



-INCLUSION COMMUNITY-

THE PILGRIMAGE OF
HOLY WEEK
2020

a companion for the journey





-INTRODUCTION-

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

-Mary Oliver, "Red Bird: Poems"

As we come to an end of our Lenten journey and step into one of the most sacred weeks of the year, we invite you to join us in a posture of intentionality, mindfulness, openness and curiosity. While we cannot physically gather together, we will still wonder together about the Divine Mystery and sacred love of God expressed in this *Holy Week*. Each day we will share scripture passages to ponder, meditations written by Inclusion Community Leadership Team members to guide your reflection, and breath prayers for you to breathe. Listen along to our Holy Week playlist. Let us journey together. Breathe deeply and know you are beloved.





-A BLESSING FOR THE JOURNEY-

"Sojourners in Faith"

by Susan Gregg-Schroeder

Come along with me
as a sojourner of faith.

Bring along
a sense of expectancy
a vision of high hopes
a glimpse of future possibility
a vivid imagination.

For God's creation is not done.

We are called to pioneer
a future yet unnamed.

As we venture forward,
we leave behind our desire for
a no-risk life

worldly accumulations
certainty of answers.

Let us travel light
in the spirit of faith and expectations
toward the God of our hopes and dreams.

May we be witnesses
to God's future breaking in.

Come along with me
as a sojourner of faith
secure in the knowledge
that we never travel alone.

Amen.





-HOLY MONDAY-

READ

Scripture:

Matthew 21:12-17

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers."

REFLECT

It's odd to read this story while feeling like our world has been overturned by COVID-19. Even more so, I find a sense of irony as I wonder why Jesus entered the temple that day. Perhaps he was looking for a sacred, quiet place to be alone and pray. Perhaps he was searching for solitude. What he found is described to be like a marketplace. We can imagine, "cattle bellowing, sheep bleating, turtledoves cooing, people yelling, and coins clanging."* This would not have been completely unexpected because people had to pay their "temple tax." Naturally folks would need to exchange money, currency, and sacrificial animals.





So, what pushed Jesus over the edge? Was he in a mood? Was it something he heard? What did he see that made him describe the temple as a “den of robbers?” Further, we are left to wonder about what exactly was Jesus raging? Many argue Jesus was raging against the robbing and exploitation of people, particularly the poor, vulnerable, and widows. Perhaps he was raging against the long-held belief that God required blood offerings and animal sacrifices. Perhaps that, instead, God desired compassion, loving-kindness, and justice, especially for the oppressed, marginalized, and vulnerable. It seems like Jesus’s rage echoed the many prophets before who challenged the status quo by claiming that God found no pleasure in sacrifice especially without compassion or justice.

Which leaves me wondering what tables need to be overturned in our lives and community? How are we called to prophetically challenge the status quo today? Where do we see the exploitation of the vulnerable, marginalized, and oppressed? What tables do we need to flip—tables that serve the status quo, homophobia, racism, sexism, ableism, white supremacy, and classism?

BREATH PRAYER

Inhale: Holy Disrupter,

Exhale: overturn that within me which is not compassionate.

By: Rev. Sarah Belles

**Feasting on the Word: Year B, Vol. 2. Bartlett & Taylor, W. Hulitt Gloer*





- HOLY TUESDAY -

READ

Scripture:

Matthew 26:6-13

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, "Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

REFLECT

The anointing of Jesus is also recounted in the other gospels: Mark's version (14:3-9) is almost identical to Matthew's, while accounts by Luke (7:36-50) and John (12:1-8) differ with regard to the woman's identity, exact day of the event, and other details. Instead of focusing on these differences among accounts and the debates surrounding them, I am drawn to two aspects of Matthew's passage that are comforting and moving to me, especially in this unsettling time.

