

THE TOMB IS EMPTY BUT THE STREETS ARE FULL

AN

ACTIVIST

LENTEN

DEVOTIONAL

ASH WEDNESDAY

LIZ THEOHARIS

JOEL 2:1-2, 12-17 OR ISAIAH 58:1-12; PSALM 51:1-17; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20B-6:10; MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-21

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Over the past weeks and months I have been hearing a lot about food. Immigrant families in Minneapolis too afraid to go to work, school, or the grocery store because of the violent presence of ICE on the streets. Emergency food distribution centers in Kansas running out of food because the need is so great. New Disabled South receiving 18,588 applications totaling \$4.1 million worth of \$100 and \$250 requests for emergency assistance during the November 2025 government shutdown. And on Feb 1, 2026, new work requirements tied to SNAP, the largest food assistance program for families in need in the richest country in human history, started with millions being impacted.

In the US, we throw away more food than it takes to feed everyone who's hungry in the world. Donald Trump's "big bad bill" cut an estimated \$186 billion of the nation's "treasure" from SNAP funding – paving the way for entire states to discontinue life-saving food assistance programs. That same bill tripled the funding for ICE – paving the way for increased child detention, ICE agents terrorizing our streets, and more violence to unfold. And before the funneling of resources away from poverty alleviation and into community militarization fully takes place from that bill alone, families from Minneapolis to Maine to Mississippi are already saying their biggest concern is going hungry.

Lent is a time of fasting. Many throughout the world go without food on Ash Wednesday and continue a practice of fasting, repentance and prayer for the next 40 days. But that fasting and hunger is not about those with LITTLE sacrificing MORE. It's not about God saying: "I didn't make enough food for everyone to eat." Nor "my abundance will trickle down from the rich to the rest." In the Bible, Jesus does not say: "Get a job!" to the unhoused or disabled of society. Nor "I want Peter to have to rob Paul" to be able to pay bills. The Bible does not proclaim a little charity is as good as you all can do. Nor that the powerful should get tax breaks and the poor shall pay for the pleasures of the rich.

Instead the prophet Isaiah reminds us: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?...If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."

We live in a world where we're taught that hunger and sacrifice is necessary. Where the rich and powerful get to ask for and receive everything while the poor and immigrant and LGBTQ people and Black people are considered lucky when we get anything at all. Sometimes to call attention to the horror of violence and the reality of oppression, people do sacrifice themselves (giving one's life to the struggle or bearing witness to the suffering around). But throughout the Bible, it is clear, God wants mercy not sacrifice. Sacrifice shouldn't be necessary. It shouldn't be inevitable. If we live the way the God of justice intends, ALL will have love and mutual solidarity and kindness and flourishing. No one will be hungry.

So this Lent, this season of holy uprising and national and international crisis, let us NOT lower our standards.

Don't preach a smaller gospel. This is no moment to get in a defensive crouch to fight off the worst attacks without also putting forth a vision of a world where people's needs are met with real programs, not diversionary rhetoric, health care cuts, detaining and strip searching children, scapegoating LGBTQ people or trashing the belongings of the unhoused. No. This is not a space to wait and hope that others will stand up to bigotry and injustice, inequality, budget cuts and even death by poverty. Instead it's a time for each of us to rise up as the leaders we are looking for.

I am emboldened by the words of Jesus and the Bible that it's not poor people who are sinners, rather it is poverty that is a sin against God and if we want to honor and worship God, we must commit our lives to fighting poverty and suffering and bigotry and racism. We must put our treasure and our heart on everybody in, nobody out. We must cry justice. We must pray freedom.

This Ash Wednesday amid our ritual fasting and prayerful observations, let us remember that Jesus implores nations to feed the hungry, care for the children and welcome the immigrant. The prophet Joel says: "You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed. I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions."

God does not promise an end to hunger and violence in the afterlife. It is for the here and now! And it is for absolutely, wholly, completely everyone. In fact the passage from Matthew 6 teaches that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," actually tells the rich they can't take it with them. That there's no reason to store up treasure because moths and plagues can just ruin all of that. Instead the rich and powerful are called to fast from oppression. Our whole society is called to lift from the bottom so everybody can rise.

As is often the case, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King summed up mercy not sacrifice and the true meaning of Ash Wednesday (and I would assert Matthew 6). He spoke in "Where Do We Go From Here?", "One night, a juror came to Jesus and he wanted to know what he could do to be saved. Jesus didn't get bogged down in the kind of isolated approach of what he shouldn't do. Jesus didn't say, 'Now Nicodemus, you must stop lying.' He didn't say, 'Nicodemus, you must stop cheating if you are doing that.' He didn't say, 'Nicodemus, you must not commit adultery.' He didn't say, 'Nicodemus, now you must stop drinking liquor if you are doing that excessively.' He said something altogether different, because Jesus realized something basic—that if a man will lie, he will steal. And if a man will steal, he will kill. So instead of just getting bogged down in one thing, Jesus looked at him and said, 'Nicodemus, you must be born again.' He said, in other words, 'Your whole structure must be changed.' A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will 'thingify' them—make them things. Therefore they will exploit them, and poor people generally, economically. And a nation that will exploit economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and will have to use its military might to protect them. All of these problems are tied together. What I am saying today is that we must go from this convention and say, "America, you must be born again!"

And isn't that it? In this season of Lent when we are called to fast from injustice, to turn away from inequality, may we hear the message "America you must be born again". "The whole structure of your society must be changed". Stop putting your treasure in terrorizing our communities. Stop declaring and funding war. Start investing in health care and good food and adequate housing. We say poverty no more, we want justice for the poor. That is where your treasure and your heart should be.

ACTIVIST GUIDE: FASTING

SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- Isaiah 58 links true fasting with justice, sharing bread with the hungry, clothing the naked, etc.
- Matthew 6 shows fasting as a humble practice between the believer and God.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FASTING

- Consumerism Fast: No unnecessary shopping, support local/ethical businesses instead.
- Plastics Fast: Give up single-use plastics, carry reusable containers.
- Social Media Fast: Stop doomscrolling, use reclaimed time for advocacy or connection.
- Convenience Fast: Walk, bike, or use public transit when possible.

HISTORICAL/ACTIVIST ROOTS

- Early Christians often fasted and redirected saved food to the poor.
- Gandhi used fasting as nonviolent resistance, drawing attention to injustice.
- Modern climate and justice movements practice consumption fasts (boycotting plastics, fast fashion)
- Fasting is a common Lenten practice and goes hand in hand with justice work.

REDIRECTION

- Money saved- donate to mutual aid, food pantries, or advocacy groups.
- Time saved- volunteer, write letters, attend community meetings.
- Attention freed- educate yourself on issues, amplify marginalized voices.

STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICAL GUIDE

CHOOSE YOUR FAST

- Pick one indulgence, habit, or convenience to abstain from during Lent.
- Name the justice issue it connects to (plastic fast= eco justice, etc).

REDIRECT RESOURCES

- Track money, time, attention saved and intentionally redirect it.
- Find local organizations in your community to support.

CONNECT SPIRITUALLY

- When craving what you've given up, use it as a prayer. Ask God to align your heart with justice.

REFLECT WEEKLY

- What did I notice about my desires/attachments?
- Who am I standing in solidarity with?
- How is God reshaping me through this practice?

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

TOMMY ALLGOOD

GENESIS 2:15-17; 3:1-7; PSALM 32; ROMANS 5:12-19; MATTHEW 4:1-11

The people cry out, Oh God Hear us!

It's destabilizing at times, to be awake to the reality that we are witnessing global reordering, systemic transitions, and power struggles that impact the well-being of our world. Shifting climate patterns, economic instability, authoritarian resurgence, and intentional deception campaigns are not just headlines— they impact our bodies' senses and shape our relationships. Depending on the identities that we carry, these collective pressures and struggles manifest in a multitude of privileges, disadvantages, individual and collective traumas. They show up as individual and interpersonal pain, discord in our relationships and material bodies, and these struggles embed into the systems we create to protect us. . . and if we're not careful we will succumb to the impossible demands modern Empire¹ places on our bodies and abandon ourselves— override our limits, disconnect from our bodies, and sacrifice our neighbor in the name of urgency and self-preservation.

These realities activate an awareness of what is broken in our world and stir a desire to lend our energy towards setting matters right. Many of us find ourselves rooted in some form of public truth-telling, collective organizing, material redistribution (mutual aid), noncompliance with unjust power (protest), and/or engaged in practices aimed at social repair. These are the practices of activism, love, justice, and care manifesting in the world, in material form, for the sake of all our kin. . . All our relations.²

In an age of deception and manufactured scarcity where it's easy to forget the sound of the genuine³ and hope seems far off in the world, reclaiming the spirit of the ritual of Lent creates space for discernment. Lent makes room to tell forgotten and obscured truths that mend and fortify our commitment of care and love to one another even amidst the decaying structures that anchor alienation, sowing discord. Said another way, Lent invites us to remember and locate the individual and collective truths of God's active love contained in all bodies. The invitation to rest and "fasting" helps us resist the deceptions of empire and activate the creative power of community stewardship— Activism as God's Love moving in the world.

Remembering Origin Stories: You are Good

The people cry out, Oh God Hear us!

For me, Lent becomes a season of embodied questioning and remembering— sensing and listening to where hunger shows up in my body, practicing restraint long enough to cultivate curiosity and slowing down long enough to experience a sense of clarity. This remembering is not a performance of perfection but rather, a contemplative, restorative return to the origin story of goodness.

In the spirit of the Judeo-Christian origin story starting at Goodness, it is important to name from the outset that our modern culture has built particular narratives and practices that shape our identity around food and body image, so it's important to clarify when I talk about fasting and hunger that I invoke these practices as metaphors. In many communities, "fasting" has been weaponized—as a performance of holiness⁴, a marker of spiritual worth, and often a proxy for body control and status. If Lent is going to invite people to the body and thus to community, the invitation has to be re-formed, remembered differently. Some people will fast from food. Many won't—and that is not a lesser Lent. Others will notice habits or activities that contribute to the body feeling heavy and weighed down, others may find that they need to take in information to stir the body

to action. For some bodies, food fasting is unsafe or harmful, and when we are curious about this ritual we see both communal care and invitation. What if the Lenten invitation is embodied awareness: practices that bring us into aliveness and into care for each other? If you have a history of disordered eating, body shame, medical complexity, chronic illness, or anything that makes food restriction unsafe: do not fast from food. Choose a practice that supports your nervous system and your relationships. After all, a product of the individual fast was the ability to locate those who could not fast and ensure their needs were accounted for and accommodated communally. What shifts when the starting place is “you are good” and not depravity or striving?

Fasting From The Doubt of Goodness

The people cry out, Oh God Hear us!

In this week’s lectionary readings we are given additional glimpses into origin stories that will go on to shape and impact a people’s identity for generations. Genesis situates us in the origin story of a good creation and the human vocation to engage in the stewardship of creation— to be in relationships of care with one another, to “till and keep it”. Yes, our relationships are like gardens. Where are you experiencing the invitation to till and keep God’s creation?

The Genesis creation story reveals how the first human pair were to be active in the world, namely through cultivating identity through relational trust and environmental responsibility. The text goes on to tell a story about how that identity is distorted through doubt, distrust, manipulation and shame. The serpent/deceiver’s question, “is it really so?” plants doubt in the human pair’s mind and clouds their ability to hear and know God’s voice as love. Stripping away gendered hierarchy that has been read into the text and used to subjugate women across time, we are invited to a remembering that the start of creation is goodness, not perfection. What if the serpent’s presence was to remind us that we all struggle with deceptive thinking and limiting beliefs? That we all struggle with desire and realizing our *imago dei*. Where do you hear this question in your own interior life?

Is it really so . . . that you are alone?

Is it really so . . . that there will never be enough?

Is it really so . . . that safety is realized only through control?

