
A Sanctified Art LLC is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshiping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their mission is to empower churches with resources to inspire creativity in worship and beyond. Driven by the connective and prophetic power of art, they believe that art helps us connect our hearts with our hands, our faith with our lives, and our mess with our God.

Learn more about their work at sanctifiedart.org.

A Lenten
Devotional

Full to the Brim

An expansive lent



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Art, reflections, &
poetry for the
season of Lent



sanctifiedart.org

EASTER SUNDAY

Full to the Brim Journaling

An expansive life

An expansive life means we are fully present to awe, beauty, and pain. We know our self-worth is rooted in God's love. We live full to the brim with grace and gratitude. In the space below, write reminders to yourself for how to live an expansive life.



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Scan to hear
the tune!

Expansive Life

LASST UNS ERFREUEN ("All Creatures of Our God and King")

Text: Anna Strickland (2021)

Music: Geistliche Kirchengesäng (1623)

Though it seemed foolish to have
Where Je - sus lay, an - gels in -
Now God has op - ened up the

faith Back to the gar - den wom - en
- stead Asked why they look am - ong the
tomb Like bud - ding flo - wer now in

came Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! They
dead Al - le - lu - ia! Christ is ri - sen! Re -
bloom Al - le - lu - ia! Christ is ri - sen! Christ

came al - though their hearts were torn With
- mem - ber and trust in his word Though
lives ag - ain who once had died So

spic - es to pre - pare and mourn
re - sur - rec - tion seems ab - surd Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le -
we may have ex - pan - sive life

- lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia! Al - le - lu - ia!

The origins of Lent were that one was to leave their old life behind to fast and prepare to be baptized into a new way of living. In essence, this was a practice of stepping away from corrupt power, scarcity mentality, and empty rituals in order to live a more expansive and full life of faith. And so, our Lenten theme, *Full to the Brim*, is an invitation—into a radically different Lent, into a full life. It's an invitation to be authentically who you are, to counter scarcity and injustice at every turn, to pour out even more grace wherever it is needed. When we allow ourselves to be filled to the brim with God's lavish love, that love spills over. It reaches beyond ourselves; like water, it rushes and flows, touching everything in its path.

As you journey through this devotional at your own pace, you will find scriptures, poems, art, reflections, and hymns that are filled with promises of God's abundant and expansive grace. Some of the stories you will encounter include: Jesus as a mother hen, a prodigal son welcomed home, a fig tree nurtured with care and hope, precious oil poured out lovingly and freely, and stones shouting out with praise. These sacred texts are brimming with a gospel of grace. We've done nothing to deserve or earn this grace, and yet, like water, it spills over.

Full to the Brim reminds us to live fully—as we pursue justice and hope, or express grief and gratitude. And so, this Lent, let us trust—fully—that we belong to God. Let us increase our capacity to receive and give grace. Let us discover the expansive life God dreams for us.

Artfully yours,

The Sanctified Art Creative Team

Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed
Hannah Garrity
Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman
Rev. Anna Strickland



About the SA creative team

REV. LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

Founder | Creative Director of SA

Lisle Gwynn Garrity (*she/her*) is a Pastorist (pastor + artist), retreat leader, and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. She founded A Sanctified Art with the conviction that, in order to thrive, the church needs more creative expression and art-filled freedom.

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Director of Branding | Founding Creative Partner of SA

Lauren (*she/her*) is an artist, graphic designer, and theologian. She uses paint, metallic inks, and Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. She also helps faith communities share their vibrant stories through branding & design services.

HANNAH GARRITY Founding Creative Partner of SA

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REV. ANNA STRICKLAND

Operations Support | Content Creator

Anna Strickland (*she/her*) looks for the Divine in the everyday like treasure in clay jars, and first encountered God in the integration of her spiritual self and artistic self. She is a native Austinite and graduated from the University of Texas where she now works as a college minister, especially serving LGBTQ students.

EASTER SUNDAY | Full to the Brim { *An expansive life*

Read Luke 24:1-12

From the Artist | Hannah Garrity

"But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body."

(Luke 24:1-3, NRSV)

I recently read *Art and Faith*³ by Makoto Fujimura. Fujimura speaks of the beauty in particular moments in scripture: when the women enter the tomb, and when Mary, sister of Martha, pours oil over Jesus before his journey to the cross. Fujimura draws attention to these texts to anchor a discussion of the importance of beauty in faithful practice. God placed beautiful things on earth for us to give back to God in glory. We must consider when, where, why, and how we engage beauty. We must engage with beauty in our faithful practice.

In this paper lace art piece, the inside of a bowl is patterned with images telling the initial moments of the Easter story. This design depicts burial spices in patterns. Amidst the spice patterns, a sunrise emerges. At the top is an abstract image of the empty tomb.

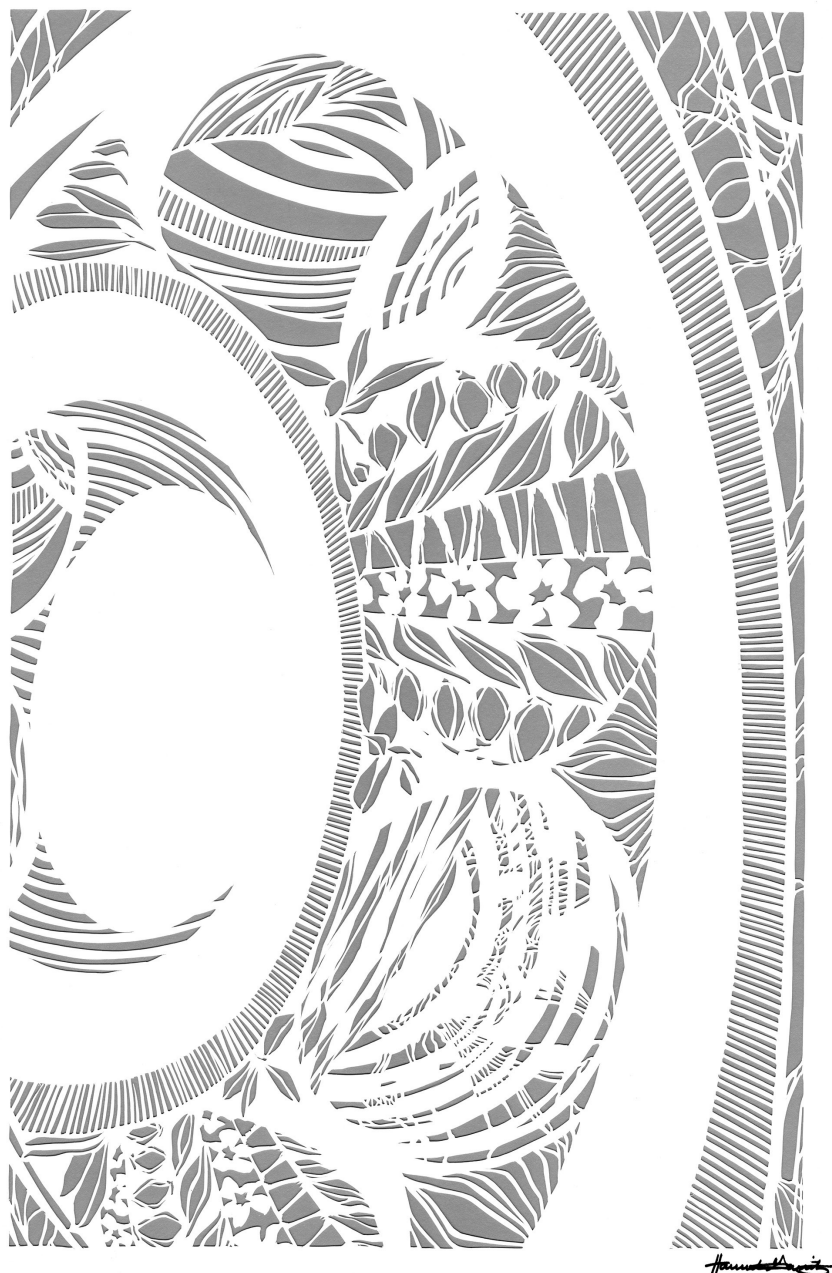
This moment, the moment when the women arrive at the tomb, represents an act of holy, extravagant, expansive beauty. Imagine being there, arriving at daybreak, holding the spice bowl in your hands. The burial spices, nard and myrrh, were aromatic. The aromas of blood, oils, death, and spices fill the air. Imagine how it would have smelled. It was the work of the women to honor the body of the deceased; to honor the life he had lived, and they had loved.

