



How much is enough? Scripture has a treasure trove of advice for defining enough and even more advice on how to make sure everyone has enough. And not merely enough to survive; rather, enough to thrive. To thrive we need enough food, nutritious food. To thrive we need enough space to live, safe, warm, and dry space. To thrive we need enough warm clothes and good shoes. To thrive we need enough clean air to breathe and clean water to drink. Access to a sound education and access to healthcare help round out the list.

During this season of Lent we hope you will consider how much is enough and how we can all work together to make sure everyone has enough. No doubt, there will always be some who have more than others. Still, our faith compels us to create safety nets for those who don't have enough—think Medicaid or SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Our faith implores us to enact legislation that allows those who don't have enough the means to acquire more—think living wage or affordable housing. These are not partisan political matters, but matters of faith lived out in everyday experiences of having enough. Join us in this Lenten journey toward God's abundance where everyone has enough.

**A LENTEN GUIDE FOR LECTIONARY YEAR B
FROM THE NORTH CAROLINA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**



Ash Wednesday: Isaiah 58:1-12

*Shout out, do not hold back!
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgements,
they delight to draw near to God.
‘Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?’
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast-day,
and oppress all your workers.
Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?*

*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?
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?
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 rearguard.
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,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.
Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.*

Most years, I am relieved when Ash Wednesday rolls around. As a society, we so rarely take time collectively to acknowledge that we are all, in one way or another, closer to our deaths today than we were yesterday. I usually find the chance to do this together uniquely moving.

This year, though, I do not need Ash Wednesday to be a collective reminder of our mortality. In some ways, the Covid-19 pandemic has made it difficult to feel like last year's Lenten observance ever really ended. We feel isolated, tired, powerless, grieved, always staring down the reality that we are but dust. The observance of Ash Wednesday seems gratuitous in days so marked by the shadow of death and the pains of isolation.

The prophet Isaiah changed my mind, though. In Isaiah 58, the prophet speaks on God's behalf to Israel, reminding them that they have forgotten the point of their fasting and religious observance. They reflect and acknowledge, pray and perform, and yet change nothing about their lives and their communities. "Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?" asks God. God's question to Israel is also a question to us. What is the point of our religious observance if it does not bring us to repent both of the things we have done and the things done on our behalf and move us to find solidarity with our neighbors?

Ash Wednesday is not just about being a little sadder than we usually are. Simply reflecting on our own frailty will not bring us closer to God. Rather, it's a reminder and an invitation to something. Isaiah reminds us that God is not interested in our sober performance of Lent for its own sake. "Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high," the prophet says. The point is that we would change our lives! Our Ash Wednesday and Lenten observance should move us,

towards God and towards each other. The call to us this Ash Wednesday and Lenten season is a call to humility, a call to remember what kind of creatures we are. We are all but dust and to dust we shall return.

To acknowledge this is to acknowledge that we are not God, over our own lives or our neighbors. Too often, though, this is what we humans do with power. We try to play God, determining who deserves food, healthcare, housing, voting rights, and the list could go on. But if Lent is to be a fast that is pleasing to God, bringing true repentance, then it begins with our Ash Wednesday acknowledgement that we are all dust. None of us deserve these things more than anyone else. Before our light can “break forth like the dawn,” out of Ash Wednesday, Lent, and season of Covid-19, then we must hear God’s words in Isaiah as if to us:

*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?
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?*

Andrew Whitworth
Duke Divinity School Intern
Summer of 2020 to Spring 2021

First Sunday in Lent: Psalm 25:1-10

*To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*

*Make me to know your ways, O LORD;
teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.*

*Be mindful of your mercy, O LORD, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O LORD!*

*Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.
All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.*

In the beginning of the year, the week the Biden administration took office and halted immigrant deportations for 100 days, I was present at a socially distanced gathering where José Chicas, an immigrant who has been living in sanctuary for 1,305 days, more than three and a half years, walked out of sanctuary, got into his car, and drove home with his family.

José entered sanctuary in June 2017 inside the School for Conversion in Durham, a house on the property of St. John's Missionary Baptist Church. In the 1980s, he had fled El Salvador during a civil war and came to the U.S. to seek asylum. Since then, he has been an integral part of the local community. It was only poor legal advice that caused José to skip his hearing and end up with a deportation order. From then, he regularly checked in with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), was given a social security number, work permit, and driver's license. 30 years later, the spring of 2017 when so much changed for our immigrant neighbors, ICE informed José that he needed to return to his home country.