Is it really so or is it God’s nature to withhold goodness and provision from us becomes a central question that shapes human relationship and ritual in the Judeo-Christian story. When doubt wins over, shame and self-preservation emerges as the organizing engine of relationships in the story.

And so in our fragility, in our weakness, we encounter rituals of renewal – rituals of remembering, rituals of care, rituals of contemplation— that invites us into acts of renewal through confession or accountability.

Confessing we have Forgotten our Power

The people cry out, Oh God Hear us!

The Psalmist declares, “I will confess my transgressions”. Said another way, I will remember what I have forgotten. What is the Psalmist remembering? The text responds, “The way in which you should go”. (Psalms 32:8) The psalm names a physical reality: when the truth is buried, the body carries the cost; when the truth is spoken, liberation is the breath that mercy and justice breathes.

From a sociopolitical perspective, many people and nations are asking, debating, and fighting about “the way in which we should go”. Many opportunities stand before us as it relates to technological advancements but we do well to question the environmental impact on our neighbors. We wrestle in body, mind, and spirit as we

witness the oppressed align with empire and become the oppressor. Those who also claim an expression of Christian faith land with differing theological positions as it relates to welcoming the immigrant into our midst or the inherent dignity of the trans body, which result in the playing out of cycles of violence against the most vulnerable among us. Black and Brown bodies are treated like the prophets of old, performatively valued for what they bring to culture but the deeper message of our sirens go unheeded. It seems we have forgotten our power: the power to tell the truth, the power to repair what has been harmed, the power to choose relationship over domination, and the power to organize our lives toward the kin-dom of God.

Confession becomes a doorway back into that power, but it also becomes an entry into the wilderness.

The Wilderness: Discernment as Resistance

The people cry out, Oh God Hear us!

We meet Jesus in the wilderness facing a similar disruption. In his hunger and longing, will he remember this origin story? In his hunger and longing will he remember his power and choose to yield it with wisdom? Three times, Jesus sets right what is presented as misaligned and distorted. “It is written” becomes the refrain of resistance. The wilderness tests whether Jesus will succumb to misinformation and pursue goodness through the lens of Empire.

It seems the tempter’s strategy is consistent: distort what is real and sow seeds of doubt. Trade trust for control. Betray your knowing under the lie of self-preservation. Trade communal life for life of Empire.

So a Lenten question emerges: Who is the deceiver today? Whose words are we going to believe? Will we follow Empire’s admonition to look away from the horror we see or do we heed the admonition of Rev Dr. Melva Sampson who proclaims in recounting the courage of Mamie Till, Emmett Till’s mother – “Open up the Casket!!!”⁵ – reminding us that the voice of God often sounds like love that can tell the most difficult truths without collapsing and that love can act without becoming that which it opposes.

Committing to the Mending and Resurrection of The World

Another person was shot and killed in Minneapolis as I type this. The disinformation campaign was swift and immediate. In such turmoil we are left to ask, What are we to reflect on as we enter this Lenten season when the thumb of empire continues to press down on our neighbors. . . continues to press down on us? If Lent prepares us for Jesus’ arrival, what does it mean to prepare for the resurrection in a world where death feels routine?

This Lent, what I offer and invite us to consider is that through rituals of memory and collective care we’re being called to practice a faith that returns us to our bodies and to each other. We’re not measuring piety by what we give up but rather how we show up. We’re measuring love by how present we become—how truthful, how tender, how accountable, how connected. Choose a practice of care that supports your nervous system and strengthens your capacity to be in community. For 40 days is there someone or a situation you can bring awareness around and connect with the needs that surface in that awareness: shared meals, rides, childcare swaps, mutual aid requests, check-in buddies. Rejecting business as usual, *that* is our fast.

We practice being with the hunger of connection and reject the feast of individual indulgence that numbs us to our needs and knowing. In doing so we cultivate life giving kindness towards people and prepare ourselves to trust in our connection with one another. In doing so we begin to dismantle the ruthless systems of oppression that strive to govern over the kin-dom of God.

The people cry out, Oh God Hear us!

If fasting helps us connect with our bodies and embodiment leads to community, then let the practices of this Lenten season be ones that connect us to the care we have in one another:

Questions to explore this week:

Where did I feel alive this week?

Where did I go numb or disappear?

What support do I need?

What repair am I being invited toward?

1 Here I use empire to mean the extractive, domination-based systems that orient our individual and collective lives, training us to abandon our limits, consume land, and dominate our neighbors.

2 Interconnection is a central core of First Nations, Inuit and Metis worldviews and ways of knowing. Some First Nations sum this up with the phrase "All my relations". For more see First Nations Pedagogy Online

3 The Sound of the Genuine (Baccalaureate ceremony) (Spelman College), 1980 May 4 · The Howard Thurman Digital Archive. (n.d.). <https://thurman.pitts.emory.edu/items/show/838>

4 Cleveland, C. (2023). God is a Black woman. HarperOne.

5 Rev. Dr. Melva Sampson, "See It In The Distance", Sermon, Saint James Presbyterian Church, Greensboro, NC, January 19th, 2026

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ACTIVIST GUIDE: WRITING

LETTERS AS LAMENT: CONTACTING LAWMAKERS

SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- The prophets confronted kings and rulers, calling them back to justice (Amos 5, Jeremiah 22). Lamenting injustice while demanding action is not just politics, but speaking truth in love to those in power.

HISTORICAL/ACTIVIST ROOTS

- Abolitionists sent petitions and letters to Congress demanding the end of slavery.
- Women's suffrage activists wrote lawmakers until the 19th Amendment was passed.
- Civil Rights leaders wrote to Congress and presidents to pass civil rights legislation.

STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICAL GUIDE

IDENTIFY YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

- Use house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative for U.S. House members.
- Use senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm for U.S. Senators.
- Search “[your city] city council” or “[your county] commissioner” for local leaders.
- Don't forget state legislators, governors, school boards, and mayors. They often have a more direct impact on daily life than federal officials.

WRITE YOUR LETTER

- Use Templates & Resources-
- Many organizations provide pre-drafted templates you can adapt. These can give you issue-specific talking points.
- Bread for the World (hunger/poverty), Amnesty International (human rights), Moms Demand Action (gun safety), ACLU (civil rights).
- The Office of Public Witness (OPW) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) equips people of faith to speak truth to power. [Their Action Alerts are short, easy-to-use guides that explain urgent justice issues, why they matter to people of faith, and how to contact lawmakers.](#)

CHOOSE YOUR ISSUE

- Food insecurity (SNAP, funding local food banks, school lunches)
- Housing (Affordable housing, tenant protections)
- Healthcare access (Affordable healthcare, Medicaid, reproductive rights)
- Creation care (Climate policy, renewable energy, green spaces, sustainability)
- Gun violence (Support background checks, safe storage laws, community programs)
- Immigration (Advocate for humane border policies, protections for refugees)
- LGBTQ+ (Oppose discriminatory bills, support inclusive legislation)

REFLECT & PRAY

- What did writing this letter stir in me?
- Did I speak truthfully and faithfully?
- Who am I standing with through this act of lament?

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

LOGAN CREWS

GENESIS 12:1-4A; PSALM 121; ROMANS 4:1-5, 13-17; JOHN 3:1-17 OR MATTHEW 17:1-9

Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.*

*He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you
by day, nor the moon by night.*

The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

When I think of hills, I think of the ones in Missouri. The ones that looked like heads of broccoli to me as a child when the trees were full and green in the summer. The sides of them are blasted open to make way for the highway, putting layers upon layers of rock on display in huge outcrops.

I can close my eyes and, even from Connecticut, be back there, nestled between the rises. A place where I feel kept. Here, I feel like I fit in the order of things.

In Psalm 121, the psalmist doesn't look *above* the hills for help but *to* the hills. We gaze upwards with the psalmist when we are knee-deep in the mire of violence and unrest, seeking the help that will pull us out. And looking to the hills, we remember: our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Who made these hills. Who made the ground under our feet. Who made the broccoli trees and the stratigraphies of earth history. And who became a part of it all.

At the top of the hill, it's easy to forget that the few inches of soil directly underfoot don't tell the land's full story. From the bottom, we see the limestone and the shale stacked on one another all the way up, with wayward volcanic intrusions pushing their way through the orderly sequence. We see how the layers have been tilted and compressed over millions of years like a toddler had come through and squished the hills like PlayDoh.

The top of the hill is not the youngest rock but the rock that has most recently been revealed by processes of weathering, saying hello once again to the open air. When our feet find this ground, something seems to say you've been here before.

We have been here before.

Lent is a time-warping season.

As designed, the United States has been in a state of crisis. Federal agents are disappearing people off the streets, quietly killing people imprisoned in detention centers and killing others in broad daylight in front of their neighbors.

We have been here before.

The American Indian Movement (AIM) has sent patrols back into the streets of Minneapolis, where AIM first began in 1968. New members of Philadelphia's chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense have been out in Minnesota, too, and are sending patrols into their own city to protect their community from ICE. Others have created rapid response networks and neighborhood defense teams of their own, responding to the hyperlocal needs of their communities in new ways while taking cues from previous eras of resistance to state violence.

We are living through moments that feel like they've been tilted, compressed, and suspended in time. Overwhelmingly new and familiar, all at once. And at each inflection point, it all collapses down to the size of our phone screen. A red dot of a laser on our chest. A stabbing pain in the hippocampus when we realize we know this story and must choose which character to play this time.

"Look to the hills," the psalmist tells us.

What is our role as Christians when our world collapses? Luckily, we are familiar with collapse. And we are experts in time travel.

In Lent, we walk solemnly toward Jesus's execution. We know it is coming because we make this journey every year and because it is always coming. Jesus tells the disciples he will be handed over to be killed multiple times across the gospels, and he carries out his entire ministry with the knowledge that it is leading him to the cross. As people who follow the way of Jesus, our faith cannot exist without risk.

This walk toward Jesus's death begins with the harsh reminder that we are mortal. We are dust and to dust we shall return. One day, the matter that makes us up will be something else and the time we spent on earth will be reflected in some hillside outcrop. Risk becomes scarier to face in the shadow of this reminder.

But the reason we walk with Jesus towards the cross instead of running away is because we know what's on the other side of the crucifixion. Because we've been here before, we know that Jesus rises and defeats sin and death. The Gospel of John tells us that as long as we believe in him, we may have eternal life.

The Christian journey is a funny one to undertake. We await the agony of Jesus's death at the same time we cling to the sure hope of the resurrection. It's like standing on an exposure of folded rock, one foot in one time period and the other foot in another.

God calls us to straddle multiple realities, to plant our feet firmly in both grief and hope. We are experts in time travel and skilled navigators of collapse. This is why our voices, bodies, and collective power are needed in times of turmoil: we learn from Jesus how to move through a broken world, knowing a new one exists as soon as we dare to imagine it.

But we cannot tend to injustice if we refuse to look at it squarely.

When we look to the hills, we pass our eyes over layers of structural sin and works of evil that have reproduced themselves over hundreds, even thousands of years. We find moments of breakthrough and peace. We see struggle and resilience, oppression and violence, death and life. Down in the valley as we look up, we tread on sediment that will become new rock. History is still unfolding and it unfolds in the presence of everything that has already been, the bad and the good. Most importantly, in the presence of Jesus Christ: the crucified and the resurrected.

The earth is an archive of all God has done and what we have done to each other. Land holds onto memory, and much of our work for justice and peace takes place on stolen land whose soil is still blood-soaked. It is

no wonder that where the Church has attempted to exist in ignorance of the land it sits upon, it has failed to meet moments of crisis.

May this Lent be a time of learning the histories that act upon us where we live, a time to reckon and repent and recommit. Map out how your own story is part of a larger one where you live, and invite your neighbors to share your stories with one another. It is easier to know what the next step is when you see where you've come from.