How might we honor God with our practices of beauty? What materials do we need to gather and incorporate? How can we keep God centered in our creative endeavors?

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

³ Fujimura, Makoto, with foreword by N. T. Wright. *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2020).



Prepared | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace

About our Guest Contributors

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CARMELLE BEAUGELIN

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GUEST WRITERS



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EASTER SUNDAY | Full to the Brim { *An expansive life*

Read Luke 24:1-12

Commentary | Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary come to the tomb with pounds of spices to prepare Christ's body. I imagine that they spent much of the walk reflecting on what was both Jesus' ministry and his horrific execution on the cross. They shared their hopes of "what could have been," or, dare I say, what "should have been."

Seeing the stone rolled away at their destination, perhaps they thought that a good Samaritan had made it easier for them to enter and complete the task at hand. Yet as they enter the tomb, they quickly realize there is no body to anoint, no sacred ritual to complete in order to say goodbye. The fragrant spices wrapped in their arms are useless. Their laments and prayers would never be uttered.

I entered a dark and cavernous sanctuary the first Easter after being cancer free. The shutters slowly opened and the black cloth over the stained glass fell away. Darkness to warmth, brilliant sunlight brought me to tears. My heart broke into a thousand pieces as the familiar words from "Jesus Christ has Risen Today" resonated around me. I couldn't contain both the joy and sorrow of that Easter moment. Cancer was my taste of death's presence, and the sacred became the place where I learned to live again. The familiar words that Easter morning brought me to a new place, calling me to resurrection hope beyond what my mind comprehended.

We knew the ending before our Lenten journey even began. We know this epic love story but we cannot stop at its familiarity. We open ourselves up to the unexpected as we arrive at the tomb and realize we have to lay our own spices down, letting go of what we know how to do to step toward whatever is next.

"Why do you look for the living among the dead?"

Do not be daunted by the symbols and signs of death. Do not be overwhelmed by what is, or what you hope will be. Loosen your grasp from what captivates and distracts.

Look for the living.

Live.

EASTER SUNDAY

Full to the Brim { *An expansive life*

New Life is Right Here

Maybe today
we can take a moment.
Maybe today
we can silence the inner critic.
Maybe today
we can leave perfection at the door.
Maybe today we can allow ourselves to be
here.

Maybe that's all that matters.
Maybe this sunrise is for us.
Maybe these Hallelujahs are for us.
Maybe the hope blooming in my chest
is for us.

Maybe the resurrection was not just about God's body,
but is about our body.
Maybe this new life reaches all the way to the edges.
Maybe we are free to live in a new way
where love is the currency and we are enough.

Maybe that's what this is all about—
not a relentless pursuit of more
but God's relentless pursuit of me.

New life
is right here.
Like the women—say it out loud.
Like Peter—run that way.

Poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

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On My Way

You said return to me
 so here I am
 skin and bones held
 together
 with memories and a little
 bit of
 duct tape. I am bringing
 the worst of me,
 consider yourself warned—
 the furrowed brow,
 the achy back,
 the slew of judgments,
 a pocket full of
 assumptions,
 the track of negativity
 that runs
 laps in my head.
 I am bringing it all
 because you said
 return to me,
 edits not required,
 so return I will.
 And not all of it will be bad.
 Some of it will be lovely.
 I will bring
 a wagon full of nostalgia,
 a melody that won't
 let me go,
 a million stories that start
 with the words,
 "Oh it was beautiful!"



I will bring a mended heart,
 a glass half-full,
 two lungs, out of breath
 from dancing too long,
 and dreams that taste
 like honey.
 I will bring my whole
 messy
 human self
 because I know,
 I just *know*,
 deep in my bones,
 that you are already
 running to meet me.
 There are no cuts on
 this team.
 You said you'd take it all,
 so here I come.
 Me and all my humanity.
 We are on my way.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Full to the Brim Journaling

A cup of sorrow

On this day of silence and death, dwell in the fullness of sorrow. In the space below, write, draw, and release any grief or sadness you carry.



Scan to hear the tune!

In the Beginning Was the Word

HAMBURG ("When I Survey the Wondrous Cross")

Text: Anna Strickland (2021)

Music: Lowell Mason (1824)



In the be - gin - ning was the Word
When the cup of sor - row was slain
This In our life and in our joy



One with Cre - a - tor be - fore the earth
All for the fear of Rome's re - venge
With so - ur wine and blood and tears
As in our pain and grief and death



In di - vine full - ness God's love stirred
He felt the full - ness of our pain
Though pou - red out, God's full - ness grows
God is the full - ness of the void



Then ov - er - flowed in Je - sus' birth
O - be - di - ent un - to the end
As when the Word had first drawn near
Close to - us as our own breath

Read Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Commentary | Rev. Ashley DeTar Birt

When you hear the words “Ash Wednesday,” what’s the first image that comes to mind? For many of you, I’m willing to bet it’s the marking of ashes, perhaps in the shape of a cross, on someone’s forehead. This image is so common that even people who don’t practice Christianity often take notice of it and are aware of what day it is. After all, they call it Ash Wednesday for a reason, right? This symbol serves as a visible marker of both our faith and our practice as we prepare to enter into a journey of the Spirit and the self, which makes it all the more interesting that our Matthew text for today seems to speak out against such markers.

In Matthew 6, we are given instructions on how we should practice our faith. Specifically, we shouldn’t be too “showy,” too “flashy,” or doing things to attract the attention of others. The truth is, though, sometimes we are going to attract the attention of others and sometimes we aren’t. Some of us are loud, bold people who live loud, bold lives, and our faith comes out the same way. Some of us are quiet and still, seeking quiet and still lives with quiet and still faith. Most of us are both and neither and in between. We’re boisterous and meek and terrified and joyous and nervous and so many things. These are all beautiful things, not because others can see them, but because they make us who we are. We, just as we are, are enough. That is enough for our existence, and that is enough for God. It doesn’t matter what others think. What matters is that we’re authentic, that our faith is authentic, and that we are ourselves before God.

On this Ash Wednesday, may you, ashes or not, connect with God for no one else but your beautiful self.

Read John 19:1-30

From the Artist | Carmelle Beaugelin

Posca is an Ancient Roman drink made by mixing acetum—a low quality or spoiled sour wine vinegar—with water, salt, and herbs like coriander seeds. Although despised by the upper class and nobility of Rome, it was the cocktail of choice for Roman soldiers and the lower classes.

Soaked in a sponge and attached to a hyssop branch, Posca was likely the drink offered to Jesus in response to his final statement before his death. Jesus' "I thirst" statement, alongside the offering of this sour cocktail, has become one of the most famous last meals in the history of capital execution.

