

# Lenten Devotional 2016

Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship

Community Mennonite Church

Shalom Mennonite Congregation



*Cover image Ash Wednesday © Jan Richardson*

## Ash Wednesday, February 10

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### Exodus 5:10-23

*<sup>10</sup> So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw. <sup>11</sup> Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.'" <sup>12</sup> So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw. <sup>13</sup> The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw." <sup>14</sup> And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, "Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?"*

*<sup>15</sup> Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, "Why do you treat your servants like this?" <sup>16</sup> No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people." <sup>17</sup> He said, "You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' <sup>18</sup> Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks." <sup>19</sup> The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, "You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks." <sup>20</sup> As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them. <sup>21</sup> They said to them, "The LORD look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."*

*<sup>22</sup> Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, "O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? <sup>23</sup> Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people."*

### Reflection on Exodus 5:10-23 Bricks Without Straw

Last fall I taught two College Writing courses to an unusual population of students, about half whose first language was something other than English, and several who had learning challenges such as dyslexia, ADHD, memory, or processing problems. A few were "typical students." I also had the eye-opening experience of being a minority in my classroom. Although I had strong training as a writer, I lacked formal training in ESL and in teaching students with disabilities. I felt unprepared. I asked

my church community to pray for my students, and to pray for me as their teacher.

I might have compared myself to the Israelites who were asked to make bricks without straw.

But then my perspective shifted, and I realized that I was not the one without the straw in this situation. It was my students, who, through misfortune, circumstances, genetics, advice, or drive and ambition, who were attempting to do something difficult—to pass a standard College Writing course required of all students when they had identifiable challenges that were well beyond the norm for the "typical" college student.

My students were not lazy, not by a long shot, although some of them had perhaps been labeled as such by teachers in the past. They were diligently making their bricks, handing in assignments on time and according to the specifications—except there were significant structural challenges!

As a teacher, I realized my task was not to be like the slave drivers, but like someone who knew where to find straw, and could helpfully share this information with my student brick-makers. I began to see myself as someone from a place of privilege because I had lived my whole life long with easy access to the straw—the language, the thinking structures, the strong educational background in my family, and heaps of books all over my house growing up (even stacked on the back of the toilet!)—while most of my students did not.

It can be an interesting exercise to meditate on an old bible story from the point of view of one character (or group of characters), then to take on a new perspective as one of the other characters.

I could also ask myself: When have I been like Pharaoh, judging others as lazy or at fault for not having the same privilege as that which I have come from? When have I been complicit in systems that demand of people without straw to build bricks as quickly and as well as those with straw?

Anna Maria Johnson  
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### Exodus 6:1-13

*6 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land."*

*<sup>2</sup> God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD. <sup>3</sup> I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name 'The LORD' I did not make myself known to them. <sup>4</sup> I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. <sup>5</sup> I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. <sup>6</sup> Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. <sup>7</sup> I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. <sup>8</sup> I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'" <sup>9</sup> Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.*

*<sup>10</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses, <sup>11</sup> "Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his land." <sup>12</sup> But Moses spoke to the LORD, "The Israelites have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, poor speaker that I am?" <sup>13</sup> Thus the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them orders regarding the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, charging them to free the Israelites from the land of Egypt.*

### A Lectio Divina Exercise

**Lectio:** Read today's scripture passage slowly a couple of times. You may want to read it out loud. Notice a word or phrase that you're attracted to and underline it.

**Meditatio:** Read the passage again. This time notice your emotional response. What feelings does this passage evoke from you?

**Oratio:** Read the passage through again as an invitation to prayer. What response to God do you wish to make? Take time to offer a prayer of response.

**Contemplatio:** Spend some time resting in God's presence allowing this word to minister to you.

## Friday, February 12

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### *Longing, Lenten*

The walk back, more loss. When I open the door  
it's over, so I set to piddling: tidy  
end tables, check the mail, draw a bath.  
The restless energy finally settles  
as I pass the mirror. I peer into it.  
My nose touches glass. Not much left,  
already effaced, not even a cross  
to speak of. A smudge. A few black soot stains  
like pin points on the forehead. The rest  
of the blessed ash has vanished to a grey  
amorphousness, to symbolize... not much.  
Except a wish for those hallowed moments  
to be followed by sustaining confidence.  
Except spirit, which means to shun its listless  
weight for yearning, awkward if not more earnest  
prayer and fasting in the clear face of dust.

--Brett Foster, from Jay Hopler and Kimberly  
Johnson, editors, *Before the Door of God; An  
Anthology of Devotional Poetry* (New Haven: Yale  
University Press, 2013).

## Saturday, February 13

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### Lenten Poem

Lent is a time to take time to let the power  
of our faith story take hold of us,  
a time to let the events get up  
and walk around in us,  
a time to intensify our living unto Christ,  
a time to hover over the thoughts of our hearts,  
a time to place our feet in the streets of  
Jerusalem or to walk along the sea and  
listen to his Word,  
a time to touch his robe  
and feel the healing surge through us,  
a time to ponder and a time to wonder....  
Lent is a time to allow  
a fresh new taste of God!  
Perhaps we're afraid to have time to think,  
for thoughts come unbidden.  
Perhaps we're afraid to face our future  
knowing our past.  
Give us courage, O God,  
to hear your Word  
and to read our living into it.  
Give us the trust to know we're forgiven  
and give us the faith  
to take up our lives and walk.

-Ann Weems

## Sunday, February 14

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### Passover Remembered (an excerpt)

Pack Nothing.  
Bring only your determination to serve  
and your willingness to be free.

Don't wait for the bread to rise.  
Take nourishment for the journey,  
but eat standing, be ready  
to move at a moment's notice.

Do not hesitate to leave  
your old ways behind—  
fear, silence, submission.

Only surrender to the need  
of the time— to love  
justice and walk humbly  
with your God.

Do not take time to explain to the neighbors.  
Tell only a few trusted friends and family members.

Then begin quickly,  
before you have time to sink back  
into the old slavery.

Alla Renée Bozarth, *Womanpriest: A Personal  
Odyssey* (revised edition 1988)

## Monday, February 15

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### A Blessing with Roots

Tug at this blessing  
and you will find  
it is a thing  
with roots.

This is a blessing  
that has gone deep  
into good soil,  
into the sacred dark,  
into the luminous hidden.

It has been months  
since the ground  
gathered the seed  
of this blessing  
into itself,  
years since the earth  
enfolded it.

Sometimes  
that's how long  
a blessing takes.

And the fact  
that this blessing  
should finally show  
its first fruits  
on the day  
you happened by—

well, perhaps we shall  
simply call the timing  
of this ripening  
a mystery  
and a sweet grace.

Take all you want  
of this blessing.  
Take every morsel  
that you need for  
the path ahead.  
Let its fruits fall  
into your hands;  
gather them into  
the basket of  
your arms.

Let this blessing  
be one place  
where you are willing  
to receive  
in unmeasured portions,  
to lay aside  
for a moment  
the way you ration  
your delights.

Let yourself accept  
its inexplicable plenitude;  
allow it to give itself  
to sustain you

not simply for yourself—  
though on this bright day  
I might be persuaded  
to think that would  
be enough—

but that you may  
gather its seeds  
into yourself  
like the ground  
where this blessing began

and wait  
with the patience  
of seasons  
and of years

to bear forth  
in the fullness of time  
a stunning harvest,  
a plenteous feast.

-Jan Richardson ([www.paintedprayerbook.com](http://www.paintedprayerbook.com))  
© Jan Richardson. [janrichardson.com](http://janrichardson.com).

**Tuesday, February 16**

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***The Slip***

The river takes the land, and leaves nothing.  
Where the great slip gave way in the bank  
and an acre disappeared, all human plans  
dissolve. An awful clarification occurs  
where a place was. Its memory breaks  
from what is known now, begins to drift.  
Where cattle grazed and trees stood, emptiness  
widens the air for birdflight, wind, and rain.  
As before the beginning, nothing is there.  
Human wrong is in the cause, human  
ruin in the effect—but no matter;  
all will be lost, no matter the reason.  
Nothing, having arrived, will stay.  
The earth, even, is like a flower, so soon  
passeth it away. And yet this nothing  
is the seed of all—the clear eye  
of Heaven, where all the worlds appear.  
Where the imperfect has departed, the perfect  
begins its struggle to return. The good gift  
begins again its descent. The maker moves  
in the unmade, stirring the water until  
it clouds, dark beneath the surface,  
stirring and darkening the soul until pain  
perceives new possibility. There is nothing  
to do but learn and wait, return to work  
on what remains. Seed will sprout in the scar.  
Though death is in the healing, it will heal.

--Wendell Berry, from *The Selected Poems of  
Wendell Berry*, by Wendell Berry. Washington, D.C.:  
Counterpoint, 1999.

## Wednesday, February 17

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### Luke 4:1-13

*4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, <sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"*

*<sup>5</sup> Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. <sup>7</sup> If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered him, "It is written,*

*'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"*

*<sup>9</sup> Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, <sup>10</sup> for it is written,*

*'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'*

*<sup>11</sup> and*

*'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"*

*<sup>12</sup> Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" <sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

### Reflection on Luke 4:1-13 Temptations

"For forty days he was tempted" (Luke 4:2).

Jesus is tempted—tempted by the devil, tempted by sin. Jesus is like us, even in our vulnerability to temptation. The wilderness weakens Jesus, exposing his desires to the allure of sin.

I usually don't think this about Jesus. I don't think of sins flashing across his mind. I don't think of him as being tempted by the same things that tempt us. I

don't think of him as having to resist sin, as if he could even entertain the possibility of sinning, as if that would be possible for God incarnate. Yet, for Luke's Gospel, from the beginning to the end Jesus is tempted—here in the wilderness, and there in Gethsemane, his "time of temptation" (Luke 22:40). From start to finish, he suffers temptation. Jesus is the tempted one.

And, according to the book of Hebrews, the temptation of Jesus is essential to gospel. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). The good news is that Jesus knows us, from the inside—he is just as human as we are, temptations and all, *tempted in every respect*.