May we listen to that feeling that says you've been here before and seek the wisdom of those who have gone before us whose struggles are ongoing in our own lives.

As we walk through dark valleys on the way to the cross, may we look to the hills and know that our marching footsteps are not sustained by our own sheer willpower but by the grace of God who is our help.

The dust is enough, the psalmist tells us. Look to the hills to find the land God found suitable for his only son. This is the world that God loved so much that he entered it like a fault breaks through rock layers, disrupting time and space.

Here, we are kept.

As we protest, as we pray, as we learn, as we struggle, God keeps us.

In these moments that feel like they are tilted, compressed, and suspended in time, God keeps us.

God keeps us in the coming light of the resurrection—the “already won” that gives us reason to keep moving through the “not yet.”

ACTIVIST GUIDE: ART

CREATIVE WITNESS: ART FOR JUSTICE

SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- Artistic expression (painting, music, poetry, theater) can be a form of prayer, lament, and praise, reflecting God's creativity.
- Scripture often uses visual and poetic language to challenge injustice (prophetic books, imagery, psalms of lament).
- Biblical examples: Tabernacle craftsmanship, murals in synagogues, and psalms as forms of communal art. Art embodies spiritual truths in tangible ways.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ART FOR JUSTICE WORK

- Murals, posters, illustrations, or comics that highlight injustice or inspire hope.
- Zines, op-eds, poetry slams, and blogs connecting faith, ethics, and activism.
- Worship songs, protest songs, spoken word, and theater as tools for advocacy.
- Social media campaigns, infographics, video storytelling that educate and equip communities.

HISTORICAL/ACTIVIST ROOTS

- Liberation Theology: Art as storytelling and cultural preservation in oppressed communities (mural movements in Latin America).
- Street art, protest posters, and zines amplify marginalized voices and educate communities about social issues.
- Songs, plays, and spoken word have historically communicated spiritual and social justice messages.

USING YOUR CREATIVE ENERGY

- Use art to highlight issues like poverty, climate justice, gender equity, or racial justice.
- Host workshops, collaborative projects, or exhibitions to amplify local voices.
- Use art to process emotions, spiritual experiences, or encounters with injustice.

STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICAL GUIDE

- **Choose Your Medium:** Identify the artistic form that resonates with you (drawing, writing, music, digital media).
- **Connect to Justice:** Pick a social issue your art will illuminate. Name how it reflects God's call for justice.
- **Create Intentionally:** Spend time crafting your work with both skill and heart. Infuse it with prayer, reflection, or research.
- **Share and Amplify:** Display your work publicly, collaborate with organizations, or distribute zines digitally or in your community.

REFLECT WEEKLY

- How did creating this art deepen your understanding of justice?
- Who might this work serve or inspire?
- How is God shaping your perspective through your creativity?

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT

JONATHAN PULPHUS

EXODUS 17:1-7; PSALM 95; ROMANS 5:1-11; JOHN 4:5-42

It's been nearly two thousand years since the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, fifty-eight years since the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and eleven years since the murder of Michael Brown Jr. Though centuries separate these tragedies, the injustices that caused them persist. We live amid a moral and systemic bankruptcy: an indecency that allows individuals and institutions to harm with impunity. These are not isolated failures; they are functions of power structures designed to divide, destroy, and deny community and justice. The attitude is simple: either stand with your people, or perish.

As people of faith and conscience, we are called to resist these forces and build a better world. This activist project, constructing humane communities, is arduous yet holy, demanding yet delightful, challenging yet courageous. When we stand with our people, grounded in faith, power bends toward justice. But to avoid perpetuating these ills, we must deepen our faith and out-organize the opposition.

From Grievance to Policy (Exodus 17:1-7)

Organizing begins with naming the problem and then moving beyond the complaint. In Exodus 17, the Israelites clash with Moses because they are thirsty. Grumbling fills the air - not collaboration, not strategy, and not creative troubleshooting. Moses turns to God, who instructs him to strike a rock; water pours forth. Scarcity gives way to abundance because faith activates courage and action.

For organizers, the lesson is clear: move from grievance to policy, from exasperation to execution. Identify the "rocks" in your community, the unyielding systems that deny life, and apply sustained pressure until change flows. As Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said in 1963, "It may be true that the law cannot change the heart, but it can restrain the heartless." Policy shifts can offer real relief to the vulnerable.

In 2014, after the murder of Michael Brown and the ensuing Ferguson Uprising, we as students and community members named the rocks and agitated for substantive developments. At Saint Louis University, that work contributed to policy commitments like the Clock Tower Accords: steps toward equity and access that helped build infrastructure for justice. The goal is simple and sacred: create a world where no community goes thirsty and every basic need is met.

Guarding Against Burnout (Psalm 95:1-11)

The psalmist sings of God's greatness and warns, "Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah." A hardened heart, calcified by cynicism, exhaustion, or despair, can sabotage our witness and our work. Ego precedes devastation. Organizers often edge God out by neglecting rest, nourishment, and care; urgency becomes our only liturgy until the ship implodes. Changemakers must take heed to the saying there's pride before the fall. The work is pressing, but urgency without sustainability becomes a slow unraveling. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to the "urgency of now" speaking to the seriousness that the present calls for in terms of change. What happens when after days, weeks, months, and years of campaigning, goals are not met? Without a practice of resting fully, eating well, unplugging from work, and self care, the toll is imminent. Organizers must soften their heart through leaning into care ensuring that their spirit is flexible enough to continue movement work.

Self-care is not a luxury item; it is a spiritual discipline and a movement imperative. Rest fully. Eat well. Unplug from the grind. Tend to your mental health. Let your spirit stay flexible enough to keep going without veering into resentment or disillusionment. Trauma leaves marks; burnout steals sight. Guard your soul, so the work doesn't take more than you can give.

Faith for the Long Haul (Romans 5:1–11)

Paul writes that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” The path from pain to hope is not a shortcut; it is a formation. The fight for justice is not a sprint; it is a marathon. The fire must be in one, not on one. As Detroit hip-hop artist Tee Grizzley emceed: “We built to last.” Movement elders like Mama Jamala Rogers and John Chasnoff reminded us during Ferguson that the work is a marathon, not a sprint. We can be in a hurry, but never a rush. The latter destabilizes our foundation and drains our spirit. When engaging causes dear to the heart, one must marry pain with sustainability toward one's strategy. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us that the “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” There will be trials and tribulations but the time, treasure, and talent invested is not in vain. The fight for justice is long being just as alive tomorrow as it was yesterday and is today. Endurance is not merely gritting our teeth; endurance is a set of structures that keep us going. Character forms as we keep our commitments, even when applause fades and headlines move on. Hope is born when communities witness that we refuse to vacate our cause, even after setbacks. The death, dread, and despair in communities may incentivize one to surrender and abandon the battle of spiritual warfare. Paul encourages us to embrace hardship as it builds stamina which reflects our faith and virtues. Will we cower to the status quo or will we stand tall through sustained protracted resistance? The refusal to vacate one's cause despite setbacks by way of discipline and persistent struggle creates hope.

Intergenerational Perspective as Power (John 4:5–42)

The fire of youth and wisdom of elders in relation together can lead to transformational shifts in society. Young people in their curiosity and courage offer innocent intellectual range coupled with brave indignation that is requisite for the necessary risk taking natural to movement work. They question the archaic systems and will fight realizing that their future is on the line. Elders have a seasoned record and battle-tested judgment that can serve as a model for navigating ills. These veterans have survived the ebbs and flows of justice work with war scars that can offer a vision helping guide movement praxis grounded in experienced direction. During the Ferguson Uprising, the youth group Tribe X benefited from the tutelage advisors known as “mamas.” These were middle aged career Black mothers with private and non-profit expertise that had a passion for youth with a record for advancing the racial justice movement. While the young people were conducting direct actions, the mentors provided technical assistance. The drafting of the Clock Tower Accords signed by then-President of SLU was coordinated by the mamas.

One can look to the birth of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee by Ella Baker. After the Greensboro Sit-Ins, Baker convinced Rev. Dr. King to provide the \$800 in seed money to host a youth conference. This youth gathering matured into SNCC. There's historical precedent for trusted adults curating spaces for young people to realize their own power to create change.

In John 4:5-42, the Samaritan woman at the well enters a sacred dialogue with Jesus. She challenges Christ by referencing Jacob, her ancestor, and his deeds making the well. Jesus informs her that the well is a bandaid to being thirsty and only through faith in him is there a vehicle to being truly quenched or experience eternal life, echoing the Israelites' preoccupation with complaining rather than studying the root cause for thirst's existence. Summoning her ancestral lineage reflects how movements span generations not occurring in a vacuum. As the late great historian Vincent Harding posits, these struggles and their byproducts are a “river.”

The Psalmist in chapter 23 reminds us that God will prepare us a table in the presence of our enemies. In the fight for justice, it's important that we check our own vices and not fall for the temptation that is the lowest

hanging fruit. We must move beyond complaints toward campaigns, burnout to better self care, turn our hardships into hope, and ignore isolation and invoke intergenerational power. As we pour into ourselves and each other during this struggle, guided by faith and a conviction for justice, we can accomplish great feats.

We must stand with our people.

ACTIVIST GUIDE: MUTUAL AID

NEIGHBORS FIRST: PRACTICING MUTUAL AID

SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- Scripture emphasizes caring for neighbors, widows, orphans, and the marginalized (Acts 2:44-45; Galatians 6:2; Isaiah 58).
- Mutual aid embodies God's call to love and serve one another, sharing resources and burdens.
- Mutual aid focuses on reciprocity and justice, not just one-way giving, reflecting the Kingdom of God as communal.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF MUTUAL AID

- Resource-Based: Food pantries, clothing swaps, community gardens.
- Skill-Based: Offering tutoring, legal aid, childcare, or mentorship.
- Financial: Crowdfunding for emergencies, rent, medical expenses.
- Advocacy & Information: Sharing knowledge, connecting people to services, or organizing for systemic change.

HISTORICAL/ACTIVIST ROOTS

- Early Christian communities pooled resources for the needy (Acts 2).
- Mutual aid has deep roots in oppressed communities - Black Panther free breakfast programs, worker cooperatives, Indigenous support networks.
- Community fridges, time banking, and solidarity networks for disaster relief, housing, and climate justice.

SHARING YOUR RESOURCES

- Time: Volunteer to help neighbors, community centers, or advocacy networks.
- Money: Contribute to mutual aid funds, local co-ops, or emergency relief programs.
- Skills/Attention: Offer professional skills, organize workshops, or amplify local initiatives.

STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICAL GUIDE

- Identify Needs in Your Community: Listen to what people actually need, rather than assuming or trying to fix superficial issues.
- Decide what you can realistically give- time, money, skills, or space.
- Start locally- Work with existing networks or start small with friends, neighbors, or faith groups.
- Focus on consistency rather than one-off aid; aim for reciprocity and mutual growth.

REFLECT WEEKLY

- Who am I standing with, not just helping?
- How am I learning from those I serve?
- How does God's justice inspire our shared community practices?

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT

ALETA HOWARD-CARTHORN

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13; PSALM 23; EPHESIANS 5:8-14; JOHN 9:1-41

The love of God in our world may not always be obvious. Our relationship with God is so personal and therefore, I think that many of us struggle with the very personal topic of God's love. I think we can get it when it comes to puppies, kittens and babies. Because they are so cute! But when it comes to the darker things in life, we may not always see God's love and trust it. But the love of God on a very basic level, is why we have life. (I understand this sentence is loaded, so just stay with me.) We are alive and if we, as Christians, believe in God and that God gives life, then we can make the connection that because God gives us life, God loves us. But there are times, moments and situations in which the love of God is not evident. When a beloved family member, or friend passes away, God's love may seem distant.

