



Lenten Guide:
Journey to
Justice

*A Lenten Guide for Lectionary Year B
from the North Carolina Council of Churches*

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Ash Wednesday—2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10

We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Grounded as I am in the northern hemisphere, during the six weeks of Lent I get to watch winter turn to spring. Ash Wednesday generally falls on one of the bleakest days of the waning winter and even if the sun shines, it will be cold. Wrapping up my understanding of repentance and reconciliation with the seasons of the year calls attention to the truth that all our understandings and misunderstandings develop within a context. Even if my friends in Cape Town, South Africa, or Fremantle, Australia, understand my Lenten analogy, it's not the one they use. For them, exactly the opposite is happening—summer is giving way to fall and Easter will come at a time that feels like my October. They have come up with a different way to narrate the move from sin to grace and death to life; when I hear their reasoning, it will enhance my own.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he tells us a truth for both hemispheres: "now is the acceptable time; . . . now is the day of salvation!" Even as we enter into this season of austerity, we know the end game is resurrection—the Alleluias will return to our refrains, the paraments will be cleaned, the stripped altar will be dressed again, bread and wine will appear upon it and we will shout together, "The Lord is risen; he is risen indeed." Paul is telling us, all of this has already happened. We can live as though we will never be poor; we can live as though we won't die.

That's not as radical as it sounds. To live as though we will never be poor is to be willing to share, to have enough and then make sure those around us also have enough. When we listen to the poor, those of us who are not so poor and oh so rich can learn a lot about wealth. What we learn from the poor can enhance our understandings about wealth.

To live as though we will never die is to know we will die and no longer be afraid. A quick survey of our fears generally leads back to death. We add locks to the doors and guns to the bedside table to convince ourselves we're safe and we use everything from creams to surgery to convince ourselves we're not getting older. Hearing from those who know something about death can enhance our understandings about life.

Paul understands there is more to know than we have learned from our own experiences. His experience informs him that the world's definitions of oppression, imprisonment, obscurity, and even death, are not the definitions God employs. For the next 40 days we have the chance to see winter give way to spring (apologies to the southern hemisphere readers), poverty give way to wealth, and death give way to life. If we watch carefully we might enhance our understanding of ourselves.

~ Jennifer Copeland
Executive Director

First Sunday in Lent—Genesis 9:8–17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

God is reminded by the rainbow not to flood the world again. “Never again,” says God (Genesis 9:11). Never again.

The story is not always told that way. Sometimes the rainbow is described as a reminder for living creatures of God’s covenant. A beautiful reminder which may bring comfort and hope. But God tells it differently. “When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh,” says God (Genesis 9:14–15).

God’s commitment to remembering covenant promise, indeed to being reminded of covenant promise, provides a powerful, if startling, model of humility. The Psalm for this week heralds the Lord who leads the humble in what is right and who teaches the humble the Lord’s way (Psalm 25:9). “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths,” prays the Psalmist. Those who gather to worship as a covenant people might ask: how do we follow God as a people committed to remembering our covenant promises? What are the promises we have made? How do we remember them?

During Lent, those who follow Jesus into the wilderness have the opportunity to confront temptations that so often lead to breaking covenant. In the wilderness Jesus faces temptations rooted in fear about hunger and safety and power: and Jesus refuses to be moved by these temptations. During Lent, the forty days of flood and the forty days of wilderness, covenant and steadfastness, waters of destruction and waters of baptism, are

bound together by the one who proclaims, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

So many of our communities—our families, congregations, neighborhoods, and cities—so much of our world, really, bear the cracks of broken covenant. Yet, bound up in the baptism of our Lord, we are strengthened to stand against the temptations that chip away at our covenant promises to one another, and to Jesus who redeems us. With what sign shall we remember to turn away from destruction, to join God in promising, “never again?”

The Psalmist promises, “All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant promise and his decrees” (Psalm 25:10). This is the good news: in Jesus we are redeemed so that we may turn from covenant breaking to covenant keeping. In our coming and our going, in our being and our doing, as we rest and as we resist, so may it be.

~ **Mary Elizabeth Hanchey**
Program Associate for Legislative Advocacy
And Interfaith Outreach

Second Sunday in Lent—Psalm 22:23-31

You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

I am what is known kindly as an “older mom.” I gave birth to my first son at thirty-seven; my second, two weeks before my fortieth birthday. While I am still in the life phase of carpooling and sleepovers and forgotten school lunches, most of my high school friends are welcoming first, second, and even third grandchildren. Yet, we still have much in common: I worry about my kids a good deal, and my friends have begun to worry about their grandchildren a good deal. And as my boys shoot skyward and my gray hairs accumulate, I—never a slouch in the worrying department—have even begun to worry about my own, yet to-be-born grandchildren. What will their future hold? I wonder. We wonder, collectively, of all our beloved children.

Psalm 22 is helpfully full of predictions for posterity and future generations and “people yet unborn.” But unlike the parents and grandparents I know, unlike myself, the Psalmist doesn’t seem a bit worried about their future. In fact, he seems downright optimistic—by way of jubilation and awe. The Psalmist prophesies that the Lord shall hear the cries of the afflicted, and not turn away; that the poor shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord will deliver deliverance itself. Because the Lord has dominion over . . . well, *everything*.

Of course, these favorable predictions come with one small catch: God’s people—including their offspring—are instructed that they must praise the Lord; must stand in awe of the Lord; must turn to, and bow down before, and worship the Lord.

They must *live for* the Lord.

These are troubling, disturbing times—an ancient lament that I’m sure must have rung throughout the City of David as of now. Yet unlike the folks in the Psalmist’s day, we inhabitants of the twenty-first century face the unprecedented threats of global nuclear destruction and full-scale environmental catastrophe. Makes sense, doesn’t it, that we would worry about the future of our children and grandchildren, of the planet itself? And given these conditions, it’s easy for us to let fear and anxiety take hold of us, of our very center. We’re quick to form our opinions, take sides, dig in our heels, lash out at strangers—and often our own friends and family—for not holding these same opinions. To think that if others don’t believe as we do, then they must be corrected, or ridiculed, or shunned, or hated. And when I saw “we,” I mean *Christians*.

Besides being an older mom—and maybe because of it—I love Lent. I am a Lent geek. Give me Ash Wednesday over Fat Tuesday anytime. Because I know when Ash Wednesday ushers in the Lenten season, I have a chance, even if just a small one, to do things a bit differently. To slow down. To reflect. To question my own opinions and fearful prophecies and even my faith itself. To listen to the words of a Psalmist that tell me I, too, have a chance to experience jubilation and awe—if only I *will* listen.

If only I’ll choose to live for the Divine.

What would it be like to live fully for the Divine? To live into the words of an ancient Psalm, and an ancient prophecy of hope and incomprehensible joy, rather than into our own worries, and fears, and prejudices?

My great hope is that with the coming of this Lenten season, we might all find the time to set aside our worry, our fear, to reflect on what living for God actually means for us. What that might actually look like. And to find the grace and wisdom, and the courage, to act accordingly.

Prayer: Divine Creator, Parent of us all—in this Lenten season may your presence be close to us—freeing us from our fears, and guiding us always to live in the way that is pleasing in Your sight. Amen.

~ Karen Richardson Dunn
Regional Coordinator, Partners in Health and Wholeness

Third Sunday in Lent—Exodus 20:1–17

Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

John 2:13–22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Talking about money makes some people uncomfortable. I am learning this more and more as I get older and have to deal with financial experiences: buying a house, planning for retirement and healthcare, etc. The way we talk about money, and, more importantly, the way we spend our money, speaks to our values. Whether we like it or not, faith and money are connected. Two of today's texts also speak about money, specifically about our economic priorities. The Gospel reading offers a negative example of what not to do with money in the temple, and several of the Ten Commandments address economics and the ways that we should or should not acquire "things."

One place where we often fail to discuss money effectively is the church. Stewardship Sunday can be awkward; pastors don't want to seem like they are asking for money all the time, and church budgets are only topics for finance committee meetings (and who wants to be on the finance committee?). However, what would Jesus say if he saw how our churches are spending their money? What would he think about our capital campaigns, building renovations, and new facilities? Would he be horrified or pleased with how we pay our child care attendants, janitors, and groundskeepers who keep our churches running? Visiting our churches, would he criticize our economic priorities, marketing campaigns, and budgets the way that he scrutinized the economic priorities of the temple of his time?

I don't have the answers to these questions, but these types of questions first emerged for me in a meeting with the Latino Community Credit Union. I was there to discuss ways to reach out to the immigrant community, but as I learned about credit unions (like I said, I am in the learning process about money), I began to realize that our banking choices reflect our values and beliefs. I want to use my money to invest in my community rather than in an institution that finances things that aren't in accordance with my values, such as private prisons and industries that ignore environmental concerns. I began to wonder about the local church—have churches thought about where they invest their money? Often, we get so caught up in whether we have enough money and how we spend that money (which is important) that we don't think about the effects of other economic decisions.

Lent is a season to prepare ourselves for new life and beginnings. It is a season of giving up and taking up. We give up things that are important to us in order to refocus our lives on God. For many people this might be giving up a "thing" in your life: coffee, chocolate, or even your cell phone. However, there are many other traditions in Lent besides fasting or giving something up. Lent is a time to center on God, to reinvigorate one's prayer or meditation life. This Lenten season I encourage you to reflect on how the choices that you make, especially economic choices, embody your values and principles. I pray that we can

all use this as a time to grow closer to God and simplify our lives amidst the very complicated world that we live in.

Prayer: Enable this church to do your will. Make it vulnerable that it may walk with others in humility. Make it outward looking that it may care deeply for our world. Make it a community that embraces social responsibility. Make it compassionate that it may reveal your Spirit. Make your church whole that it may live in simplicity. Enable this church to do your will. Amen.

(from the Council's lectionary on "Tax Justice")

~ Jennie Belle
Director, Immigration and Farmworkers

Fourth Sunday in Lent—Ephesians 2:1–10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

The fourth Sunday of Lent brings us to the celebration of our right to be called children of God as the source of all our happiness. This comes to us as a blessing in the very moments that our faithfulness is being tested.

As we move through some of the darkest internal conflicts our country has seen in my lifetime, I have been reading *Strength to Love*, a collection of sermons by The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. which explains his convictions in terms of the conditions and problems of society. This passage from one of King's sermons speaks strongly to the verses from Ephesians:

"One of the great tragedies of life is that men (sic) seldom bridge the gulf between practice and profession, between doing and saying. A persistent schizophrenia leaves so many of us tragically divided against ourselves. On the one hand, we proudly profess certain sublime and noble principles, but on the other hand, we sadly practice the very antithesis of these principles . . . We proclaim our devotion to democracy, but we sadly practice the very opposite of the democratic creed. We talk passionately about peace, and at the same time we assiduously prepare for war. We make our fervent pleas for the high road of justice, and then we tread unflinchingly the low road of injustice. This strange dichotomy, this agonizing gulf between the ought and the is, represents the tragic theme of man's (sic) earthly pilgrimage."

The truth in this writing breaks my heart, and I am acutely aware of all the externalities attempting to fill in the cracks with hatred and fear; but the scripture speaks deeper, reminding me of the grace in faith. Jesus has shown us that pain and suffering is in sharp

contrast with trusting in God's love. We are not limited by the times of our lives, but instead empowered to embrace eternity through the practices of compassion and goodwill. To again quote King: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Prayer: May the Sunday of Joy remind our faithfulness fills dark spaces with light. Let us reflect on the special signs of joy permitted in the middle of Lent, intended to encourage us to lift up our beliefs in a radically peaceful set of principles and stay on our faithful course through the season of penance. Amen.

~ Susannah Tuttle
Director, NC Interfaith Power and Light

Fifth Sunday in Lent—John 12:20–33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The Greeks had a simple yet audacious request: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (v. 21). This request comes from a place of need, of wanting connection, of needing reassurance. The Greeks wanted to encounter Jesus. It seems that they were tired of hearing about this radical, controversial person, and wanted to be in his presence.

I wish to see Jesus too. When the day-to-day of this world chips away at my ability to focus on God, it seems easier to go search for Jesus wherever he is rather than finding him in my own life. When I wish to see Jesus, I wish to see the Hope and kin-dom work that can only be of Christ, holy and sanctified, void of human manipulation or capitalistic gain. I wish to see Jesus often, actually.

It is a bold demand to ask to see Jesus. The Greeks hoped to see Jesus face to face but our request comes from a need of his presence, nothing less. However, seeing Jesus can entail looking inward at the most painful seasons of our lives and society—times that require healing, redemption, and resurrection. It can mean seeing Jesus not only in God’s presence across the globe, but also in our own life and daily experience.

Perhaps the Greeks had the expectation that if they saw Jesus they would gain understanding and feel whole after the experience. Yet, Jesus’ response to their request, and sometimes our requests, was frightening and demanding.

Jesus responds to the Greeks' request with grim, even macabre imagery. The Greeks' request, full of encounter, promise, connection is met with death. Jesus talks about dying to one's self by using the imagery of a seed. We understand that in order for a seed to blossom, it must first die, or stop being a seed. Then he says, "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (v. 25). We wish to see Jesus in order to gain more, not to experience loss. This is a difficult response for us to hear.

Yet, from this passage, we learn that Jesus would never ask of us what he would not also do. The passage leads into Jesus predicting his submission to death. Even now, knowing the full story of death and resurrection, I can still read this passage and panic. I have to die to myself in order to live?

Lent reminds us that death is not the most powerful part of our experience because death leads to new life, new ways of living, and new understandings. We learn in this passage that through Christ we have daily-resurrection. When we request Jesus, we can see that Jesus has already been with us and will stay with us as we journey.

Prayer: Great, Gracious, and Living God—
 Help us see your presence in our lives—
 Help us trust you and see your love in our day to day.
 We give thanks for your hope and the life that only you can bring.
 May we be renewed by your peace. Amen.

~ Jessica Stokes
 Regional Coordinator, Partners in Health and Wholeness

Palm Sunday—Psalm 31:9–16

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me. I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Palm Sunday is a day full of tension. The gospel readings for today present two very different pictures of Jesus. On the one hand we have Jesus entering the holy city of Jerusalem as a crowd grows and people clamor to see him. They’re shouting out: “Hosanna! Blessed is he! Hosanna!” They have rolled out the red carpet, so to speak, by placing cloaks and palm branches along the road as Jesus arrives. Jesus is a celebrity on this day.

On the other hand, we know that those shouts of praise will soon shift to screams of anger and hatred. Many who were blessing him will persecute him and lead the calls for his execution. I imagine things didn’t shift as quickly as they seem to in the gospel reading. There were certainly underlying hostilities, factions, and hatred just waiting for the right time to bubble up to the surface. There is a long, gradual build up to the acts of violence and persecution Jesus will soon experience.

Some believe Psalm 31 was originally composed by David when he was experiencing persecution under King Saul. Today, many of our own brothers, sisters, and friends find themselves in a similar position—on the receiving end of hostility and hatred. People of color continue to find themselves on the receiving end of hate crimes—which have greatly risen in number over the last couple of years—as well as brutality by law enforcement. Immigrants fleeing persecution and oppression in their native countries and seeking safety within our borders have been chased down and torn away from their communities to be deported. For the better part of the last decade elected officials in our own state have tried “every trick in the book” to keep gerrymandered maps in place to decrease the value of each vote in minority communities.

As a closing prayer, read Psalm 31 again. As you do so hear it from the voice of someone in this country on the receiving end of hostility and hatred in the many forms it takes. Hear it from the voice of a persecuted Messiah who will soon be delivered from the hands of his enemies.

~ Andrew Hudgins
Program Associate for Operations

Maundy Thursday—John 13:1–17

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. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 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. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 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." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." 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? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Oh how full of meaning and wonder and pain and love this passage is . . .

We have come to the final days of the Lenten season, thinking about Jesus journey here on Earth. The passage grounds us in a specific time, "just before the Passover Festival," when the Jews celebrate the amazing deliverance and faithfulness God had shown by "passing over" the doors marked by lamb's blood during Israel's escape from Egypt. If they only knew the way God used "power" to bring them out of slavery was an illustration of what is about to happen to "The Lamb of God" (John 1:29).

The hour had come. We remember Jesus telling his mother Mary at the wedding at Cana that his "hour had not yet come" and saying it again to the Samaritan woman at the well, and he mentioned it to the disciples on more than one occasion. Now he knows it is time. In this moment, he loved to the end, choosing to be with the ones he loved the most, his disciples.

This meal shared with the disciples becomes the Eucharist we share today, a meal of thanksgiving and remembrance, shaping us into a cruciform people who can also place love at the forefront of our actions.

The meal is followed by an act that puts into motion the kind of love Jesus images we will enact in his name. By washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus offers a tangible example of the divine understanding that makes incarnation possible. One could imagine that in the communion of the Trinity, the “[Second Person] got up” from the throne, “took off his outer clothing” leaving royalty behind, “wrapped a towel around his waist,” wrapping himself with humanity and “poured water” as he was about to pour out his own life . . . and “began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.”

The love of a servant, the love of a savior. His human journey ending in the sacrifice that washes us from our sins. We can imagine the towel getting dirtier and dirtier as he went from one disciple to another, until finally coming to Peter who initially resisted the act of love until Jesus explained the need for inclusion. We have part with Jesus when we let him wash us from the wrongdoings of our walk in life.

As Jesus returns to his seat at the table and prepares to leave the room, he also prepares to return to his royal place in eternity—seated at the “right hand of God.” Because Jesus walked our human life, we will walk in eternity.

Eternity can begin for us even in this earthly life. Just as Jesus forgave, we must also forgive. Just as Jesus served, we must also serve. Just as Jesus loved, we must also love. We do so by standing in confidence of how God sees us, already forgiven, ready and willing to serve and love others.

Prayer: Lord, receive my dirty feet.

Help me to serve and love others to the end, like Jesus. Amen.

~ Sabrina Rosario
Intern, NC Interfaith Power and Light

Good Friday—Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame. But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; “Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—let him rescue the one in whom he delights!” Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shriveled; I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots. But you, O LORD, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me. I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

“From noon on, darkness came over the whole land—until three in the afternoon. 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?” (Matthew 27:45–46)

I imagine Jesus screaming out. The journey to Calvary has been long, exhausting, a constant battle between his will and his purpose. He had asked for this cup to be passed on, and here he was—fully immersed in the hate, sin and darkness of a world blinded by its desire of power. And on the ninth hour, he vocalizes a heart-breaking phrase: “Daddy, why did you leave me?” This is the voice of a child, looking into the silence for the voice that recently had said: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

This time there is nothing, only the cries of people screaming at him to show his power, come down from the cross. In his desperation, Jesus goes back to what he knows, the words of lament that helped his people through the storms of life. His words are no longer his own, he wails with the voices of his ancestors, of every single person who cried out before him. In that cry, Jesus remembers his story and holds on to the promise. The promise gives Jesus freedom to lament. We must not move too quickly from cross to resurrection, from trouble to joy, forgetting that in lament we name the truth about who we are before God.

Trouble is all around us. Our world is flooded by daily news that beats down our spirit, feels like a whip to our backs, like vinegar in our thirsty mouths. Some days we cry out: “How long, Lord?” (Habakkuk 1:2). Our tears have run dry, our voices are hoarse from speaking out, and our bodies are tired from so much running. We long for the day of the Lord, for the resurrection, for the morning. For rest . . .

When there is no rest, lament allows us to sit in the mess. When we have no more words, lament gives us a reason to speak. We lean on the words of all those who sat by the rivers and wept, while still managing to sing a new song in the land of their affliction (Psalm 137). On Good Friday, we lament, knowing God hears our cries and in God’s time the veil will be broken and we will be free to rejoice once again.

Prayer: Lord Almighty, who knew us from our mother’s womb, who carried your people through the wilderness, who taught them to sing in exile, and who knows our struggles, we ask you to remain with us as we lament the state of this world and as we remember your own lament in the cross. That this Good Friday be a reminder to recognize our pain and put it in your hands. Lead us to trust you enough to ask questions and enable us to remember that, just as with our ancestors, you will deliver us. As we await your resurrection, assure us that nothing can separate us from your love that is in Jesus Christ our Lord. In the name of the crucified and risen Lord we pray. Amen.

~ Yolanda M. Santiago-Correa
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Easter Sunday—Mark 16:1–8

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Every year as Easter approaches, I remember my childhood. My family always attended a sunrise service followed by traditional Sunday worship. I would wake up so excited to finally show off my new Easter Sunday dress at church, spend the day with family and friends, and, of course, snack on some goodies from the Easter Bunny.

What I remember most vividly, though, is the sunrise service. It always took place in a small garden right outside the church with a perfect view of the sun as it began to crest the horizon. I can still feel the growing excitement, building as the morning progressed. The culmination of my excitement came during traditional worship as everyone united to celebrate the resurrection of Christ.

Reflecting on these memories, I realize that over time this excitement has faded. As I have grown older and experienced sadness, discomfort, and fear, I find myself searching for reasons to celebrate. In times of turmoil, wreathed with fear and hatred, what is there to praise? During these times when I feel my faith wavering, I turn to the scripture.

In Mark 16:1–8, Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus’ tomb only to find that he is no longer there. When the angel tells her not to be afraid because Jesus has risen, this deepens her sadness and fear even more—who is this stranger, and why should she trust him? Later in John 20:11–18, Mary Magdalene’s despair quickly turns to joy when Jesus appears to her. Her uneasiness is comforted knowing that Christ will have eternal peace.

Mary Magdalene's emotions echo the feelings of many of us living in the present day. Another year passes and we pray things will get better, only to feel more hopeless. People keep repeating that it is time to move on, but why should we? Politically and socially, decisions are made that are rooted in anger and hatred. What is there to praise?

It is during these times when we experience life's most precious moments. Over the past couple months, I have collaborated with people, organizations, and communities that I never expected to encounter. Despite all the chaos, I recognize the love rooted in our communities can overpower the hate, and I am filled with hope again.

Prayer: Gracious God, let us remember in darkness there is light, in pain we find strength, and in heartache we find peace. Grant us the patience to follow your word and trust in your guidance. Bless us with the courage to respond to hate with love. Amen.

**~ Lindsay Barth
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