Jesus is "truly human... like us in all things but sin" (Council of Chalcedon).<sup>i</sup>

"Temptation besets me as it beset him" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).<sup>ii</sup>

In the wilderness Jesus reveal the pulse at the heart of all our temptations. All of them have to do with grasping, the sin of overreach. "They are temptations to certain kinds of grasping."<sup>iii</sup> We are tempted to take what we want now, no matter the consequences. In the wilderness Jesus is offered good things. There is nothing wrong with wanting bread to satisfy hunger. There is nothing wrong with wanting a new kingdom on earth, the reign of God. These are good. Jesus longs for them. He wants them. He is hungry with desires. But he doesn't seize what he wants as soon as he feels the desire for it. He waits instead. He is patient with his longings.

In the wilderness Jesus is tempted by the sin of speed, the urge for immediacy. The temptations have everything to do with the impulse to grab what you want when you want it, without having to endure time, without having to undergo the discipline of patience, without having to wait. Jesus is tempted by the offer to escape from being human, as human as we are. To be human is to learn how to wait, to be where you are in time. To be human like Jesus means we grow into our weakness, our vulnerability to the passing of time.

During Lent we are invited to wait in the wilderness with our brother and savior, Jesus Christ, the tempted one. We are invited into the patience of Jesus, to wait with our hunger and longing, to make peace with them—to resist making deals with the devil to get what we want right now.

Instead Jesus shows us how to love, how to take time to love, to spend your life undergoing the discipline of love—to love without coercion, to love without possession, to love without grasping. Jesus falls in love with this world and us, and takes time to get to know creation from the inside. He undergoes time with us, the frustrations of learning patience.

In the wilderness he doesn't turn those stones into bread because he longs for a meal with his disciples, with his friends—that meal where he breaks the bread of his body for all of us to eat with him. He will suffer this world for the sake of that meal, for the joy of that fellowship that shared life with his beloved friends. “For the joy set before him he endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2).

Love is patient.

He waits because he loves.

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- i Chalcedonian Creed,  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.iv.i.iii.html>
  - ii Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall, Temptation* (SCM, 1959), 117.
  - iii Eugene Rogers, *After the Spirit* (Eerdmans, 2005), 164.

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### **Deuteronomy 26:1-11**

*26 When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, <sup>2</sup>you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. <sup>3</sup>You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." <sup>4</sup>When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, <sup>5</sup>you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. <sup>6</sup>When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, <sup>7</sup>we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. <sup>8</sup>The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; <sup>9</sup>and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>10</sup>So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. <sup>11</sup>Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.*

### **Three Mini-Reflections:**

1.  
Dios no nos trajo hasta aquí / God did not bring us here  
Para volver atrás / To return back  
Nos trajo aquí a poseer la tierra que nos dio / He brought us here to possess the land He gave us

Y aunque gigantes se encuentran allá / And although there are giants there  
Yo nunca temeré / I will never fear  
Nos trajo aquí a poseer la tierra que nos dio / He brought us here to possess the land He gave us

The first time I heard this song in my church in Chocó, on Colombia's pacific coast, it sent chills

down my spine. The words took on new meaning through the a capella voices of Afrocolombians, whose ancestors were enslaved and brought to a new land to extract gold from Chocó's mineral-rich soil. They took on new meaning in the context of a country that is living an over 50-year-old armed conflict whose roots include inequality and land distribution, where 4% of landowners own 70% of the land, and where about 6 million people have been internally displaced, many times because of the location of their land or because it holds natural resources wanted by multinational corporations. The story of the Israelites suffering oppression and yearning for land no longer seems a distant, Biblical reality - it is a story I encounter in my work here in Colombia with MCC.

2.

This passage in Deuteronomy is situated among a litany of commands that God was giving the people of Israel following their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It is a beautiful thing that among what seem to me so many complex and tedious commands, He also commands His people to remember - remember their suffering, remember His role as their liberator, and remember His work in their story. This call includes offering firstfruits. How are we remembering God's work in our lives and offering our firstfruits to Him?

3.

Colombia is currently experiencing a Lenten season of waiting: for peace accords to be signed between the government and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). Negotiations began in 2012 and have been attempted several times before, never resulting in success. This time things seem more promising, but even if they are signed, many uncertainties still remain about successful implementation of the agreements as well as what the impacts will be.

Please pray for the peace talks in Colombia, for the churches and their role in a post-conflict scenario that may bring more complications, and that millions of victims of the armed conflict will someday be able to rest in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Amy Eanes  
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### **Matthew 23:37-39**

<sup>37</sup> “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! <sup>38</sup> See, your house is left to you, desolate. <sup>39</sup> For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

### **Reflection on Matthew 23:37-39**

I don’t know about you, but I find the world to be a complex place. I like the idea of simple living, but living simply just isn’t so simple. A job that provides shelter, food and family needs, while also fulfilling my passions in life is difficult to come by. Then – perhaps too often – life becomes the drudgery of simply getting through the day, and real joy can be hard to find.

And the world itself – full of war, hatred, prejudice, where men and women strive for wealth, while others live from one day to the next; where people proclaim the superiority of their ideologies, nations and religions, and then seemingly deny it through arrogance, unfair judgment of others and the sanctioning of violence – saddens me as it must sadden God. I vote this way or that way, write some letters, join an interfaith group, but nothing seems to change.

Yet – even when I despair – I think that I am strong. Through my education, my better theology, my simple living, somehow, I do have answers, if only I persevere; or at least that is what I tell myself.

My image of God, powerful and just, encourages me to remain strong; because as God, He is on the side of the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized.

But, here in this passage, Jesus speaks of gathering the people of Jerusalem under the wings of a mother hen. We have an image of God as a mother hen, longing to give love and protection.

I know that I am not as strong as I pretend to be. And though God is just; on the side of the poor – just maybe, sometimes – I need to look to this image of the Mother Hen God and listen to Her call to gather under Her wings for warmth, comfort and rest.

Lord, Mother Hen, guide me into your wings for rest!

Mike Brislen  
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## Saturday, February 20

### **Philippians 3:17-20**

*<sup>17</sup> Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

#### **Reflection on Philippians 3:17-20**

"Their God is the belly..." I recently revisited the *Enneagram* paradigm for spirituality. The *Enneagram* draws on ancient streams of mystical wisdom—Pythagorean; Platonic; Christian; Sufi; Kabbalist—reframed within the parameters of modern (Jungian) psychology. It maps out nine personality types, clustered into three triads: "Head"; "Heart"; and "Gut" (or "Belly"). Each of us engages one of these three centers as our primary mode of relating to the world.

Think of the expressions "go with your gut"; or "follow your heart"; or "use your head!" Which are you most inclined to do? Or the archetypal *Wizard of Oz* characters the (Brainless) Scarecrow; the (Heartless) Tin Man; and the (Gutless) Cowardly Lion. Which are you most like? Aristotle spoke of three ways of viewing the world (and thus persuading others): through the lenses of *logos* (logic); *pathos* (emotions); or *ethos* (moral character). Which mode do you emphasize when making your case (or which kind of appeal do you find most persuasive)? Each personality-triad also correlates to a dominant emotion: head people are driven by fear; gut people by anger; and heart people by the need for affirmation. Which of these emotions most motivates you?

To further complicate matters, there are three primary instinctual orientations, towards: the *Self* (preserving inner peace and security); the *Sexual* (seeking one-on-one, relational intimacy); or the *Social* (gaining communal identity/group acceptance). Which of these matters most to your sense of well-being?

Paul has strong warnings (with tears) for those who make their Belly their "god": they are enemies of Christ's cross; their minds are set on "worldly" things; their end is destruction. I believe this is

equally true for those who make their Head or their Heart a god!

(My favored form of idolatry is worshipping the Head! I'm an Enneagram "Five": the Observer or Thinker. Like the Tin-Man, I need a heart-transplant, and like the Cowardly Lion, I need courage to face my anxieties about anyone/anything penetrating my walls of Self-Preservation!)

Paul's pastoral admonitions resonate with the Enneagram's psychological warnings about the "shadow" side of our dominant Way-of-Being-in-the-World (which has enabled us to survive, so we naturally cling to it as to life itself!) The Enneagram draws ominous arrows to where each personality-type heads under stress (disintegration, anyone?) It ain't a pretty picture. "Dying" to our self (number) will be key to experiencing life abundantly and serving others generously, especially in the second-half of our lives. The Enneagram also points in the direction each type needs to move to sustain health, find integration, and experience redemption (towards another "wing" or "ally" number than its own home-base).

But "how do we get there from here?!" Paul offers us one fruitful avenue. He says "observe" and "imitate" those who "live according to the example" we all have in Jesus. Is there someone you admire, who models something Jesus-y you need in your life? Imitate their practices, says Paul.

Jennifer and I have been reading a biography of my (step-grandfather) Orie Miller (who served simultaneously as the executive of both Mennonite Central Committee and Eastern Mennonite Missions for nearly 25 years!) Orie's personality and piety were quite different than mine (not to mention his generational context of the 1910s-1960s). But I would benefit from imitating any one of his following practices: 1) daily reading of both the Bible and the newspaper; 2) holding together service, peacemaking, and mission work as equally essential expressions of the church's witness; 3) sticking with the church through conflicted times, even when he disagreed with it; and 4) sustaining optimistic energy about the practical possibilities of the kingdom-coming, over a lifetime of faith.

Kent Davis Sensenig  
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## Sunday, February 21

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### Passover Remembered (an excerpt)

Set out in the dark.  
I will send fire to warm and encourage you.  
I will be with you in the fire  
and I will be with you in the cloud.

You will learn to eat new food  
and find refuge in new places.  
I will give you dreams in the desert  
to guide you safely home to that place  
you have not yet seen.

The stories you tell one another around your fires  
in the dark will make you strong and wise.

Outsiders will attack you,  
and some who follow you,  
and at times you will weary  
and turn on each other  
from fear and fatigue and  
blind forgetfulness.

You have been preparing for this for hundreds of  
years.  
I am sending you into the wilderness to make a way  
and to learn my ways more deeply.

Those who fight you will teach you.  
Those who fear you will strengthen you.  
Those who follow you may forget you.  
Only be faithful. This alone matters.