Yet, the word of God reminds us, repeatedly, of His great love. Thinking of the scriptures from today's first reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-12 and Psalm 23, I'm particularly struck by Psalm 23. The author (King David) almost sings in celebration of this great love. He, once a shepherd himself, writes about the penultimate love and protection of our Creator God, the Greatest Shepherd of all. The very first verse establishes the foundation on which this love is based. This declaration of God's character firmly establishes David's relationship to the Great Shepherd. Because God is his Shepherd, all of his needs are cared for. He is loved, provided for and protected. God's character as a Protector, Provider, Refresher and Reviver, is depicted in a few short verses. Themes of God's safety, guidance and protection are repeated throughout this psalm.

But then, we get down to where David speaks of how he has been chosen by God. In verse 5, the second part, David declares that his head is anointed with oil and his cup runs over. To obviously tie in our reading from first Samuel, in verse 13, the prophet Samuel anoints young David as God instructs him to. But before David received this anointing, there was a process that occurred that he wasn't aware of. The beginning of chapter 16 describes the scene and shows us how Samuel follows God's instructions. He goes to Jesse's house because God has selected one of his sons to be the next king over Israel. Jesse has Samuel take a look at all of his sons first, except David. After God had rejected all of David's brothers, Samuel asks if all of Jesse's sons had been seen. Enter David. Although David had been left out of the process, God still chose him! God tells Samuel that David is the son God has chosen and instructs Samuel to anoint him!

The same is also true for you and me! We too are chosen! No matter who may appear to be better looking, stronger or smarter, we are chosen by God!

As you move through this Lenten season, I invite you to consider contemplating this truth: you are chosen by God. YOU are chosen by God. You ARE CHOSEN by God. You are chosen BY GOD! The repetition is for emphasis. I invite you to step into that space to receive the depth and fullness of that truth. Some practical ways to meditate on this would be to practice saying it. If you haven't thought of yourself as a "child of God", saying it will help you begin to believe it. Try saying it a few times. Begin to own it more as you repeat it. By "own it", I mean, you have to mean it as you say it. Don't just mumble these words but say it like you mean it!

Next, as you read verses 10 through 13 of 1 Samuel daily, follow the story and let the words form the story in your mind and imagine yourself as young David. Think about how you would feel if the prophet of your home town came to your house and blessed you and anointed you. Then imagine the feeling of being chosen by a prophet of God as the future ruler of your hometown.

Finally, as you meditate on the story and envision yourself in it, think on how it feels to be chosen. Think about the description of God as The Great Shepherd in Psalm 23. Consider how it feels to be selected or sought out. Keep in mind, this is not a competition. I repeat, this is not a competition! Do not gloat over the fact that you were chosen instead of your siblings. Do not celebrate that in the future, you're going to be someone famous. But rather, sit in the warmth of that feeling of being seen. Being called by God for God's purpose! To use an old baseball term, imagine how it feels to be "called up" into who you are yet to be. Let the warmth of that love fill your heart and hold it there.

Lastly, as you move through this exercise, end with grateful prayer. Praise God and thank God for God's love for you. Thank Jesus for His journey here on earth and the sacrifice of His life for yours. And then give thanks for the Holy Spirit who keeps and guides you and for your precious, blessed, special, sacred, chosen life.

This Lenten season, reflect on who you are in Christ, holy, chosen and beloved. With this practice, your awareness of self and others is refined and your overall sense of community will expand.

One final note: the traditional South African philosophy of Ubuntu basically says that I am human because you are human. It follows the line of thinking that my humanity matters because your humanity matters. Being fully confident in your identity as a chosen, special and blessed child of God helps us to care for others, for when we carry this philosophy, we can then see others as we are: blessed, chosen, special children of God. When we view others in this communal aspect, our care for them naturally flows from a shared place of knowing and belonging. And when we as humans, love and care for other humans in this manner, the light of Jesus shines brightest.

ACTIVIST GUIDE: SABBATH

REST AS RESISTANCE: TAKING SABBATH SERIOUSLY

SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- God commands rest in Exodus 20:8-11 and models it in Genesis 2:2-3. Sabbath is a sacred rhythm of restoration and trust.
- Observing Sabbath counters the culture of overwork, consumption, and exploitation. It is a spiritual practice that aligns personal renewal with justice.
- Sabbath honors both human dignity and God's creation, reminding us that life is more than productivity.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SABBATH PRACTICES

- Step away from phones, social media, or email to reclaim presence and mindfulness.
- Avoid unnecessary spending, shopping, or resource use.
- Walk, rest, or practice gentle exercise instead of rushing through routines.
- Share meals, prayers, or fellowship with others intentionally.

HISTORICAL/ACTIVIST ROOTS

- Early Jewish and Christian communities observed Sabbath to rest, worship, and support one another.
- Labor movements invoked rest as a form of justice for workers
- Modern faith-based justice movements connect Sabbath to ecological stewardship, slowing consumption, and prioritizing relational and spiritual well-being.

REDIRECTING TIME AND ENERGY

- Time saved from busyness can be redirected toward prayer, reflection, and reconnecting with loved ones.
- Use Sabbath to discern ways your work or activism aligns with God's justice.
- Create space for gratitude and attentiveness to God's creation and human community.

STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICAL GUIDE

- Pick one rhythm to observe- daily rest, weekly, or monthly practice.
- Inform your community or household, and limit tasks, media, or work that disrupt rest.
- Incorporate prayer, scripture reading, or reflective journaling during this time.
- Use renewed energy for justice work- volunteering, advocacy, or supporting others- without overextending yourself.

REFLECT WEEKLY

- What did I learn about my limits and priorities?
- How did Sabbath reshape my connection with God, others, and creation?
- How can rest deepen my commitment to justice in sustainable ways?

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT

RUTHANNE BROOKS

EZEKIEL 37:1-14; PSALM 130; ROMANS 8:6-11; JOHN 11:1-45

O Lord God, Only You Know

As an Old Testament specialist, there are few texts which capture my imagination in the way that Ezekiel 37, the vision of the valley of dry bones, does. Of course, this is in large part due to the bizarre imagery. The visuals of bones stitching themselves back together and skin materializing on top sounds more like a scene from a horror film than a vision of hope, healing, and vitality from a biblical text (vv. 6–8). Nevertheless, it is exactly this strangeness that spotlights not only the extent of God’s miraculous power, a consistent theme proven time and time again throughout the biblical texts, but also the shortcoming of the human perception of imagining what can be and will be.

The Book of Ezekiel is a reflection on the tension of displacement, the violence of exile, in the aftermath of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in 587/6 BCE. Many of the people of the southern kingdom of Judah had been displaced from their homes and forced into a foreign land; those who remained in the land of Judah faced the pressure of foreign rule which prioritized its own interests. We are told at the very beginning of the book that Ezekiel’s visions take place as he is among the exiles in Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1–3). This itself is a remarkable statement: the author makes clear that, far from being limited to the land of Israel, God travels with his people wherever they might be. It also highlights that, though a prophet granted a miraculous, unique experience of the divine (Ezekiel 1), Ezekiel is not separate from the plight of his people.

Throughout the book, the Spirit of the Lord constantly transports Ezekiel to and fro, forcing him to bear witness to desolation and death. In the scene in chapter 37, the Spirit takes Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones. This is not just a premonition of what could be but a fully embodied, visceral experience for the prophet. These are the bones of victims, his own people, the bones themselves the result of military invasion and oppression.

As biblical texts grapple with the meaning of exile, exile is portrayed as the just result of the people’s rebellion against God and the divine covenant - a covenant which mandates mutual care and social justice (cf. Isaiah 58). The tension of the exile experience paves the way for our biblical authors to wrestle carefully and honestly with their relationship to God, reflecting on their own spiritual stagnation and the state of their community in order to envision a path forward. This is why Ezekiel’s position “among the exiles” is so important: he himself is one of them. Though commissioned to speak on behalf of God, it is his role to also speak on behalf of his people, to plea to the God of justice for justice and mercy on their behalf, to respond to their sufferings as in the past (cf. Exodus 2:23–25).

The context of chapter 36 leading into this scene is likewise fundamental. Before God calls Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones, God calls him to prophesy to the mountains and valleys so that justice may be done to them as well, a demonstration of the interconnectedness of human life with that of the earth and creation. As we are reminded at the beginning of the Lenten season from the words of Genesis 3:19, “dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”

Yet observing the previous context of Ezekiel 37 highlights a question: why, even after having just heard and received the word of the Lord which promised the renewal of life, does Ezekiel respond to God’s question of whether it is possible for the bones to come alive again with the words, “O Lord God, only You know” (v. 3) ?

Ezekiel's reticence to answer directly could be taken as the result of doubt. However, doubt is not the same as grief, and grief is not in opposition to faith. Similarly, Martha expresses both this hope and grief (John 11:19–27)—as well as a doubt lingering in the shadows of her hope (11:39–40).

Nevertheless, we can also observe in both, a humility: “O Lord God, only You know”—as You say, I am only a mortal (Ezekiel 37:3, 11); I do not know what you know and cannot do what you can do. “I believe that You are the Messiah coming into the world and that he will rise again” (John 11:21–27)—but I do not know what this means or what You will do in the present moment. Not all the bones of the land were resuscitated; not every death was reversed.

Furthermore, we may also ask, if our hope is in a final resurrection, a future glory that creation and we, along with it, long for (Romans 8:18–23; see also Ezekiel's vision of restoration in Ezekiel 40–48), what is the point of these accounts? Would it not have been better for Lazarus, as Martha observes, to rise again in the end, to not have to face again here the pain of the human experience?

However, as Jesus himself says to Martha in our reading, he is both the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). The hope of Easter is not just the hope of eternal life in a far-off time, far from it. It is the hope of restoration, of vitality, and the promise of life in this world, in the here-and-now. It is a faith full of reverence for the gift of life, one that recognizes the interconnectedness of human life with one another, where the deprivation of one is the deprivation of all. It is an active faith that seeks to breathe life into what is dead and restore it to its full potential and beyond.

Nevertheless, Ezekiel's response, “O Lord God, only You know,” recognizes the ambiguity of human experience, the constant state of potential, the tension between the known and the unknown, life and death. Like Ezekiel and Martha, the psalmist of Psalm 130 struggles with their liminal position. Yet this language of the soul waiting for the Lord (vv. 5–6) suggests that these dark spaces of life are not spaces of death, but spaces with the potential for divine encounter. The darkness of night is the signal for the expectation of divine deliverance, the reminder that hope is an active choice to believe in the divine power of restoration (v. 7).

As I have been in especial anticipation for the Lenten season this year, I find myself resonating with Ezekiel. I mourn with a full-hearted knowledge and belief in the God of life and vitality, and yet an exasperation in response to what I see: a church that has foregone its mission, a faith I hold dear being desecrated and profaned at the altar of the nation-state, of self-service, of bigotry, wondering if we, the church, as a body have fallen past the point of return. Thus, I find in myself and in this Lent the need to activate my hope, to set the conscious intention to embrace the posture of Martha: “O Lord God, only You know; but I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

We are filled with the Spirit that gives life, that is able to animate the dry bones, to give life to our mortal bodies and bring us life and peace (Romans 8:6–11). In this Easter season, let us join with our cloud of witnesses who can testify that in every season of despair, ours is a living hope with the potential to activate all that is around.

This Lent, let us:

Focus inward to pour outward. In both of the narrative texts of our readings, there is an active participation in the process of bringing life: both Ezekiel and Jesus speak to that which is dead. Yet they each do not act in haste but only after times of reflection and discernment. Likewise, though the psalmist waits, the psalmist takes the initiative to implore the Lord to act on divine promises.

Find a community with whom to mourn, and then to hope. As we can see throughout the Old Testament,

being a prophet is quite lonely business, and although his mission is for his community, Ezekiel carries the burden of grief on his own. In stark contrast, the scene of Lazarus depicts a community grieving together. Likewise, the psalmist goes beyond their own needs and exhorts the community to join in their example. We are here to speak life to one another, and share the burdens of our common humanity in unity.