First is Jesus's closeness with those who are marginalized. He has chosen to spend precious time – as he will very soon be killed – dining with a man identified as a leper (now healed by Jesus), an outcast of society and an "untouchable." Over and over in the Bible, Jesus chooses to be with

people who are “the least of those among us.” I have thought many times over the past several weeks how those who are hospitalized with Covid-19 must feel like lepers, completely cut off from the world and basically untouchable except by dedicated healthcare workers. Even in our own homes we are feeling intense isolation, whether living with others or alone. At this time, perhaps we are called more than ever to reach out to the marginalized as Jesus did and express our love and care in whatever ways we can.

The second aspect of this passage that stirs me is the woman’s seemingly reckless and extravagant expression of love for Jesus. It is not a rational act; the perfume she pours over Jesus could cost as much as a year’s worth of wages. The disciples point out that the ointment could be sold and the money donated to the poor, but Jesus recognizes this act as a beautiful outpouring of devotion and overflowing love and care of him, anointing him in preparation for his burial to come. Could this be an invitation for us to pour out our love for the Divine, each other, and our world with reckless abandon?

*Love is reckless; not reason.
Reason seeks a profit.
Love comes on strong,
consuming herself, unabashed.*

*Yet, in the midst of suffering,
Love proceeds like a millstone,
hard surfaced and straightforward.*

*Having died of self-interest,
she risks everything and asks for nothing.
Love gambles away every gift God bestows.*

*Without cause God gave us Being;
without cause, give it back again.*

-Jalaludin Rumi (Mathnawi VI, 1967-1974)

BREATH PRAYER

Inhale: Dear Divine,

Exhale: Stir our hearts to love.

By: Allison Simpson



-HOLY WEDNESDAY-

READ

Scripture:

John 13:1-17; 33-35 (The Message Version)

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world. It was time for him to go to the Father. Jesus loved his disciples who were in the world. So he now loved them to the very end. They were having their evening meal. The devil had already tempted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. He had urged Judas to hand Jesus over to his enemies. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything under his power. He also knew he had come from God and was returning to God. So he got up from the meal and took off his outer clothes. He wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a large bowl. Then he began to wash his disciples' feet. He dried them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter. "Lord," Peter said to him, "are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You don't realize now what I am doing. But later you will understand." "No," said Peter. "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you can't share life with me." "Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet! Wash my hands and my head too!" Jesus answered, "People who have had a bath need to wash only their feet. The rest of their body is clean. And you are clean. But not all of you are." Jesus knew who was going to hand him over to his enemies. That was why he said not every one was clean. When Jesus finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes. Then he returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord.' You are right. That is what I am. I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet. So you also should wash one another's feet. I have given you an example. You should do as I have done for you. What I'm about to tell you is true. A slave is not more important than his master. And a messenger is not more important than the one who sends him. Now you know these things. So you will be blessed if you do them. "Children, I am with you for only a short time longer. You are going to look high and low for me. But just as I told the Jews, I'm telling you: 'Where I go, you are not able to come.'" Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."

REFLECT

Never have we experienced a time when we have collectively faced our mortality so directly and simultaneously. I messaged a friend in Afghanistan and was surprised by our common experience: Their schools were also closed. They also had stay at home orders. They were also feeling a sense of dread.

Together we see the numbers ticking upward, images of frantic hospitals, sick people, the death toll rising. Holy week is here and a novel virus has come to our doorstep. No escaping its reality. And for the first time I am having an acute sense that we truly are all in this together, we share in this common humanity...no one is above this.

You don't understand now...but it will be clear enough to you later.

We are getting a window of understanding as we face what was unthinkable a few weeks ago. A heightened awareness of what has always been here, a great equalizing in God's kingdom. We were born into a world of deep connectedness, common fears, common desires, hopes, dreams, and an awareness that we all face certain death. The servant, the sage- we are all a part of a reciprocal whole.

