telling the story of the one who impacts lives in unmatched ways. It is this same story that continues to bring us hope today, and you are a part of this story. Paul was not shy about using his own story, a life full of shortcomings, failures, and tribulations, imperfect by far. His story, and yours, helps others understand that life is to be lived daily and while unexpected things happen, in Christ there is no condemnation. In Christ, there is hope through the Spirit that dwells in us. Paul exhorts us to remember that where we focus our minds has much to do with the fruit we bear in our lives. A mind focused on the flesh will produce a different result than a mind focused on the Spirit. What we think about is what we are going to yearn for, and this influences what we will become. Rene Descartes famously wrote the phrase: “I think, therefore I am.” What do you think about? This changes the way we treat others, how we talk, act, and live our lives. You can be one who positively impacts the life of others too, but where your mind spends most of its time either helps or hinders this. Paul’s words remind us that the way we think affects our lives. It is the difference between living a life of sin and death and a life of freedom and peace. If you think love, you love. If you think justice, you do justice. If you think about Jesus, you will praise and shout hosanna. Imagine the possibilities in your thoughts!

Prayer: *Spirit of life, guide our minds to you and help us to focus our thoughts on that which is pleasing to your heart oh God. May our flesh be held captive to minds that surrender to your Spirit and may you fill us to the overflow with your sweet and unforgettable presence so that we may positively impact others in your name and for your glory.*



Rev. Lori Tapia is the National Pastor for Hispanic Ministries for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. Lori, a proud Mexican-American, is a graduate of Claremont School of Theology (M.Div/2017), a sought after speaker, a lover of worship and empowering others, an advocate for justice, a wife, a mother of three, and grandmother of nine.

☞ Sunday, April 5, 2020 ☞
Matthew 21:1-11

¹ “When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.’ ⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! / Hosanna in the highest heaven!’” (Matthew 21:1-9)

A long time ago, I had a chance to travel through Peru. One of the most memorable experiences was trekking through the Inca Valley from Cusco to Machu Picchu. I saw many native people who were carrying a heavy load on their backs and walking through the valley. They walked several days to reach Machu Picchu through the narrow path around mountains and cliffs. It was almost impossible for me to take ten steps without stopping to rest, even without any heavy load. I had altitude sickness. Since there is a limit on how much one person can carry in this condition, they made donkeys carry most of the heavy stuff. It looked like they were carrying several times their body weight and walking through those perilous cliffs. Later, I learned that donkeys are life-giving sources that provide crucial necessities for the local population in mountain villages and to trekkers like me. Whenever I read this bible verse about Jesus, who mounted a donkey and entered Jerusalem, I cannot help remembering those donkeys in the Inca Valley. Besides the humbleness a donkey symbolizes, the heavy burden they were carrying overlapped with the burden that Jesus was carrying throughout his ministry and on the cross. On the day entering Jerusalem, this donkey might relieve Jesus from the burden, even if it was for a short moment. Jesus’ tired feet after a long journey finally had the chance to rest. Lent is the season of self-reflection on the holy burden Jesus carried throughout his life and on our willingness to participate in it by carrying our own cross. Am I a faithful disciple who is willingly and faithfully carrying my own cross? Am I carrying the holy burden to realize the kingdom of God on earth, which is expressed concretely through peace, justice, hope, and love? Instead, am I trying to use Jesus as my donkey, to relieve my burden or even fulfill my greed at the expense of the Gospel? It might be true that Jesus did not want to mount a donkey, but he wanted to become a donkey who carries the burden of others. Then he may be calling us now to become a donkey, a life-giving humble creature who is faithfully walking with our heavenly master. He may be commending us to be just like him.

Prayer: *Gracious God, let us be like a humble donkey who carried a heavy burden for others, not because we are able, but because you showed us how. We ask you to be with us when we are out of breath and our feet are trembling with fear and pain. In Jesus name, Amen.*



Rev. Chung Seong Kim is the Executive Pastor of North American Pacific/Asian Disciples (NAPAD). He has been serving as a local pastor in several congregations and an executive in several ecumenical organizations. His lifelong passion is peace and reconciliation of the Korean Peninsula.

- ¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!
- ² Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever."
- ¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.
- ²⁰ This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.
- ²¹ I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.
- ²² The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.
- ²³ This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.
- ²⁴ This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.
- ²⁵ Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!
- ²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.
- ²⁷ The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.
- ²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.
- ²⁹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

"This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118:24

"Everyday is a Day of Thanksgiving," a song by Leonard Burks, inspires congregations across the Black Church all through the year. The song says, "God's been so good to me; Everyday He's blessing me." It's a song of thankful praise that gives strength and hope for persons to live from day to day.