ACTIVIST GUIDE: DIGITAL ACTIVISM

SCROLL WITH PURPOSE: FAITH-BASED DIGITAL ACTIVISM

SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- Scripture emphasizes the power of words to build up or tear down (Proverbs 18:21; Ephesians 4:29). Online advocacy can be an extension of speaking truth in love.
- Social media shapes our perception and engagement. Using it intentionally can reflect God's call to justice.
- Digital platforms can foster connection across distances, embodying God's vision for a global, caring community.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DIGITAL ACTIVISM

- Awareness Campaigns: Share facts, infographics, and stories to inform and educate.
- Petitions & Fundraising: Mobilize support for causes through online signatures or crowdfunding.
- Community Building: Host virtual gatherings, discussion groups, or online prayer circles.
- Creative Advocacy: Use digital art, memes, video, or music to engage audiences creatively and memorably.

HISTORICAL/ACTIVIST ROOTS

- Early print media and pamphlets spread social justice messages
- Hashtag campaigns like #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and climate action movements.
- Faith communities increasingly use online spaces to amplify marginalized voices, organize events, and educate.

UTILIZING YOUR DIGITAL ENERGY

- Set goals for education, advocacy, or amplification.
- Elevate marginalized voices rather than centering yourself.
- Transform scrolling or passive use into actionable steps: signing petitions, sharing resources, donating, or attending events.

STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICAL GUIDE

- Unfollow accounts that spread negativity or misinformation; follow credible, justice-centered sources.
- Decide where your advocacy will be most effective and which issues resonate with your values.
- Post, comment, or engage with the goal of education, solidarity, and constructive action.
- Avoid burnout; step back to process emotions, pray, and discern next steps.

REFLECT WEEKLY

- How did my online actions contribute to justice or solidarity?
- Whose voices did I amplify?
- How did my digital activism shape my spiritual life and commitment to God's work in the world?

PALM SUNDAY

JOHN BLACKSHIRE

PSALM 118:1-2, 19-29; MATTHEW 21:1-11

I want to start by being vulnerable with you. It has been hard to write this devotional. Not because my love for God is not strong, nor because I do not enjoy the season of Lent, but like so many of you, my soul feels heavy from the reality of the world. As I write this, our comrades in Minnesota are dealing with the presence of ICE in their state. There have been multiple deaths at the hands of government officials and sitting at my desk, in front of a laptop feels disconnected from the realities of life. I have started writing, walked away, started again, only to walk away once more. In between breaks of writing, I check in with a dear friend on the ground in Minneapolis and learn of protests in sub-zero temperatures. I hear her stories of community gatherings and the care being given to those most vulnerable. After many days of this routine, trying to write, walking away, chatting with her, rinse and repeat, it finally dawned on me that Palm Sunday – a moment of joyful procession and holy disruption – is applicable to this moment more than ever.

Palm Sunday is riddled with emotional complexity, a time of when celebration cuddles with the awareness that Holy Week leads Jesus to the cross. Likewise, we find ourselves at a moment of emotional complexity. We feel the grief and mourning that we are losing a reality in this country we thought we knew, but also the hope and longing that liberation might be on the other side of this turmoil. We typically think of Psalm 118 as a psalm that was traditionally sung during festival processions, making it an organic backdrop for Palm Sunday, while Matthew 21 reveals Jesus' entry into Jerusalem with crowds waving branches and shouting "Hosanna." Together, they provide us with a liturgical base that many follow for worship on Palm Sunday. However, upon closer reflection they remind us that praise and protest are not opposites in scripture, nor in our lives, but instead they often coexist together. That not only do they coexist together, but often praise is a form of protest. These pericopes invite us to remember that entering God's 'gates' means stepping into public spaces with courage, humility, and hope. When we do so we can settle into the truth, that even with the ever-present reality of injustice, polarization, and fatigue, that which seems like death could very well be the beginning of something new rising up.

Exploring Psalm 118: 1-2; 19-29

Psalm 118 shows us what it means to possess a worship infused with an understanding of justice. Verse one tells us to "give thanks to the Lord, for God is good." Our world is shaped by fear and scarcity, and systems of oppression are maintained by having us believe that everything is gloom and doom. The constant bombardment of bad events dysregulates our nervous systems and it is difficult for us to remember that we have much to give thanks for. As such, gratitude becomes a countercultural act. We give thanks not just because God is God, but because in doing so we root ourselves to the truth that life still holds goodness that is worth acknowledging. If there is goodness now, then there is the possibility for even more goodness in the future.

Similarly, when Psalm 118:19 says, "Open for me the gates of righteousness" it serves as a reminder that the reality we face is not all that is possible for us. Righteousness in this verse is not about personal piety, but about being in right relationship with God, neighbor, and community. This psalm of praise declares that we, as creations of the Divine have access to a justice that is greater than this moment, and we will walk through its gates.

Further, we know that the justice we have yet to see is coming because Psalm 118:22 tells us, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." God has a history of uplifting the marginalized and making

them the center of change and importance. Presently, we can see how God is working through those dismissed by systems of power to awaken the country to new possibilities! Collectively, these verses demonstrate that the psalmist's praise is not passive, but a declaration that God's love forecasts and outlasts oppression. Equally, let us use our worship as a launching point for justice-oriented living.

Exploring Matthew 21:1-11

Matthew 21:1-11 gives us an immeasurable example of Jesus modeling what it means to be a public witness. Verse five tells us that he was "gentle and riding on a donkey." Not only does this fulfill prophecy, but it is a public demonstration that signals a kingdom of peace, not domination. Jesus' presence served as a counter-parade to Rome's military processions. Likewise, let us be inspired by his actions and move in the world knowing we are the opposite of the injustices we see around us.

We can be this opposition to oppression by being like the crowd around Christ that yelled "Hosanna!" as he entered Jerusalem (verse 9). Their yells were more than an acknowledgment of Jesus as Savior, but a plea for the liberation they believed he would bring forth. Too, let us wave our "palms" and cry for victory, hope, and resistance against subjugation. When we do so we follow the tradition of Palm Sunday, one that reminds us that our faith is not a quiet religious moment, but an embodiment that is meant to disrupt the status quo.

Importantly, this pericope in Matthew illuminates that Jesus as Messiah is not the only significant part of the story. While Jesus models being the ultimate public witness to tyranny, the crowd importantly participates in the affirmation of Jesus' role. They provide a collective act of hope, proclaiming an altered way of life is possible. Let their example be a reminder to us of the importance of being co-participants with God in ushering in a new society.

Jesus' entry exposed the tensions between God's idea of kinship and the unjust systems of empire that people faced. We can easily see the parallels between this moment in Jesus' ministry and our own contemporary lives. We are in a historical moment that demands we sit in the tension of what some say is right, and what we know is wrong.

Overall, both Psalm 118 via a procession towards the temple, and Matthew 21 via a procession towards the city, show the importance of public, communal praise and the way it can also function as protest. Further, both passages remind us that Palm Sunday is a call to embodied faith, where worship and movement co-align, public witness is tethered to praise, and the call of "Hosanna" functions as a prayer and declaration. The two unveil that joy is entwined with struggle and activism requires courage, resilience, and trust in a greater liberation to come.

A Moment of Practical Application

As you continue to think about the significance of Palm Sunday and what it means to your life and your community's wellbeing, I encourage you to take a moment to engage in a prayer for Hosanna. Start by answering:

Where in my life and in society do I long for God's saving presence to enter?

Remember, honest lament can fuel faithful action. Furthermore, praying for God's presence not only reveals where we would like to see more justice, but it also helps us to identify where we can be co-creators of liberation with the Divine.

As such, write down what comes to your heart and use your prayer to help you identify your 'gate' to enter.

A gate might be:

- A community organization you volunteer at
- A justice initiative you donate to
- A difficult conversation you might need to have
- A protest or march you show up for

For each of us, our gate(s) will be different, but Palm Sunday reminds us that faith moves us into public spaces.

Next, review your schedule, finances, emotional and physical capacity, and set aside time to enter your gate. I encourage you to not put this step off until later. Instead, right here, right now, decide when and how you will show up. Remember you do not have to be the most educated, the richest, or even what others would consider qualified. Instead, be inspired by Jesus' humble riding on a donkey procession and commit to a practice of unpretentious advocacy, accompaniment, and solidarity with marginalized communities.

If you are already involved in many 'gates' use this step to refocus your commitment and continued growth. How will you continue to sustain yourself and show up for others? What does rest look like for you? How can you educate yourself and connect with new partners in the fight for justice?

Next, consider the 'palms' you will wave as you do the work. Stated another way, what are the symbols of hope you can provide to others, and what are the symbols of hope you need to keep fighting? I recently heard a prison abolitionist say, "hope itself is not a strategy, but it is the foundation of all good ones." We need hope to continue this fight for liberation. Take a moment to identify what you can offer as a sign of hope. That might be:

Your voice or writings

Your musical talents or creative contributions

Your financial and material resources

Or simply, your presence in a difficult time

As you identify your 'palms' remember to not discount what you bring to the table. You, and whatever you offer represent the possibility of a different kind of world!

Finally, conclude by considering the community you need to start or continue doing justice work. What organizations already exist so you don't have to recreate the wheel? Who can you partner with to help encourage you when it gets difficult? Who can you teach and learn from to help you grow? What resources can you access to stay physically, mentally, and emotionally safe?

Palm Sunday, like justice work, is communal. It is the ever reminder that no one walks alone, and that justice work is sustained through shared commitment.

A Concluding Blessing

Blessed are those who are unsure of where to begin or continue.

Blessed are those who hear their calling but still seek courage to answer.

Blessed are those whose feet are planted, yet they still feel the wind blowing around them.

Blessed are those who are tired and still wave their palms.

Blessed are those whose praise is a protest and protest a praise.

Amen.

ACTIVIST GUIDE: STORYTELLING

FAITHFUL NARRATIVES: SHARING STORIES THAT MATTER

SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- Scripture is full of stories that teach justice, mercy, and compassion (parables of Jesus, the Exodus narrative).
- Sharing our experiences and the experiences of marginalized communities reflects God's call to bear witness and seek justice.
- Storytelling allows communities to name truth, resist oppression, and embody hope.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF STORYTELLING FOR JUSTICE

- Share your own journey or faith experience connected to justice work.
- Highlight voices from marginalized communities to educate and foster solidarity.
- Use fiction, poetry, music, or visual media to illustrate systemic issues and inspire empathy.
- Podcasts, videos, or social media threads to reach wider audiences.

HISTORICAL/ACTIVIST ROOTS

- Oral traditions and parables preserved culture, ethics, and community memory.
- Stories have historically mobilized social movements (civil rights leaders, Indigenous storytelling for land rights).
- Documentary filmmaking, zines, blogs, podcasts, and social media storytelling for advocacy.

REDIRECTING STORYTELLING ENERGY

- Focus on elevating voices that are often unheard.
- Use stories to mobilize action: petitions, donations, volunteering, or policy engagement.
- Create safe spaces for storytelling that foster dialogue, understanding, and community.

STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICAL GUIDE

- Decide what issue or perspective you want to highlight.
- Choose Your Medium: Writing, oral storytelling, art, film, or digital content.
- Prioritize stories of those impacted, obtaining consent and respecting dignity.
- Distribute through platforms where your audience can engage and act.

REFLECT WEEKLY

- Whose voices did I amplify?
- How did storytelling deepen my understanding of justice?
- How is God shaping my empathy, discernment, and advocacy through narrative?

MAUNDY THURSDAY

CIARA TAYLOR

EXODUS 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; PSALM 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26; JOHN 13:1-17, 31B-35

Revolutionary Love, and the Rituals of Repentance and Redemption

Lent invites us into the dangerous work of remembering.

