

## **Spiritual Practices for Lent.**

### **LENT**

THE SEASON OF LENT BEGINS WITH ASH WEDNESDAY, THE DAY WE GO TO CHURCH TO BE MARKED BY THE IMPOSITION OF ASHES ON OUR FOREHEADS. THE ASHES, MADE BY THE BURNING OF THE PALM LEAVES USED ON THE PREVIOUS YEAR'S PALM SUNDAY, REMIND US THAT "WE ARE DUST AND TO DUST WE WILL RETURN." WE ARE MORTAL BEINGS MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

LENT IS A FORTY-DAY MINI-PILGRIMAGE IN THE GREAT PILGRIMAGE OF LIFE. LENT GIVES US THE TIME AND THE SPACE TO REFLECT ON OUR MORTALITY, OUR PURPOSES AND INTENTIONS IN LIFE, AND WHETHER OR NOT OUR LIVES REFLECT OUR HIGHEST INTENTIONS AND PURPOSES. AS JOHN SHEA SAYS IN LUKE: YEAR C, "GENUINE RELIGIOUS AND MORAL ACTION IS THE ESSENTIAL SIGN PEOPLE ARE LIVING IN GOD'S COVENANTAL LOVE." (P.67).

JESUS TEACHES US BOTH IN WORD AND DEED THAT GOD'S COVENANTAL LOVE IS TO BE THE TOUCHSTONE OF OUR LIVES. EACH OF US IS CALLED TO DEMONSTRATE GOD'S LOVE, MERCY, KINDNESS AND JUSTICE IN THE WORLD AND TO THE WORLD.

THIS LENTEN SEASON LET US BEGIN AGAIN.

### **WEEK 1: TEMPTATION**



THE GOSPEL READING FOR THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT IS LUKE 4:1-13. IN THIS READING, "JESUS IS LED BY THE SPIRIT WHERE FOR FORTY DAYS THE DEVIL TEMPTED HIM." TEMPTATION IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE PILGRIMAGE JOURNEY. IT OFTEN APPEARS WHEN WE START SOMETHING NEW OR EXPERIENCE SUDDEN, UNEXPECTED CHANGE. THE DEVIL SERVES TWO FUNCTIONS IN THE READING: ONE IS TO TAKE A CAT SCAN OF JESUS' HEART, TO REVEAL HIS COMMITMENT TO GOD. THE OTHER IS TO TEMPT JESUS, TO SEDUCE JESUS INTO TRUSTING IN SOMETHING OR SOMEONE OTHER THAN GOD.

THE FIRST TEMPTATION THE DEVIL HURLS AT JESUS IS TO TURN STONES INTO BREAD, TO USE HIS POWER TO FEED HIMSELF. JESUS' RESPONSE TO THE TEMPTATION IS SHORT AND SWEET,

"PEOPLE DO NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE."

IN A MERE SEVEN WORDS, JESUS ACKNOWLEDGES THAT WE ARE EVER SO MUCH MORE THAN OUR PHYSICAL NEEDS. OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND THE EARTH IS PRIMARY TO ALL CREATION'S WELLBEING. YES, BREAD IS NECESSARY TO LIVE, BUT BECOMING THE ONE GOD CALLS US TO BE IS ESSENTIAL TO ABUNDANT LIFE, LIFE THAT REVEALS GOD'S LOVE IN ALL WE DO.

THE SECOND TEMPTATION THE DEVIL SETS BEFORE JESUS IS THE OFFER OF UNLIMITED WORLDLY AUTHORITY/POWER IF JESUS WILL FALL DOWN AND WORSHIP HIM. IT IS A SEDUCTIVE, SUBTLE APPROACH, FOR POWER OFTEN CARRIES AN

UNSEEN HEAVY PRICE. ALTHOUGH POWER, ITSELF, DOES NOT CARRY A MORAL VALUE, THE WAY POWER IS USED DOES DEFINE ITS MORALITY. POWER WITH ENABLES PEOPLE TO COME TOGETHER, SEEK COMMON GOALS, ENGAGE MULTIPLE TALENTS, ENLARGE RESOURCES, AND BRING SOMETHING NEW INTO BEING. POWER OVER, HOWEVER, DIVIDES AND DOES NOT RECONCILE, TEARS DOWN AND DOES NOT BUILD UP, DESTROYS AND DOES NOT CREATE. IN LUKE 6, THE DEVIL, THE DIVIDER, SEEKS TO DIVIDE JESUS FROM HIMSELF, HIS GOD, AND THE PEOPLE TO WHOM GOD SENDS HIM. TO THE DIVIDER JESUS SAYS,

“YOU SHALL DO HOMAGE TO THE LORD, YOUR GOD;  
HIM ALONE SHALL YOU ADORE.”

JESUS CHOOSES RELATIONSHIP OVER THE DEVIL’S OFFER OF DIVISIVE WORLDLY POWER.

THE THIRD TEMPTATION THE DEVIL USES IN AN EFFORT TO BEGUILE JESUS IS MORE CUNNING THAN THE SECOND. HE SAYS, “IF YOU ARE THE SON OF GOD, PROVE IT.” AGAIN, JESUS IS NOT TRICKED BY THE DIVIDER; HE SEES THROUGH THE DEVIL’S PLOY. AS PAUL WRITES, JESUS “DID NOT CONSIDER EQUALITY WITH GOD A THING TO BE GRASPED.” (PHILIPPIANS 2:6). JESUS’ HEART FINDS ITS PEACE, ITS MEANING AND PURPOSE, ITS FULFILLMENT IN ADORATION OF GOD. FAITHFULLY, JESUS RESPONDS,

“YOU SHALL NOT FORCE A TEST  
ON THE LORD YOUR GOD.”

FOR JESUS, GOD IS THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF ALL IN ALL.

## **WEEK 1’S SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: EXAMEN**

“IN THE 16TH CENTURY, IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA (1491-1556), FOUNDER OF THE JESUITS, DEVELOPED AN APPROACH TO ASSIST EVERY CHRISTIAN IN THE DISCIPLINE OF SELF-ASSESSMENT. IGNATIUS HIMSELF WAS KNOWN FOR PRACTICING THIS EXAMINATION THREE TIMES EACH DAY. IN THE MORNING, HE REFLECTED ON THE PREVIOUS NIGHT’S EVENTS; AT NOON, HE CONSIDERED THE EVENTS OF THE MORNING, AND AT NIGHT THE EVENTS OF THE AFTERNOON. EACH EXAMINATION WAS ABOUT 15 MINUTES IN LENGTH AND COVERED FIVE TOPICS SUCCESSIVELY ... ACKNOWLEDGING, ASKING, ADMITTING, REPENTING, AND RESOLVING.”