More than 3 and half years later in sanctuary, José was finally able to leave thanks to the 100 day halt on deportations. The most amazing part of this day was when José stood next to Rosa Ortiz Cruz, a woman who had lived in sanctuary from April 2018 until October 2020, finally able to leave when her deportation order was dismissed. José and Rosa stood next to each other and were able to talk in person for the first time. What a surreal moment.

As it is written in this Psalm, this prayer for guidance and deliverance, we must wholeheartedly trust in God, for God will guide us to our salvation. But is it enough to read this prayer, to say these words and expect change? Will it be enough to give ourselves to God, without living God's word? It will only be enough when we can truly live by the words we pray and seek out positive change.

As I reflect on this day and think about the Psalm passage and our theme for this Lenten season, the ability for José to leave sanctuary may seem like enough, but it is not. It will be enough when José is granted a work permit, it will be enough when others who are living in sanctuary are able to leave, it will be enough when we see positive comprehensive immigration reform that allows immigrants, like José, a pathway to citizenship.

So, how do we get there? We get there when we have finally had enough and are willing to go above and beyond to advocate alongside our neighbors to accomplish positive change.

Prayer:

Lord, give us the strength to acknowledge when we have had enough. Grant us the courage we need to live out your word each and every day and allow us to come together by your teachings and follow in your footsteps. Amen

Rachel Baker
Communications Director

Second Sunday in Lent:

*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.*

Amanda Gorman in her inauguration poem “The Hill We Climb” begins with the lines:

*When day comes we ask ourselves
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry,
a sea we must wade.
We braved the belly of the beast,*

These words struck me because they describe what I am feeling: a sense of exhaustion and frustration in this time of Covid. The poem feels timely for the collective moment we are living, but also for the season of Lent. We are in a time of multiple conflicting emotions and as we gaze on the liturgical calendar we find ourselves in a time of reflection and preparation.

We have hope that this dark period is coming to an end as the vaccine rollout continues, but there is still much to reckon with about this past year. I wonder if Jesus, fasting and praying in the wilderness, would relate to Amanda's words the same way we do. When the spirit sent Jesus into the wilderness for those 40 days and 40 nights, it was a time of trial for him and also a time of self-reflection.

Last Lent, my friend Damien preached at my church that our experience of Covid could be compared to Jesus' time in the desert. I could certainly relate to that message a year ago, but now almost a year later his words resonate even deeper. Our lives during Covid have been full of struggles and hard questions. Many of us have been separated from our families and friends. We have been challenged to rethink the way we worship, stay in touch, and work.

For me, this has also been a time of self-reflection. I have learned how to be resilient in times of crises, but I have also learned about my personal limitations and the importance of rest. Our time in the desert is coming to a close, but we cannot walk out of the desert without reflecting on what we have learned.

In the words of Amanda Gorman:

*When day comes, we step out of the shade
afire and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.*

Elizabeth Brewington
Overdose Response Program Coordinator

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. For 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.

In the spirit of our 2021 NC Council of Churches Lenten Theme: Enough for All, let focus on the fourth commandment as a particularly grounding force amongst the Ten Commandments.

To begin this commandment with “Remember” is intentionally profound – as if God knew that we would forget to honor the Sabbath. This rule of God’s law gives additional purpose and reverence during a particularly difficult season of sacrifice and lament as we continue to experience devastating loss and challenges during the Coronavirus pandemic.

On this Third Sunday, the almost half-way mark to Easter we must ask ourselves “have we forgotten to keep the Sabbath Holy?” As a technological example: have we become so consumed with smartphones, Facebook, Twitter, and Zoom that we’ve forgotten to make space for what it means to be unplugged from our earthly world in order to have “ears to hear” God, even for a moment?

Each Ash Wednesday through Easter we honor the 40-day spiritual test of temptation that Jesus experienced while fasting in the wilderness, while the actual number of days between the beginning and end of our Lent practice is 46 days including Sundays. Each of these Sundays provide enough sacred opportunities to establish space and time to “be still and know” God.

The fourth Commandment of “Remembering the Sabbath” calls us to manifest a way of life so that ultimately we might not be wrapped up in ourselves. Our knowing that divine reality exists gives us permission to be humble, gentle, and kind. Just when we think there is not enough time to heal the pain and wounds of our neighbors, we find that when we rest our own hearts, minds, and bodies, we are able to harness increasingly powerful energies in compassion and justice ministries.