This despised drink of the poor, consumed by the soldiers of Rome, may offer hints to the social standing of the Roman soldiers performing Jesus' execution in the hierarchy of ancient Roman society. We are reminded throughout the passage that, while it is the soldiers who are charged with the physical labor of carrying out the execution, they were performing as the muscle of the Roman state on behalf of the Jewish religious nobility—who indicted and demanded Jesus' execution in the first place. Matthew's account of the crucifixion recalls that it was one of the soldiers who testified to the truth of who Jesus was in the moments following his death, stating, "Surely he was the son of God!" (Matt. 27:54, NIV)

Posca offers us a symbolic moment of fleeting and subliminal solidarity. The action of offering the soon-to-be-executed Christ a drink from the personal flask of the executioner invites us into the complexity of the actors in the crucifixion: Jesus as a servant of God performing the will of God, and the soldiers as servants to Rome performing the will of the religious leaders. Two cups of power, divine and secular (albeit, religious), converge in the partaking of this final sour drink.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Stardust | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Acrylic on raw canvas with digital drawing

Read Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

From the Artist | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Many of us begin Lent with ashen marks smudged against our foreheads, the oil glistening on our skin throughout the rest of the day. It's a mark that is holy because it tells the truth: we are formed from the dust, and to dust we shall one day return. We are not immortal. Death will one day find us all.

However, as we've crafted this Lenten series around the theme, *Full to the Brim*, we've found ourselves asking for more from our Lenten journey. Yes, death will surely find me one day, inhaling me into that infinite abyss. But the cross on my forehead only tells me part of the story. The empty tomb tells me a fuller, more expansive truth: death will not have the last word. There is more. God is more.

This expansive truth requires more of us. It invites us to abandon empty or showy practices of faith, and instead, draw inward to open ourselves to a deeper journey of transformation. It requires me to believe that I am truly worthy of love, belonging, and grace. It requires me to believe others are also.

In this Lenten season, we've reimagined this Ash Wednesday ritual. What if, instead of ashes, gold gleamed on our foreheads? What if, alongside the certainty of death, we are also reminded of God's expansive grace? What if on this day we said to one another, "From stardust you have come, and to stardust you shall one day return"?

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Posca | Carmelle Beaugelin
Acrylic on canvas

Read John 19:1-30

Commentary | Rev. Ashley DeTar Birt

I have worked in children, youth, and family ministry in some capacity for over twelve years. Young people ask a lot of questions that don't have easy answers, and it can often take some time to figure out what to say when a question strikes a nerve. One of the more common questions I get is, "What does it mean for Jesus to be fully human?" I don't think I even knew the answer to that myself until a few years ago.

My father died during Holy Week. We had a complicated relationship, and I knew he was sick, but the news stunned me all the same. When I had to preach the John 19 text at the end of that week, I remember relating in my sadness and anger. Everything felt so unfair. What was happening to me felt unfair, but what was happening to Jesus felt unfair, too. He didn't deserve this! His family didn't deserve to watch this happen! Why was this happening to him, to his family, to his body? None of this was okay! In reading the text, I broke down and mourned, both for my father and for Jesus, for both were fully human.

We live in a world that feels woefully unfair, that is woefully unfair. It is unfair that certain people aren't seen in their full humanity. It is unfair that not seeing this humanity leads to suffering, mistreatment, lack of care, and loss of life. And yet, when we mourn these situations and honor humanity, we show that our capacity to love has not been taken away in all this. Good Friday gives us an opportunity to mourn Jesus in HIS full humanity and, as we do that, to mourn so many others in THEIR full humanity as well.

On this Good Friday, may you feel God's love in any mourning and sorrow you experience.



Joy Comes in the Mourning | Carmelle Beaugelin
Acrylic, gold leaf on canvas

It is Finished

One day,
one day
we will say,
“It is finished”
and not in reference to
the suffering that took place
in a school shooting,
in a police raid,
in a boat of immigrants
packed too tightly.
One day we will say,
“It is finished,”
but not in reference to
a fight against addiction,
another catastrophic storm,
a broken marriage that got
lost along the way.
One day,
one day
we will say,
“It is finished”
and only mean the
book we just read,
the cake we just baked,
the song that made us sing,
the meal around the table,
the familiar drive back home.

Until then
I will say,
“I am thirsty,”
but I still believe
in one day.
One day.

Poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Read Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

From the Artist | Carmelle Beaugelin

Mother’s Day 2016 happened to fall on a Sunday, the weekend I buried my mother after a yearlong illness. I traded my traditional bright, spring dresses for a delicate black dress to wear to worship. As soon as I shook my first hand that morning, I was abruptly greeted with, “Why in the world are you wearing all black?” Visible signs of mourning, as I recall during that season of fresh grief, were uncomfortable for those around me.

The Day of the Lord in Joel chapter 2 is an intentional call to expressions of mourning that bring life to a holy halt. The rending of hearts and of garments of mourning, the calling for a holy fast and stillness, and the expectant joy of the relenting of the wrath of God are deeply tied to the process of fasting, weeping, and mourning named in verse 12.

Joy Comes in the Mourning is an interrogation of the collective “turning away” from practices of mourning. The mourner wears their grief as a golden garment for all to see. In a world where rendered black bodies captured on body cams frequent the media, while black mourning is disregarded as performative, *Joy Comes in the Mourning* embraces the dancing and disruptive public displays of black mourning that often serve as prophetic witness, calling us to face the reckoning of the Lord’s Day where peace and justice will reign.

As we struggle to recoup in the reality of loss of all kinds in the midst of an ongoing pandemic era, what can a practice of holy mourning look like in our current life? Joel 2 calls us into a Lenten practice of expressing our hearts to a God who hears our lament out of the fullness of all that we are.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

Full to the Brim { *Even in the desert*

From Here in the Sand

You've been here before.

I squeeze that truth like an orange in my hands,
willing some form of comfort to run out,
roll down my wrists,
calm these aching nerves.

You've been here before—

in the wilderness, in the desert,
in the place where nothing is what it seems
and everything is sharp.



You've been here before
so surely you know how hard it is
to hold tight to what is real
in the middle of a storm.

But because you've been here before,
I will stand tall.

I will sing songs of the river,
from here in the sand.

I will sing songs of the river,
into the wind.

Poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Full to the Brim Journaling *Take off your shoes*

*Reflect on a time when you resisted receiving love, support, and
nurturing from others. Then, in the space below, draw or write about
a time when you let your walls down and let yourself be fully loved.
How did that experience change you?*

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Full to the Brim { *Take off your shoes*

Take Your Shoes Off STOCKTON



Scan to hear
the tune!

Text: Anna Strickland (2021)

Music: John H. Stockton (1874)



As Christ in - vi - ted friends to share in
As grains of wheat are gath - ered in to
With ten - der hearts and ten - der hands we
To be the bo - dy Christ has called we



one last ho - ly meal We gath - er here in
be one loaf of bread We are one bo - dy
wash each oth - er's feet In ho - ly vul - n'ra -
fol - low Christ's com - mand To love and serve each



song and prayer to wit - ness Christ re - vealed
fol - low - ing where Jes - sus Christ has led
- bil - i - ty we serve each one we meet
oth - er well and seek to un - der - stand



Take your shoes off, let me wash you You're on ho - ly ground



Take your walls down, let me love you Christ is all a - round

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT | Full to the Brim { *Even in the desert*

Read Luke 4:1-13

Commentary | Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia

It was four years ago when two women, one of whom had dark ash in the shape of a cross on her forehead, were locked in a loud, screaming embrace as tears streamed down their faces. That year, American Christians marked the beginning of Lent with a shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL.¹ Four. Years. Ago. What is different?