(DISCOVER FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, “WHY SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OR DISCIPLINES,” [HTTPS://WWW.DISCOVERFIRSTCHURCH.ORG/ SPIRITUAL-FORMATION/ SPIRITUAL-PRACTICES](https://www.discoverfirstchurch.org/spiritual-formation/spiritual-practices), GOSHEN, INDIANA.)

### **SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

DURING WEEK 1, YOU ARE INVITED TO USE A MODIFIED FORM OF EXAMEN DAILY. SOMETIME IN THE EVENING BEFORE YOU PREPARE FOR BED, SPEND 15-20 MINUTES REFLECTING ON THE EVENTS OF THE DAY.

ASK YOURSELF THREE QUESTIONS BASED ON THE GOSPEL READING:

1. THIS DAY, DID MY ACTIONS REFLECT GOD’S LOVE FOR THE WORLD?

WAS I TEMPTED TO THINK ONLY OF MY NEEDS AND IGNORE THE NEEDS OF OTHERS? DID I PUT MY NEEDS ABOVE THE NEEDS OF OTHERS OR FOCUS ON MYSELF AT THE EXCLUSION OF MY COMMUNITY OR THE WORLD.

2. THIS DAY, HOW DID I USE MY POWER, MY TALENTS AND ABILITIES? DID I USE THEM ONLY TO ENHANCE MY LIFE AND WELL-BEING, OR DID I ALSO THINK OF MY WIDER WORLD AND SEEK TO PROMOTE THE LIVES AND WELL-BEING OF OTHERS ?
  
3. THIS DAY, DID MY ACTIONS INDICATE SOMETHING OTHER THAN GOD IS MOST IMPORTANT TO ME?

**HYMN OF THE WEEK:** JESUS TEMPTED IN THE WILDERNESS (FOUND IN TFWS)

**WEEK 2: PRAYER**



**WEEK 2'S GOSPEL READING IS LUKE 9:28-36.** THIS PASSAGE IS COMMONLY KNOWN AS THE TRANSFIGURATION. OF JESUS. IMMEDIATELY BEFORE IT, JESUS GIVES THE DISCIPLES THE POWER AND AUTHORITY TO UNDERTAKE A MISSIONARY TRIP, INSTRUCTS THEM IN THE WAYS OF EVANGELISM, AND SENDS THEM OUT. WHEN THEY RETURN, HE BEGINS TEACHING THE MULTITUDE WHO FOLLOWED HIM TO BETHSAIDA. THEN, AS THE DAY IS ENDING, JESUS FEEDS THE HUNGRY WITH THE FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH THE DISCIPLES HAVE BETWEEN THEM.

THE DAY, HOWEVER, IS NOT YET OVER FOR JESUS. HE HAS ONE MORE THING HE WANTS TO SHARE WITH HIS DISCIPLES. IT WEIGHS HEAVY ON HIS HEART, FOR HE KNOWS THE DISCIPLES WILL NOT COMPREHEND HIS MESSAGE. BEFORE HE SPEAKS, HE TURNS TO GOD IN PRAYER. THEN AND ONLY THEN, DOES JESUS TELL THE DISCIPLES,

“THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER MANY THINGS AND BE REJECTED BY THE ELDERS AND CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES AND BE KILLED AND BE RAISED UP ON THE THIRD DAY.”

TO INCREASE THE DISCIPLES' UNDERSTANDING, JESUS SAYS WHOEVER

“...WISHES TO COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY, AND FOLLOW ME.”

THEN TO MAKE HIS MESSAGE UTTERLY CLEAR, JESUS TELLS HIS BAND OF MEN,

“FOR WHAT IS A MAN PROFITED IF HE GAINS THE WHOLE WORLD AND LOSES OR FORFEITS HIMSELF?”

EIGHT DAYS LATER, JESUS GOES UP THE MOUNTAIN TO PRAY. HE TAKES WITH HIM, PETER, JAMES AND JOHN. FOUR GO UP TO PRAY, BUT ONLY ONE ACTUALLY PRAYS. THE DISCIPLES, PERHAPS BOTH PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY WEARY, DRIFT BETWEEN WAKEFULNESS AND SLEEP. AS JESUS PRAYS, HE IS TRANSFIGURED. HIS INNER GLORY RADIATES OUTWARD AND CAUSES HIM TO SHINE LIKE A BRILLIANT WHITE LIGHT. WITHIN THAT NIMBUS OF RADIANT LIGHT MOSES AND ELIJAH APPEAR AND TALK WITH JESUS. WE CAN ONLY SPECULATE ABOUT WHAT JESUS AND THE PROPHETS ARE SPEAKING, BUT SINCE JESUS HAS RECENTLY TALKED WITH THE DISCIPLES ABOUT THE EVENTS THAT WOULD TRANSPIRE IN JERUSALEM, THERE IS EVERY GOOD REASON TO THINK JERUSALEM IS THE TOPIC OF THEIR CONVERSATION.

THE DISCIPLES WITNESS WHAT OCCURS ON THE MOUNTAIN. THEY SEE JESUS TRANSFIGURED, AND THEY SEE HIM TALKING WITH THE TWO PILLARS OF THEIR FAITH. I AM SURE IF I HAD BEEN THERE THAT DAY, I WOULD HAVE BEEN BEWILDERED AND CONFUSED. I MAY VERY WELL HAVE BLURTED OUT SOMETHING AS INANE AS PETER'S SUGGESTION TO BUILD THREE TABERNACLES. BEFORE JESUS CAN RESPOND, A CLOUD OVERSHADOWS THEM AND A VOICE SAYS, "THIS IS MY SON, MY CHOSEN ONE; LISTEN TO HIM."

"LISTEN TO HIM." THESE WORDS ARE A SIGNPOST ON OUR LENTEN JOURNEY THIS WEEK. IN PRAYER, JESUS LISTENS TO GOD, AND WE, PER GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS, ARE TO LISTEN TO JESUS. WE CAN LISTEN TO JESUS BY READING AND STUDYING SCRIPTURE, WE CAN LISTEN TO JESUS BY ATTENDING WORSHIP SERVICES WHERE SCRIPTURES ARE READ, PRAYERS ARE MADE, AND MESSAGES ARE GIVEN. AND AS JESUS DID WITH GOD, WE CAN LISTEN TO JESUS IN PRAYER. JOHN O'SHEA SAYS THAT *THE GOAL OF LISTENING IS PROFOUND SILENCE, AN EMPTY, RECEPTIVE MIND.* (P.73).

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF PRAYER. TWO BROAD CATEGORIES MIGHT BE DESCRIBED AS TALKING AND LISTENING. WHEN WE ENGAGE IN LISTENING PRAYER, PRAYER THAT MOVES US INTO PROFOUND SILENCE, SOMETHING REAL AND TANGIBLE HAPPENS. WE ARE CHANGED, TRANSFIGURED, TRANSFORMED! OUR THINKING CHANGES. OUR HEARTS CHANGE. OUR BEHAVIOR CHANGES. WE BECOME A NEW CREATION. CENTERING PRAYER IS ONE FORM OF LISTENING PRAYER.

## **WEEK 2'S SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: CENTERING PRAYER**

"CENTERING PRAYER IS AN ANCIENT FORM OF PRAYER THAT JOINED MEDITATION ON A WORD OF SCRIPTURE WITH PRAYER. IN THE 1960S AND 1970S, THREE CISTERCIAN MONKS, THOMAS KEATING, BASIL PENNINGTON, AND WILLIAM MENINGER, SOUGHT TO REVIVE THIS ANCIENT FORM OF MEDITATIVE PRAYER." (DISCOVER FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, "WHY SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OR DISCIPLINES," [HTTPS://WWW.DISCOVERFIRSTCHURCH.ORG/SPIRITUAL-FORMATION/SPIRITUAL-PRACTICES.](https://www.discoverfirstchurch.org/spiritual-formation/spiritual-practices)" GOSHEN, INDIANA.)

### **SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

TRADITIONALLY, CENTERING PRAYER IS A TWENTY-MINUTE SIT. IT BEGINS WITH CHOOSING A SACRED WORD. IF YOU DO NOT ALREADY HAVE A SACRED WORD, YOU MIGHT LIKE TO CHOOSE A WORD FROM THIS WEEK'S GOSPEL READING. PRACTITIONERS OF CENTERING PRAYER SUGGEST KEEPING THE WORD SIMPLE. CHOOSE ONE OR MAYBE TWO WORDS WITH FEW SYLLABLES. CENTERING PRAYER IS A VEHICLE TO SILENCE, AND SILENCE IS A VEHICLE TO LISTENING. THOUGHTS WILL COME, FOR IT IS CHALLENGING FOR US TO STILL OUR MONKEY MINDS. WHEN UNBIDDEN THOUGHTS COME, SAY YOUR SACRED WORD AND LET THEM DRIFT ON BY. THE SPACE MADE BETWEEN SAYING THE SACRED WORD AND THE NEXT THOUGHT GIVES THE SPIRIT AN OPENING FOR LIGHT TO ENTER IN. OUR INTENTION IS TO BE

STILL AND LISTEN WITH AN OPEN, RECEPTIVE MIND THAT WE MAY BE CHANGED TO WITNESS TO GOD'S LOVE IN ALL WE DO.

THIS WEEK, YOU ARE INVITED TO SET 20 MINUTES ASIDE EACH DAY TO SIT. IF POSSIBLE, CHOOSE THE SAME TIME EVERY DAY. YOU CAN SIT WITH YOUR EYES OPEN OR CLOSED. SOME PEOPLE MAY BE DISTRACTED WHEN THEIR EYES ARE OPEN AND SO CLOSE THEIRS. SETTING A TIMER WHEN YOU START WILL ALERT YOU WHEN THE TIME IS UP.

**HYMN OF THE WEEK** THE LORD'S PRAYER (YOU TUBE, ANDREA BOCELLI, LIVE FROM THE KODAK THEATRE)

### **WEEK 3: REPENTANCE**



**WEEK 3'S GOSPEL READING IS LUKE 13:1-9.** IN THIS THE THIRD WEEK OF OUR LENTEN JOURNEY, JESUS IS TRAVELING TO JERUSALEM. ALONG THE WAY, PEOPLE COME TO HIM AND TELL HIM ABOUT SOME GALILEANS, WHO WERE KILLED BY HEROD'S SOLDIERS AS THEY WERE SACRIFICING IN THE TEMPLE. JESUS' RESPONSE SURELY CAUGHT THEM OFF GUARD, FOR IT WAS NOT WHAT THEY WERE EXPECTING.

“DO YOU SUPPOSE THEY WERE GREATER SINNERS THAN ALL OTHER GALILEANS, BECAUSE THEY SUFFERED THIS FATE?”

I TELL YOU, NO, BUT UNLESS YOU REPENT,  
YOU WILL ALL LIKewise PERISH.

THEN, ADDING TO THEIR CONFUSION, JESUS ASKS THEM,

“DO YOU SUPPOSE THAT THOSE EIGHTEEN ON WHOM THE TOWER IN SILOAM FELL, AND KILLED THEM, WERE WORSE CULPRITS THAN ALL THE MEN WHO LIVE IN JERUSALEM?”

I TELL YOU, NO, BUT UNLESS YOU REPENT,  
YOU WILL ALL LIKewise PERISH.”

WHAT IS JESUS DOING HERE? HE IS CERTAINLY NOT MAKING A CONNECTION BETWEEN SIN AND PUNISHMENT, WHICH WAS THE GENERAL UNDERSTANDING REGARDING TRAGEDIES. IN FACT, HE REFUSES TO ENGAGE IN ANY THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION ABOUT WHY BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO PEOPLE. I THINK JESUS IS TRYING TO SHAKE PEOPLE UP. OPEN THEIR MINDS TO A NEW WAY OF THINKING. ENCOURAGE THEM TO MOVE BEYOND THEIR TIGHTLY HELD BELIEFS. HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THAT TRAGEDY IS NOT A PUNISHMENT FOR SIN. HE UNDERSCORES THIS WHEN HE SAYS FIRMLY, “NO.”

THAT, HOWEVER, IS NOT ALL JESUS IS DOING. HE IS SEEKING TO HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT AND MORE IMMEDIATE TO THEIR ETERNAL WELL-BEING THAN ENDLESS DISCUSSIONS ABOUT WHY THE PEOPLE DIED. THE IMPORTANT QUESTION, THE ULTIMATE QUESTION FOR ANY OF US, IS, “HOW AM I LIVING TODAY?” AM I LIVING AS GOD WOULD HAVE ME LIVE? AM I ENACTING GOD'S LOVE, MERCY, KINDNESS, AND JUSTICE IN THE WORLD? AM I BEARING FRUIT? THAT'S WHAT THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE IS ABOUT. IT'S JESUS' CALL TO US TO BEAR FRUIT.

WHEN JESUS SAYS, “REPENT!”, HE IS URGING US TO CHANGE OUR MINDS ABOUT WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO US. CHANGE OUR MINDS ABOUT HOW WE WANT TO RELATE TO OTHERS AND CREATION. JESUS IS CALLING US TO MAKE A PERSONAL DECISION ABOUT HOW WE WILL LIVE. THE TIME IS HERE. THE TIME IS NOW. ALL WE HAVE IS THIS MOMENT. WE HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THE NEXT MOMENT MAY BRING. EVERY MOMENT WE TAKE A BREATH IS AN OPPORTUNE TIME. EVERY MOMENT WE CAN CHOOSE TO BRING HEAVEN TO EARTH OR NOT. (JOHN SHEA, P.79).

### **WEEK 3’S SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:** BREATH PRAYER

“BREATH PRAYER IS A MODERN ADAPTATION OF THE ANCIENT PRAYER OF THE HEART. (“THE BREATH PRAYER,” THE UPPER ROOM). THE DESERT MOTHERS AND FATHERS ARE CREDITED WITH DEVELOPING THIS PRAYER FORM, WHICH THEY PRAYED DAILY, OFTEN FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME. WHISPERING WORDS OF SCRIPTURE AS WE BREATHE IN AND OUT OPENS OUR HEARTS TO GOD.

THE DESERT MOTHERS AND FATHERS SELECTED A SHORT SCRIPTURE PASSAGE, SUCH AS THE PRAYER OF THE HEART, ON THE “IN” BREATH, THEY WOULD SAY THE FIRST LINE OF THE PASSAGE, “LORD JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD,” AND THEN ON THE “OUTBREATH” THE LAST LINE, “HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER.” SOME PEOPLE RECOMMEND LIMITING THE PASSAGE TO SIX TO EIGHT SYLLABLES. THAT, HOWEVER, IS NOT A HARD AND FAST RULE.

THE BIBLE PROVIDES MANY SHORT SCRIPTURE PASSAGES THAT CAN BE UTILIZED AS BREATH PRAYERS. SOME EXAMPLES ARE

IN BREATH	“LIVE BY THE SPIRIT”
OUT BREATH	“WALK IN THE SPIRIT.” (GAL.5:25)
IN BREATH	“LOVING SHEPHERD”
OUT BREATH	“LEAD ME BY THE STILL WATERS.” (Ps. 23)
IN BREATH	“BE STILL”
OUT BREATH	“AND KNOW THAT I AM LORD. (Ps. 46:10)
IN BREATH	“SPEAK LORD,”
IN BREATH	“YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING” (Is. 3:9-10)
IN BREATH	“FATHER, INTO YOUR HANDS, “
OUT BREATH	“I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.” (LUKE 23:46)

IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE TO CREATE YOUR OWN BREATH PRAYERS. FOR THE IN BREATH, SELECT A NAME BY WHICH TO ADDRESS GOD; ON THE OUT BREATH SELECT A WORD OR PHRASE THAT DESCRIBES YOUR HEART’S DESIRE OR GREATEST TRUTH. ONE CREATED BREATH PRAYER THAT HAS COMFORTED MANY PEOPLE IS “ABBA, I BELONG TO YOU.” A BREATH PRAYER FROM THIS WEEK’S GOSPEL READING IS,

IN BREATH	“FATHER FORGIVE ME,”
OUT BREATH	“I HAVE SINNED . . .” LUKE 15:18B

BREATH PRAYERS CAN BE OFFERED ANY PLACE, ANY TIME FOR AS LONG AS THE PERSON CHOOSES. OR A SPECIFIED TIME MAY BE SET ASIDE EACH DAY FOR AN EXPRESSED PERIOD OF TIME. THE PROCESS CARRIES WITH IT FLEXIBILITY. WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT IS OUR INTENTION TO DRAW ASIDE AND SPEND TIME WITH GOD. AS DIETRICK BONHOEFFER SAID, "TO PRAY IS TO BREATHE ALONGSIDE GOD."

THIS WEEK SEEK TO DO BREATH PRAYER A COUPLE OF TIMES A DAY OR SIT FOR A SPECIFIED TIME EACH DAY.

**HYMN OF THE WEEK:** JESUS TEMPTED IN THE DESERT

**WEEK 4: FORGIVENESS**



**WEEK 4'S GOSPEL READING IS LUKE 15:1-3, 11-32.** WE HAVE JOURNEYED FAR AND WIDE OVER ROCKY TERRAIN AND HAVE ARRIVED AT A PLACE WHERE WE CAN STOP AND TARRY FOR A BIT, SIT BY A FIRE, GET COMFORTABLE, WARM OURSELVES AND HEAR A STORY. IT IS GOOD TO TAKE A MOMENT OF RESPITE WHEN THE JOURNEY IS LONG. THE STORY JESUS SHARES WITH US INTRODUCES US TO A FAMILY, WHOSE CHOICES AND DEEP MISUNDERSTANDING BRING THE FATHER PAIN. UNLIKE SOME STORIES, THE FATHER HERE IS PATIENT, LOVING, AND KIND, JUST AND MERCIFUL. AS WITH OTHERS OF JESUS' STORIES, THIS STORY TEACHES US SOMETHING ABOUT HOW TO LIVE FRUITFULLY IN THE WORLD.

IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING JESUS' TELLING OF THE STORY OF THE PRODIGAL SON, LUKE TELLS US THAT "ALL THE TAX GATHERERS AND SINNERS WERE COMING TO JESUS TO LISTEN TO HIM AND THE PHARISEES AND THE SCRIBES BEGAN TO GRUMBLE, SAYING 'THIS MAN WELCOMES SINNERS AND EATS WITH THEM.'" IT IS THE GRUMBLING OF THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES THAT PROMPTS JESUS TO TELL US THIS STORY. THE TWO STORIES IMPINGE ON ONE ANOTHER. JESUS REPLICATES THE BEHAVIOR OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE TWO SONS.

THE FATHER HAS TWO SONS, BOTH OF WHOM HE LOVES FEROCIOUSLY. THE OLDER SON IS DEPENDABLE AND A HARD WORKER. NOT SO MUCH THE YOUNGER SON. VERY QUICKLY, WE SEE THAT THE YOUNGER SON IS FOOLISH, RECKLESS, FULL OF HIMSELF, AND LACKING IN WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING. ONE DAY HE GOES TO THE FATHER AND DEMANDS HIS SHARE OF THE INHERITANCE. BY DOING THAT HE IS EFFECTIVELY TREATING HIS FATHER AS HIS HE HAS ALREADY DIED.

NOW THE FATHER DOES NOT HAVE TO ACQUIESCE TO HIS SON'S DEMANDS, BUT RATHER THAN SHAMING HIM, HE DOES. THE YOUNGER SON TAKES THE MONEY AND RUNS. HE CUTS HIMSELF OFF FROM THE DEEP CARING AND WARM HOSPITALITY OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO GO TO THE BIG CITY WHERE HE KNOWS NO ONE AND NO ONE KNOW OR CARES ABOUT HIM.