Prayer

Dear God, as you restore our souls and provide our renewed energies may we commit to providing an equitable distribution of space, time, and resources needed for ALL to be able to rest, not just the affluent and privileged. We pray all God’s children are able to rest in peace, now and always, as you have reminded us to keep Sabbath holy in the beloved community. Amen.

Susannah Tuttle

Director, NC Interfaith Power & Light

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 towards 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.

As we navigate life in a pandemic, we are taxed. We have found ways to fill up our lives virtually. In our daily pursuit of meeting what we think we need, and navigating all that beckons our attention, we traipse through inevitable exhaustion. Despite our best efforts to accomplish, consume, produce, create, and utilize – we rarely become fulfilled.

Ephesians 2:1-10 speaks to this starkly. We read in this passage about what it means to be resurrected from death to life. The words strongly note the before and after effect of being made alive again. How many of us feel fully alive?

In our hoarding of resources, time, energy, and compassion – it is ironic that we are still searching, consuming, and depleting. We already have so much, but life still feels lacking. We read: “You were dead” (2:1); “following the course of this world” (2:2); “following the desires of flesh and senses” (2:3). We are numb, even unaware, of what life could be. Ephesians tells us, “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” (2:5). Ephesians reminds us that there is a different way.

In the before and after of resurrection, we gain life. We shed what has immobilized our spirits – the worry, the “keeping up,” the scarcity-driven ways we hoard our energy and more. We eliminate what keeps us from God. When we live into the grace and mercy this passage speaks of, we are choosing life over death. We move from taking inventory of our securities and instead invite vulnerability, mindfulness, health, and less ego.

We do not have to keep choosing this hard route. We can choose a life of compassion for ourselves and others, alongside a God who offers us deep meaning in this life. Where we continue to learn daily about how God is working in this world, and join those sacred efforts that offer us incredible meaning and purpose.

We are invited to live into the grace and mercy of God. We can stop the endless pursuits of self-gratification and self-importance. There is more than enough of God's love. We no longer need to exhaust ourselves for what we think offers life. We can rest because God is offering all that we need.

Jessica Stokes

**Associate Director, Partners in Health and Wholeness
Mental Health Advocacy**

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 judgement 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.

There is “enough” for all in this world. God created this world and called it good. God’s desire for all to be fed, welcomed, and cared for is an overwhelming message of the Gospel. However, there being enough is not the same as all having enough. Systems of oppression prevent many of God’s people from access to enough food, shelter, land, and healthcare. These systems of sin stand in the way of enough, and these systems are the exact structures that Jesus’ ministry sought to tear down. The ministry of Jesus led him to the cross, to execution by the state, because the ministry of Jesus dared to proclaim “enough for all.” We must contemplate this as Christians. Today’s passage, which holds the highest concentration of statements regarding Jesus’ death in all of John’s gospel, provides us the opportunity to do just that.

When preaching the ordination service of his friend and student Chris Hedges, the Rev. Dr. James Cone said: “When Jesus calls you, he bids you come and die . . . Jesus’ way is the way of the cross.” He continues by noting that a vocation in ministry is a dangerous calling because the work of the Gospel includes work that “cuts deep and makes people mad.”

Speaking truth to power is not an easy task. When we speak truth to power, we upset the same systems of oppression Jesus worked to upend. In his sermon, Cone reminds the followers of Jesus that systems of sin will offer consequences to our truth-telling. When we follow Jesus, when we proclaim and live his message of enough for all, we walk toward the cross and crucifixion.

And yet there is hope. In this season of Lent, it is important to think intentionally about the ways crucifixion is still enacted – the ways systems of power still stand in opposition to the truth of “enough for all.” It is important to gather the courage to do the hard and courageous work of the Gospel – the work Cone reminds us of and Jesus invites us into. It is also important to remember the full arc of the story, and imagine the ways our prophetic witness might live into the narrative of resurrection that declares the radical and salvific love of God more powerful than the hatred of oppression.

Prayer

God of Justice and Compassion, grant us the courage to prophetically speak truth to power and walk with you toward the cross. Grant us the courage to do the hard work of our faith – to love deeply and fully and radically. Grant us strength and wisdom for the journey. Grant us community that we may do this work together. Amen.