While I want to say there have been small, incremental wins, my heart breaks at how little has changed. Too often, I am enveloped in doubt: I doubt my 3 year old daughter and 10 year old son will know a world without violence, divisiveness, homophobia, sexism, racism, classism and the countless other “-isms” that plague us. I doubt we will embrace our role as stewards of Creation, reversing the damage already done. I doubt our churches will embrace true welcome, transformed by those we deem “other” rather than simply providing a “space for one more.” I doubt that we can live as the faith-filled, wholistic community to which we are called.

Lent invites us into our own wilderness journey. It’s a patient walk of exploration which we inevitably escape on Easter morning. But if I were really honest with myself (and with all of you), I would say that we are never leaving this desolation. These doubts are rooted in the limitations of who we are as human beings, falling short of transformation over and over again.

But what if it isn’t about getting out of the desert? What if we are called to dwell in our doubts, fears, anxieties, and brokenness? What if we are meant to stand in solidarity with those trapped in their own wilderness experiences? I wonder if we can imagine making a home right here, a place existing in the tension between desolation and burgeoning possibility.

In the desert, we cast aside the temptations of this world and actively engage in the promise that abundant love will always have the final say. The desert may very well be right where we belong.

¹ In February of 2018, a gunman opened fire at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL, killing 17 and injuring 17 others. The beginning of Lent in 2022, the publication date of this devotional, marks 4 years since this tragedy.

Read John 13:1-17, 31b-35

From the Artist | Rev. T. Denise Anderson

"He loved them to the end."

(John 13:1b, NRSV)

The hardest time of a loved one's transition, in my opinion, are the moments right before it happens, when the family gathers to say goodbye and usher them into Life Eternal. It may be difficult or impossible to remember a time when they weren't in your life. How will you go on without them? You don't know what's on the other side of this journey, which makes the moment particularly unsettling.

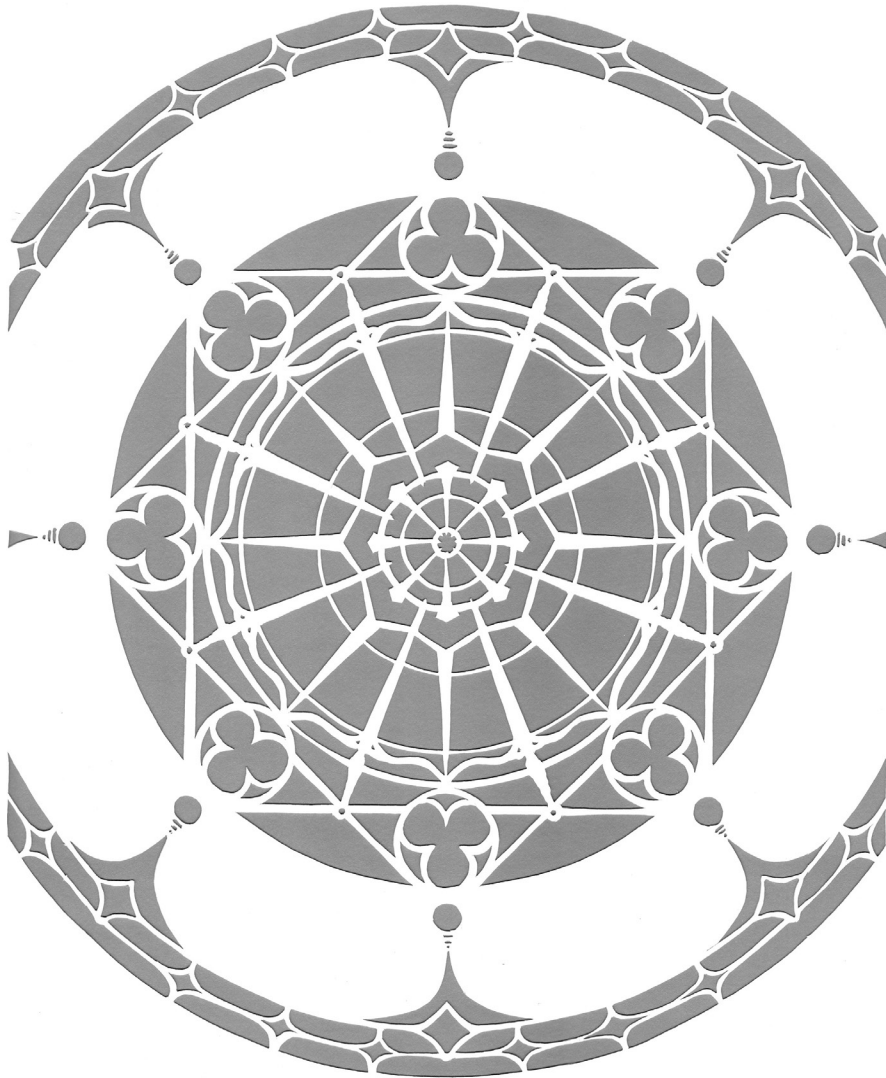
When I visited the Holy Land, I found myself regularly taking off my shoes and stepping into whatever body of water was there. For me, there is a liminality to standing with my feet submerged, not far from dry ground. Whether a boat ride or baptism, you're going somewhere you've never been when you decide to take that step.

The disciples have no idea where their own journey will take them. Peter is at first reluctant to even dip his toes into the water—into the liminality. But they're assured they'll be with Jesus on the other side.

I used a photo of my own feet as I stood on the banks of the Sea of Galilee as a reference for this painting. Unknown to me at the time, the Golan Heights were about to be bombed later that day.² But at that time, the water calmly danced over my ankles, making its own art as it bent and reflected light around them. I've signed the piece in such a way that invites you to turn it any number of orientations. What changes for you when the feet are facing downward, upward, or sideways? I invite you to embrace that disorientation, if only for a moment, and try to find your footing.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Temptations | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace

² In May, 2018, Iranian forces in Syria fired rockets into the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. To learn more about the event and the conflict that led to it, read: "Iran Fires Rockets Into Golan Heights From Syria, Israelis Say" by Isabel Kershner. *The New York Times*. May 9, 2018.

Read Luke 4:1-13

From the Artist | Hannah Garrity

"Jesus answered him,

'It is said,

"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time."

(Luke 4:12-13, NRSV)

In this image, concentric circles depicting the temptations that Jesus meets in the wilderness radiate outward. A crown and swords echo the power of kings that the devil offers to Jesus. Steeples point outward between the swords.

"Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Jesus quotes scripture in verse 12 of this Luke passage. And yet, the devil continues to test. Nails in the center foreshadow Jesus' death on the cross.

"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

I depicted this story within the structure of a stained glass window. Where in our religious structures do we find temptation winning the day? Where do our selfish actions fall on this temptation continuum? May we see the abundance before us, dispelling the desire for more.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Threshold | T. Denise Anderson
Oil on wood panel



First Fruits | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital Painting

MAUNDY THURSDAY | Full to the Brim { *Take off your shoes*

Read John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Commentary | Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia

The first thing I do when I step through our front door is kick my shoes off. Piles of boots, sneakers, dress shoes, and sandals litter the entryway. The minute my feet are freed, I swear I breathe differently. I feel the solid floor beneath my toes and the welcoming comfort of home. I'm ready to rest, relax, and rejuvenate.

Sometimes I forget to tell guests of this Chinese custom ahead of their visit. It results in an awkward, unspoken conversation as we negotiate their shoes joining the pile of mismatched footwear on the ground. Toes curl under feet as bare skin touches the floor. Fingers delicately shift socks to hide holes now exposed for all to see. It feels oddly vulnerable and unfamiliar.

Removing shoes is an invitation to enter the holy ground of our home. It means that we are settling in and committing to be fully present to one another. Everyone who walks through our door will be intimately aware of how we live, the beloved items that surround us, the ways that we have attempted to fill every corner with love, and the mess that dwells in the midst of it all.