Not the soft remembering of nostalgia, but the disruptive remembering that unsettles empire. Lent calls us to remember who we are beneath the lies that those in power tell us about our worth. To remember who God has been in the long arc of liberation. To remember what it costs to love in ways that cross boundaries, threaten hierarchy, and refuse dehumanization.

Across the lectionary texts appointed for Maundy Thursday, a pattern emerges: liberation is never abstract, and love that reorganizes power is always met with resistance. On this night in particular, liberation is carried not only through words—but through ritual.

As Arnaé Batson's song names what so many of our bodies know:

Justice, justice, justice, justice

Ooooh, ooooh, ooooh

Let it be so

Justice

This is not a slogan. It is a prayer. A chant. A vow.

I often return during Lent to Huey P. Newton's concept of revolutionary suicide. Newton understood that any individual or movement capable of exposing the contradictions of the state—especially by uniting people across lines of historic division—would inevitably be met with repression: surveillance, incarceration, assassination. History bears this out.

Fred Hampton was murdered as he helped build the Original Rainbow Coalition, uniting poor Black, Brown, and white communities. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was executed as he prepared to launch the Poor People's Campaign, naming racism, poverty, and militarism as interconnected evils. And long before them, Jesus of Nazareth was killed by the state for proclaiming a kingdom that threatened empire by reorganizing power from the bottom up.

Love that redistributes power is never considered safe.

Yet in my formation as a minister and organizer, I have come to understand revolutionary suicide not only as a singular, physical event, but as a cyclical, spiritual, and communal practice. It is the ongoing work of dying—again and again—to the habits, instincts, and formations that normalize and perpetuate the status quo. It is the disciplined refusal to allow empire to shape our leadership, our movements, or our imagination of what is possible.

*Justice to cleanse the soul
Justice to make us whole
Let it be so
Justice*

A Season of Struggle & Lament

In the Freedom Church of the Poor community, we frame Lent as a season of Struggle and Lament. This is a time when repentance is not private guilt, but public realignment. Redemption is not escape from the world, but recommitment to it. Lent asks us: *What must be shed so that we can be principled stewards of liberation in our time?*

This work is not theoretical. It is embodied. And Maundy Thursday makes that unmistakably clear. Liberation does not move forward on ideas alone—it moves through the heart, our everyday practices, and how we make meaning through ritual.

In *We Pray Freedom: Liturgies and Rituals from Freedom Church of the Poor*, Dr. Charon Hribar and Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis offer us language for this truth:

“We define ritual as an intentional and symbolic action that emerges from, evokes, and nurtures profound layers of feeling and thought. Grounded in our lived experience—our stories, our needs, our moral authority, and our desires—ritual embodies the values and intentions of a given community and can help deepen and repair relationships to one another and to the world around us.”

Maundy Thursday is precisely this kind of night. A night when ritual does not adorn theology, but gives it flesh. A night when washing, eating, remembering, and loving become sacred practices that forms a people able of surviving empire and realizing the Beloved Community into being.

In my role as a cultural strategist with Songs in the Key of Resistance (SKOR), we hold our organizing work as inseparably political, spiritual, and logistical, with each dimension being critical for creating the conditions for leaders to develop into the revolutionaries our movement needs and deserve, and to unite with one another in service to the work of our collective liberation.

Political: Ritual as Embodied Practice of the World We Are Making

Exodus 12 places us inside a ritual of defiance. Passover is not quiet piety; it is organized resistance. Blood on the doorposts is a public declaration. The people eat in haste, dressed to move. Their homes, bodies, and traditions become sites of protest.

Faith, here, is dangerous.

John’s Gospel situates Jesus’ foot washing in this same political tension. Jesus has entered Jerusalem amid chants of liberation, overturned tables, and exposed the alliance between religious authority and imperial violence. By the time we reach the upper room, everyone knows the stakes. The disciples are not naïve. They are organizers under occupation, revolutionaries living under surveillance.

And instead of consolidating power, Jesus kneels.

Foot washing is not an act of withdrawal—it is a ritual intervention. Jesus uses ritual to retrain the movement. He dismantles hierarchy not with a speech, but with water, touch, and vulnerability. This is revolutionary leadership: dying to ego, supremacy, and control so that something sustainable can be born.

*Justice must overflow
Justice where it is owed
Let it be so
Justice*

Spiritual: Ritual as Repair

Maundy Thursday insists that love must be practiced, not merely professed. Jesus does not wash the feet of empire. He does not wash the boots of Roman soldiers. He washes the feet of the poor and dispossessed—fearful, imperfect, sometimes complicit people who are nonetheless needed to carry the movement forward.

This is repentance enacted. Redemption rehearsed. Ritual used to repair relationships strained by betrayal, fear, and failure.

Spiritually understood, revolutionary suicide is the death of individualism and a shedding of behaviors—unconscious and conscious—aligned with empire. It is learning to receive care as much as give it.

Logistical: Moving Our Hearts, Minds, and Bodies Into Alignment

The Gospel is unapologetically material. The disciples gather in someone else's home. The meal exists because of trust, relationship, and shared risk. Feet carry bodies across empire's roads. Washing them is not symbolic alone—it is necessary. Jesus tends to the places where movement has worn people down.

I witnessed this truth on January 29th in Washington, DC, when faith leaders from many traditions gathered for a day of action called by Faith in Action, the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice, and others. We gathered in solidarity with immigrants and with the people of Minneapolis resisting terror in their communities from ICE and DHS, calling on Congress to vote “no” on any additional funding for DHS this year and to get ICE out of our communities.

Before marching, Songs in the Key of Resistance sang “A Force More Powerful” by the Peace Poets:

*We have come with a force more powerful
than the guns in our enemies' hands.
It's our love for all creation that will liberate this land.*

Song, like foot washing, aligned bodies with purpose. It unites our breath with the breath of our neighbors. Lyrics defined our values. Melody carried us across difference, space, and time.

Let it be so: A Love That Risks Everything

Paul reminds us: “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” Communion is not nostalgia. It is resistance rehearsed.

Jesus commands love that risks everything. This is not sentimental love. It is coalition-building love, survival love, it is Beloved Community love.

Lent asks us: *What must die in us so that this love can live?*

So may we have the courage to kneel.
To wash and be washed.
To love in ways that make empire tremble—
And to sing together
Let it be so.

References:

[Revolutionary Suicide](#), Huey P. Newton

[Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk](#), Dr. Delores S. Williams

[We Pray Freedom: Liturgies and Rituals from the Freedom Church of the Poor](#), Edited by Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis and Min. Dr. Charon Hribrar

[Justice](#), Arnaé Batson

[A Force More Powerful](#), Peace Poets

ACTIVIST GUIDE: SELF-CARE

WHOLE AND HOLY: NURTURING SPIRIT, MIND, AND BODY FOR JUSTICE

SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- Scripture emphasizes rest, renewal, and care for the whole person (Psalm 23; Mark 6:31). God calls us to tend to our bodies, minds, and spirits as sacred vessels for service.
- Practices like prayer, meditation, and reflection nurture resilience and clarity, enabling sustained advocacy without burnout.
- Caring for oneself is not selfish. It honors God's creation and equips us to care for others effectively.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SELF-CARE AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

- Intentional time away from work, advocacy, and media.
- Daily practices for grounding, discernment, and spiritual reflection.
- Exercise, mindful eating, and physical care to honor God's creation in our bodies.
- Art, journaling, music, or storytelling to process emotions and envision justice.
- Fellowship, mentorship, small groups, and accountability networks for mutual support.

HISTORICAL/ACTIVIST ROOTS

- Early Christian communities cultivated prayer, shared meals, washed feet, fasted, and used meditation as spiritual grounding for justice and communal service.
- Activist movements have historically emphasized self-care as resistance: mental health, rest, and emotional support systems
- Modern faith-based justice movements recognize the need for emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being to sustain activism.

REDIRECTING ENERGY THROUGH SELF-CARE

- Replenish emotional and spiritual reserves to engage more effectively in advocacy.
- Use time for reflection to discern next steps in justice work.
- Prioritize practices that align personal well-being with collective liberation.

STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICAL GUIDE

- Identify areas where rest, reflection, or support are needed.
- Pick spiritual disciplines or self-care habits that resonate with you.
- Limit overwork, media consumption, and toxic influences.
- Let self-care sustain your advocacy; see rest and reflection as acts of faith and resistance.

REFLECT WEEKLY

- How did caring for myself impact my ability to serve others?
- What practices deepened my connection with God and justice?
- How can self-care become a spiritual and communal rhythm, not just an individual act?

GOOD FRIDAY

EMILY KNOTH

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12; PSALM 22; HEBREWS 10:16-25 OR HEBREWS 4:14-16; 5:7-9; JOHN 18:1-19:42

Content Warning- this piece contains descriptions of racial and police violence. Please take care of yourself.

Dystopian Novels, Memory, and Sin

John 18:1-19:42

The best book I read this year was *Chain Gang All Stars* by Nana Kawme Adjei-Brenyah. This dystopian, Hunger Games-esque novel was written as a critique of the American prison system. I found it so compelling because the storyline felt so close and so far away all at once.

The novel takes up themes of torture, sin, innocence, and harming our neighbors (sometimes inadvertently). When we read *Chain Gang All Stars*, we hear the echoes of our current prison system in America. In this sub-text, Aedjei-Brenyah invites us to think beyond our carceral reality through the power of imaginative fantasy. Great literature helps us step outside of our current time and place to see our reality more clearly, and it opens us up to how our world could be.

While reading this novel, I could not help but be reminded of another story about torture, sin, innocence, and the harming of our neighbors: Good Friday.

Let's walk through the text together, beginning at John 18.

“Judas led the way to the garden, and the Roman soldiers and police sent by the high priests and Pharisees followed. They arrived there with lanterns and torches and swords. Jesus, knowing by now everything that was imploding on him, went out and met them. He said, ‘Who are you after?’ They answered, ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’ He said, ‘That’s me.’ The soldiers recoiled, totally taken aback. Judas, his betrayer, stood out like a sore thumb. Annas interrogated Jesus regarding his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered, ‘I’ve spoken openly in public. I’ve taught regularly in meeting places and the Temple, where the Jews all come together. Everything has been out in the open. I’ve said nothing in secret. So why are you treating me like a traitor? Question those who have been listening to me. They know well what I have said. My teachings have all been aboveboard.’ When he said this, one of the policemen standing there slapped Jesus across the face, saying, ‘How dare you speak to the Chief Priest like that!’¹

The last interaction feels dystopian, doesn't it? Illegal. Disgusting. An authority figure harming an innocent man for the way he chooses to speak to another authority figure. We couldn't imagine that happening today.

But it does. On September 9, 2024, this happened in our country. A police officer was supposed to be taking the fingerprints of a man who had been detained. He was caught on video assaulting this detainee in the city lockup, repeatedly punching him with a closed fist, yelling expletives and, according to federal prosecutors, challenging the victim to “Say something else!” Say something else!”²

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

After Jesus is slapped, Pilate enters the scene. After much back and forth with the crowd³, “Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.”⁴ Flogged- as in to beat someone with a whip or stick as punishment or torture. Again, this is dystopian, unreal. It should be unimaginable in today’s circumstances.

Except it’s not. In 2021, a police officer used excessive and unreasonable force in the arrest of Kyle Vinson, pointing his gun at his head, repeatedly hitting the man in the head with a gun and strangling him for 39 seconds.⁵

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

After Jesus was flogged, “The soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and striking him on the face.”⁶

In other words, they mocked him. They threw a purple robe on him as it represented royalty and offered him a “crown” for the same reason. Dystopian. Unreal. Unimaginable.