ONCE SETTLED THERE, THE SON SQUANDERS HIS MONEY ON WINE, WOMEN, AND SONG. OF COURSE, PEOPLE HAPPILY FLOCK TO HIS PARTIES, DRINK HIS WINE, EAT HIS FOOD. WHEN THE MONEY RUNS OUT AND THE WINE STOPS FLOWING, THE MISGUIDED SON SEES THAT HIS SO-CALLED FRIENDS WERE THERE FOR ONE THING

ONLY, A GOOD TIME. QUICKLY, THE INEXPERIENCED, UNQUALIFIED SON FINDS HIMSELF ALONE AND HUNGRY. TO QUENCH HIS HUNGER, HE TAKES A JOB FEEDING SWINE. WHILE FEEDING THEM HE REALIZES THAT HIS HUNGER IS SO GREAT HE WOULD EAT THE PODS HE IS FEEDING THEM. IN THAT MOMENT, THE SON COMES TO HIS SENSES, CHANGES HIS MIND, REPENTS OF HIS ACTIONS.

ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT SEE IT IN THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION, THE GREEK TELLS US THAT THIS ERSTWHILE SON COMES TO HIS SENSES WHOLEHEARTEDLY, FULLY, COMPLETELY. IN THAT MOMENT, HE REALIZES THE FULL EXTENT OF HIS SIN AND DECIDES TO RETURN HOME TO HIS FATHER. “NO TURNING BACK, LORD, NO TURNING BACK. THE SON KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT HE WILL SAY, “FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AND AM NOT WORTHY TO BE CALLED YOUR SON; MAKE ME ONE OF YOUR HIRED HANDS.”

SINCE THIS BELOVED SON LEFT, THE FATHER HAS SCANNED THE DISTANT HORIZON DAILY IN THE HOPE OF SEEING HIS SILHOUETTE ON THE HORIZON. WHEN THE DAY FINALLY COMES, THE FATHER RUNS TO HIM AND EMBRACES HIM. AS THE SON BEGINS HIS CONFESSION, HIS FATHER CALLS THE SERVANTS TO BRING THE BEST ROBE, A RING, AND SANDALS FOR HIS SON TO WEAR. THEN HE CALLS FOR THEM TO PREPARE A FEAST SO THEY CAN CELEBRATE THE HOMECOMING OF THE ONE WHO WAS LOST AND IS FOUND. EVERLASTING, EVER FORGIVING, EVER FAITHFUL LOVE WAITS FOR AND WELCOMES THE SON HOME.

THE OLDER SON, SEEING NO REASON FOR JOY OR CELEBRATION, REFUSES TO JOIN IN THE FESTIVITIES. HE HAS PLAYED THE PART OF THE DUTIFUL SON FOR AS LONG AS HE CAN REMEMBER. HE REMAINED AT HOME, OBEYED HIS FATHER, WORKED HARD IN THE FIELD, DONE ALL HIS FATHER ASKS HIM TO DO. HE IS ACUTELY AWARE THAT HIS FATHER NEVER CALLED FOR THE BEST ROBE FOR HIM TO WEAR OR A RING FOR HIS FINGER OR SANDALS FOR HIS FEET. THE OLDER SON FEELS ANGRY, RESENTFUL, AND HURT.

THE OLDER SON SEES HIMSELF AS RIGHTEOUS. HE DOES NOT REALIZE THAT HE STAYED HOME NOT BECAUSE OF LOVE FOR HIS FATHER BUT FOR SELF-GAIN. ALL OF HIS ACTIONS HAVE STRINGS ATTACHED TO THEM. STRINGS OF EXPECTATION, STRINGS OF ENTITLEMENT, STRINGS OF BEING REWARDED FOR WHAT HE DOES. HIS IS A *QUID PRO QUO* RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FATHER. HE EXPECTS HIS FATHER TO REWARD HIM FOR BEING A DUTIFUL SON AND FAILS TO SEE THAT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER IS PARAMOUNT. JOHN SHEA SAYS THE OLDER SON “.... DOES NOT WORK WITH THE FULL HEART OF A SON” BUT “...WITH THE CALCULATING MIND OF A SLAVE.” (P.85)

LIKE THE YOUNGER SON, THE OLDER SON MISSES THE MARK. HE, TOO, SINS AGAINST HIS FATHER. WHEN THE FATHER LEARNS THAT THE OLDER SON IS UNWILLING TO GO TO THE CELEBRATION, THE FATHER GOES OUT TO HIM AND BEGINS BEGGING HIM TO COME IN. HE EMPHASIZES WHAT THE SON DOES NOT GET: “MY SON YOU ALWAYS BEEN WITH ME AND ALL THAT IS MINE IS YOURS.”

WE DON'T KNOW IF THE OLDER SON COMES TO HIS SENSES. WE DO KNOW THAT “WE CANNOT BE HEALED IF WE HOLD ONTO THAT WHICH HARMS US.” (JAMES 5:16).



WE ALSO KNOW THAT THE FATHER IS FAITHFUL AND JUST. HE WILL SCAN THE HORIZON FOR HIS OLDER SON, WAITING AND WATCHING FOR ANY SIGN THAT HE HAS BEGUN THE JOURNEY HOME.

THE TEXT EMPHASIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVENESS — CONSCIOUSLY CHOOSING TO LET GO OF OUR ANGER, HURT, AND RESENTMENT

SO WE CAN LIVE AS PEACE MAKERS AND KEEPERS;

SO WE CAN LIVE OUT GOD’S CALL TO LIVE JUSTLY, DO MERCY, AND WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD;

SO WE CAN BECOME THE GRACIOUS, LOVING, COMPASSIONATE PEOPLE GOD CALLS US TO BE.

WE, THE FATHER’S SONS AND DAUGHTERS COME HOME WHEN WE FORGIVE AND BEGIN TO INCARNATE HOLY LOVE IN THE WORLD.

### **WEEK 4’S SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:** VISIO DIVINA

VISIO DIVINA

GAZING, REFLECTING, RESPONDING, RESTING.

“VISIO DIVINA, SACRED SEEING, IS AN ANCIENT FORM OF PRAYER THAT CONTINUES TO BE A POWERFUL METHOD OF MEDITATION. ART BECOMES THE SACRAMENT THAT OPENS OUR HEARTS TO THE INDWELLING SPIRIT OF GOD. THE VISIBLE MAKES THE INVISIBLE PRESENT IN A PALPABLE WAY.

“ANY PIECE OF ART CAN BE THE SUBJECT OF REFLECTION. IT IS NOT NECESSARY FOR IT TO BE RELIGIOUS ART; HOWEVER, REFLECTING ON ICONS HAS BEEN PRACTICED SINCE ANCIENT TIMES. THE STEPS OF VISIO DIVINA ARE SIMILAR TO THOSE OF LECTIO DIVINA . . . .”

BEGIN BY PICKING A COMFORTABLE PLACE TO SIT AND A PIECE OF ART TO REFLECT ON. **THIS WEEK YOU ARE INVITED TO REFLECT ON *THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL* BY REMBRANDT.** IT IS ATTACHED TO THIS DOCUMENT.

STEPS

1. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND BREATHE IN AND OUT FOR A FEW MINUTES.
2. “GAZE AT THE ENTIRE PICTURE. NOTICE THE SHAPES, THE COLORS, AND THE LIGHTING. NOTICE THE DETAIL OF BOTH THE FOREGROUND AND BACKGROUND. ONCE YOU HAVE VISUALLY CANVASED THE ARTWORK, NOTE WHAT HAS DRAWN YOUR ATTENTION. AS IN LECTIO DIVINA, IT IS GOD THAT IS LURING YOU TO A TREASURE MEANT JUST FOR YOU.
3. “MEDITATE ON THE PART OF THE PICTURE THAT HAS DRAWN YOUR ATTENTION. HOW IS GOD SPEAKING TO YOU? WHY DO YOU THINK GOD DREW YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS PARTICULAR PART? IS A MESSAGE BEING CONVEYED THAT PERTAINS TO YOUR LIFE TODAY? DO YOU SENSE AN INVITATION? DO YOU HEAR A CALL? IS A MEMORY AROUSED? ALLOW THESE THOUGHTS TO DESCEND TO YOUR HEART. WHAT EMOTION IS

EVOKED? WHAT WORD DESCRIBES YOUR INNER STIRRING AS YOU EMBRACE THIS FEELING? ALLOW GOD'S COMMUNICATION TO TOUCH YOU DEEP WITHIN WHERE THE SPIRIT DWELLS.

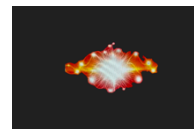
4. "GOD HAS BEEN SPEAKING TO YOU AS YOU MEDITATED ON THIS ARTWORK. IT'S NOW TIME FOR YOU TO RESPOND TO THE DIVINE. ALLOW YOUR WORDS TO BE BORN IN THE RECESSES OF YOUR SOUL. WHAT IS YOUR RESPONSE? WHAT IS YOUR PRAYER? ARTICULATE ANY YEARNINGS OR DESIRES THAT ARISE. GIVE VOICE TO THE EMOTION THAT IS WHIRLING WITHIN. " IS GOD CALLING YOU TO TAKE A PARTICULAR ACTION THROUGH YOUR INTERACTION WITH THE PICTURE?
  
5. "WORDS ARE NEVER SUFFICIENT TO EXPRESS OUR DEEPEST SELVES. TURN TO SILENCE TO SIMPLY REST IN COMMUNION WITH OUR CREATOR, . . . THE ONE WHO LOVES YOU BEYOND MEASURE. SAVOR THE STILLNESS. BE SOOTHED BY LOVE. VISIO DIVINA SETS OUR INTERIOR STAGE FOR A SOULFUL CONNECTION WITH OUR MAKER WHERE INTIMATE COMMUNION IS POSSIBLE."  
 (KATHY KEARY, PRECIOUS BLOOD RENEWAL CENTER, *CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER: THE FIVE STEPS OF LECTIO DIVINA*).

**HYMN OF THE WEEK:** *FATHER I HAVE SINNED*

([https://www.google.com/search?q=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gFather+I+have+sinned&rlz=1C5CHFA\\_enUS973US973&oq=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gFather+I+have+sinned&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIGCAEQRRq60gEINTUzM2owajSoAgCwAgE&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:bf2647c9,vid:vq8JNLwX5sM,st:0](https://www.google.com/search?q=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gFather+I+have+sinned&rlz=1C5CHFA_enUS973US973&oq=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gFather+I+have+sinned&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIGCAEQRRq60gEINTUzM2owajSoAgCwAgE&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:bf2647c9,vid:vq8JNLwX5sM,st:0))



## **WEEK 5: GOD'S GLORIFIED PRESENCE ~SHEKINAH**



**WEEK 5'S GOSPEL READING IS JOHN 8:1-11.** THE SHEKINAH GLORY OF THE LORD ENFOLDS THIS PASSAGE AND IS FULLY REVEALED AT ITS CONCLUSION.

THIS READING MAKES TWO REFERENCES TO TWO EVENTS IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES. BOTH INFORM OUR UNDERSTANDING OF TODAY'S GOSPEL LESSON. THE FIRST REFERENCE COMES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE READING WHEN JOHN TELLS US THAT JESUS JOURNEYED FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES TO THE TEMPLE. HUNDREDS OF YEARS EARLIER IN THE DAYS AFTER THE ISRAELITES RETURN HOME FROM THE BABYLONIAN EXILE, THE PROPHET EZEKIEL WRITES THAT GOD LEFT THE TEMPLE, WENT TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES, AND FROM THERE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN. GOD'S SHEKINAH GLORY TRAVELED WITH THE PEOPLE AS THEY FLED EGYPT. GOD'S SHEKINAH GLORY WAS WITH THEM AS THEY ENTERED THE PROMISED LAND. AND GOD'S SHEKINAH GLORY WAS WITH THEM AS THEY BUILT HOMES AND PLANTED CROPS. BUT, THE PEOPLES' SIN PROMPTED GOD TO WITHDRAW FROM THE PEOPLE.

JOHN'S DESCRIPTION OF JESUS GOING FIRST TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES AND THEN TO THE TEMPLE IS NOT MERELY A TRAVELOGUE OF JESUS' JOURNEY TO THE CROSS. IT IS FIRST AND FOREMOST AN ANNOUNCEMENT THAT DIVINE GLORY HAS AGAIN COME INTO THE TEMPLE. GOD RETURNS TO THE TEMPLE TO BE WITH GOD'S BELOVED PEOPLE.

THE SECOND REFERENCE TO THE HEBREW BIBLE COMES WHEN JOHN TELLS US THAT TWICE JESUS WRITES ON THE GROUND WITH HIS FINGER. THE PEOPLE OF JESUS' DAY WOULD HAVE REALIZED THAT JOHN WAS REFERRING TO THE GIVING OF THE LAW ON MT. SINAI WHERE GOD USING THE DIVINE FINGER WRITES THE LAW ON TWO TABLETS NOT ONCE BUT TWICE.

ONCE INSIDE THE TEMPLE, JESUS SITS DOWN AND BEGINS TO TEACH. ALMOST IMMEDIATELY THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES BRING IN A WOMAN CAUGHT IN ADULTERY AND MAKE HER TO STAND HER BEFORE HIM THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS TELL JESUS OF THE WOMAN'S SIN AND REMIND HIM THAT THE LAW DECLARES SUCH SINNERS SHOULD BE STONED. THEY THEN SPRING THEIR CAREFULLY CONTRIVED TRAP BY ASKING,  
 "TEACHER, WHAT DO YOU SAY?"