There is a rich intimacy as Jesus moves from one disciple to the next to wash their feet. These feet carried them through a lot: miracles, political and religious disputes, despair, hope, weariness, joy, and confusion. These same feet will soon bear the weight of violence, death, and resurrection. But there will be time in those three days to become enfleshed.

For now, alongside the disciples, we are invited to surrender to the moment. Take our shoes off and feel the solid ground below. Rest our weary bodies and souls to be cleansed by the water splashing in the basin. Through these waters, we will become more deeply present to the days ahead.

HOLY WEEK— MAUNDY THURSDAY
Full to the Brim { *Take off your shoes*

Water Marks

Jesus probably knelt down.
He probably took Peter's heel
in his hands
to wash his feet.
And I wonder if they both thought of Jacob—
the heel-grabber,
the trickster who wrestled
with God.
I wonder if it felt like a do-over,
a fresh start for creation.



I wonder if the basin overflowed
when Jesus poured the water out.
I wonder if it splashed,
leaving water marks on the floor—
proof that love was really there.
I wonder if I would have let Jesus do the same.
Would I have been like Peter and said,
“Not just my feet but my head and my hands”?
I suppose I can look at my life today
and answer the question.
Have I allowed myself to be loved?
Are there water marks on the floor?

Poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT | Full to the Brim { *Even in the desert*

Read Deuteronomy 26:1-11

From the Artist | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

This text urges the harvester to ground themselves in ancestral and divine identity. This requires a primal knowledge of the answers to the questions, “*Who are you?*” and “*Whose are you?*” When the harvester brings the first fruits to the dwelling place of God, they are asked to offer a response to God, in which the harvester recounts the Exodus narrative. This narrative defines the harvester and gives understanding, resonance, and purpose to their offering before God.

Notice how the response is in first person plural: “*When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord... and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power... and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.*” (Deut. 26:6-9, NRSV) I imagine this recitation roots the harvester in their identity as an Exodus person—a wandering alien, oppressed and afflicted, who was heard, seen, and rescued by God.

Regardless of whether or not the harvester directly experienced the events of their pronouncement before God, this narrative is where their identity is found and it changes how they live. Echoes of this narrative live in the harvester. This narrative affirms the truth that the harvester was once an alien, and whatever they have been given and all that they are belong to God. Therefore, all of the bounty—the sumptuous, nurturing, first fruits of the ground are to be shared with the aliens who reside among them. What would it look like for you to ground yourself in ancestral and divine identity? How would it change how you live? Who are you? Whose are you?

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

Come Rain or Shine

"I will keep on."

That's what I heard him say.

I will keep on

driving out demons

and healing people,

speaking the truth

and loving endlessly,

searching for the lost sheep

and crying for the brokenhearted,

feeding the hungry

and welcoming the outcast.

"I will keep on."

That's what he said, right

after he said my name, right

after he called me beloved, right

after he welcomed me home

and saved me a seat.

And I knew,

there was no stopping him.

I was under his wing.

Come rain or come shine,

today and tomorrow,

this love keeps on.

Poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Full to the Brim Journaling

Even the stones cry out

*As you begin your journey through Holy Week, pause to reflect.
What joys, truths, confessions, or questions are emerging in the world
and in you? In the space below, draw or write what must be said.*

Scan to hear
the tune!

Chorus of Our Faith

ELLACOMBE ("Hosanna, Loud Hosanna")

Text: Anna Strickland (2021)

Music: Gesangbuch der Herzogl (1784)



"Ho - san - na!" Loud ho - san - nas
The Pha - ri - sees a - long the way
Be loud and be cou - ra - geous



Re - soun ded through the streets "All glo - ry in
Took no - tice of the crowd Re - buk - ing Je -
Tell truths that must be told The world may try



the high - est to him who comes in peace!"
- sus, they pro - claimed this gath - ered mob too loud
to sil - ence you But Christ helps us be bold



The beau - ti - ful ca - co - pha - ny
But some truths can - not be con - tained
In voi - ces and in bo - dies



of chil - dren's laughs and songs ac - com - pan ied
They spill out from the earth "No, ev - en if
In art for pro - test made Our truths take ma -



the grand par - ade all through the gath - ered throng
you sil - ence them the stones will still be heard."
- ny shapes and forms A cho - rus of our faith

Read Luke 13:31-35

Commentary | Rev. Ashley DeTar Birt

While we were in seminary, one of my good friends adopted a dog who, on her best days, could be described as "hectic." She was (and often still is) a wild tornado of a dog who, although adorable, often got herself into worlds of trouble. There were many complaints of never-ending barking, I and many others bore scratch marks from being jumped on over the years, and there are more than a few stories of injuries caused by this poor pooch. Just recalling the tales is exhausting! And yet, my friend loves her dog with a kindness and patience that I don't think I've ever seen before. She shows kindness and mercy, even when the dog exhausts her. She signs up for training after training, hoping that she and her dog will both learn some skills to help them manage better. She buys toys and treats and equipment so that her dog always knows how much she loves her and has the best chance for success in the world. She is fiercely loving and protecting, showing a warmth and understanding that the world often doesn't toward her pet. Even when her dog pushes her to her limit, she's still her dog, and her love never ends.

With this in mind, it's not hard to understand Jesus' sentiment in Luke 13. Jerusalem has not always treated Jesus particularly well, and yet it is clear that he still loves it so very deeply. All he wants is to protect it, like a mother hen protects her brood. Jerusalem's actions can't and don't change that, for that is what true, unconditional love actually looks like. We can be frustrating, we can be challenging, we can be difficult. We might even, intentionally or unintentionally, try to push God away. Yet God will remain with us, still loving us because God's love never ends.

Know that you are loved, no matter what you do.

Read Luke 19:28-40

From the Artist | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

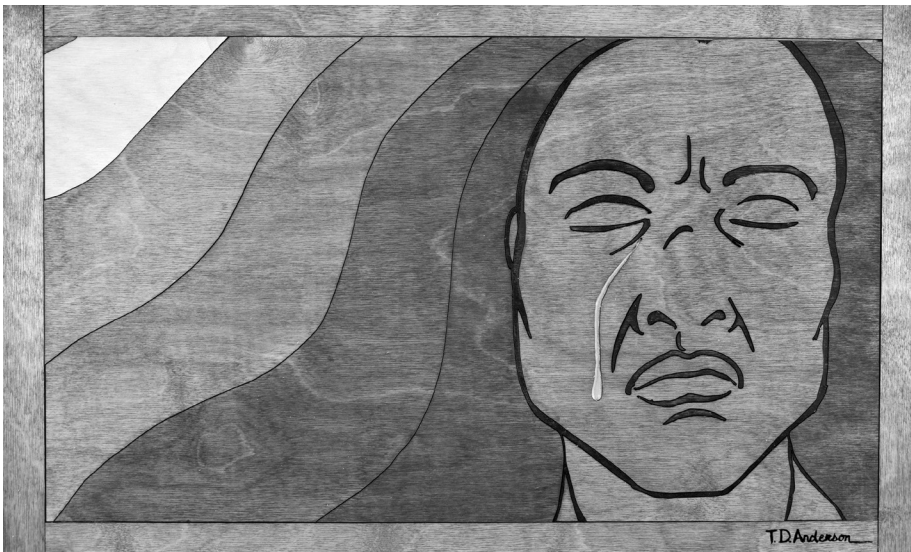
When I began this image, I wanted the medium to be the message. Initially I thought I might make a mosaic of stones, however, I was wisely encouraged by my colleagues to try photography and digital collage. I went out into my side yard and picked up rocks to take pictures of them. As I quickly scanned for interesting rocks, I was underwhelmed by what I was seeing. I had already decided that the rocks were going to be dull and boring. My color enthusiast self was annoyed by the prospect of dusty neutral tones and minimal contrast.