Except, in 2025, videos were found of jail guards mocking an intellectually disabled inmate. The same man guards had filmed days earlier being shocked in an electrified vest after he asked for a Coke.⁷

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

After more back and forth between Pilate and the crowd, the crucifixion begins. “They crucified him and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.”⁸ A painful and horrible death no one should ever have had to endure.

Dystopian. Disgusting. Unimaginable.

Except- One of the last lynchings in America (supposedly) was the lynching of Michael Donald on March 21, 1981. Less than 50 years ago. Several Ku Klux Klan members beat and killed Michael Donald, a 19-year-old, and hung his body from a tree.⁹

Lord have mercy, Christ have Mercy, Lord have mercy.

You and I both know how the story ends, but today we sit in the horror of this dystopian story, where our God hangs on a cross.

Growing up, when I first encountered the story of Good Friday, or any other dystopian story—like *Chain Gang All Stars*, the *Hunger Games*, or *The Handmaid’s Tale*—it felt far away. But having the opportunity to step beyond my privilege to get a closer look at reality, the less far away these stories seem. So often, if we look closely enough, dystopian stories act as a mirror to the underbelly of our current reality.

If we told our current reality to someone in the distant future, the American prison system might sound like a dystopian novel too. Innocent men are sentenced to death by their community today, and they will be sentenced to death tomorrow. This story is not far away. It is right here. And it is, unfortunately, our story.

The philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote, “The work of memory collapses time.” For Benjamin, memory is not about the past calmly returning to the present in a smooth timeline. We don’t merely reflect as subjects on the past as an object. Memories of the hardest, toughest, most profound things, like the violent death of a God we love, interrupt our present and can change our future.

This Good Friday, I am spending time in prayer and confession, noting my own role in the way I allow this story to live on today. May you spend time today doing the same. May the violent death of our God bring you to refuse the erasure of the stories of those in our prison system today.

Amen.

1 This comes from The Message version of the Bible. Many people have a variety of opinions about The Message, and I am usually an NRSVUE fan, but The Message worked well here. Moving forward, all other translations will be from the NRSVUE.

2 <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/macomb/2024/09/09/warren-police-officer-matthew-rodriguez-assault/74782929007/?gnt-cfr=1&gca-cat=p&gca-uir=true&gca-epti=z113624d00-v113624d--40--b--40--&gca-ft=225&gca-ds=sophi>

3 John's gospel is ripe for Judeophobia- particularly this chapter. Judeophobia is defined as a generalized dislike of Jews in a given population. Englund, Steven, 'Antisemitism, Judeophobia, and the Republic', in Edward Ducler Berenson, Vincent Duclert, and Christophe Prochasson (eds), The French Republic: History, Values, Debates (Ithaca, NY, 2011; online edn, Cornell Scholarship Online, 18 Aug. 2016),

4 John 19:1, NRSVUE

5 <https://sentinelcolorado.com/metro/aurora-cop-who-beat-black-man-with-a-pistol-goes-on-trial-today/>

6 John 19:2-3, NRSVUE

7 <https://mississippitoday.org/2025/11/19/rankin-county-jail-guards-mock-intellectually-disabled-inmate/>

8 John 19:18, NRSVUE

9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynching_of_Michael_Donald

ACTIVIST GUIDE: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS & SUPPORTING IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

- Scripture repeatedly calls for the protection of strangers, immigrants, and the marginalized (Leviticus 19:33-34; Matthew 25:35).
- Standing with immigrant communities reflects God's heart for justice, mercy, and hospitality.
- Advocacy is a spiritual practice of witnessing to God's justice and protecting the vulnerable.

UNDERSTANDING RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS

- Everyone in the U.S., regardless of immigration status, has certain legal rights
- During ICE Encounters: Know when to show ID, how to respond to warrants, and what to say or not say.
- Legal aid clinics, immigrant advocacy organizations, and rapid response hotlines.

HISTORICAL/ACTIVIST ROOTS

- Churches and faith communities historically offered protection for refugees and immigrants.
- Civil rights and immigrant justice movements have long combined legal knowledge with community organizing.
- Faith-based organizations providing "know your rights" workshops, rapid response networks, and accompaniment programs.

WAYS TO ADVOCATE AND SUPPORT

- Share accurate information on rights, legal resources, and safety protocols.
- Attend court hearings or accompany community members to appointments as moral and emotional support.
- Provide food, housing, or emergency funds for families at risk of deportation.
- Contact legislators, participate in campaigns, and push for humane immigration policies.

STEP-BY-STEP PRACTICAL GUIDE

- Learn about immigration laws, local resources, and community needs.
- Understand what you can legally and safely do to help.
- Connect with trusted immigrant advocacy groups, lawyers, and community leaders.
- Share rights information through workshops, zines, or social media.
- Donate to trusted organizations providing direct support.

REFLECT WEEKLY

- Whose voices and experiences am I centering?
- How am I using my privileges to protect and empower others?
- How does God's call to justice guide my advocacy and solidarity?

EASTER

JIMMIE HAWKINS

ACTS 10:34-43 OR JEREMIAH 31:1-6; PSALM 118:1-2, 14-24; COLOSSIANS 3:1-4 OR ACTS 10:34-43; JOHN 20:1-18 OR MATTHEW 28:1-10

34 Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him. - Acts 10:34-35

Acts 10 represents the moment where Peter, a man bound by tradition and cultural boundaries, stands in the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion and an agent of the occupying empire. Everything within Peter compelled Peter to not be there for as a Jew he was forbidden to enter the home of a gentile. Peter's words are revealing, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean."

This is a turning point in his life and resulting impact upon religion is to challenge religious and ethnic prejudice. Peter expressed a view that was not mainstream or popular. It was previously believed that God appeared to the powerful, wealthy, and religiously pious. The new revelation is that God is revealed to those considered unworthy, lowly, even sinful. Peter learns that no one is beyond God's extension of grace. None are exempt from God's movements for justice and transformation. He states a revolutionary discernment: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism" (v. 34).

The tragedy is that God had revealed this message through Jesus in the presence of Peter beforehand. Jesus constantly broke the religious and social taboos in his life and ministry. Tax collectors were despised and unclean. One of his first disciples was a tax collector and he ate in the home of Zacchaeus. He associated with women, which Paul missed when he urged women to remain silent in church. The list of female followers is long: Mary Magdalene, the sisters Martha and Mary, Joanna, Susanna, "and many others" (Luke 8:3).

In order to be faithful to God, each one of us must confront our own "clean vs. unclean" judgment of others. God treats and approves of everyone equally without regard to citizenship, race, societal status, wealth, or perceived power. God is interested in the qualities within one's heart including faith, compassion, and a passion for justice.

The season of Easter represents the human quest for dignity, justice, and faith. The resurrection of Jesus represents an end to the appeal of worldly injustice and partiality. From a perspective of practical theology, the Resurrection is not just a future hope; it is the validation of Jesus' earthly ministry fulfilled through activism and direct involvement in the lives of the poor and those spiritually oppressed. Jesus didn't just preach abstract peace, he addressed the "powers and principalities" of the world. Powers manifested in economic exploitation, social exclusion, and political oppression. Therefore, our work for justice isn't a distraction from the Gospel; it is the Gospel in motion. To follow the Risen Christ is to go around doing good, specifically targeting the systems that keep people under oppression that undermine their ability to achieve in life.

We are in the midst of a seismic shift in American society through the outright animosity towards refugees, immigrants, and those who have migrated to our shores. While not new, its modern version reflects the vehemence of the past and is quite shocking to many. Immigrants are treated as the modern version of "unclean." They are rounded up like cattle and deported at a rate of 1,200 a day. Parents are kidnapped from work, school, while walking down the street with no notification to families as to what has happened to them. Children are terrorized to the point that they are emotionally scarred by the domestic trauma being experienced.

ICE has the authorization to invade homes and places of work and has been involved in the deaths of American citizens daring to protest.

Not only are individuals unclean, but nations are also denigrated by an administration that takes delight in imperialism. The United States has commandeered the right to invade other countries and take what it wants with not even the resemblance of righteousness or lawfulness. It is manifesting a “might makes right” manifesto that disregards international law and norms. It adheres to an “us vs. them” binary where you are either with us or against us. Actions are justified as being in the interest of the nation based on superficial and insufficient justifications and an arrogant, dictatorial approach to foreign policy. Threats to take Greenland, invade Cuba, and bomb Iran, are frightening and no longer considered just bombastic rhetoric.

All of this is contrary to the essence of what it means to be a country that professes to be a Christian nation and a land governed by Christian principles. It is plainly evident that our actions of inhospitality represent those of a nation in spiritual and psychological disarray as our actions do not match our democratic proclamations.

Christians must resist the influence of such things and declare that these notions are contrary to our faith. Our enemies are not those declared by politicians and billionaires who operate from selfish motives of power and greed. We affirm the right of others to determine for themselves what is in their best interest and the path they will tread. We declare that we are children of a God who is impartial and does not judge based on nationality, race, sexual identity, gender, or any of the hateful prejudices humans create.

Claudette Colvin died in January of 2026. She is overshadowed by her more famous peer, Rosa Parks. But they share the same courage of refusing to relinquish their seats to a white person despite living in Jim Crow Alabama. Fifteen-year-old Claudette was arrested in Montgomery, Alabama on March 2, 1955, nine months before Ms. Parks. Her charges included disturbing the peace and violating segregation laws. After their arrests, both women were considered by the NAACP to be plaintiffs in a test case to end racial discrimination. But after sharing her pregnancy, civil rights leaders chose Rosa Parks as the face of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Lighter skinned Parks was seen as more appealing, while Colvin was considered “feisty” and “mouthy.” Leaders shared their opinions that she was not a “respectable” symbol for the movement. Martin Luther King III noted that Colvin’s dark skin was a factor. Despite being sidelined, Colvin was a key plaintiff in *Browder v. Gayle*, the case that successfully challenged the legality of bus segregation. She famously commented of her decision to remain seated, “History had me glued to the seat. It felt as if Harriet Tubman’s hand was pushing me down on the one shoulder, and Sojourner Truth’s hand was pushing me down on the other. Learning about those two women gave me the courage to remain seated that day.”

Ms. Colvin’s courage shows that we serve an impartial God who uses those rejected by worldly standards, yet who are remarkable and can play a role in God’s mission. Each day is a reminder that anyone can make momentous decisions that impact each one of us. There is no criteria for being faithful or to take actions that put our faith into action.

The most powerful form of activism is embodied presence. Change rarely comes from those considered to be at the top of the social hierarchy. It often comes from those who have a passion for what is right and a desire to be treated justly. And who desire it for all.

Reflection

The Resurrection proves that death, and the systems that deal in death, do not have the final word. If the grave could not hold the “One who went about doing good,” then our efforts to bring healing to our communities are never in vain. Where others see only a tomb of death, people of faith see the power of God to bring life and restoration. While the original gaze upon the cross saw it as an instrument of persecution, Christians see the hope of the manifested presence of God to endure suffering on our behalf.

Prayer

Risen Lord, strip away any favoritism found within me. Please give me the courage of Peter to enter houses I've been taught to avoid. May I possess the heart of Jesus to confront all powers that oppress anyone wherever they may be found. Give me the courage that can only be found in love to confront all who seek to oppress and exploit the vulnerable. May my activism be a witness to Your life. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Amen.

ACTIVIST GUIDE: HELPFUL LINKS

WRITING

- <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials> – The official U.S. government directory where you can look up your federal, state, and local elected officials and access their contact information and offices.
- <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative> – The U.S. House of Representatives tool that lets you find your member of the House based on your ZIP code and provides their contact details and office information.
- <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm> – The official U.S. Senate page listing all U.S. Senators with their contact information so constituents can reach them directly.
- <https://5calls.org/> – A civic action tool that provides issue-specific call scripts and contact details for elected officials to make it easy for U.S. residents to call Congress and voice their opinions on current policy issues.
- <https://www.votervoice.net/mobile/PCUSA/home> – The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s grassroots action center where members and allies can take organized advocacy actions by contacting lawmakers on

MUTUAL AID

- <https://winwithoutwar.org/policy/immigration-mutual-aid/> – A list of mutual aid groups and immigrant support organizations nationwide that provide ways to connect, volunteer, donate, and support immigrant communities facing detention, legal issues, or basic needs.
- <https://www.mutualaidhub.org/> – A centralized online hub for finding, connecting with, and sharing mutual aid networks and resources.