Psalm 118, although found in the Old Testament, has much to say regarding the significance of Jesus. Jesus was despised and rejected, like a blemished stone, but became the Cornerstone of our faith. In Christ, the Lord is with us, on our side to never leave us nor forsake us. God's love and power has been proven on the day of Exodus, liberating Israel from the oppression of Egyptian slavery; the day of Israel's return to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile; and the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Each of these days are days in which God acted and God is active today.

Easter is a day above all the days we may mention, for it is the day to celebrate the greatness and goodness of God. The Psalmist reminds us that God made it, God preserved it, it is the "Lord's Day," and we celebrate it. Because God's steadfast love and mercy endures forever, we may surely receive each new day as a day of Thanksgiving.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please hear my prayers of thanksgiving as an offering of gratitude for all that You have done for me and my hope for tomorrow. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Dr. Timothy James serves as Associate General Minister and Administrative Secretary of the National Convocation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He and his wife Joyce have five children and seven grandchildren.

⁴ “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens—wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵ The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶ I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷ The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸ he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ⁹ It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.”

Lent is a time for repentance and self-purification throughout the Christian world. Such repentance and self-purification are intended to emulate Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice on behalf of those who would seek the salvation that Christianity anticipates as a result of his crucifixion and resurrection.

The portrayal of the suffering servant in Isaiah 50:4-9a is read during Lent, in this year on April 7. The text depicts an obedient servant of G-d, who employs a skilled tongue to speak to the weary in the service of G-d, and who endures insults and spittle, but persists due to confidence in the support of G-d.

Christians generally read the so-called Servant Songs, including Isaiah 50:4-9, as a depiction of Jesus, who suffers rejection, persecution, and crucifixion in the service of G-d. But Christian readers generally overlook or dismiss the explicit reference in Isaiah 49:3 to Israel as the servant of G-d by whom G-d is glorified. There are questions concerning this identification, but Isaiah 49:3 clearly states that Israel is G-d’s servant and that the servant’s task is to serve as a light to nations that portends divine deliverance to the ends of the earth.

The recognition of Israel as G-d’s servant raises an important issue, especially when read in relation to the following text, Matthew 27:11-54, on April 8, which happens to be the date of the first Passover seder this year. Matthew 27:11-54 portrays Jesus’ suffering, crucifixion, and death. It’s juxtaposition with Isaiah 50:4-9a reinforces the view that Jesus is the suffering servant, but its reading at the time of Passover sends a potentially ominous message. As part of the narrative concerning Jesus’ trial before Pontius Pilate, Matthew 27:25 claims that the Jews gathered at the trial proclaimed, “His blood be on us and our children,” after choosing Barabbas rather than Jesus as the condemned man who would be spared execution on Passover. This passage and others in the Gospels which vilify Jews and Pharisees have frequently prompted the persecution and murder of Jews throughout Christian history.

Prayer: *O L-rd, please let Christians understand that true repentance and self-purification calls for the rejection of the murder and persecution of Jews, who have suffered as servants of G-d. Amen.*



Dr. Marvin A. Sweeney is Professor of Hebrew Bible at the Claremont School of Theology.

³⁸ “Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁹ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’ ⁴¹ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, ⁴² ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him’... ⁴⁶ And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ ⁴⁷ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, ‘This man is calling for Elijah.’ ⁴⁸ At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.’ ⁵⁰ Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.” (Matt. 27:38-42, 46-50)

The most agonizing moment of Matthew’s crucifixion narrative is Jesus’ cry of dereliction: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (27:46) This sense of divine abandonment is confounding in light of Matthew’s confessional portrayal of Jesus. Jesus is the promised “Son of David.” He has power over creation—“even the winds and the sea obey him!” His messianic mission is authenticated by the blind receiving sight, the lepers being cleansed, and the dead being raised. To Jews, he is the “lord of the sabbath;” for Gentiles, he is their “hope.” He will come “in glory” as the final judge. This Jesus is the very “Son of the living God.” In fact, Matthew begins and ends his gospel proclaiming that Jesus is the very presence of God in our midst: He is *Emmanuel*, “God with us,” who is “with you always, to the end of the age.” (1:1; 8:27; 11:5; 12:7; 25:31–46; 16:16; cf. 27:5; 1:23; 28:20)

Yet, *this* Jesus is overtaken by agony and doubt. This God-with-us experiences God-without-us! *This* “Lord of the sabbath” is disquieted by wretched restlessness. This eschatological judge is denied justice and unjustly condemned. This “Son of the *living* God” is one breath away from death, and his “Father” (6:9) is nowhere to be found.