THE QUESTION IS CUNNING. IF JESUS SAYS, "FREE HER," HE WOULD BE BREAKING THE LAW. IF HE SAYS, "STONE HER," HE WOULD BE KEEPING THE LAW BUT SHOWING NO COMPASSION.

WITHOUT SAYING A WORD, JESUS BENDS DOWN AND WITH HIS FINGER WRITES SOMETHING ON THE GROUND. NOT SATISFIED, THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS ASK AGAIN,

“WHAT DO YOU SAY?”

JESUS REPLIES,

“LET THE ONE WHO IS WITHOUT SIN  
BE THE FIRST TO THROW A STONE AT HER.”

THEN JESUS BENDS DOWN AND AGAIN WRITES SOMETHING ON THE GROUND.

HEARING JESUS’ RESPONSE, THE MEN BEGIN LEAVING THE TEMPLE ONE AT A TIME BEGINNING WITH THE OLDEST. AFTER THE LAST MAN LEAVES, JESUS STRAIGHTENS UP AND ASKS,

“WOMAN, WHERE ARE THEY?  
DID NO ONE CONDEMN YOU?

AND THE WOMAN REPLIES,

“NO ONE, LORD.”

TO HER AMAZEMENT, JESUS RESPONDS,

“NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU;  
GO YOUR WAY;  
SIN NO MORE.”

JOHN SHEA SAYS THAT WHAT JESUS WRITES IS OF LESS IMPORTANCE THAN THE FACT THAT HE WRITES TWICE. JESUS DOES THIS BECAUSE OF SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS AFTER GOD WRITES THE STONE TABLETS AND GIVES THEM TO MOSES. AFTER RECEIVING THEM, MOSES CAREFULLY CARRIES THEM DOWN THE MOUNTAIN. AS HE APPROACHES THE CAMP, HE HEARS SOUNDS OF REVELRY. DRAWING CLOSER, HE SEES THE PEOPLE WORSHIPPING A GOLDEN CALF. ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED, MOSES THROWS THE TABLETS TO THE GROUND, DESTROYS THE GOLDEN CALF, AND CALLS THE LEVITES TO KILL THE MEN IN THE CAMP, ABOUT THREE THOUSAND IN ALL.

THAT IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY. MOSES ASCENDS THE MOUNTAIN AGAIN, TAKING WITH HIM TWO BARE STONE TABLETS. THERE HE PLEADS WITH GOD FOR THE PEOPLE AND THEN CURIOUSLY ASKS TO SEE GOD’S GLORY. GOD GIVES MOSES WHAT HE ASKS FOR. GOD HIDES MOSES IN THE CLEFT OF A ROCK AND PASSES BY HIM. AS GOD PASSES BY MOSES, THE SHEKINAH GLORY SPEAKS, SAYING

“THE LORD, THE LORD, A GOD MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS,  
SLOW TO ANGER AND ABOUNDING  
IN STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS,  
KEEPING STEADFAST LOVE FOR THE THOUSANDTH GENERATION,  
FORGIVING INEQUITY AND TRANSGRESSION AND SIN....”  
(EXODUS 34-6-7).

THROUGH THESE WORDS, GOD, WHO IS MERCIFUL AND KIND, TEACHES MOSES THAT THE LAW MUST ALWAYS BE MEDIATED BY MERCY AND KINDNESS.

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES HAVE FORGOTTEN THIS. THEIR INTENTION IS TO FOLLOW THE LETTER OF THE LAW. JESUS REMINDS THEM THAT THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION IN GOD AND NO CONDEMNATION IN HIM. THAT IS WHY TWO WRITINGS OF THE LAW ARE NECESSARY. WE NEED TO BE REMINDED TO ALWAYS AND FOREVER SHOW MERCY AND BE KIND AS OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN IS.

**TWO MEDITATIONS ARE OFFERED THIS WEEK .**

**ONE IS A VIDEO OF JOHN 8:1-11, WHICH CAN BE VIEWED AT**

*OUR DAILY BREAD MINISTRIES: EVENING MEDITATION*

[HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=GxQYC7w7TLO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxQYC7w7TLO)

**THE OTHER IS A WRITTEN GUIDED MEDITATION OF JOHN 8:1-11, WHICH FOLLOWS BELOW.** THE MEDITATION IS TITLED *JESUS DOES NOT CONDEMN YOU* AND WAS WRITTEN BY BILL GAULTIERE. IT CAN BE FOUND AT [SOULSHEPHERDING.ORG](http://SOULSHEPHERDING.ORG): UNDER IGNATIAN MEDITATION GUIDES.

“... QUIETLY READ THE PASSAGE BY USING YOUR IMAGINATION TO ENTER INTO THE STORY, SENSING AND FEELING WHAT’S GOING ON. DON’T ANALYZE THE PASSAGE OR SEEK INSIGHTS – EXPERIENCE YOURSELF AS A CHARACTER IN THE STORY. AFTER THE SECOND READING HAVE A “COLLOQUY” (SHORT, PERSONAL CONVERSATION) WITH THE LORD. YOU CAN USE THE PROMPTS AND QUESTIONS AT THE BOTTOM TO GUIDE YOUR PRAYER TIME AND JOURNALING (AND SHARING WITH OTHERS).

“INTRODUCTION: JESUS HAS CLAIMED TO BE THE BREAD OF LIFE COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN THAT GIVES ETERNAL LIFE TO ALL WHO TRUST IN HIM AND HIS FATHER. THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS WANT TO KILL HIM FOR BLASPHEMY. THEY COOK UP THE PERFECT PLOT TO TRAP HIM INTO DISAGREEING WITH GOD’S LAW. BUT JESUS OUTSMARTS THEM! IN THE PROCESS HE SHOW US HOW INCREDIBLY FAR GOD GOES TO EXTEND MERCY AND GRACE TO ALL PEOPLE, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR SHORTCOMINGS AND SINS ARE.

“1-2 JESUS WENT ACROSS TO MOUNT OLIVES, BUT HE WAS SOON BACK IN THE TEMPLE AGAIN. SWARMS OF PEOPLE CAME TO HIM. HE SAT DOWN AND TAUGHT THEM. 3-6 THE RELIGION SCHOLARS AND PHARISEES LED IN A WOMAN WHO HAD BEEN CAUGHT IN AN ACT OF ADULTERY. THEY STOOD HER IN PLAIN SIGHT OF EVERYONE AND SAID, “TEACHER, THIS WOMAN WAS CAUGHT RED-HANDED IN THE ACT OF ADULTERY. MOSES, IN THE LAW, GIVES PERSONS. WHAT DO YOU SAY?” THEY WERE TRYING TO TRAP HIM INTO SAYING SOMETHING INCRIMINATING SO THEY COULD BRING CHARGES AGAINST HIM. 6-8 JESUS BENT DOWN AND WROTE WITH HIS FINGER IN THE DIRT. THEY KEPT AT HIM, BADGERING HIM. HE STRAIGHTENED UP AND SAID, “THE SINLESS ONE AMONG YOU, GO FIRST: THROW THE STONE.” BENDING DOWN AGAIN, HE WROTE SOME MORE IN THE DIRT. 9-10 HEARING THAT, THEY WALKED AWAY, ONE AFTER ANOTHER, BEGINNING WITH THE OLDEST. THE WOMAN WAS LEFT ALONE. JESUS STOOD UP AND SPOKE TO HER. “WOMAN, WHERE ARE THEY? DOES NO ONE CONDEMN YOU?” 11 “NO ONE, MASTER.” “NEITHER DO I,” SAID JESUS. “GO ON YOUR WAY. FROM NOW ON, DON’T SIN.”

“1ST READING: VISUALIZE YOURSELF IN THE GOSPEL STORY. DON’T SEEK INTELLECTUAL INSIGHTS – STAY WITH THE IMAGERY. USE YOUR SENSES TO

SEE, TOUCH, FEEL, AND HEAR. WHAT PART OF THE STORY ARE YOU DRAWN TO? WHICH CHARACTER DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH OR ARE YOU A BYSTANDER?

“2ND READING: EXPERIENCE THE STORY IN THE ROLE OF THE CHARACTER GOD LED YOU TO. THEN TALK WITH THE LORD. WHAT DO YOU FEEL? HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO SOMETHING IN YOUR LIFE TODAY? WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?”

**HYMN OF THE WEEK:** AMAZING GRACE

**WEEK 6: JOURNEY TO THE CROSS**



BELOVED, THE JOURNEY HAS BEEN LONG. WE NOW STAND OUTSIDE JERUSALEM ALONGSIDE OUR LORD AT THE EASTERN GATE. WE HAVE FOUND REST ALONG THE WAY. WE HAVE ALSO FACED CHALLENGES. PERHAPS, WE HAVE FELT THE NEED TO MOVE BEYOND OUR COMFORT ZONE. PERHAPS EVEN TEMPTED TO TURN BACK. THAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN WE BEGIN TO EXAMINE OUR LIVES. BY OPENING OUR HEARTS TO GOD AND ENGAGING IN VARIOUS SPIRITUAL PRACTICES, WE HAVE, PERHAPS, ENCOUNTERED GOD IN A NEW WAY. THAT ENCOUNTER STRENGTHENS US FOR THE LIVING OF OUR DAYS. WE ARE POISED TO STEP INTO THE FUTURE WITH OUR LORD KNOWING AND NOT KNOWING WHAT LAYS AHEAD. NOW IS THE TIME TO PUT ON THE ARMOR OF GOD,

TO PUT ON FAITH,

TO PUT ON HOPE,

TO PUT ON LOVE.

NOW IS THE TIME TO STEADY OURSELVES FOR THE FINAL LEG OF OUR JOURNEY.

THIS WEEK YOU ARE INVITED TO WALK WITH JESUS EACH STEP OF THE WAY BY READING EACH DAY’S GOSPEL LESSON **ALOUD**. TO DO THIS, SET ASIDE A TIME TO SIT WITH THE DAY’S READING. I FIND IT HELPFUL TO CHOOSE A SET TIME TO ENGAGE IN THIS PRACTICE, BUT IT IS NOT NECESSARY. YOUR SCHEDULE MAY NOT ALLOW YOU TO DO IT. THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO READ DAILY. GET COMFORTABLE IN A CHAIR OR SIT AT A TABLE. OFFER A PRAYER ASKING GOD TO OPEN YOUR HEAD AND HEART DURING THE PRACTICE, THERE ARE FOUR STEPS TO THE PRACTICE. WHICH IS KNOWN AS THE SOAP. HERE SOAP IS AN ACRONYM FOR **S**CRPTURE, **O**BSEVATION, **A**PPPLICATION, **P**RAYER.

**STEP ONE: S**CRPTURE

SLOWLY READ THE PASSAGE ALOUD, LETTING THE WORDS SINK DEEP WITHIN. IF YOU WANT TO READ IT AGAIN, DO SO.

**STEP TWO: O**BSEVATION

ASK YOURSELF WHAT YOU NOTICE ABOUT THE VERSES. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE MAIN MESSAGE IS. WHAT VERSES OR IDEAS JUMP OUT TO YOU?

**STEP THREE: A**PPPLICATION

ASK GOD HOW YOU SHOULD APPLY THE READING TO YOUR LIFE.

**STEP FOUR: PRAYER**

PRAY FOR YOURSELF AND/OR FOR OTHERS.

THE LECTIONARY READINGS ARE

<b>PALM SUNDAY</b>	<b>LUKE 19:28-40</b>
<b>MONDAY AFTER PALM SUNDAY</b>	<b>JOHN 12:1-11</b>
<b>TUESDAY AFTER PALM SUNDAY</b>	<b>JOHN 12:20-36</b>
<b>WEDNESDAY AFTER PALM SUNDAY</b>	<b>JOHN:13:21-32</b>
<b>MAUNDY THURSDAY:</b>	<b>JOHN 13:1-17, 31B-35</b>
<b>GOOD FRIDAY</b>	<b>JOHN 18:1-19:42</b>
<b>HOLY SATURDAY</b>	<b>JOHN 19:33-42</b>

IT IS HOLY SATURDAY. WE FIND OURSELVES SITTING BESIDE THE TOMB WATCHING AND WAITING. THE WORLD SEEMS QUIETER THAN USUAL. WE MAY FEEL QUIETER THAN USUAL. THE SUN HAS SET AND WE WAIT FOR THE DAWNING OF A NEW DAY. IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW WHAT OUR NEXT STEPS SHOULD BE WHEN WE FEEL OUR HOPES AND DREAMS HAVE BEEN SHATTERED. YET, WE REMEMBER THAT JESUS MET HIS DEATH WITH GRACE, EQUANIMITY, AND A PEACE THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING. SO FILLED WITH GOD WAS HE THAT HE WAS ABLE TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHO MOCKED, AND SCORNE AND TORTURED HIM, SAYING

“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM,  
FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.”

NOW IS THE TIME TO GIRD OURSELVES IN HOPE AS WE WATCH AND PRAY,  
HOLDING FAST TO THE HOPE GOD WILL OPEN A DOOR TO NEW LIFE,  
ANTICIPATING THE RISING OF THE SUN,  
WAITING FOR THE BIRTH OF A NEW DAY.

**HYMN OF THE WEEK:** WERE YOU THERE?