This was an interesting place to begin my process, considering the text I was working with. I was definitely underestimating what the rocks would have to offer the piece, and was preemptively disappointed about the mundane color schemes and textures I would have to work with from my photographs. Gosh, was I wrong. As I downloaded the images and began to edit them, a wide spectrum of color came into view. Most of the hues were entirely shocking and unexpected: periwinkle, magenta, turquoise, mauve, rust, orange, gold, and plum, just to name a few. It was as if God was saying to me, “See, even if you turn a blind eye, and your assumptions distract you, the stones will cry out.”

In this piece there are three stones bordered in gold to reference the voice of God, the truth that will not be quelled. Down the sides of the image are the Pharisees or the “silencers” in postures of quieting judgment. My hope was for the silencers to be completely visually enveloped and drowned out by the stones. I left the silencers simplified and unfinished to signify that their attempts at diminishing the truth would ultimately and always be in vain.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Enough | T. Denise Anderson
Wood and acrylic inlay



Even the Stones Cry Out | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting with photo collage

Read Luke 13:31-35

From the Artist | Rev. T. Denise Anderson

Jesus' lament over Jerusalem's intransigence is powerful because you can hear a righteous indignation and a deep anguish. He foreshadows his own execution, but his pain is for the waywardness of his people. This is one of a handful of times scripture uses feminine, specifically maternal, imagery in connection to God: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..." (Luke 13:34b, NRSV) That, for me, is significant. As a mother, I know what it feels like to watch from a relative distance as a child makes heartbreaking decisions. I didn't want to illustrate the details of the scene with my piece; I wanted to depict the emotions in it, to somehow capture the heartache of a parent whose children have chosen a destructive path.

Engaging with this theme has drawn me to wood and water. Here, I've moved away from realism and my usual oil paints to a medium with a more graphic quality: wood inlay. I wanted a simple depiction of this very specific pain. I felt that an emotion so germane to the human experience had to be anthropomorphized, and because Jesus uses feminine imagery, I decided to depict a figure who could be perceived as feminine, but perhaps could also be perceived as masculine or nonbinary. The Parent's eyes are closed as if they cannot bear to watch what's happening. The hair radiates to the left, mimicking a mother hen's wingspan. The teardrop is a clear acrylic inlay with its underside painted blue, and the subtle way it refracts and reflects light is reminiscent of water.

As I consider the destruction we continue to visit upon each other and all of creation, I imagine God is still grieved. What emotions arise within you when you consider the human condition?

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

Read Luke 19:28-40

Commentary | Rev. Ashley DeTar Birt

Living above a school is quite an experience. From the moment I wake up until the moment my workday ends, I am surrounded by the sounds of the school. The honking of the horns as cars and buses try to move down my one-way street during drop-off and pick-up. The screaming of the children as they run around excitedly outside the building. The faint caw of the school bell as the students change classes. The speeding footsteps and blaring whistles of recess. The exhausted yelling of parents trying to corral their kids to take them back home. It's a constant source of energy and life. It's vibrant and chaotic and, from my perspective, sometimes disruptive. I'll admit that there are times I wish it would stop and quiet down so I can sleep longer or think easier while I work. Truth remains, however, that it doesn't really matter what I want. Something important is happening below me, something that I can't stop and I can't silence.

When the Pharisees ask Jesus to order his disciples to stop their expressions of joy in Luke 19, Jesus tells them, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." What they're feeling is too important, the kind of thing that just has to come out regardless of whether or not it makes others uncomfortable. The discomfort of others is often not enough of a reason to keep the silence.

Expressing our joys, telling our truths, asking the questions we need to ask, repenting and making amends, being our honest and authentic selves—these things are too important to be silent. We shouldn't have to restrain ourselves because some may temporarily experience discomfort. Rather, we should be free, like the rocks, the disciples, and the school, to cry out, to be loud, and to make whatever noise we need to make to exist.

This Palm/Passion Sunday, may you cry out as your freest self.



Under God's Wing | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Acrylic on raw canvas with digital drawing

Even the Stones Will Cry Out

The Pharisees found Jesus;
they said,
“Order your disciples to stop.”
It’s not the first time
justice was almost
silenced. People stood on the
sidelines shouting hosanna
which means, “Save us,”
“Save me.”
It’s not the first time we’ve
heard that cry from the street.
The Pharisees said
stop. They wanted the people
quiet, but some things can’t be
silenced.



Justice will bubble up,
hope will raise its head,
love will rise to the surface.
Hate and fear will try to
drown them out,
but you cannot silence
what was here first,
which was love,
and it was good.
It was so good.
So even the stones will cry out.
Remember that
at your parade.
Justice will bubble up,
hope will raise its head,
love will rise to the surface.
Amen.

Poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Read Psalm 27

From the Artist | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

The beauty of the psalms is that they are personal; they are prayers that are honest, desperate, and undeniably human. The psalms remind us that theology is not just something we think about—it’s something that we live.

Scholars think the author of this psalm may have been seeking asylum in the temple, fleeing persecution. Learning that contextual detail expanded the psalm for me—it was no longer just my personal prayer, but the prayer of someone fighting for their life.

The day I began working on this image, I learned that 40 Afghan families would be seeking refuge in the city I call home. With that in mind, I read the psalm again, imagining the words spoken from the lips of one forced to flee their home. When I finished the psalm, I gritted my teeth and prayed my own desperate plea: “Please, make it so, God. May your protection expand to everyone. *Please.*”

I invite you to read the psalm again from a similar vantage point. When you do this, how does your faith grow fuller? How does this impact your sense of who God is?

When I began this image, I drew a young boy peeking out from the open folds of a canvas tent in a refugee camp. I added rugged stones lining the bottom hem of the tent, holding the flimsy fabric in place. But then I felt compelled to turn the tent flap into a wing with feathers lined in gold. At that point, all the details of the boy’s setting no longer mattered. I erased them from the scene. I saw clearly the promise of this psalm: you are under God’s wing. May you dwell there, surely and safely, all your days long.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

Full to the Brim { *You are worthy*

What I Forgot

Sometimes I wish I was the fig tree.
No fruit here, just soaking up the sun,
growing roots, turning green,
stretching out my branches until
I can hug the horizon.
Sometimes I wish I was the fig tree,
because she doesn't produce,
and she's not exhausted,
and she probably gets eight hours
of sleep at night.

And her branches,
unlike my shoulders,
are not heavy with work—
pulled toward the ground,
threatening to break.

And her trunk,
unlike my spine,
is not fighting to stand tall
while holding it all together.

Sometimes I wish I was the fig tree
because she knows
what I forgot
many years ago.

You are still worthy
even if
you don't produce.

Poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

THE FIFTH WEEK OF LENT | **Full** to the Brim { *Brazen acts of beauty*

Read Isaiah 43:16-21

From the Artist | Hannah Garrity

"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." (Isaiah 43:19, NRSV)

Dear God, we perceive it. Our initial reaction appears to be a tendency to dig in our heels. We are all holding firm to the past in one way or another. May your wisdom fall upon us, helping us to let go of the things of old. Amen.

In this text, I see water flowing in the abstract. Patterns of fallen chariot wheels, footprints of the jackal and the ostrich, and imagery of creation give detail to the shape of a vessel amidst the flow. God is doing a new thing! When I sing hymns, I feel the power and the joy. I feel the beauty and the freedom of God's new way in this wilderness. Yet, when I live my daily life in the midst of God's current shifts toward a new thing, it feels rocky, painful, devastating, and infuriating. It is so easy to let fear take over. Isaiah sings of God, of God doing a new thing. Isaiah helps us to remember, to embrace, to find the positives in the midst of the current drastic changes. Who are we to stand in the way of the flow of the Holy Spirit? Isaiah reminds us to open our minds to a new way.