DIGITAL ACTIVISM

- <https://naacp.org/articles/gen-zs-next-challenge-transforming-activism-lasting-change> – An NAACP article discussing how Generation Z’s activism energy from recent elections must shift toward sustained, strategic efforts and long-term advocacy to achieve meaningful and lasting social change.
- <https://activisthandbook.org/tools> – Digital and other practical tools that activists and organizing groups can use to communicate, organize, and carry out campaigns effectively.

STORYTELLING

- <https://narrativearts.org/story-guide/> – A guide from Narrative Arts that teaches activists, nonprofits, and social change makers how to use storytelling effectively for social change, covering strategy, storytelling methods, structure, ethics, and case studies.
- <https://ethicalstorytelling.com/> – A site focused on promoting ethical storytelling practices in the nonprofit and social impact world.

ACTIVIST GUIDE: HELPFUL LINKS

SELF-CARE

- <https://commonslibrary.org/10-great-resources-on-activist-wellbeing/> – A list of articles, guides, and tools designed to help activists sustain their health, cope with burnout, and build long-term wellbeing while doing social justice work.
- <https://activisthandbook.org/wellbeing/self-care> – A handbook outlining the importance of self-care for activists, encouraging individuals to identify activities that bring joy and rest so they can maintain resilience in their work.
- <https://jedfoundation.org/resource/civic-engagement-how-to-get-involved-while-protecting-your-mental-health/> – A resource that explains how people can engage civically and take action on issues they care about while setting boundaries and protecting their mental health.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

- <https://immigrantjustice.org/for-immigrants/know-your-rights/> – A page offering “Know Your Rights” guides and linked resources to help immigrants understand what to do if detained, face ICE interactions, avoid fraud, and plan ahead for legal situations in the U.S. (National Immigrant Justice Center)
- <https://www.ilrc.org/community-resources/know-your-rights> – A page with downloadable tools, flyers, solidarity signs, and training materials to educate immigrants and advocates about asserting constitutional rights when confronting immigration enforcement. (ilrc.org)
- <https://unitedwedream.org/resources/> – A resource hub focused on “Know Your Rights” materials and related guides to empower immigrant youth and communities with information for interacting with immigration officials and defending their rights. (unitedwedream.org)
- <https://immigrantjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/KYR-Encounter-ICE-Nov.-2024-English.pdf> – A PDF “Know Your Rights: If You Encounter ICE” fact sheet from the National Immigrant Justice Center outlining steps to stay safe, assert constitutional rights, and prepare emergency plans for interactions with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (National Immigrant Justice Center)

BIOGRAPHY



The Reverend Dr. Liz Theoharis is a theologian, pastor, author, and anti-poverty activist. She is the Director of the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice and Co-Chair of the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival. Rev. Dr. Theoharis has been organizing in poor and low-income communities for the past 30 years. Her books include: *You Only Get What You're Organized to Take: Lessons from the Movement to End Poverty* (Beacon, 2025), *We Pray Freedom: Liturgies and Rituals from the Freedom Church of the Poor* (Broadleaf Press, 2025) and *Always with Us?: What Jesus Really Said about the Poor* (Eerdmans, 2017) and she has been published in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Politico*, *Sojourners* and elsewhere. Rev. Dr. Theoharis is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and teaches at Union Theological Seminary. She has been awarded the Freedom Award from the National Civil Rights Museum, the Selma Bridge Award, the Women of Spirit Award from the Presbyterian Church (USA) and many others.



Tommy Allgood (Thomas Allen Garvin V) is a facilitator, organizational consultant, and coach with The Allgood Collective. They are a seminarian at McCormick Theological Seminary and their work sits at the intersection of trauma-informed practice, relational intelligence, and participatory leadership. Tommy specializes in circle-based facilitation and group process design, drawing from Circle practice and the Art of Hosting. They also support teams with restorative and relational accountability—especially in the aftermath of leadership harm, conflict, or rupture. Alongside this, Tommy partners with organizations on culture repair and strategy, helping groups rebuild trust, strengthen emotional literacy, and align their ways of working with their values.



Logan Crews (she/her) is a writer, dancer, and Episcopalian from St. Louis, Missouri. She is a third-year Master of Divinity student at Yale Divinity School (who once upon a time studied geology) and serves on the student leadership team of the US chapter of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF-US).

BIOGRAPHY



Jonathan Pulphus (he/him) is an equity advocate, organizer, and thought leader from St. Louis, Missouri. A graduate of Saint Louis University in 2017, he received his BA in African American Studies and a minor in Women & Gender Studies. While at SLU, his commitment to service and organizing, including his role as President of the Black Student Alliance and co-founder of Tribe X, led to the signing of the Clock Tower Accords, a significant agreement for campus access and equity. He has been recognized for his work with the St. Louis American Foundation 2025 “Salute to Young Leaders” Award and has recently launched Justice Cultivator in 2024 to provide customized solutions for social justice and anti-racism needs. His published work on student activism and injustice has appeared in *The Black Commentator* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. His debut book, *With My People: Life, Justice, and Activism Beyond the University* (Sept. 16, 2025), explores the power of student organizing and what it takes to sustain a movement beyond the campus.



Aleta Howard-Carthorn is a follower of Jesus Christ and a lover of his word. She is deeply-rooted in the study of the word and enjoys seeking deep spiritual truths through the study of it and revelation from the Holy Spirit. She is pursuing her call to ministry as a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in the Master’s program for Pastoral studies. She is the wife of Charles and mother of Charles Anthony and enjoys encouraging and building up her family.

Her ministry is to lead people to the feet of Jesus where they may find their identity, purpose and destiny. She leads a local women’s prayer ministry, Sisters In Prayer, International and she is currently in pursuit of ordination within her home church, Sixth Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Her favorite scripture is: “Be anxious for nothing but in all things, with prayer, supplication and with thanksgiving, make your requests known unto God and the peace that passes all understanding will guard our hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.” This scripture reminds her that the peace of God leads and guides us, not matter what may cause us any anxiety or worry. It helps to keep her centered and focused on Christ at all times.



Ruthanne Brooks is a DPhil (PhD) candidate in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament at the University of Oxford, UK. Her research specializes on concepts of wisdom and philosophical thinking in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism with a particular focus on concepts of mystery and divine hiddenness. She is passionate about showing students the richness and vibrancy of biblical texts and their ongoing life throughout countless generations of transmission, reception, and interpretation.

BIOGRAPHY



Rev. John D. Blackshire, Ph.D., is an educator, impact strategist, and minister who helps individuals and organizations identify small yet mighty ways to accomplish radical social justice goals. He is the founder and executive director of There's Room of North Carolina, a grassroots organization that works to improve the spiritual, emotional, and economic well-being of Black LGBTQIA+ individuals in the South. John formally served as an assistant professor of gender studies at Skidmore College and was an ACLS Leading Edge Fellow in 2021. Overall, he feels best when empowering others to leverage their agency to transform their communities for good.



Minister Ciara Taylor is an educator, artist, and movement strategist shaped by prophetic traditions that arise wherever people in struggle remember themselves and refuse erasure. Her work lives at the crossroads of culture, faith, and liberation, grounded in the belief that ending poverty requires developing and uniting leaders of the poor and dispossessed across lines of historic division. Guided by the conviction that movements need more than ideology alone—that they require song, ritual, memory, and moral courage as a part of our strategy—she draws from Black freedom movements, interfaith justice lineages, and grassroots organizing to help communities tell the truth about power and practice the world they are organizing to bring into being.

She serves as Director of Culture, Faith, and Organizing at the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice, where she works alongside organizers, artists, and faith leaders to unsettle stories that bless violence and inequality. There, she tends the spiritual and cultural life of movements—crafting curriculum, shaping ritual, and strengthening faith-rooted networks confronting racism, poverty, ecological devastation, militarism, and religious nationalism.

Ciara is a founding member and cultural organizer with Songs in the Key of Resistance (SKOR), a movement song collective that carries the music of struggle across generations—as inheritance, medicine, and invitation. She is also a movement minister with the Freedom Church of the Poor, a spiritual home without walls where people in struggle author their own prayers, shape their own rituals, and claim their lives as sacred testimony—good news to the poor and a living vision of the Beloved Community on earth.

Her notable projects include “Songs in the Key of Resistance: A Movement Songbook”, “We Do Not Move Alone: Songs, Chants, Poems, Prayers, and Artwork to be Used in the Call for Ceasefire on Gaza and a Free Palestine”, “Power in the Air”, and as a contributor to *We Pray Freedom: Liturgies and Rituals from the Freedom Church of the Poor* (2025). Across this work, Ciara wields song, prayer, history, visual art, and poetry as technologies of resistance—ways to grieve what has been taken, remember what has been taught, and organize what must be transformed.

Her political formation began as a high school student organizing against the Iraq War and deepened through the co-founding of the Dream Defenders in 2012. As Political Director and later Director of Political Consciousness, she helped shape an organizing tradition rooted in moral clarity, historical memory, and disciplined love. Her work—and the origins of the Dream Defenders—are featured in HBO's *Eyes on the Prize III: We Who Believe in Freedom* (Episode 6, *What Comes After Hope?* 2008–2015).

Guided by the belief that liberation is both a moral demand and a collective practice, Ciara works with movements to remember what they know, raise their voices in song and ritual to break isolation, and organize as if another world is not only possible—but calling us into being together.

BIOGRAPHY



Rev. Emily Knoth is a PCUSA pastor in Wichita, KS. She lives with her wife, Rev. Maddy Bishop-Knoth, and their two dogs, Wrigley and Rufus. Her work and writing focus on the Holy Spirit, gender, and motherhood.



Rev. Jimmie Ray Hawkins serves as Mission Director of the five advocacy offices of the Presbyterian Church (USA): Washington Office of Public Witness, the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations (NYC), Immigration and Advocacy, Mission Responsibility Through Investigations, and race and Gender Justice.

He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Social Studies from North Carolina Central University (Durham, NC); a Master of Arts in Christian Education from the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (Richmond, VA); and a Master of Divinity from the Interdenominational Theological Center/Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary (Atlanta, GA).

For twenty years he served as the pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Durham, NC, 1996 - 2016. Between 1992 - 1996, he served as the senior pastor of Grace Presbyterian, Holmes Memorial and Trinity Presbyterian churches in Virginia (Peaks Presbytery).

He served on the boards of Church World Service, the National Council of Churches and Union Presbyterian Seminary. He has chaired several interfaith /ecumenical and non-profit boards: NC NAACP Executive Committee, Durham Congregations in Action, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, the Religious Coalition for a Non-Violent Durham, Housing for New Hope (homeless advocacy), End Poverty Now, and others. He served as a tri-chair for the Washington Interfaith Staff Committee (WISC) and the Heads of Washington Office (HOWO). Serving the church, he has traveled to Haiti, Cuba, and Israel/Palestine.

His community ministry includes being a leader for the Moral Monday Movement since its onset in 2013, as well as with the Poor People's Campaign since 2017. He has engaged in four acts of civil disobedience protesting voter suppression, lack of healthcare and for a living wage.

He is the author of two books, *Unbroken and Unbowed* (2022) and *The Shaping of Black Identities* (2025), both published by Westminster John Knox Press.

He is the son of the late Elsie L. and James P. Hawkins. He is married to Sheinita Hampton Hawkins, and they have two children: Kaela Renee and James Hampton.