What do we make of this? Well, let’s remember that it is none other than God-*with-us* who hangs on the cross (J. Moltmann). The Cross is thus the depths to which God lovingly goes to be with us. Meaning, this divine-yet-crucified Presence accompanies us *even* into the chasm of our own godforsakenness. To believe in the Crucified One is to believe in a God present in our doubt, to believe that God’s hiddenness, paradoxically, reveals God’s presence (K. Barth). *Emmanuel* is with us even—nay, *especially*—in our experience of divine abandonment. In the dirgeful trenches of suffering, we are not alone, for God *in Christ* is there, yowling with us—*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*

Prayer: *My God, my God, in moments of dereliction and despair, of abandonment and agony, remind me that your Son has been there too and is with me still. Amen.*



Rev. Dr. José F. Morales is the Director of Pastoral Formation at DSF Claremont and Assistant Professor of Historical and Comparative Theology at Claremont School of Theology.

¹ “Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end....” ^{2b} And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ ⁷ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.’ ⁸ Peter said to him, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, ‘One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.’.... ¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’ ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” (John 13:1, 2b-10, 12-17)

Throughout our Lenten journey of faith this year, we have heard many teachings and parables and words of Jesus. But here in chapter 13 of John’s Gospel, we encounter his greatest teaching to his disciples: a teaching by example of how we are to live and love as his followers today.

Jesus knew that his “hour” has come to depart from this world. And knowing this, he chooses to demonstrate his love in a dramatic way by taking the role of a slave and washing their feet. Indeed, it is nothing short of scandalous that the One who has come from God should take on the menial task of a slave. And while it is astonishing that Jesus takes the role of a slave and washes the dirty feet of his disciples – including Judas, who would betray later that night! – it is even more astounding that he does so knowing full well that his disciples will all fail and deny him miserably in his hour of greatest need.

Jesus’ “teaching by example” is that the commandment “to love one another” means that we are to take on the role of a servant, caring for the needs of others without expecting anything in return. It means understanding that we not only do this to those who treat us well, but even to those who may disappoint or despise us. Loving one another is not about feeling affection; rather, it is about truly and humbly serving and caring for all those in need.

Prayer: *Gracious God, help us as we seek to follow Jesus’ example as the One who loves fully and completely, even to the end – to the cross, and the grave, and back. Amen.*



Rev. Dr. Robert Welsh is a retired minister of the Disciples of Christ and currently serves as the Treasurer of the DSF Board. Over his 40 years of ministry, he served as Executive Secretary on the staff of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, as President of the Church Finance Council, and as President of the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He and his wife (Nancy) live in Indianapolis, IN.

²⁸ “Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate’s headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went out to them and said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this man?’ ³⁰ They answered, ‘If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.’ ³¹ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.’ The Jews replied, ‘We are not permitted to put anyone to death.’... ^{19:4} Pilate went out again and said to them, ‘Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.’ ⁵ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Here is the man!’ ⁶ When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.’ ⁷ The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.’... ^{16b} So they took Jesus; ¹⁷ and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.” (John 18:28-31, 19:4-7, 16b-17)

I am blessed to have walked the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem seven times, but I will never forget my first time. I had looked forward to a contemplative time, pondering all that happened to Jesus along the route. But my experience turned out to be quite jarring. In my imaginings, it had been a quiet, somber wandering through the tragedy of the day. Of course, there were massive crowds, but what got to me the most is that the streets were lined with shops – and shoppers! How could this be where Jesus had to carry the cross to his crucifixion? When I told a fellow traveler of my dismay, he said that was why they brought him through there, for all the world to see what happened to anyone who defied Rome. I could not help but think of all those who loved Jesus, watching him take that last tragic walk. As they watched his bloodied body, laden with that heavy cross, they had to look across to see jeering onlookers and shopkeepers negotiating sales. And to think that all of this followed his “trial.” Too many times we have seen our courts not live up to the fairness that we expect of them. Trayvon’s killer went free and a president was acquitted without any witnesses. It is tragic when the innocent are convicted, but certainly never more than when a sham trial was used to convict Jesus.

How truly painful it must have been to watch Jesus carrying that cross. We still feel it as we remember it this season. But as tough as this all is, we can still find hope in the midst of it. Yes, they took Jesus away in a most tragic way. But he is still with us, and he taught us how to challenge the injustices in this world, like those that he faced, and he gave his all to do that. We are called to do the same, with the assurance that God is with us.

Prayer: *God of Justice, help us to hear the cries of your people. Give us the wisdom and the courage to challenge the unjust powers of today. Amen.*



Rev. Nancy Fowler will graduate in May from Claremont School of Theology with a Ph.D. in Spiritual Formation. Her focus is self-compassion as a way through grief. She is on the board of Beloved San Diego and is a member of Missiongathering San Diego.

³⁰ “When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. ³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.... ³⁸ After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰ They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.” (Jn 19:20-31, 38-42)

This passage is full of references to Jews, Judaism, and Jewish customs. The Jewish sabbath accelerates the removal of the bodies from the crosses, Joseph of Arimathea is afraid of Jews, Jewish custom dictates the burial practices, Jewish festivals influence the timeline, and Jewish scripture is cited throughout to help make sense of the narrative. If it were taken out of its Jewish context, this part of John wouldn't make any sense at all; the story is a Jewish story start to finish. This is a dangerous story. The history of Christianity is full of moments when stories like this one have provided a pretext for Christian violence against Jews. The “fear of the Jews” shown by Joseph of Arimathea (and the same fear shown by the disciples one chapter later in John 20:19) has given Christians an excuse to misunderstand, hurt, and persecute Jews from antiquity to today. Anti-Semitic violence has been a part of Christian practice as long as things like communion and baptism. But it doesn't have to be. The author of the Gospel of John thought of himself as a worshipper of the God of Israel and a follow of that God's messiah, Jesus. But the shadow of Roman violence looms large, both in the text in Jesus' death and in the Jewish War of 66-70 CE that the author had probably already lived through. His community had probably been in conflict with people from Judea and Jerusalem, and the “fear” in this text reflects the author's own time rather than Jesus' time. “Jews” and “Judeans” are both ways of translating the same Greek word, so it's probably the case that the “fear” in the text was fear of people from another region, not people from another religion. We misunderstand John when we think that this passage and others like it are about Jews in the modern religious sense. As 21st Century Christians, we can do better, and we must do better. Our religion should never include prejudice against another group or religion, and it certainly shouldn't include violence. The “fear” in our bibles belongs to the past, but it doesn't have to belong to us.

Prayer: *God, you have many children. Give us understanding and respect as we relate to our Jewish siblings, and enlighten us with the wisdom and beauty of the Jewish tradition that gave us Jesus, the apostles, and the scriptures we read. Amen.*



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¹ “After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.

⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.’

⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’”

I recall that Easter Sunday, many years ago, at Denley Drive Christian Church in Dallas, TX. I stepped out on the stage in the fellowship hall and proclaimed in my loudest, clearest six-year-old voice, “What are you looking at me for? I didn’t come to stay. I just came to tell you Christ arose on Easter Day!” Matthew 28:1-10 was the inspiration for the writer of my first public speech. But my speech was only one piece of a fuller narrative. With the assistance of my weekly Sunday school peers, we belted out for the congregation that Easter morning the resurrection narrative as we had learned it.

There are many unforgettable moments from my childhood of church and particularly Sunday school. One, for sure, is the intentionality with which a number of adults at Denley Drive taught us in Sunday school week after week; year after year. I had heard the Easter narrative many times before I was six and standing on that stage. It had been rehearsed in Sunday school, over and over again, and performed every Easter morning, prior to my performance. I could not wait for my turn to stand with confidence and proclaim the good news.

Even when I was six, I knew the role of the angel, voice and actions, were important – descending from heaven, rolling the stone away, delivering the good news to the women. As we hold on to what the angel said and did, there is invitation for us to be intentional about a few things. We must tell others what we have seen and heard; and we must keep our spirits ready to meet the resurrected Jesus along life’s way.

Prayer: *O God of resurrection, thank you for the gift of proclamation that we know in your risen Son Jesus, the Christ. God is with us! Christ is risen! Hallelujah! Amen.*



Rev. Belva Brown Jordan is Interim President of Disciples Seminary Foundation and Moderator of the General Board of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.