Jesus washed the disciples' feet as one of his very last acts. His message was clear: we are all equal, no better, no worse than any other. We breathe the same air, we are vulnerable to the same virus, the same disease, the same fear of going to the place where others cannot come. We need the same healing touch, even in the days where closeness and togetherness are dangerous and forbidden.

Imminent death. The statistics are stark. Even in the best case models, the numbers are staggering. I see the steep curve of exponential growth and hear the urgency in Jesus' words: Love one another. Have a conversation with an estranged family member. Reach out to someone who is alone. Stop right there in your tracks and know what is important. We have no choice.

I will be with you only a little longer.

Will it be decades? Days? We don't know. In the meantime, none of us is above washing the feet of another. None of us is beneath being cared for, tenderly, lovingly, nursed back to health or beloved to our last breath. There is no time to wait. Love. One. Another. Now.

BREATH PRAYER

Inhale: LOVE

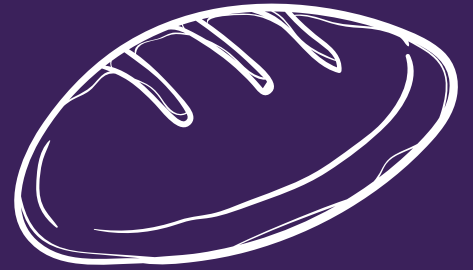
Exhale: NOW

By: Julie Crandall



-MAUNDY THURSDAY-

Comfort Food: A Feast of Love



**Adapted from Dr. Marcia McFee's "Comfort Food: A Feast of Love" at www.worshipdesignstudio.com*

Scripture:

Matthew 26:26-30

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Preparation:

- Prepare your favorite comfort food** (or whatever you have available), and perhaps listen to your favorite music as you do.
- Light a candle** (if you have one), as a reminder of the divine presence with you.

Reflection Guide:

When we "break bread" together as a community at the Gathering, we remember that Jesus invited folks to eat together throughout his ministry, not just at the Last Supper. This Feast of Love is our way of creating connection across our many tables, while we are distanced. So, prepare your favorite "comfort food." If you are able, share on Instagram or Facebook a photo of what food you are bringing to our shared feast!

God's table is always extended far beyond our imagination. Jesus-Love-Enfleshed always made a way to extend tables beyond our expectations, imaginations, and barriers. Jesus used the parable of a great banquet to which all people are invited in order to talk about what the "kin-dom" of God looks like. He often invited the most unlikely guests to

his meal-times, confounding the disciples. In this way, he was encouraging a deep love and connection beyond all social norms. Jesus knew that we humans need connection and inclusion. Jesus comforts us, saying “you have a place at the table” and Jesus challenges us to make sure we are doing the same—that all people know they are welcome in our hearts, in our homes, in our communities, in our churches – even if we can’t physically be with each other right now.

It is difficult in this moment not to be near some of the people we love and might be worried about. Take a moment and say out loud the names of people you wish were right there next to you at your table today.

Pause for a moment of quiet reflection.

Jesus is no longer physically on earth, yet every time we gather around a table and we call Love to mind, God is present with us in Spirit. And so too, our loved ones are with us. Let this be a hope and comfort to us. We also want to call to mind, the people we cannot name, whose names we do not know, entrusting them to the infinite and immeasurable love of the Divine.

For those who have lost loved ones

For those who are in prison

For those who are without shelter or a safe and healthy home

For those who are sick and recovering

For those who are caring for loved ones who are sick at home

For those who are caring for persons in medical care

For those who are separated from loved ones

For those who are feeling alone and isolated

For those who are helping and are so very tired

For those who are struggling to find friends, food, and comfort

For those who are without work

For those who are afraid or anxious

For those who are grieving

You are invited to take a deep breath on behalf of all those we do not know and cannot call by name. *Breath of God, breathe your tender mercy upon these individuals.*

Pause to take a few deep breaths.



Blessings at the table are part of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Indeed, Jesus adapted his Jewish ritual blessing spoken before and after meals. He asked us to remember him whenever we break bread and raise a cup in thanksgiving. This is why we call our communion prayers the "Great Thanksgiving." In this feast of love and comfort, we can call to mind things for which we are deeply grateful. You are invited to speak aloud a couple of things for which you are grateful.

Speak aloud your gratitude.

Now you are invited to raise a plate of "something" on your table, or a glass of whatever you are drinking, and offer this blessing:

*Divine Source, as we gather across the miles to share in a meal,
bind us together by your Spirit.*

*With this comfort food, nourish our bodies, minds, and souls,
so that we might be a comfort to others.*

As we fill our plates, fill us with a hunger for justice.

As we pour our drinks, pour out your love. Amen.

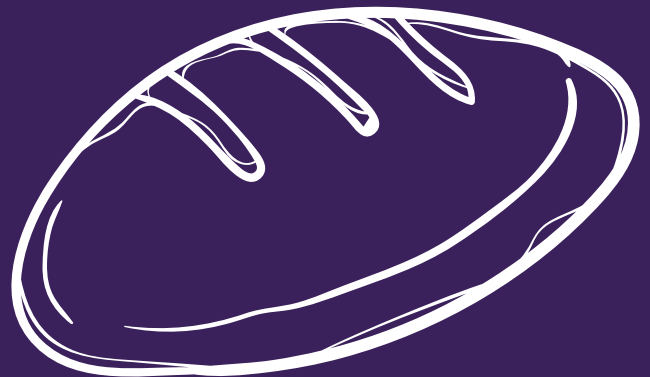
Enjoy your meal!

As you enjoy your meal, think back to a time when someone offered or prepared food for you as a sign of love. Food is a common love language. Do you think that Jesus was trying to express his love for his disciples in this last meal? How does that layer add to the story? What do you imagine extravagant love looks like in these unprecedented days? How might we reach across the social distance to loved ones, to friends, and even acquaintances or strangers?

Evening Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer

*Keep watch, dear Lord, with those
who work, or watch, or weep this night,
and give your angels charge over those who sleep.*

*Tend the sick, Lord Christ;
give rest to the weary,
bless the dying,
soothe the suffering,
pity the afflicted,
shield the joyous;
and all for your love's sake.
Amen.*



-GOOD FRIDAY-

READ

Scripture:

Matthew 27:15-24 (Common English Version)

It was customary during the festival for the governor to release to the crowd one prisoner, whomever they might choose. At that time there was a well-known prisoner named Jesus Barabbas. When the crowd had come together, Pilate asked them, "Whom would you like me to release to you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?" He knew that the leaders of the people had handed him over because of jealousy. **While he was serving as judge, his wife sent this message to him, "Leave that righteous man alone. I've suffered much today in a dream because of him."** But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and kill Jesus. The governor said, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" "Barabbas," they replied. Pilate said, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Crucify him!" But he said, "Why? What wrong has he done?" They shouted even louder, "Crucify him!" Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere and that a riot was starting. So he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I'm innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It's your problem."

REFLECT

How familiar is this dramatic – almost theatrical – scene of Pilate washing his hands and abdicating all responsibility for the fate of Jesus, even though he alone, as the provincial Roman governor, had the power to determine Jesus' fate. Moreover, Pilate even acknowledges the very innocence of this man Jesus and deflects the responsibility for his fate to the religious leaders and "the crowd."

But, as familiar as the telling and re-telling of this scene is to Christian believers across two millennia, who among us has ever noticed and stopped to ponder the message to Pilate from his wife: "Leave that righteous man alone. I've suffered much today in a dream because of him." (Verse 19)

Who indeed? On one level, one could allow a bit of levity to creep in here and quip that this is just yet another instance (no doubt repeated millions of times since then!) of a husband not paying attention to the wise and prescient counsel of his wife. And, note that the wife is not named in the Matthean text (ah, male chauvinism, thy name is Matthew), even though if Pilate had followed her advice, the course of Western religious history (if not human history) would have no doubt been dramatically altered.

Think about it: what if Pilate had followed his wife's advice and **released** Jesus of Nazareth and handed him over to the religious leaders and "the crowd?" Presumably, there would have been no crucifixion, no substitutionary atonement (Jesus died for our sins), no resurrection, no Pauline theology, no Trinity, no split between the Eastern Orthodox Church and western Roman Catholicism, no Protestant Reformation, no Divine Right of Kings (used to commit unspeakable atrocities in the name of God), no....[Fill-in-the-Blank]

Not to trivialize the meaning and power of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection for believing Christians throughout the ages, but isn't it intriguing and fascinating to ponder and to meditate on what might have happened **if Pilate had heeded his wife's advice, presented to her in a DREAM?** What if Jesus had lived and continued his "earthly" ministry and met a "natural" death?

How often have you and I ignored the advice of "the unnamed" in our wakened or unawakened dreams, or in the clamoring voices of others? How often have we ourselves been a voice "in the crowd," so willing to go along with what our religious, our political, or our secular elitist "powers that be" have us act? Where do we locate our voice in this drama?

On this Good Friday of a chaotic 2020, in which we are besieged by so many "voices in the crowd," in which the innocent, the powerless, and those on the margin of our entire world are being crucified daily, may we recognize ("see again") within us the resurrected Spirit of the One who came that we might have human life, and have it more abundantly. What would that unnamed dreamer say to us? How would that dream disturb us? What would that life look like? Perhaps another dreamer was on to something when he dreamed, when he imagined... **May we all be disturbed by this dream... just like Pilate's wife...but, this time, may we listen....**

BREATH PRAYER

"Imagine," John Lennon

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us, only sky
Imagine all the people
Livin' for today

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion, too
Imagine all the people
Livin' life in peace

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us

And the world will be as one
Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can

No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one,
AMEN!

By: Steve Cloniger

[Note: Thanks to our pastor, Sarah Belles, for calling to my attention the verse relating to the dream of Pilate's wife. Though I have read the story countless time, I had never noticed it. So, mea culpa, I'm "Pilate" or one of the "voices in the crowd."]

-HOLY SATURDAY-

READ

Scripture:

Luke 23:54-56

It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

REFLECT

Holy Saturday is an interesting, in-between kind of day. Jesus has died. His friends, family, and followers are in shock, despair, the fog of grief. After seeing his body in the tomb, the women who were closest to Jesus throughout his life began to prepare his body for burial. It was their final act of following, if you will. But, as the sun began to set, they had yet to finish their work. The Sabbath day was setting in. Trusting their work would still be there after the Sabbath, the women rested.

The Sabbath day required a fast from activity that hearkened back to that first Sabbath day when God rested. A few years ago, I heard a sermon by Bishop Claude Alexander that completely transformed my imagination of Holy Saturday and the practice of Sabbath. In his sermon, he explored why God rested that first Sabbath day saying:

"God's essential state is being. God is revealed in terms of being first. Doing comes out of God's being. God was and then God created and then God rested from creating.... Why does an eternal, inexhaustible, and omnipotent God rest? It's not that God grew tired, faint, or weary. It's not that God needed to be replenished.... Obviously, it is not out of need. And, if it is not out of need, then why does our God rest? Could it simply be that God rests because God chooses to do so as an expression of God's worth? Could God's resting simply be a matter of God saying I am worthy of resting? Could it be that just as God's creating reveals who God is, so does God's resting reveal who God is. God is the God who does not need to do anything to be who God is. God is just God. Period. And, God's resting is an assertion of God's worth and value."

How might we rest on this Sabbath day, as an expression of our own divine worth? How might this day be set apart as an expression of our own belovedness-- of God's immeasurable love for us? And in our rest how might we release any sense of comparison, or notions that elevate exhaustion as a status symbol, or ideas that productivity produces our self-worth?