Alla Renée Bozarth, *Womanpriest: A Personal  
Odyssey* (revised edition 1988)

### Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

*15 After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." 4 But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." 5 He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

*7 Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

*12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.*

*17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."*

### Reflection from Genesis, by Walter Brueggemann (John Knox Press, 1982)

Abraham and Sarah were called out of their barrenness (11:30) by God's powerful word (12:1). Their pilgrimage of hope had begun on no other basis than the promise of Yahweh (12:1-4a). The promise of Yahweh stood over against the barrenness. But when we arrive at chapter 15, the barrenness persists. That barrenness (which the promise has not overcome) poses the issue for this chapter. The large question is that the promise does delay, even to the point of doubt. It is part of the destiny of our common faith that those who believe

the promise and hope against barrenness nevertheless must live with the barrenness. Why and how does one continue to trust solely in the promise when the evidence against the promise is all around?

The entire passage [Genesis 15:1-6] is one of sharp exchange in which Abraham stands face to face with God and seeks to refute the promise and resist the assurance. Clearly, the faith to which Abraham is called is not a peaceful, pious acceptance. It is a hard-fought and deeply argued conviction. Abraham will not be a passive recipient of the promise. He is prepared to hold his own. His freedom in the face of God is not unlike the freedom of the creation in Gen 1:1-2:4a. This Lord invites and permits but will not coerce. Abraham is forced to faith no more than the creation is forced to obedience.

...

How could it be that the multitude of stars is a promise of a son? We must not misunderstand the universe of discourse at work here. It is not an argument, but a revelation. This is a vision, a disclosure that surprises old reality. We are struggling, as was Abraham, with the emergence of a certitude that is based not on human reason but on a primal awareness that God is God. And that certitude is given in this dark moment to Abraham. He knows, and the knowing can only be credited to the work of God's brooding care. The same God who gives the promise is the one who makes it believable. Only the new awareness that God really is God provides ground for Abraham's safe future.

...

Abraham has repented. He has abandoned a reading of reality which is measured by what he can see and touch and manage. That new orientation is not a generalized notion that "everything will work out all right." He is not guilty of pious abdication. Rather, it is a quite specific response to a concrete promise from a known promise-maker. The faith of Abraham is certain on one point. There is a future to be given which will be new and not derived from the present barrenness. He believes that God can cause a break point between the exhausted present and the buoyant future. He believes in a genuine Genesis.

...

Faith responds to an already given grace. This faith is not simply an embrace of the goodness which meets us in the world, but a reception of the *goodness of God promised* in spite of the way the world is. The faith of Abraham is not in anything he sees in the

world, but in a word which will overcome the barrenness of the world. Faith is reliance on God's promise of overcoming the present for a new life.

## Tuesday, February 23

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### **Exodus 33:1-6**

*33 The LORD said to Moses, "Go, leave this place, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, and go to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.'"<sup>2</sup> I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>3</sup>Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."*

*<sup>4</sup>When the people heard these harsh words, they mourned, and no one put on ornaments. <sup>5</sup>For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, and I will decide what to do to you.'" <sup>6</sup>Therefore the Israelites stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.*

### **A Lectio Divina Exercise**

**Lectio:** Read today's scripture passage slowly a couple of times. You may want to read it out loud. Notice a word or phrase that you're attracted to and underline it.

**Meditatio:** Read the passage again. This time notice your emotional response. What feelings does this passage evoke from you?

**Oratio:** Read the passage through again as an invitation to prayer. What response to God do you wish to make? Take time to offer a prayer of response.

**Contemplatio:** Spend some time resting in God's presence allowing this word to minister to you.

### Argument with God

But why?, I ask again, But why?  
Not "fondly", as the saintly Milton  
might have done,  
but roughly, the ruck of life stuck  
ragged in my throat,  
my blood tempered by rising dust hills  
of discontent, injustices, ledgers never kept.  
So many of your own, the best,  
the very best  
just tossed away,  
scrapped,  
it seems,  
with all the care that might attend  
some sleazy news-rag's passage  
to the bin.  
If this be earnest  
for that ancient Sin  
that somehow crept  
unbidden  
into our bones, hanging around  
like some unwelcome guest,  
have we not more,  
even the worst of us,  
more, than over paid,  
simply in living?  
Not overpaid  
In having to grow old,  
each vestige of beauty  
slowly stripped away  
leaving ruined youth  
to shamle off at last  
in a clatter of bones?

Margaret Havill "Mandi" Reid, from "Song of the  
Wayward Wind."

### **Luke 13:22-31**

<sup>22</sup> Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. <sup>23</sup> Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?" He said to them, <sup>24</sup> "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. <sup>25</sup> When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then in reply he will say to you, 'I do not know where you come from.' <sup>26</sup> Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' <sup>27</sup> But he will say, 'I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!' <sup>28</sup> There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. <sup>29</sup> Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

<sup>31</sup> At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

### **Reflection on Luke 13:22-31**

#### **The Kingdom of God and the Narrow Door**

These weeks leading up to the Lenten Season happen to be when I am in Oregon visiting my 96 year old mother who is now in hospice and very fragile. With drenching rain creating vast ponds of water in the ryegrass fields and berry patches, the Willamette Valley settles into unrelenting greyness.

Oregon is making the national news these days by the odd "Bundy standoff" in Burns, a region of sage brush and cattle rangers east of the Cascade Mountains. Ammon Bundy and his militia occupy the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge as a form of protest against the Federal government. Bundy's messianic fervor stems from what he considers a message from God—never mind that this intrusion by outsiders does not convince the locals. They would like nothing better than to have their town and simple life returned to them.

This is the stuff of life—tentative, messy, even exhausting. As I reflect on the Luke 13 chapter, with its combination of parable, an account of Jesus as

teacher and miracle worker, of his conflict with the religious leaders, I am struck again by how scary a text is this passage. Repent or perish. It echoes my growing up memories of hell-fire and judgment sermons—of childhood terrors coming into the farm house, finding no one and wondering if I had missed the Rapture.

Jesus instructs us to try to enter the narrow door. What does that mean? "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because I tell you, you will try to enter and will not be able to" (v. 24, NIV). Jesus warns that the door will at some point be shut in the face of those who think they deserve entrance. Those who think they should be first, will in fact be last.

Lent calls us to a time of confession and self-searching. We attend to Jesus' message that the journey—the Way—of the Kingdom of God is hard. It is inscrutable. It requires something of us beyond relying on what we think of as right living. The text concludes with the vision of a grand Feast bringing together those from the East, the West, the North and the South. But we are stopped short by Jesus' harsh message. Some will be denied a place at the table. With humility and repentance may we open ourselves to the Spirit's direction of what is demanded of us today.

*Dear God,*

*We confess our self-righteousness, our sense of being good people, of working day to day in the Kingdom of God. Too often we have presumed to know what you expect of us. Forgive us and show us the way. Amen.*

Lee Snyder  
Community Mennonite Church

### **Luke 6:43-45**

<sup>43</sup> “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; <sup>44</sup> for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup> The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

### **A Reflection on Luke 6:43-45**

You’ve probably seen it. The Capitol One credit card commercial that ends with the punchline, “What’s in *your* wallet?” The producers clearly want you to believe that the credit card in your wallet makes all the difference in your life.

Jesus knew nothing about credit cards, Capitol One or otherwise. But Jesus has a far more urgent question to ask: “What’s in *your* heart?” Jesus knows that it is “the abundance of the heart,” whether “good” or “evil,” that gives birth both to the words “that the mouth speaks” and the tangible actions that a person “produces.” In short, Jesus knows that human life proceeds from the heart outwards. The heart can be the source of “good treasure” and “bear good fruit.” Or it can be the source of “evil treasure” and “bear bad fruit.” So it’s what’s in your *heart*, not your *wallet*, that makes all the difference in your life.

Luke, the Gospel Writer, knows this truth well. Throughout his Gospel the motif of “heart” plays a crucial role in depicting human life. For Luke the heart is the locus of human pondering, whether for good or evil. Mary ponders “in her heart” the events of Jesus’ birth (2:19) and childhood (2:51) and “treasures” these thoughts (2:19, 51). John the Baptist’s ministry will “turn the hearts of fathers to their children” (1:17). And Jewish people ponder “in their hearts” the significance of John’s birth (1:66) and his potential messiahship (3:15). Jesus’ disciples, by contrast, harbor competitive thoughts “of their hearts” (9:47, DJW), are “slow of heart to believe” (24:25), and “have doubts in [their] hearts” (24:38). And the scribes and Pharisees, for their

part, question Jesus maliciously “in their hearts” (5:22; cf. 5:21).

For Luke the heart is also the source of human actions. People make decisions “in their hearts” that result in actions either evil (12:45; DJW) or good (21:14; DJW). The primary scriptural imperative pointedly engages the heart: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . and your neighbor as yourself” (10:27; cf. Deut. 6:5), a heart-driven love that proves profoundly active in the real world (10:25-37). Jesus also calls people to nurture their hearts in crucial ways toward tangible outcomes: “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down by dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life” (21:34), but “hear the word [of God], hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance” (8:15).

As Luke demonstrates, the “abundance of the heart” grows out of the thoughts that we treasure, the love that we live out, and the word of God that we hold fast. But ultimately the “abundance of the heart” grows out of divine encounter. When the Emmaus disciples finally recognize the Risen Jesus at their table (24:31), they respond, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (24:32). Ultimately the Risen Jesus himself nurtures the hearts of his disciples into abundance with the fire of his presence.

Forget the wallet. It’s the heart that matters.

Dorothy Jean Weaver  
Community Mennonite Church

## Saturday, February 27

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### ***I Corinthians 10:1-13***

*10 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.*

*<sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup>Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." <sup>8</sup>We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup>We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. <sup>10</sup>And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup>So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup>No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*

### **A Reflection on I Corinthians 10:1-13 Our Biases, Plus an Encouragement**

"This has got to be the only place on the continent where the morning sun rises in the northwest!" I made this claim, quite in jest, standing just outside the home our son and his wife were building on a hillside in West Virginia. My brash claim soon became a family joke, as everyone who knew me remembered me as a son of the midwest where roads and property lines were mostly laid out according to the four points of the compass. But here, in the gently-rolling hills of WV, my bias about directions was being sharply challenged. It took a major stretch of mental energy to make allowances for this adjustment to reality. I had to admit that what seemed *north* to me was really *east* even if it didn't feel like that there on the hillside.