Sarah Ogletree
Program Coordinator, NC Interfaith Power & Light

Palm Sunday: 118:1-2

*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
His steadfast love endures forever.*

Give thanks because there has been enough for all in the past, give thanks because there is enough for all right now, give thanks because there will be enough for all in the future. Give thanks because, you who are made in the image of God, you are enough. Why? Because God's steadfast love endures forever.

Psalms 118 is one of a collection (Psalms 113-118). It connects to Psalm 136 and all these psalms together are prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Why would we be talking about praise and thanksgiving right now in the middle of a pandemic? For this time and space, Psalm 118 seems strangely fitting even in the middle of a pandemic that for all of us, and our children, and our children's children, is/will be a defining moment in history in every corner of the globe. It is fitting because it shares and reminds us that God loves all of creation with a steadfast love. These Psalms stand in defiance of hardship and grief reminding us that God's love is steadfast and endures forever. It's one thing to talk about the span of historical events or the universal aspects of human experience, but it is so very tangibly real to be living in the middle of this moment; a time when every person is sharing in the collective grief, uncertainty, change, loss, and pause that the pandemic has inescapably brought into daily life.

How many devotionals, sermons, words of wisdom, words of inspiration and exhortation have we read and heard and have recounted in our own heads like mantras about the God who saves, redeems, restores, and provides over and over? Every woman who is in the middle of feeling like there is not enough time, not enough brain space, not enough help, not enough of her. Every child who is saying enough of virtual learning, not enough outdoor time, not enough smiles with people my size, not enough childhood exuberance, not enough love. Every worker who has lost a means to provide for daily needs. Every family who has missed birthdays, weddings, dinners and simple occasions to be together. Every person who has lost someone without even the rituals that we typically use to say goodbye. It doesn't seem like there is enough.

I think Psalm 118 reminds us that there IS enough space for our grief and our loss and our despair because God's steadfast love endures in the smiles behind the masks, in the sunshine of our days, in the kind words that we share with each other, in the medical professionals who video call family so they could say goodbye to their loved ones, in the neighbors who are taking care of each other, in the socially distanced rituals of spiritual practices, and in the God who was and is and is to come. So while it is sometimes harder to hope right now, there is enough love to hold it all.

Nicole Johnson

**Associate Director, Partners in Health & Wholeness
Denominational Support**

Maundy Thursday: John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

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."

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Maundy Thursday, the day we remember Jesus gathering with the disciples in the city of Jerusalem. Even on this last night, he continued teaching them by washing their feet and sharing a meal. The meal is today repeated in Christian communities around the world, going by names like The Lord's Supper, Communion, the Eucharist. The meal is a constant reminder of God's love for us and Jesus' commandment to us that we ought to "love one another."

This day that marks the beginning of the Triduum, the culmination of Lent, calls us to reflection, repentance and renewal. I am struck by how these few verses of scripture

contain such a multitude of messages and how any one message will stand out for me depending upon the times in which we are living or what is happening in my life at the moment.

This year as I pondered these verses, I was struck by the conflict between the words of Jesus and the world I see swirling around me. Jesus' expectation of us in these verses is clear: *"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."* By removing his outer robe, tying on a towel around his waist and washing the feet of his disciples, Jesus displays total humility. Humility willingly demonstrated by one who is Lord of all creation.

How are we not convicted by the way we often use our privilege, our titles, our incomes, and other attributes we imagine make us more worthy than others? Jesus follows this example of humility with a paraphrase of the "Great Commandment," telling those who would be his followers to "love one another, just as I have loved you." How are we still finding ways to see each other as anything besides someone to love as Jesus loved?

In a year that has been collectively more difficult than any in most of our lifetimes, we have continued to see many of our neighbors treated as less than. This treatment has literally caused some of God's beloved to die, whether through the systemic racism that permeates our lives to the denial of life saving healthcare during a global health crisis. How are we still debating the equal worth of all people no matter our skin color, our gender, who we love, how we worship, or what our monetary worth is?

These verses in the Gospel of John are powerful--the example of Jesus' humility, the institution of the Eucharist, and the command to love. This is the way of life offered to us if we embrace the teachings of Jesus. The Council's Lenten theme, "Enough for All," asks each of us to consider what our lives and the lives of our neighbors can look like when we only take enough for our needs and when we give enough to others to meet their needs. There is enough for all of us to live life abundantly. As we move from Maundy Thursday, through Good Friday, and into the hope of the resurrection, I pray that we say enough is enough when we see that our neighbors are not been given enough dignity as God's beloved, enough food as God's children, and enough love as our neighbors. Jesus has given us enough instructions in this one scene for us to figure out how to do it.