I invite you to join in a fast from technology and social media. Perhaps you might take a walk or a nap. Maybe you could cook your favorite dish and delight in the gift of creation upon your table. What does it look like for you to rest?

As Bishop Claude Alexander proclaimed, "There are some things God can do with you not being around.... They rested, may it be said of us, we rested."

SABBATH PRAYERS

"Days pass, the years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles. Lord, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing. Let there be moments in which your presence, like lightning, illumines the darkness in which we walk. Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed. And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness, and exclaim in wonder: How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it! Blessed is the Eternal One, the holy God!"

- Hebrew Sabbath Prayer

In the Breath, Another Breathing

For Holy Saturday

—Jan Richardson from Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons

Let it be
that on this day
we will expect
no more of ourselves
than to keep
breathing
with the bewildered
cadence
of lungs that will not
give up the ghost.

Let it be
we will expect
little but
the beating of
our heart,
stubborn in
its repeating rhythm
that will not
cease to sound.

Let it be
we will
still ourselves
enough to hear
what may yet
come to echo:
as if in the breath,
another breathing;
as if in the heartbeat,
another heart.

Let it be
we will not
try to fathom
what comes
to meet us
in the stillness
but simply open
to the approach
of a mystery
we hardly dared
to dream.

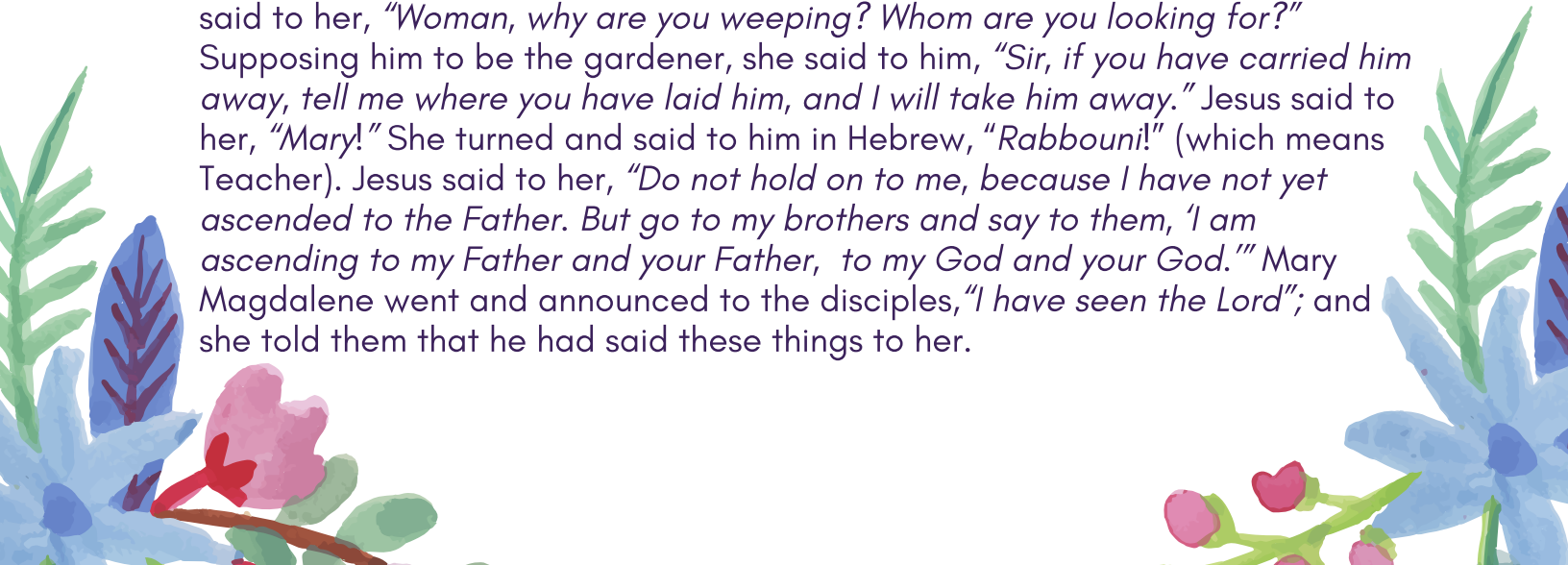


-EASTER SUNDAY-

READ

Scripture: John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.





REFLECT

While it was still dark.
While it was still night.
While she could not see.
While she thought death held sway.
While she grieved.
While she wept.
While it was still dark, **resurrection began.**
-Jan Richardson

"There are some things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried." - Oscar Romero.

I met Randy while serving four small rural NC churches. One summer night, I was driving home just as the sun was setting. As I passed the community cemetery, something caught my eye. Sitting in a fold-up, camping chair was sweet, old Randy. I was told Randy never spoke to anyone. Three months prior his wife passed away from a short battle with cancer. And there he was-- sitting in the middle of the cemetery, hunched over, by Betty's grave.

It wasn't a cognitive decision, my car kind of drove itself over there. I walked up to him saying, "Well, hey there Randy, I just wanted to say hello." "Oh okay," he responded hesitantly. With the sun gently painting a beautiful backdrop behind us, I wandered a bit to give him some space. But he called out to me, "I know she's not here, but I come sit out here anyway." I began to wander back. Then he just started talking, sharing all sorts of things. I learned he sat there every evening as the sun set. I asked what he missed most about Betty. He said he missed fishing with her, her company. "I know she's not here, but I come sit out here anyway."

Mary knew that Jesus was dead, but she returned to the tomb anyway. While it was still dark, before the sun began to rise, with her mind clouded by grief, she stumbled around without a flashlight, trusting the light of the moon to guide her path.

"Do you want to see something really beautiful?" Randy asked. "Yea, of course." He guided me to a bush on the edge of the graveyard. Pulling the branches to the side, he revealed a nest full of baby birds. He had checked on the eggs every night and, "I just watched them hatch yesterday." There are some things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried.

As the dark of night set in, as Randy let death sink in, he began to discover new life unfold.



I wonder how many eyes have cried during this season of Lent. We've been scattered but gathered by our grief in our own homes for a few weeks now. We've spent the past two days sitting in our grief, practicing lament.

And now, in the midst of our grief and interrupting that which is growing normal, Easter arrives. But it's not the Easter we may have grown accustomed to. Not the Easter Madeleine L'Engle describes as, "almost too brilliant for me to contemplate; it is like looking directly into the sun. I am burned and blinded by life." Not an Easter full of loud songs and joyous alleluias, with hundreds of bright flowers, butterflies, and Easter eggs crowding our churches.

But this Easter seems illuminated by the light of the moon, an Easter that emerges while it is still dark. An Easter that is perhaps more genuine because of its rawness, more sustaining because of its authenticity, maybe more graceful because of its vulnerability, and more hopeful because of its honesty.

It's not the Easter I expected. But, I need a different kind of Easter this year- one that brings a hope that will sustain me in the days ahead, when injustice arises, confusion continues, and grief grows. I need an Easter hope...

That breaks through like candlelight dancing with the shadows
That comes from love transcending death
That breathes new life when we least expect it
That meets me in my fear
That calls my name when my face floods with tears
That invites us to see beauty and mystery
That looks like a community committed to staying home
That cares like our compassionate nurses
That persists like teachers and our essential workers
That resists like a weed growing in the sidewalk crack
That births mercy and justice
That abides in the midst of anxiety and uncertainty
That grows like a peace lily in the shade
That echoes like a song sung in an empty church

A hope that begins in the dark.

Have a hopeful Easter!

-Rev. Sarah Belles

CHRIST IS RISEN!