In Paul's letter to the new believers at Corinth, we can imagine that Paul is likely remembering his own

struggles to surrender his earlier bias against Jesus being the Messiah. Paul draws on history to emphasize the weakness of human frailties. He warns his readers to not repeat the mistakes of their ancestors who lived and failed with their biases.

For us today, "we are just as capable of messing it up as they were. Don't be so naive and self-confident. You're not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else. Forget about self-confidence; it's useless. Cultivate God-confidence." 1 Cor. 10:12,13 (*The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson)

Paul then pushes on with a clear word of encouragement to those who were facing difficulties and were tempted to think they were being bashed by greater forces than they could handle. With a confidence focused on God, they could count on God's help to see them through it.

This lesson from Paul's letter is for us today also.

Millard Osborne  
Community Mennonite Church

## Sunday, February 28

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### *Passover Remembered (an excerpt)*

Some of you will die in the desert,  
for the way is longer than anyone imagined.  
Some of you will give birth.

Some will join other tribes along the way,  
and some will simply stop and create  
new families in a welcoming oasis.

Some of you will be so changed  
by weathers and wanderings  
that even your closest friends  
will have to learn your features  
as though for the first time.  
Some of you will not change at all.

Some will be abandoned  
by your dearest loves  
and misunderstood by those  
who have known you since birth  
and feel abandoned by you.

Some will find new friendship  
in unlikely faces, and old friends  
as faithful and true as the pillar of God's flame.

Alla Renée Bozarth, *Womanpriest: A Personal  
Odyssey* (revised edition 1988)

## Monday, February 29

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### **Exodus 32:7-14**

<sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; <sup>8</sup> they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" <sup>9</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. <sup>10</sup> Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation."

<sup>11</sup> But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" <sup>14</sup> And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

### **A Reflection on Exodus 32:7-14**

#### **The Day God 'Thought Twice'**

"I am the Lord Your God . . . I change not!" so declared Jehovah in Malachi 3:6, in the context of noting that because God remained faithful to his covenant to the children of Israel, the descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed.

Does our immutable God change his mind? Two apparent instances – and there are likely others – jump out from the biblical record. The first: When the people of Nineveh responded to the reluctant prophet Jonah's preaching – "When God saw that they had put a stop to their evil ways, he abandoned his plan to destroy them and didn't carry it through" (Jonah 3:10). Even so, God first had to take drastic action – talk about your fish story – to get Jonah to go to Nineveh, and when the people repented, Jonah was displeased, even angry.

The second: When the Israelites grew tired of waiting for Moses to come down from Mt. Sinai and

decided to throw a wild party complete with golden calf. God's anger "burned against them" (Ex. 32:10) for their disobedience, telling Moses to leave his presence as he intended to destroy them all, adding: "I will make you, Moses, into a great nation instead of them."

But Moses entreated the Lord to spare the people, recalling God's leading his people out of bondage in Egypt "with great power and mighty miracles" and reminding him – as if a reminder was needed – "of your promise to your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. For you swore by your own self, 'I will multiply your posterity as the stars of heaven, and I will give them all of this land I have promised to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever'" (vs. 13).

And so, "The Lord changed his mind [relented (NIV)] and spared them" (vs.14), even though later he sent a plague upon the people because of their waywardness.

It seems apparent in both these cases that the Almighty's "change of mind" was a result of people turning from their errant ways. In this regard, some things never change, then or now.

I've found that the older I get, the more difficult it's become to change my mind. First off, I've always wrestled with change in and of itself – in being asked, or even forced, to change a way of doing something, to reorder a long-held belief or reverse my position on a societal issue, to adapt to the technology revolution. The old ways are the best ways – and especially the Bishop way – and so, I inquire, why mess with perfection?

God knows, long before we stop, look, listen and petition, what is best for us. Even in retirement and in gravitating into my 70's, my job is to seek first the Kingdom of God, which means adjusting or even getting rid of things, obstructions and attitudes that stand in the pathway, even if I don't always understand God's ways or timing. The motivation should not be out of fear of punishment but rather arise from a desire for a closer walk with Jesus Christ. Has God whispered to you lately, "What's on your mind right now that might need changing?"

Jim Bishop  
Community Mennonite Church

### Numbers 13:17-27

*<sup>17</sup> Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up there into the Negeb, and go up into the hill country, <sup>18</sup> and see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, <sup>19</sup> and whether the land they live in is good or bad, and whether the towns that they live in are unwalled or fortified, <sup>20</sup> and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be bold, and bring some of the fruit of the land." Now it was the season of the first ripe grapes.*

*<sup>21</sup> So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. <sup>22</sup> They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the Anakites, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) <sup>23</sup> And they came to the Wadi Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them. They also brought some pomegranates and figs. <sup>24</sup> That place was called the Wadi Eshcol, because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down from there.*

*<sup>25</sup> At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. <sup>26</sup> And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup> And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.*

### A Lectio Divina Exercise

**Lectio:** Read today's scripture passage slowly a couple of times. You may want to read it out loud. Notice a word or phrase that you're attracted to and underline it.

**Meditatio:** Read the passage again. This time notice your emotional response. What feelings does this passage evoke from you?

**Oratio:** Read the passage through again as an invitation to prayer. What response to God do you wish to make? Take time to offer a prayer of response.

**Contemplatio:** Spend some time resting in God's presence allowing this word to minister to you.

## Wednesday, March 2

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### Marked by Ashes

Ruler of the Night, Guarantor of the day . . .

This day — a gift from you.

This day — like none other you have ever given, or  
we have ever received.

This Wednesday dazzles us with gift and newness  
and possibility.

This Wednesday burdens us with the tasks of the  
day, for we are already halfway home

halfway back to committees and memos,

halfway back to calls and appointments,

halfway on to next Sunday,

halfway back, half frazzled, half expectant,

half turned toward you, half rather not.

This Wednesday is a long way from Ash Wednesday,

but all our Wednesdays are marked by ashes —

we begin this day with that taste of ash in our  
mouth:

of failed hope and broken promises,

of forgotten children and frightened women,

we ourselves are ashes to ashes, dust to dust;

we can taste our mortality as we roll the ash

around on our tongues.

We are able to ponder our ashness with

some confidence, only because our every

Wednesday of ashes

anticipates your Easter victory over that dry, flaky  
taste of death.

On this Wednesday, we submit our ashen way to  
you —

you Easter parade of newness.

Before the sun sets, take our Wednesday and  
Easter us,

Easter us to joy and energy and courage and  
freedom;

Easter us that we may be fearless for your truth.

Come here and Easter our Wednesday with

mercy and justice and peace and generosity.

We pray as we wait for the Risen One who comes  
soon.

--Walter Brueggemann, from *Prayers for a Privileged  
People* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008)

## Thursday, March 3

### Joshua 4:14-24

*<sup>14</sup> On that day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him, as they had stood in awe of Moses, all the days of his life.*

*<sup>15</sup> The LORD said to Joshua, <sup>16</sup> “Command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant to come up out of the Jordan.” <sup>17</sup> Joshua therefore commanded the priests, “Come up out of the Jordan.” <sup>18</sup> When the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet touched dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before.*

*<sup>19</sup> The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. <sup>20</sup> Those twelve stones, which they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal, <sup>21</sup> saying to the Israelites, “When your children ask their parents in time to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ <sup>22</sup> then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.’ <sup>23</sup> For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over, <sup>24</sup> so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, and so that you may fear the LORD your God forever.”*

### A Reflection on Joshua 4:14-24

My writing assignment for Lent is from “JOSHUA?!” I cringe at the blood and conquest of this book! I avoid it when I can! But now – an assignment, and I begin reading the story in Joshua 4. I am drawn immediately to the stones. Twelve stones carried faithfully across the Jordan to create a sanctuary marking safe passage -- from wilderness wanderings into the Promised Land. Stones marking God’s faithful guidance and care to be commemorated and shared.

I began thinking about rocks.

- The stones in Joshua 4
- The small rock pile on my desk
- The barren but beautiful rocks of the Rocky Mountains
- The rock that gave the wandering Israelites water in the desert
- Stratified rocks and glittering rocks
- Gray, eroding rocks
- Rocks small enough to fit in my pockets

Crossing the Jordan was a big deal for the Israelites. Each representative carried his stone with honor. The group celebrated and worshiped when they arrived. Joshua commissioned them to tell the story of God’s miraculous care to their children and the world (4:24).

The rock pile on my desk pales by comparison. Here lie four smaller and lightweight rocks collected during a Spiritual Formation class years ago. My assignment was to find rocks that represented my life and God’s movement within my life.

One of the rocks is worn smooth, yet scars and dents remain to remind me of God’s healing and hope from the bumps in my life.

Another rock – also smoothed by water erosion – clearly shows layers of varying shades of gray, representing for me the phases of my life and God’s artistry in shaping who I am today.

A third rock is quite rough to the touch. Dark gray yet glittering, this rock reminds me of rough patches in my life and in my behavior. I remember when my desperate cries for help brought unexpected birdsong or a timely call of encouragement from a friend. I treasure these signs of God’s care!

The fourth rock is lightweight but bold in appearance. It is hard and smooth, yet jagged with sharp edges protruding at odd angles. It is solid and strong – just as God is for me when I become hardened and my sharp edges show.

The rock pile remains on my desk because it carries meaning for me. Sometimes the rocks get buried in to-do lists or I simply forget to notice and give thanks. Often the faith story of another person reminds me to uncover my rock pile and recount God’s faithfulness in my life.

When the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land, Joshua commanded them to tell their story again and again. We need to tell the stories of God’s faithfulness more – to our children, to each other and to our world. What symbols and stories help you remember God’s faithfulness in your life? How will you share your story?