Holy One, as we lean into your new way, may we find the songs to sing, as Isaiah did. May we flow on this new path with your Holy Spirit. May we find the hope that allows us to navigate the pain and the jagged devastation of daily life in the midst of change. You are doing a new thing! May we bear witness and join Isaiah in song. Amen.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Vessel | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace

THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT | Full to the Brim { You are worthy

Read Luke 13:1-9

Commentary | Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia

“Wait a little longer.”

“Work hard to show what you are capable of.”

“Trust me...”

As a Person of Color, I hear these comments on a regular basis. On my best days, this commentary ignites a fire to change the systems and structures that regularly oppress marginalized people. Other times I wonder, “Am I being pacified *just enough* to stick around?”

The first thing I want to know is why a fig tree is in the midst of a vineyard. The tree would not be of primary focus in a field cultivating grapes, apparently planted only so that no inch of the ground is squandered.

Many of us experience the world as a fig tree in the midst of grape vines. We are placed in fields not meant for us and yet expected to thrive. People discount and doubt us, threatening to cut us down if we don’t produce in the ways that have been defined *on our behalf*. We are afterthoughts demanded to bear fruit or be destroyed.

The story of the fig tree reminds us that the world’s expectations do not need to be ours. The gardener puts their faith in that which they have no control. Digging a bigger hole and filling it with manure, they tend to the tree with everything it needs to grow into its purpose. Perhaps this means bearing figs. Or maybe it provides shade for the laborers during the harvest, an opportunity for the gardener to tend to the fields in a new way, or transformation of the owner’s ability to see beyond the commodification of the land.

Those of us living a fig tree existence are invited to be nourished and tended to so that, in time, we grow into our purpose. People with power are reminded to disrupt their knowledge of how the world works and their complicity in earthly systems and measurements so that everyone has an opportunity to thrive. And still others provide nurture in solidarity, trusting that intentional care will lead to new life.

Together, we invest in a fruitful Creation.

Read John 12:1-8

From the Artist | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

In the chapter just before this, Lazarus dies and Jesus weeps. But after being laid in the tomb, Lazarus is raised and made well. This act solidifies for the chief priests and Pharisees that Jesus is a dangerous threat. In response, they order for his arrest and plot how they will kill him. Jesus retreats from public ministry, hiding out in the wilderness in Ephraim. As the Passover nears, people begin to wonder: “*Will Jesus be here?*”

Despite the threats mounting, Jesus does return. On his way to Jerusalem, he stops in Bethany, seeking refuge and comfort in the home of his friends. Martha cooks a feast, and Lazarus—healthy and alive—joins him at the table. In resistance to death, as an act of extravagant love, Mary anoints Jesus with a fragrance that fills the whole room. Her actions could appear impulsive, but if you were saying your last goodbye to someone you loved, how would you act?

This image began as a painting on raw canvas. With fluid strokes of paint, I allowed the colors to run and bleed into each other. As I drew Mary kneeling, I omitted the other details in the scene, removing Jesus’ feet, the other guests, the table full of food. I wanted to focus on Mary’s brazen act of pouring out the expensive perfume, a commodity valued at a year’s worth of wages. The luxurious liquid is expansive, flowing out toward us as the viewer. It bleeds into the red, foreshadowing the blood Jesus will soon shed. The vessel she holds is lined with gold, a reference to the ancient Japanese practice of Kintsugi, of repairing broken pottery with gold lacquer. The art of Kintsugi embellishes the cracks and transforms a shattered vessel into a new object of beauty. In this embodied act of worship, Mary is practicing Kintsugi—boldly celebrating the beauty of life even as death approaches.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



You Are Worthy | Lauren Wright Pittman
Block print with oil-based ink

Read Luke 13:1-9

From the Artist | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

How often does society wish us to feel like we are wasting soil? The whole capitalist system lurches forward, powered by our collective sense of unworthiness and our searching for worth based on what we produce. This parable upends the notion that we are what we produce, and speaks truth: you are worthy. You deserve rest and care simply for existing. What a gift!

In this image, I wanted the fig tree to look unremarkable, surrounded by the hands of the Gardener reaching down to lovingly massage the soil. The sleeves contain patterning of simplified visual references to everything a plant needs to not only survive, but to thrive. Starting close to the roots and moving upward, the patterns include water, air, sunlight, nutrients, and space. The emphasis in this image is on what is happening below the surface, in the depths of the dirt. The roots stretch toward the hands of the Gardener as the specks of dirt seem to also image the stars of the vast universe. Within us, despite what we produce, despite what can be seen at the surface, we contain multitudes. We bear the image of God, and our mere existence makes us worthy of Sabbath and the loving arms of the Gardener reaching out to provide us with everything we need.

On a personal note, the *Full to the Brim* theme keeps bringing me back to the image of resting while God reaches to embrace us. Lately I've spent so much time and energy fighting so hard to get some kind of tangible grasp of God, all the while feeling so empty. I'm realizing that I need to practice surrender, allowing God to find me where I am, and to receive God's care and love, filling me to the brim so I can then be full to pour out once again.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Brazen Beauty | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Acrylic on raw canvas with digital drawing

Read John 12:1-8

Commentary | Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia

When my son was younger, he decided the worship prelude was the perfect time to start rolling on the ground in the narthex of the sanctuary. Worshipers dressed in their Sunday best awkwardly stepped over him or winced as his speeding body hit their heels.

“Isn’t it wonderful that your son feels so comfortable here that he can move his body around to get ready for worship?!” Nothing about that moment felt wonderful. To be honest, I was mortified that he was greeting church members as an embodied obstacle course before worship. But this person’s ability to see beauty where I could not, to proclaim abundant love for who my son is and who the congregation was to be for him, was a gift ripped open for us.

The story of Mary breaking open a jar of expensive perfume is surrounded by death. Only one chapter earlier, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead at the risk of his own life. Returning to Judea and resurrecting the dead became the final actions necessary for the religious and political leaders to conspire against him. Yet here is this faithful family, welcoming and celebrating Christ as the outside world seeks to write a different story.

As people of faith, we are called to crack ourselves open, pouring out the richness of what is within to more fully worship God. We cannot hide pieces of ourselves or grasp onto expectations that distract from what God created and creates within us. We are free to bring our whole selves as a living testimony to who God has made and makes us to be, both what we label as good and that which we hide from the world.

God doesn’t need our “good” behavior. God needs our being/ be-ing. Remember all of you is beautiful. Live as though you are an expensive gift from God to Creation, because surely you are.



Worthy of Being Fed | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Acrylic on raw canvas with digital drawing

Lessons from a Winter Rose

I am dumbfounded
by the sheer persistence
of a winter rose
that blooms
on the coldest of days—
when the rest of the world
has turned dim and gray,
when the rest of the world is sleeping.

The audacity
to stand so tall,
to decorate the world with color,
to be the only one
brave enough
to bloom.

I wonder what that's like.

Maybe it's similar
to pouring perfume
on the feet of Jesus—
shocking and beautiful
at the same time.

On winter morning walks
I pass a bed of roses.
I dare not pick one.
Instead I say thank you.
Thank you for the beauty.
Thank you for the reminder.
Thank you for the bloom.
And I walk home and pray—
God, if you can,
make me that brave.

Poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Read Isaiah 55:1-9

From the Artist | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

In my early 20s, in the midst of too many life transitions to navigate at once and a personal crisis that deeply unraveled me, I called an old family friend who happened to live in the new city I had just moved to. I don't remember what I said, exactly, but the friend instantly sensed that I needed more than just a phone conversation. She invited me to meet her at the park near her apartment. We went on a walk, and as the daylight waned, she said, "Would you like to stay for dinner?"