Christine Pernell
Director, Partners in Health & Wholeness

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 shrivelled;*

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 for ever!*

*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.*

Psalm 22 is pretty intense.

The psalmist doesn't hold back in describing his agony: he is scorned, despised, insulted. Attacked by ravening enemies, like mad dogs and bulls and lions in their ferocity. His heart is melted like wax, his very bones liquefied! Could there possibly be anyone else on earth whose suffering could reach such a fever-pitch of misery and lamentation?

Yes -- Jesus, for one. Centuries beyond the psalmist's begging, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" the question arises from Jesus' lips, as he hangs on a cross in first-century Palestine. Two centuries later, it continues to reverberate in the hearts of so many. Too many. Those who are scorned and despised because of the color of their skin. Those who are cruelly attacked because they love the "wrong" person. Who feel their hearts turned to wax, their very being disintegrating, as their loved one dies alone on a ventilator, and they know there will be no way to replace this loss, and no way to ever pay the medical bills.

Yet, despite the psalmist's graphic lament, lamentation is not the final word here -- for him, for us. Because we have the gift of faith, of trust. Of hope. Redemption. And it is remarkable that this is available to -- everyone. Not only the poor, who will be satisfied, or the rich, who will worship and feast, but to all the families of all the nations. There is enough of God's goodness for everyone.

I used to attend a church whose worship and ministry were focused on the homeless population of my city, yet open to everyone. The congregants were an even mix, of those who were gaunt and dressed in rags and reeking, and those clad in business attire, well-fed and prosperous and cologned. The suffering of some was visible and even shocking; the suffering of others was hidden, nearly unimaginable, until their voices rose up to name it aloud. Yet together in our singing, and our prayers, in our holding hands, the joy was palpable -- because grace and mercy were ours. There was enough for all of us.

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Healthy Aging

Easter Sunday: Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

According to Peter, all the prophets told Israel what to look for—look for peace; look for justice; look for righteousness. The faithful watch and wait for hundreds of years, probably 500 years, maybe more. The faithful tell stories about the God who delivered them from slavery, the God who made them into the People of God. The faithful tell stories about rulers who abused their power bringing about destruction of the great nation, because no nation can be great that denies access to healthcare and allows people to go to bed hungry. The United States is certainly not the first powerful nation to make that mistake; only the most recent. The faithful come to understand that greatness is about more than being in charge and amassing wealth.

It takes them hundreds of years to learn to think this way and still everybody doesn't get it, even when Jesus embodies exactly what the prophets said to look for: peace, justice, righteousness. Jesus preaches and teaches, he feeds and heals. First people noticed him, then people listened to him, and then people started following him. Now we've got a bit of a movement on our hands, always a threat to the authorities and to those who have amassed wealth. The story picks up steam until, in Peter's words, "they put him to death by hanging him on a tree." Many who stand for peace, justice, and righteousness, die doing so.

But that's not the end of Peter's story. He goes on, "God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people, but to us who were chosen as witnesses." Resurrection appearances are belief confirmations for those who risked everything pursuing peace, justice, and righteousness. And for those who are ready to embrace that truth, Peter says: "Everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name." This is the linchpin Peter offers to Cornelius and by extension to us. There's little dispute that Jesus lived and died. There's little dispute he did some fine work and

provided good teaching. But to say we are forgiven by believing in him makes some very specific claims about Jesus and about us.

For starters we're claiming Jesus is God with us. He is the proof of God's love, God's willingness to say to God's creation, I love you enough to become one of you. I love you enough to be born (most vulnerable moment in any creature's life) and I love you enough to die (most frightening moment in any sentient being's life).

When we are vulnerable, we are selfish. When we are afraid, we are violent. Jesus shows us there is no need for these sins in the kin-dom of God, because he has been both vulnerable and afraid without becoming selfish and violent—without sinning. Think of all the tributaries that run into the rivers of greed and fear and how different our lives would be without them.

Peter is telling Cornelius, and us, there is another way to live. This forgiveness is far more profound than confessing a laundry list of personal misdoings. This is forgiveness that reorients our entire way of seeing the world. It can take an entire lifetime to learn to live this way, to live without greed and fear, but Peter says we are capable of doing it.

Cornelius is ready to start. May we all be so eager to start afresh living the commitment that defines our belief, "...everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins." And then there will be enough.

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