Sharon Wyse Miller  
Community Mennonite Church

## Friday, March 4

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### **Luke 13:1-9**

*13 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”*

*<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ <sup>8</sup> He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”*

### **Bright light**

the bright light of  
(un)  
mediated gaze  
has uncovered my name  
in the black and white

the dark and bitter fruit of  
a private and untended moment  
has become a sickly sweet supplement  
poised for public consumption

—another name  
has already choked on these seeds—

I know—  
life cannot go back  
to what it was

and yes I know—  
it will take time  
before the stench of this unguardedness  
is absorbed back into the soil  
to contribute to new growth

—but life does continue—

and what of the years of fecundity?  
the light is different now  
but will all that building up  
become a cutting down?

where is the place  
for those who have been  
rooted out?

Matt Carlson  
Community Mennonite Church

### ***Isaiah 55:1-9***

55 Ho, everyone who thirsts,  
    come to the waters;  
and you that have no money,  
    come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
    without money and without price.  
<sup>2</sup> Why do you spend your money for that which is not  
bread,  
    and your labor for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,  
    and delight yourselves in rich food.  
<sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to me;  
    listen, so that you may live.  
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,  
    my steadfast, sure love for David.  
<sup>4</sup> See, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
    a leader and commander for the peoples.  
<sup>5</sup> See, you shall call nations that you do not know,  
    and nations that do not know you shall run to you,  
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of  
Israel,  
    for he has glorified you.

<sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while he may be found,  
    call upon him while he is near;  
<sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake their way,  
    and the unrighteous their thoughts;  
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy  
on them,  
    and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.  
<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
    nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.  
<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
    so are my ways higher than your ways  
    and my thoughts than your thoughts.

### **Reflection on Isaiah 55:1-9**

I work at a middle school/high school. I must admit that moving from elementary students to 12-18 year-olds was hard to do. Little kids let their thoughts & feelings show. For the most part, teenagers do not. Or if they do, they are skewed toward acceptance from their friends. I work diligently to understand their thoughts, but often I am baffled. I respond to them inaccurately because I have misinterpreted their actions. This can happen to all of us, even with adults. How often do we misjudge a person? How often do we assign blame, when others are innocent. But God knows them and he knows me. I often pray for "eyes to see" the child inside the teenager; the hurt inside the adult. I try to understand and realize that there is always a "back story" for everyone.

Prayer: God give us grace as we look, listen and love others as they are. Help us remember that everyone is endowed with splendor.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Sheri Smucker  
Community Mennonite Church

## Sunday, March 6

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### ***Passover Remembered*** (an excerpt)

Wear protection.  
Your flesh will be torn  
as you make a path  
with your bodies  
through sharp tangles.  
Wear protection.

Others who follow may deride  
or forget the fools who first bled  
where thorns once were, carrying them  
away in their own flesh.

Such urgency as you now bear  
may embarrass your children  
who will know little of these times.

Sing songs as you go,  
and hold close together.  
You may at times grow  
confused and lose your way.

Continue to call each other  
by the names I've given you,  
to help remember who you are.  
You will get where you are going  
by remembering who you are.

Alla Renée Bozarth, *Womanpriest: A Personal  
Odyssey* (revised edition 1988)

## Monday, March 7

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### **Exodus 12:21-27**

*<sup>21</sup> Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb. <sup>22</sup> Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. <sup>23</sup> For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down. <sup>24</sup> You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. <sup>25</sup> When you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. <sup>26</sup> And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?' <sup>27</sup> you shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed down and worshiped.*

### **A Lectio Divina Exercise**

**Lectio:** Read today's scripture passage slowly a couple of times. You may want to read it out loud. Notice a word or phrase that you're attracted to and underline it.

**Meditatio:** Read the passage again. This time notice your emotional response. What feelings does this passage evoke from you?

**Oratio:** Read the passage through again as an invitation to prayer. What response to God do you wish to make? Take time to offer a prayer of response.

**Contemplatio:** Spend some time resting in God's presence allowing this word to minister to you.

## Tuesday, March 8

### **John 11:45-48**

<sup>45</sup> Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. <sup>46</sup> But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. <sup>47</sup> So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."

### **Reflection on John 11:45-48**

#### **The Tipping Point**

This pivotal text in the narrative of John's Gospel cries out for a larger context. The immediate setting is at the end of Jesus' final miracle, that of raising his friend Lazarus from death after his illness. Many of Jesus' miracles in this Gospel are called "signs" because they signify something beyond just the miracle itself. These signs call the observers to recognize the power of Jesus and believe in him as God's beloved Son.

We must also understand that this entire Gospel is written in an ironic mode. The Jewish religious leaders, whom one would expect to accurately read these signs, always get them wrong, whereas simple folks like the Samaritan woman at the well (ch. 4) or the lame man (ch. 9) both understand and believe.

The reason John's narrative pivots on Lazarus' resurrection is because it is the climactic event that sets Jesus on his journey to the cross. (This contrasts with the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark, and Luke], who place the political triumphal entry and temple cleansing in this role [i.e., Luke 19:29-48].) Besides being the most dramatic miracle, this account also draws together important Johannine themes. Martha, rather than Peter, first names Jesus as "Messiah, the Son of God" (11:27). Faithful belief in Jesus is central, as is love—both agape love and the mutual love of friends (phileo).

At the same time, the irony is striking, even shocking. The chief priests and other religious leaders are the villains in this plot, and here they begin to show their true colors. "If we let him go on like this," they say, "everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation"! Original readers of this

Gospel, written in the 90s, were no doubt amused at the irony, since Jesus' execution had not prevented the Romans from doing exactly that in the Jewish-Roman War of 66-70. In fact, the war completely wiped out the party of the Sadducees, who had been the pro-Roman chief priests of the temple system.

Caiaphas, the high priest for that year, continues addressing the council in verse 50: "You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." Caiaphas proved to be an unwitting prophet, for he and others orchestrated that Jesus would indeed "die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God" (verse 52).

In this way, our author demonstrates his skillful use of irony and immense literary talent as s/he prepares readers for the second half of the narrative where one man does indeed "die for the people."

Postscript: Why was such a major event as the raising of Lazarus omitted from the Synoptic Gospels? One scholar, Richard Bauckham, has suggested that it was deliberately left out in order to protect Lazarus. John 12:10 says that "the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well." Lazarus could still have been alive when Mark (whom Matthew and Luke follow) was writing around 65-70 CE, so why call public attention to him? But by the 90s, neither the chief priests nor Lazarus would have been around.

Postscript on authorship: All four Gospels are anonymous, with authorship not attributed until the 2nd century. The Galilean fisherman John as author is highly unlikely, since most of this narrative takes place in Jerusalem and demonstrates a detailed knowledge of the city. Certainly the "beloved disciple," whoever he was (Jn 13:23; 19:26) must be responsible for many of the traditions cited in the narrative. The only persons in the Gospel specifically identified as those whom "Jesus loved" (11:5) are Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, who lived in Bethany, two miles from Jerusalem. Is it possible that this Gospel was composed from the memories of the community that developed around these three earliest disciples who had been intimate friends of Jesus? I like to think so!

Reta Finger  
Community Mennonite Church

## Wednesday, March 9

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### **Isaiah 43:1-7**

*43 But now thus says the LORD,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:  
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with  
you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm  
you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.  
3 For I am the LORD your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.  
I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.  
4 Because you are precious in my sight,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give people in return for you,  
nations in exchange for your life.  
5 Do not fear, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you;  
6 I will say to the north, "Give them up,"  
and to the south, "Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from far away  
and my daughters from the end of the earth—  
7 everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made."*

### **Poem: A Trusting Path**

**LENTEN Verse: Isaiah 43:1-7**  
**(And reflections on the CMC verse of the year,**  
**Jeremiah 6:16)**

We stand at the crossroads this year,  
To learn how to trust and obey.  
God clearly says not to fear,  
Let's ask God to show us the good way.

It's time to take God at His word,  
When storms and difficulties surprise.  
He says to each, "Have you heard?  
Stand firm, I'm with you, arise."

"I've called each one of you by name,  
You are precious, do not be afraid.  
Each circumstance, each worry, each flame,

A way for Israel, I made."

"For all who are called by my name,  
Will not be overwhelmed or overcome.  
I sent my Son, Jesus, who came,  
To earth, so that my will may be done."

So this year, this season of Lent,  
Let's remember God's promises, God's word.  
A time to truly repent,  
How wonderful, to say we have heard....

From Jesus, our Creator, our Friend,  
He loves and frees us from sin.  
He rescues, and ransoms, and will send,  
A promise, a new chance to begin.

He will gather, protect, and restore,  
Our sons and daughters to Him.  
His love, forever, so much more,  
So we pray for His grace once again.

Dear Father, give rest for our soul,  
Our journey can sometimes seem long.  
So we may believe you, and know,  
That your path is the right way, not wrong.

Forgive us, for not trusting You,  
Not caring for others in need.  
Give courage for seeing what's true,  
Bring peace in each word and each deed.

Bring faith for the storms in our life,  
Bring hope, forgiveness, and rest.  
Redeem us, our Lord, and our Life,  
Our Saviour, in whom we are blest.

Lois R. Kauffman  
Community Mennonite Church

## Thursday, March 10

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### The Hawk Swoops

*Where can I go from your spirit? Psalm 139:7*

You count our wanderings West;  
tell our staggerings East.  
Like a hawk, you eye us

from afar. When you swoop low,  
your shadow covers us  
before we hear your wings go *swish*.

If we crawl into the rocks,  
you eye us from the top of the pine  
and wait for us

to show our heads  
to forage for food.  
When we hide under cover

of the weeping willows  
at the waterfall,  
you're not deceived

as we've hidden there before.  
If we explore Maine's forests,  
you fly so high,

you eye us through  
the canopy. As for me,  
when I see you

through the lattice  
scratching on my door  
with your talons  
my failings so terrify me  
I hide in the cellar, imagine  
you'll lift latch and kill.

Wrong.  
Your mercy stalks me.

--Father Kilian McDonnell, from *Aggressive Mercy*,  
St. John's University Press (August 14, 2014)

**Friday, March 11**

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**Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

15 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable:

<sup>11</sup> Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup> When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup> He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ <sup>20</sup> So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup> He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup> Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with

*prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ <sup>31</sup> Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”*

**Reflection on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

In chapter 15 Luke records three familiar parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. The last of the three, much longer than the sum of the first two, has inspired music in compositions by Benjamin Britten and Arthur Sullivan (of Gilbert & Sullivan fame) and has been staged by the New York City Ballet. It has also inspired art.

Rembrandt’s “Return of the Prodigal Son” depicts a ragged, shoeless son kneeling before his father as other men, presumably of the household, look on. The painting is dark, and suggests the arrival of an exhausted son at night. The father places his hands on the son’s back, an intimate gesture of welcome. The son’s waywardness is at once evident and forgiven.

Midwestern artist Thomas Hart Benton has the father, a suitcase near him, looking away for the son. Nearby we see the father’s dilapidated house. While not true to Luke’s account, the artist makes a strong criticism of the nation he knew during the Great Depression.

Interpretations are legion. In a book based on the parable, the Belgian theologian Henri Nouwen calls it the parable of the lost sons, and it is easy to argue that the perennially hard-working, stubbornly unforgiving older son also has a seriously flawed character. When he refused to come into the house to join in the hastily-arranged welcoming celebration, the father went to the field and “began to plead with him” to join the celebration, to no avail; no music and dancing for him.

The parable is male-based, in keeping with the Biblical culture. However, the lack of a mother is all too obvious. How were the boys raised? How well did they get along? What compelled the father to divide the inheritance merely because the younger son requested it? Was he perhaps the favored son? Why did he want to leave with his money in hand? Did this intense sibling rivalry arise after the departure of the younger son, or was it damaging

their                      earlier                      relationship?

We cannot claim the luxury of regarding this story as describing life long ago and far away. These are our problems. The love of the father for the returning son is exemplary and timeless, a quality needed in all families, and sometimes lacking. The circumstances that forced the son to return home were extreme, but children who return home today after adversity can expect to be challenged. The father clearly expresses a divine quality of grace, extending to the son an unconditional love that, whatever the difficulties of family life, blesses and redeems with grace. It is our earthly salvation. Kyrie eleison — Lord have mercy.

Thomas Lehman  
Shalom Mennonite

### Exodus 32:7-14

<sup>7</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; <sup>8</sup> they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” <sup>9</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. <sup>10</sup> Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

<sup>11</sup> But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” <sup>14</sup> And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

### Reflection on Exodus 32:7-14

#### Fear and Loathing at Mount Sinai

Moses is on the mountain with God. Meanwhile, back at the camp, the people have chosen a new object to worship – a golden calf.

God is not pleased and tells Moses: “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely” (Exodus 32:7, NRSV).

Notice that God says “your people,” not “my people.” This is not a friendly beginning.

It gets worse. The people, God reports, have sacrificed to the calf and forgotten the ones who rescued them from slavery. (What have you done for me lately, God and Moses?)

Let me kill them, God says to Moses, “and of you I will make a great nation” (verse 10).

When Moses recovers from his shock – at the people and at the proposal – he strongly declines: “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people . . . ?” The Egyptians will think you brought out Israel with “evil intent” (verses 11-12). Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses continues. Think of the promises you made to them. Don’t forget them, Moses is saying, even though their descendants seem to have forgotten you.

Is God really serious about destroying the people? The attitude described here seems troubling. Does false worship really justify genocide? If everyone guilty of idolatry were struck dead, who would be left?

Yet it is precisely the universality of the problem that makes this story important. Though we may not bow down to bovine statues, the worship of false gods – money, success, technology, and power – remains very much with us.

Some of these idols may appeal to us because of greed. Yet the stronger motivation for false worship may be fear.

In addition to being a sign of wealth, gold can serve as a haven for investors in uncertain times. Likewise, savings, a house, professional status, and even the latest devices can offer comfort and protection. On a more primal level, walls and weapons can promise safety in a violent world.

Perhaps fear, more than ingratitude, was behind the golden calf. Moses had been gone a long time, and no one knew what was happening on the mountain. The desert can be a frightening and dangerous place.

It’s hard to trust when God seems hidden. It’s easier to put our faith in silicon, gold, and guns. The challenge for us, as for the people in the wilderness, is to wait and remember. In reflecting on the past, we can gain strength to face an unknown future.

Dave Graybill  
Community Mennonite Church

## Sunday, March 13

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### *Passover Remembered (an excerpt)*

Touch each other  
and keep telling the stories  
of old bondage and of how  
I delivered you.

Tell you children lest they forget  
and fall into danger— remind them  
even they were not born in freedom  
but under a bondage they no longer  
remember, which is still with them, if unseen.

Or they were born in the open desert  
where no signposts are.

Make maps as you go,  
remembering the way back  
from before you were born.

So long ago you fell  
into slavery, slipped  
into it unawares,  
out of hunger and need.

You left your famished country  
for freedom and food in a new land,  
but you fell unconscious and passive,  
and slavery overtook you as you fell  
asleep in the ease of your life.

You no longer told stories of home  
to remember who you were.

Alla Renée Bozarth, *Womanpriest: A Personal  
Odyssey* (revised edition 1988)

## Monday, March 14

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### Hebrews 10:19-25

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

#### A Lectio Divina Exercise

**Lectio:** Read today's scripture passage slowly a couple of times. You may want to read it out loud. Notice a word or phrase that you're attracted to and underline it.

**Meditatio:** Read the passage again. This time notice your emotional response. What feelings does this passage evoke from you?

**Oratio:** Read the passage through again as an invitation to prayer. What response to God do you wish to make? Take time to offer a prayer of response.

**Contemplatio:** Spend some time resting in God's presence allowing this word to minister to you.

### **Luke 18:31-34**

*<sup>31</sup> Then he took the twelve aside and said to them, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. <sup>32</sup> For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. <sup>33</sup> After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again." <sup>34</sup> But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said.*

### **Reflection on Luke 18:31-34**

How many times do we miss the essence of a message or story or illustration in a conversation? I catch myself tuning out at times because I think I understand what is being said or what is going on around me. I'm so sure of what I know that I'm not really paying attention to what I'm being told. I filter out most of what is being said because, well, I already know. Does this ever happen to you?

In this passage, Jesus is once again foretelling the Passion. This is said to be the sixth prophecy of the Passion. Jesus takes the twelve aside and tells them what will go down in Jerusalem according to what was written by the prophets about the Son of Man. This is seemingly some pretty heavy stuff. It's about his death and resurrection after all. Jesus' orientation sounds important for an inner circle of followers to grasp. Yet, "they understood nothing about these things."

It's unbelievable to me that the apostles understand nothing of what Jesus said. What is so difficult about the focus of this instruction? I suppose they were so sure of what kind of Messiah Jesus was to be that they already knew what was coming. They knew what they knew and there was little space for something - new.

But what are we to make of the closing words in this passage. "... in fact, what he (Jesus) said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said." Hidden from them? I'm perplexed here. It seems that it was not for the twelve to understand, or even realize, all that was about to unfold around and within them. They would have to go through it - experience the Passion as it played out and then try to make sense of it.

That's actually my sincere prayer for all of us as well in these Lenten and Easter seasons - to allow ourselves to not fully understand all aspects of the Passion but, rather than tune out because we've heard it all before, to stay alert through the journey of our shared scripture reading, devotionals and worship rhythms as the Passion is relived in our midst once again.

Brian Martin Burkholder  
Community Mennonite Church

## Wednesday, March 16

### **Luke 19:28-40**

<sup>28</sup> After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

<sup>29</sup> When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup> saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup> If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" <sup>32</sup> So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup> As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" <sup>34</sup> They said, "The Lord needs it." <sup>35</sup> Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup> As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup> As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup> saying,

*"Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven,  
and glory in the highest heaven!"*

<sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." <sup>40</sup> He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

### **Reflection on Luke 19:28-40**

In a few days we will celebrate Palm Sunday along with other Christians worldwide, remembering this passage together. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem brims over with drama. The possibilities for pageantry are second only to the Christmas play. Some of the props are the same in both: animals, coats (housecoats), kings (crowns), and hosannas—glory in the highest!

Sometimes when we've paraded palm branches through the sanctuary for the tenth or twentieth or fiftieth time in our lives, we may feel like there's nothing new to see or hear in this passage. We know the story well.

We also know it's important. After all, all four gospels tell this story. The unbroken colt fulfills the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having

salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

We know that this same crowd – the people who pour forth praise as though they're at a rock concert or the Super Bowl -- will also turn on Jesus.

They will go from "Hosannah" to "Crucify him" faster than the snow melts after a Virginia blizzard.

When they call him "King," they know not what they speak. Many are hoping, like the children of Israel originally hoped, that a king will make their nation like other nations. Moreover, this king would do more. He will deliver the Jews from Roman domination.

Jesus, so skittish when it came to too much publicity in the past, finally allows the people to praise him. He doesn't try to correct their faulty vision. He just rides. Soon he will drive out the moneychangers from the temple. He is approaching the time when his hour has come.

For now he seems willing to accept the adulation of the crowd, especially in front of the Pharisees, who fear the uproar and want Jesus to rebuke his disciples for this public display of insubordination to empire.

Jesus' reply to the Pharisees stands out as a message for us today. "He answered, 'I tell you, if these [disciples] were silent, the very stones would cry out.'"

We have the benefit of knowing what the crowd in Jerusalem did not. We know that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world. We also know that he stood up to the powers and principalities, from the Pharisees to the Romans, whether the crowds were with him or not, all the way to the cross and beyond.

Let us recognize our own fickleness as part of the crowd both in Jerusalem and Calvary. But let us keep our eyes on the King himself.

Perhaps we should enter our own sanctuary this Sunday with a palm branch in one hand and a stone in the other to remind us. Wherever Jesus rides, the very rocks and stones cry out!

Shirley Showalter  
Community Mennonite Church

## Thursday, March 17

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### **Luke 19:41-44**

<sup>41</sup> As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it,  
<sup>42</sup> saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on  
this day the things that make for peace! But now they  
are hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> Indeed, the days will  
come upon you, when your enemies will set up  
ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you  
in on every side. <sup>44</sup> They will crush you to the ground,  
you and your children within you, and they will not  
leave within you one stone upon another; because  
you did not recognize the time of your visitation from  
God."

### **Reflection on Luke 19:41-44**

There stands a tree that knows my tears,  
back a twisted gravel lane,  
nestled in the skirt of the mountain  
pirouetting gradually across  
the stage behind my house. I visited it  
once just by chance,  
having set out that morning  
seeking something else entirely,  
which I could not find then  
nor can I be sure I have found now.  
I meant, of course, to keep going on  
up the mountain, but when the days  
come upon you, climbing becomes  
futile. Instead I leaned  
into that tree and did what I could  
to keep us both alive. Being a wet spring,  
I doubt anyone noticed much my efforts,  
but the tree was gracious enough not to say so.  
It just stood over me.

If I had only recognized on that day the things that  
make for peace!  
But they were hidden from my eyes.

The stones know me, and ours  
is a bond forged after the waters came,  
when they did not leave one stone upon another.  
The bridge needed to be rebuilt then,  
but I had the sunny breeze, oiled leather,  
a pitcher of water and my grief,  
setting up ramparts around me,  
surrounding me, hemming me in,  
crushing me and my unborn tomorrows within me.

Was this the time of my visitation from God?  
If so, I could not recognize it, and I did not want it.  
All I could see was the bridge, or what had been,  
and as the stones moved my muscles,  
behind and under and around them,  
he came near and saw the city.

If I had only recognized on that day the things that  
make for peace!  
But they were hidden from my eyes.

I pass those stones and that tree in this grey morning  
and the next, and sometimes when the sun is red  
and often in the middle of the day, and every time  
I remember. So do they. We all weep  
for what is hidden.  
Peace.

Greg Yoder  
Community Mennonite Church

**Friday, March 18**

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**Isaiah 54:9-10**

<sup>9</sup> *This is like the days of Noah to me:  
Just as I swore that the waters of Noah  
would never again go over the earth,  
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you  
and will not rebuke you.*  
<sup>10</sup> *For the mountains may depart  
and the hills be removed,  
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,  
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,  
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*

**Reflection on Isaiah 54:9-10**  
**A New Slate**

The snow sails slant outside my window, hour after hour,  
covering my garden inch by inch,  
erasing all weedy imperfections under its pure whiteness  
like the steadfast love of the Lord that never ceases.

As the snow, the flood in Noah's day  
covered all living things, giving the earth's inhabitants a fresh start  
--the slate wiped clean of man's sin.  
And now in this present earth,  
mountains and hills that once seemed solid and immovable  
are bulldozed into pristine streams, leaving poisoned waters  
and ugly brown scars that swathe through once unbroken green.  
Still and again, we need the Lord's promise of his steadfast love to redeem our broken lives,  
like our broken land, to cleanse and make all lovely as the snow.

As in those exile days when life was hard and times were dark,  
now, a woman still weeps in the night for a lost husband,  
a dead or estranged brother, a wounded child  
who will never again walk through her doorway as before,  
with a warm hug, joyful laughter, a living wage, a good name.  
Still and again, we need the Lord's promise of a steadfast love

that redeems our shame and our pain  
—to wipe the slate clean and pure as new fallen snow.

As snow melts and performs in the earth  
Its own ministry of regeneration, of rebirth,  
so the Lord's anger still gives way to compassion  
for the afflicted one, the storm-tossed one,  
the sin-weary one,  
and in a heavenly reversal offers to all the longed-for gift  
of ceaseless love to those able to receive and find renewal  
in God's holy and beautiful covenant of peace.

Esther Stenson  
Community Mennonite Church

## Saturday, March 19

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### Luke 22:1-13

*22 Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. <sup>2</sup> The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.*

*<sup>3</sup> Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; <sup>4</sup> he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. <sup>5</sup> They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup> So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.*

*<sup>7</sup> Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it." <sup>9</sup> They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?" <sup>10</sup> "Listen," he said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters <sup>11</sup> and say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" <sup>12</sup> He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there." <sup>13</sup> So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.*

### Reflection on Luke 22:1-13

This section of the Lenten story is filled with intrigue, drama, heartbreak, and irony. "Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people." When I first read this sentence, I was confused at the combination of narrative strands here: First, the Festival is approaching; second, the chief priests want to get rid of Jesus; and third, because they're afraid of the people. How did these fit together for Luke?

The Feast is the remembrance of Israel's deliverance from bondage. They celebrate by abstaining from unleavened bread, viewing the leaven as symbolic of their sin. "Seven days there be no leaven found in your houses; for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land." (Exodus 12:19)

Eat a leavened bread crumb, be ex-communicated. The bread motif seemed to have importance to the early Hebrews. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means "House of Bread," in Hebrew. John has Jesus refer to himself as the "bread of life," and of course in that secret room the disciples are preparing here, bread will be broken in a most confusing and mysterious way. Finally, and most important to this passage, Jesus turns the tables on the whole yeast-sin connection by comparing the kingdom of God to the yeast in bread, essentially upending the unleavened bread law, the Festival, and our entire concept of God. What is holy is no longer bound up in law, but in relationship. The sacred will be found in all things, even yeast. What the very cornerstone of their faith says is sin, Jesus says is the very ingredient of transforming society.

Those chief priests and teachers of the law must have felt it in their bones. Their tradition was being turned on its head. I'm sure they didn't consciously grasp the connection between the Feast, the yeast, their fear of "the people", and Jesus. But, they obviously intuited something they couldn't yet understand.

This story unfolds with all of the elements of a great socio-political revolutionary drama: Espionage, meetings of the powerful behind closed doors, betrayal, sending off the protagonist's agents for a clandestine rendezvous, speaking the secret code, and gaining entry to the hidden room. It's all there. The Irony? The events set in motion during this Feast of Unleavened Bread (arguably the most important Hebrew festival, with its deeply encoded remembrance of their liberation) will result in the Great Reversal; the alchemical romance of the Philosopher's stone. Our sin becomes our sacred transformation. A new creation and a new yeast will spread from the table set in that secret room down that dusty road, to all corners of the Earth, overturning everything we thought we knew. The people are coming. And their transformation lies in the symbol of that explicitly forbidden yeast. The coming and pervasive overturning – the kingdom of God.

Valerie Serrels  
Community Mennonite Church

## Sunday, March 20

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### ***Passover Remembered*** (an excerpt)

Do not let your children sleep  
through the journey's hardship.  
Keep them awake and walking  
on their own feet so that you both  
remain strong and on course.

So you will be only  
the first of many waves  
of deliverance on these  
desert seas.

It is the first of many  
beginnings— your Paschaltide.  
Remain true to this mystery.

Pass on the whole story.  
I spared you all  
by calling you forth  
from your chains.

Do not go back.  
I am with you now  
and I am waiting for you.

Alla Renée Bozarth, *Womanpriest: A Personal  
Odyssey* (revised edition 1988)

## Monday, March 21

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### Isaiah 50:4-9a

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

### Reflection on Isaiah 50:4-9a

*The LORD GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher.* This poetry begins the third of Isaiah's four "Servant Songs." The church has historically understood these songs to be especially relevant to Jesus' self-understanding. Indeed Jesus was regarded in his own day as a gifted teacher. He announced his ministry as an encore of Isaiah's prophesy: ***The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...*** (Is 61 & 58 and Luke 4.) He captivated crowds with multi-valent parables (the most memorable ones being the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, both found only in the gospel of Luke), incorporated great one-liners (*you cannot serve God and Mammon*), and summarized Torah in a memorable double-commandment: *Love God; love neighbor*. Jesus taught in synagogues, houses, fields, roads, boats, and the Temple to name just a few places. The Servant-Teacher of Isaiah 50 teaches with compassion and empowerment for "the weary" (v.

4). Understanding Jesus as a Servant-Teacher is familiar for Anabaptist Christians and inspires many of our vocations.

The difficulty in this text is vv. 5-6 when the Servant-Teacher chooses to endure abusive treatment, relying on God's help rather than returning insults or seeking revenge. Clearly, this is not always the right course of action. Our congregation's Safe Church policy equips and empowers adults to prevent abuse. It seems clear that there are some situations in which it would not be appropriate to allow this passage to govern our attitude and ethic. Even Jesus after teaching that God's Shalom agenda for the world was all-inclusive (not just for Israel), when threatened by an angry mob chose to walk away, to escape abuse.

So when might we apply this ethic of non-resistance? On a personal level, I think of times when my reputation has been tarnished or when others have falsely attributed motives to me or insulted me. In these kinds of situations, I've noticed that spending my energy on self-justification is often a dead-end. In 1540 the Swiss Brethren, having endured serious persecution, included Isaiah 50:4-9 in their concordance under the heading: *patience*. Christ is a patient Servant-Teacher. Rather than justifying himself, he allowed his life and death to speak for themselves. In Holy Week, let us "listen as those who are taught" and be patient in the struggles for change that we teach and engage in Jesus' name.

Jennifer Davis Sensenig  
Community Mennonite Church

### **Philippians 2:5-11**

<sup>5</sup> *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*

<sup>6</sup> *who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,*

<sup>7</sup> *but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.*

*And being found in human form,*

<sup>8</sup> *he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.*

<sup>9</sup> *Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,*

<sup>10</sup> *so that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

<sup>11</sup> *and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.*

### **A Lectio Divina Exercise**

**Lectio:** Read today's scripture passage slowly a couple of times. You may want to read it out loud. Notice a word or phrase that you're attracted to and underline it.

**Meditatio:** Read the passage again. This time notice your emotional response. What feelings does this passage evoke from you?

**Oratio:** Read the passage through again as an invitation to prayer. What response to God do you wish to make? Take time to offer a prayer of response.

**Contemplatio:** Spend some time resting in God's presence allowing this word to minister to you.

### **Luke 22:7-13**

*<sup>7</sup> Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> So Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it." <sup>9</sup> They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?" <sup>10</sup> "Listen," he said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters <sup>11</sup> and say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" <sup>12</sup> He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there." <sup>13</sup> So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.*

### **Reflection on Luke 22:7-13**

#### **Prepare**

It is the day of Unleavened Bread, no time for yeast and rising. No space to leave bread dough out on the counter and wait—we must rush and it is too cold. Satan has already entered the hearts of men (one is enough). The Passover recalls deliverance for a people—freedom!—along with blood-smeared houses, the deaths of children. Strange, severe God. We shudder, eat in haste (Ex 12:11).

Jesus, per usual, is calm, issuing placid directives, more attentive to men carrying water jugs than the master of the house. He sends his disciples to make preparations: find a space, make a reservation, set the table for me and my friends. Always involving us in his unfolding. Per usual, there is food for feasting.

After hearing his words, "they left and found things just as Jesus had told them" (Lk 22:13). There was already a room for them, large enough to hold everyone. The details in place, down to the furniture.

We listen, follow, never imaging what could come next. He asks us to prepare, even though everything is already taken care of.

So we will sit, reclining at Jesus' table, bewildered, bemused. Ready to receive.

Catherine Thiel Lee  
Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship

## **Maundy Thursday, March 24**

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### **Luke 22:14-23**

<sup>14</sup> When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; <sup>16</sup> for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup> Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; <sup>18</sup> for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup> Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup> And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. <sup>21</sup> But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. <sup>22</sup> For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" <sup>23</sup> Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

### **Reflection on Luke 22:14-23**

Jesus gathered his disciples for a dinner party, where the food and drink was more than sustenance and entertainment. And the guests represented more than who was present—the twelve disciples represent twelve tribes. Together their influence spanned far beyond that of one man or one tribe. With the twelve, Jesus leveraged a vast social network. With the twelve, Jesus structured his ministry to best spread the word—to build a movement, a people, a kingdom of God.

Networking for peace and justice, Jesus also broke bread (or otherwise communed) with unlikely people, people considered unfit for his company, people he disagreed with, and people who acted out of place. Here at the Last Supper, he welcomed even his betrayer, who would play a critical role in realizing Jesus's final act of salvation. When we sit down to a dinner party, what social networks do we leverage? How are we building a movement, a people, the kingdom of God? And who there might help realize our salvation?

Social science tells us there is great strength in loose social ties. Strong ties require significant effort—we can only maintain a limited number of close relationships. Our loose ties, on the other hand, can

help us reach greater distances and leverage more resources. The church is a powerful social network, for sure, and there we take communion. But we can enact the Eucharist whenever we eat with others. We can find ways to gather unlikely company, cross tribal lines, expand and strengthen the social networks that sustain us and others.

Today, as an unprecedented number of immigrants risk their lives crossing borders to flee war, we can build the kingdom of God by breaking bread together. In sharing the intimate act of eating with people across social lines, we link ourselves together, creating valuable loose ties and shaping our identities to reflect a broader humanity. We may find that someone we sit with at table shows us ourselves in a new light, betrays us to ourselves, helps us see a new perspective—thereby facilitating our salvation.

This Maundy Thursday, consider planning a dinner party with a motley crew, with hearty desire for the company of God among all people.

*Laura Sider Jost is founding the Jane House Project, a dinner party nonprofit in Harrisonburg that gathers small groups of people across social lines for nights out on the town: [www.janehouseproject.org](http://www.janehouseproject.org).*

Laura Sider Jost  
Community Mennonite Church

## Good Friday, March 25

**Luke 23:1-9**<sup>23</sup> Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. <sup>2</sup> They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." <sup>3</sup> Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." <sup>4</sup> Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." <sup>5</sup> But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."

<sup>6</sup> When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup> And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. <sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. <sup>9</sup> He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer.

<sup>27</sup> A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. <sup>28</sup> But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' <sup>30</sup> Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' <sup>31</sup> For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." <sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." <sup>43</sup> He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

### Reflection on Luke 23:1-9, 27-31, 39-43 Speaking and not speaking

Jesus talks—a lot. He goes around Palestine stirring up the people with his teaching. He doesn't shy away from controversy, he courts it, inciting a riot in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). He sends a message to Herod that could be construed as a threat (13:31-35). He is a prophet, and prophets call out injustice,

often in the very courts of rulers. Even Greek philosophers and Roman politicians, when accused of treason, would be expected to mount a stirring defense. Jesus tells his disciples that when they are brought before kings and governors that they should take the opportunity to testify (21:12-19). Yet when he is hauled before a governor and king, Jesus has nothing much to say. So much for speaking truth to power. "Are you the king of the Jews?" Pilate asks. Jesus replies, "You say so." That's all that Pilate, Herod, the crowd, and we get out of Jesus. When his life is on the line, he says nothing. His silence is shameful. And so the crowd that has been on Jesus' side turns on him.

Yet it is not the case that the one who is silent says nothing. Jesus' silence makes plain that his death is not about his purported threat to the public order. Given the opportunity, Jesus does not incite the crowd. He does not insult the Romans or remind Herod that he once called the king a fox.

The powers that kill will fill Jesus' silence with questions, disdain and the sounds of pain. Rome never confesses, apologizes, or explains, but only doubles down on its rhetoric. Rome brings peace and prosperity—Rome saves!—at the point of a sword, at the cost of confiscated livelihoods. Pilate publicly pronounces Jesus innocent three times but kills him anyway. Jesus' silence and death reveal the hypocrisy of Rome's rhetoric. Violence cannot give peace, but only take life. Rome and the complicit Judeans will kill a healer to preserve the status quo. What Rome finds expendable Jesus finds valuable: his only words in this hour are for others who suffer or will suffer: the women of Jerusalem and a criminal on a cross.

Like Ezekiel, who lies on one side as if paralyzed (Ezekiel 4), or Jeremiah, who pointedly does not take a wife (Jeremiah 16), or Hosea, who takes an unfaithful wife, or Isaiah, who walks about barefoot and naked for three years (Isaiah 20), Jesus will perform in his body the life of Israel. Just as he has walked the way of life and healing, he will now walk the path of utter destruction that awaits his people. Jesus' words of truth and his deeds of healing now reach their fullness, for he does not stop living a life of love in the face of death.

Marci Frederick  
Shalom Mennonite Congregation

## Holy Saturday, March 26

### **Luke 23:13-25**

<sup>13</sup> Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, <sup>14</sup> and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. <sup>15</sup> Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. <sup>16</sup> I will therefore have him flogged and release him."

<sup>18</sup> Then they all shouted out together, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" <sup>19</sup> (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) <sup>20</sup> Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; <sup>21</sup> but they kept shouting, "Crucify, crucify him!" <sup>22</sup> A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." <sup>23</sup> But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup> He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

### **Reflection on Luke 23:13-25**

This passage designated for Holy Saturday is part of the story of Jesus' journey to the cross. In so many ways it is a story that does not make sense. It appears that evil is overpowering good. In other ways it is fully understandable. Jesus continually challenged the religious leaders, the status quo, and those in power. You can get yourself in trouble when you do that! And he did. But it is, of course, much bigger. It is also about Jesus embracing fully his mission in life.

As I read and reread this part of the Holy Week story, I began to notice the power of one – living fully known and embracing his beloved-ness in contrast to the power of two and the irrational power of the crowd. And I am reminded of Jesus' words recorded by John (12:24), "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."

So, I share these thoughts: *Alone*

*Alone . . .*

he stood before  
imperial powers' gaze

content in his identity  
as his Fathers' son,  
alone.

Alone . . . he faced  
religions' impassioned fury,  
choosing not to defend or convince  
but rather to quietly embrace his Father's words,  
"you are my beloved,  
in you I am well pleased."

Alone.

Alone,  
betrayed and forsaken  
by friends who knew him well.

Alone,  
he faced evils' intent  
to silence him forever.

Alone.

Together,  
Pilate and Herod,  
political foes made friends  
through their intrigue with this  
solitary man,  
whose life spoke louder than words  
under their interrogation.

Together.  
Though Pilate washed his hands of Jesus' fate and  
Herod joined the voices of derision and  
mockery,  
together, they sent him back to the angry crowd,  
robed in finery befitting a King.

Together, the frenzied crowd yelled "Crucify him!"  
"Crucify him!"

Three times Pilate tried with a voice of reason to  
assuage their demands.

But their loud voices  
insisted he set the insurrectionist, Barabbas,  
free instead.

Together, with one voice the angry crowd insistently  
screamed,

"Crucify! Crucify him!"

Pilate, weak with resignation, handed Jesus over as  
they wished.

Alone . . .

Jesus walked the way of suffering love.

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## Easter Sunday, March 27

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### Luke 24:1-12

*24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they went in, they did not find the body. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. <sup>5</sup> The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. <sup>6</sup> Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, <sup>7</sup> that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." <sup>8</sup> Then they remembered his words, <sup>9</sup> and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. <sup>10</sup> Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. <sup>11</sup> But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. <sup>12</sup> But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.*

### Reflection on Luke 24:1-12

When preparing for Easter, I often recall a time that one of my seminary professors referred to the resurrection with the phrase, "Zombie Jesus." It might seem flippant at first blush, but she was making a serious point. Everyone loves to talk about Baby Jesus during Advent and Christmas. Babies are cute, sweet, safe (or at least the version we focus on often is, despite a more messy reality). But what about during Lent and Holy Week, when we focus on Jesus, the adult, who is brutally killed, buried, and then comes back to life? That really is terrifying. Who wants to be tasked with wrapping Zombie Jesus up in pastel bows for Easter Sunday brunch? I wonder, can we tell this story in a way that is comfortable, comforting? Should we?

When the women come to the tomb that morning and find the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, they no doubt imagined many frightening possible reasons for what they saw, none of which were that Jesus simply was no longer dead. So, the appearance of two men in dazzling white added to their fear, though the message was a good one. Good, but confusing, and indeed, terrifying. *He told you this was what would happen*, the dazzling men remind

them, address their fears. They remember, they believe, and their fear turns to joy that sends them running off to preach this good news to the eleven remaining apostles.

Jesus revealed himself as risen lord first to these faithful women, who rose in the early morning, who came to his tomb carrying their grief. So too, after hearing the good news that they need not mourn any longer, they faithfully proclaimed, "He is risen!" although the disciples did not believe them. *An idle tale!* they scoffed -- except for Peter. Peter, hopeful Peter, ran off to see with his own eyes the empty tomb. He heard the message the woman preached: *He is risen! Alleluia!* And Peter was amazed.

Perhaps you are like these women, who believe and proclaim the good news. Perhaps you are like the disciples, who scoff as such a far fetched tale. This Easter, let us pray that our fears, our scoffing, would send us running to the tomb like Peter, to see if it really can be true what they say, so that we too would come back amazed, proclaiming with them, *He is risen! He is risen indeed!*

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