I'll never forget the way she warmed up homemade soup from her fridge and fixed me an arugula salad. She dressed it with olive oil and lemon juice, and to my surprise, added a pinch of salt and a shake of pepper. Like manna in my desert, that meal nourished me at a time when I did not think I was worthy of being fed.

The prophet Isaiah brings a message of good news to the Israelites, though they have been in exile for so long that perhaps they've forgotten there is a story beyond scarcity. Through Isaiah, God invites them into an abundant life rich with food that is free and waters that satisfy.

In this image, a feast is savored and shared. The brackets, which look like doves flying inward, also form the shape of a vessel that is simultaneously upright and full and also upside down and poured out. We fill up so we can pour out—we can't give from an empty cup.

In this text, there is no doubt that God's expansive mercy is abundant. The only question—for the Jewish exiles and for us—is are you ready to be restored? Can you believe you are worthy of God's nourishing grace? Will you allow yourself to receive it?

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

What Doesn't Play by the Rules

I come into the room
calculating
what I've done,
as if hurt could be measured,
as if there was a score system,
as if we could say what I owe in return.

I come into the room
ready to apologize,
ready to make amends,
ready to tell you all the things I'll do to make it better,
but you put your arms around me.

Grace is the ocean
that softens the edges.
Grace is rain in the desert—
you're not sure whether to
laugh, cry, or dance.
Grace is a miracle,
all by itself.
In a scorekeeping world,
grace doesn't play by the rules.

I come into the room
calculating what I've done.
You say there's grace here.
It feels like a miracle.
I don't know whether to
laugh, cry, or dance.

Poem by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

From the Artist | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

How does one image the transformation we experience in Christ? I began with this verse: *"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"* (2 Cor. 5:17, NRSV)

When I closed my eyes and repeated this verse over and over again, I began to see the silhouette of a person filled with the echoes of the first creation narrative in Genesis. This came at no surprise to me, considering I like to think of the first creation narrative in a radial fashion, with the imagery of each day starting from the center and building in rings upon the next. Within this person experiencing new life in Christ is imagery of the delineation of light and darkness, water and sky, water and earth. They contain seeds yielding vegetation, the light of the sun and the moon, the feathers of winged creatures, the patterned wings of butterflies, and the closed buds of Sabbath. From there the creation narrative begins again, continuing to ripple and move toward the edges of the figure.

At the center of the creation narrative is a fire poppy, which symbolizes new life, for it grows and thrives in the ash following the destruction of wildfire. A butterfly is poised on the flower, also representing new life, for it transforms from a caterpillar into an intricately-designed, delicately-winged creature. The poppy grows from the wound of the golden figure who is meant to personify the transformative love of Christ. The figures, one experiencing new life, and the other sharing the love of Christ, embrace and dance, offering a new picture of what the ministry of reconciliation might look like.

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

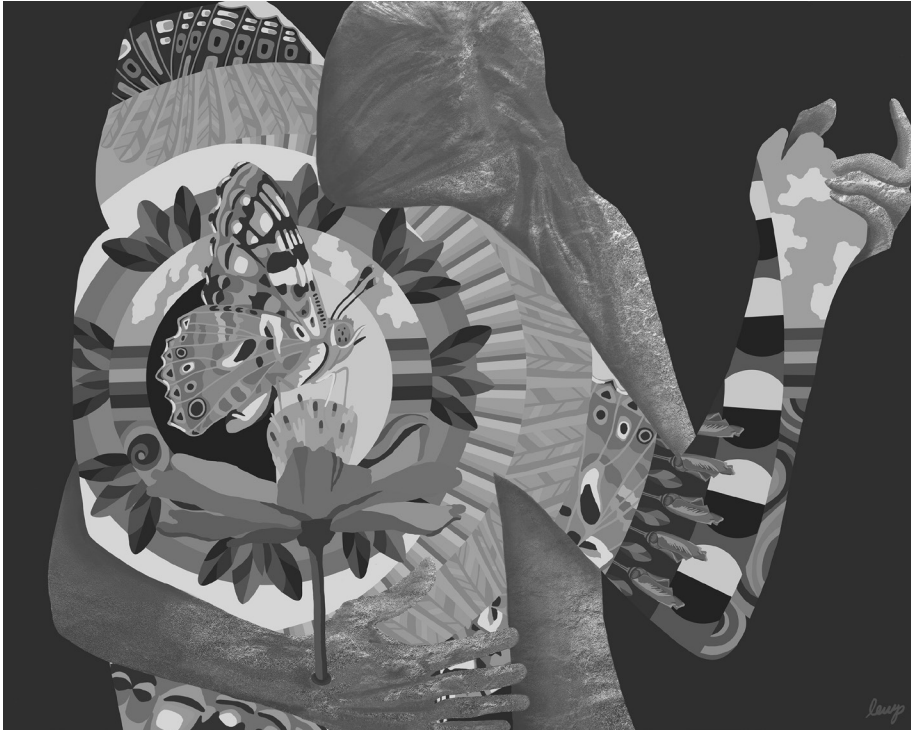
Read Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Commentary | Rev. Ashley DeTar Birt

Everyone has something that challenges them, pushes them in a way that is ultimately good for them but perhaps they weren't quite ready for. These things often help us grow as people and teach us important lessons, even if we struggle with them. For some people, it's a person—maybe a teacher, or a classmate, or a coach. For others, it's an experience—maybe a book that brought about new ideas, or a trip that didn't go as planned, or an assignment with an unexpected level of difficulty. For a very long time, my challenge was the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

I don't think I'm the only person who has ever struggled with this parable. No matter where we see ourselves in this story—as the younger son, the older son, or even as the father—it can be challenging to sympathize with everyone. Why would the younger son take so much—half of the estate—from his father, only to waste it? Why wouldn't the older son celebrate the fact that his brother is back? Why wouldn't the father (or anyone, for that matter) bother to tell the older son what's going on? Trying to make sense of these characters was hard for me, but what I eventually came to realize is that every single one of them, regardless of what they've done, receives grace. Both sons, one wasteful and one frustrated, receive the grace of their father, and even the father (who could, but isn't explicitly said to, represent God) experiences grace in his interactions with his sons. No one earns it, but rather it is something they experience together. Once I understood this, I began to feel the grace this parable extends in my own life. There's no limit to the grace we can experience with God because God puts no limits on grace. Our lives can be big, full, messy, complicated, imperfect, a wreck, and God's grace will still be there.

Go forth and experience God's grace in the people in your life, without limits.



New in Christ | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting

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

From the Artist | Hannah Garrity

Full to the brim with joy. An existential crisis, like the last two years of the COVID pandemic, helps us all to appreciate the joy with which the father of the prodigal son celebrates.

This image depicts the joyful motion of a party, the lights in particular. The lines in this stained glass window design are inspired by photographs of light glowing and moving, dancing in the night. In the center circle, the shadow of a dancing silhouette repeats, echoing the way that we see figures move in two dimensions in the light of the night. In the corners of the window frame, architectural motifs that historically represent the Holy Trinity reflect the light as though shining themselves.

Thinking about an expansive Lent as I worked on this paper lace, this image became all about joy. Joy that is misunderstood. Joy as an act of resistance. Inexplicable joy. In an expansive understanding, the joy that the father is experiencing makes sense. He shows an uncharacteristic willingness to celebrate inexplicably with joy.

How can we notice and give grace to those who are experiencing inexplicable joy—particularly when it is an act of resistance? Where can we enter into their joy? Where in our own lives can we celebrate despite the incongruence of joy and pain, joy and discord, joy and anger?

Pray

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Inexplicable Joy | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace