

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT ~ 06 MARCH 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

As we begin our Lenten journey, we are more than aware that we live in Lenten times. We are at a new phase in the COVID-19 pandemic, somewhat uncertain about the way forward, and more conscious of the divisions within our society made starker by the pandemic. This past week received another section of the sixth Assessment Report from the International Panel on Climate Change, entitled *Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, and described by UN Secretary-General António Guterres as, "an atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate leadership." We are on the brink of a world war as Russia, without provocation, has invaded the Ukraine, and NATO and the United Nations struggle to find ways to respond and protect the Ukraine and indeed the whole world.

Within Peru, the struggle for political stability continues as pressure increase for a no-confidence vote for the Cabinet and the impeachment of President Castillo. Within Newfoundland and Labrador, the recent Health Accord NL Report outlines a compelling case to improve health outcomes and health equity for the people of the province. In the Archdiocese of St. John's, bankruptcy protection is challenging the people of the Archdiocese around much-loved properties including their cemeteries and around the pastoral approach in these circumstances. Many of us and our family members are challenged with health issues and increasing frailty.

In these Lenten times, the readings in the Liturgy of the Word for the first Sunday of Lent bring us three welcomed messages: (i) the Lenten journey of today is echoed in the Lenten journey in biblical times, (ii) we see more clearly in that Lenten journey that Earth and people are one, and (iii) even within the Lenten journey, Easter is already present.

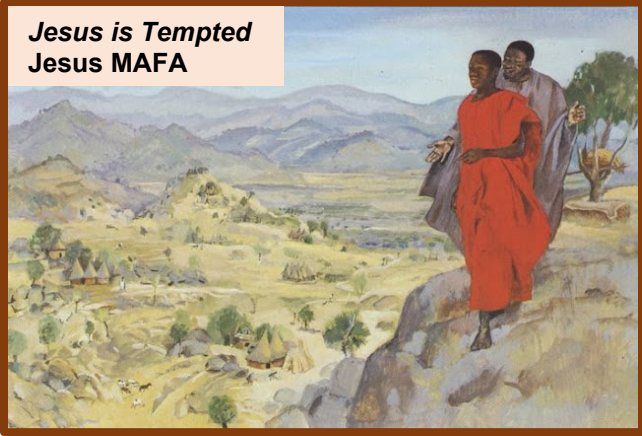
***The Lenten journey*** – the forty-year journey in the wilderness marks the key moment of the Old Testament, the Exodus from Egypt. In the reading from Deuteronomy, Moses tells the story of the intervention of God to save the people from oppression in Egypt, the journey through the wilderness, and the coming to the Promised Land. At the moment of this storytelling, the people have not yet entered the Land, but the time is coming near. In the passage from Luke's Gospel, Jesus is at the beginning of his ministry, has just been baptized and has been named Beloved by God. He immediately goes into the wilderness for forty days (clearly a connection with the forty-year journey of the Israelites in anticipation of the Promised Land). He is tested three times and succeeds in meeting each test. The last verse of the passage reminds us that this is not the end of the testing which will continue until Jesus is crucified.



**Jezreel Valley, Lower Galilee**

***Earth and People as one on the Lenten journey*** – the story from Deuteronomy begins in the land of Egypt, continues through the wilderness journey, and will end in the entry into the Promised Land. In the telling of the story, Moses reminds the people of their deep and intimate connection with the land. Their roots are in the wandering of their Aramean father (Abraham or Jacob – two distinct traditions) whose descendants do not own the land but are graciously given

it by their God. They are truly strangers in the new land – knowing this, throughout the rest of their scriptures, they realize that they are called upon to link living in the land with compassion for and just behavior towards those “strangers” who dwell among them. Moses calls them to mark their gratitude for the gift of the land by their bringing the first fruits of the land to the altar to return in gratitude to the Lord their God.



In the story in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is led by the Spirit as he leaves the Jordan River and goes into the wilderness for forty days. This close connection to the land marks the beginning of his ministry. The very first test he is given is to abuse the stones of the land by changing what God meant them to be – the devil tells him to turn the stones into bread. The devil continues this assault on the land by taking him to the highest point of land and offering him control of all the Earth, deceiving him by saying that God had given him that control. Finally, the devil offers him the temple (built by human hands as a place

of meeting between God and the people) and uses the Scripture (a quotation from Psalm 91) as a means of getting Jesus to test God’s goodness.

**Easter already present in Lent** – one of the most important lessons which today’s readings teach us and one of the greatest supports they give us is the certainty that Easter is already present in Lent, not a time for which we are still waiting. In the telling of the Exodus story in Deuteronomy, Moses (who himself will never enter the Promised Land) speaks as if the people are already in the land, giving them the words to say at the very first time they worship there. He speaks of the future moment as if it has already happened.

In Psalm 91, the psalmist knows that we are always under the protection of our God, “living in the shelter of the Most High, abiding in the shadow of the Almighty” ((Ps 91:1). In the psalm, God responds, “The one who loves me I will deliver. I will protect the one who knows my name” (Ps 91:14). In the reading from Romans, Paul reminds us that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, that “the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (Rom 10:12-13). And in the story of Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus defeats the devil in each test by using God’s word from his Hebrew Scriptures. Throughout these wilderness journeys, despite the anxieties and tests, God is always present, loving and supportive.

The Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, says this beautiful prayer for Ash Wednesday which echoes this sense of Easter already present as our Lenten journey unfolds:



*Jesus is Tempted, Cerezo Barredo*

On this Wednesday, we submit our ashen way to you —  
you Easter parade of newness.  
Before the sun sets, take our Wednesday and Easter us,  
Easter us to joy and energy and courage and freedom;  
Easter us that we may be fearless for your truth.  
Come here and Easter our Wednesday with  
mercy and justice and peace and generosity.

Through all our readings, the word of God is alive and active. Moses re-tells the story from Exodus as the people coming close to the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey. That description of the Promised Land is repeated twenty times in the Pentateuch and the Prophets. Milk comes from mothers – mother goats, mother cows, human mothers. Milk nourishes the young and strengthens all of us in our growing and in our energy. It is a gift of the present and the future. Honey never loses its sweetness; even if it is very old, it still tastes as sweet. It is a gift of our present and our past – a metaphor for the history, traditions, and values that have been passed down since biblical times and continue to nourish us today.



Paul's letter to the Romans tells us, "The word is near you, on your lips and in your hearts" (Rom 10:8). What a beautiful image this is of Scripture that is present in our physical being and in our spiritual being, in the delight of the spoken words and the treasure of the spirit of the words. And remember that today we acknowledge the two books of revelation – the written word of the Bible and the visible word of God in the universe. Jesus uses the spoken words of his Scriptures to defeat the tests of the devil and to protect the created world which is God's gift to us. He challenges the one time the devil abuses the written word of the Scripture to test God.

Jesus comes to his Lenten journey immediately after being called the Beloved One. [Jan Richardson](#) chooses this image to bless us as the "Beloved" – all of us as humans, as other-than-humans, as Earth and as the universe – as we take this Lenten journey to an Easter which is already present among us:

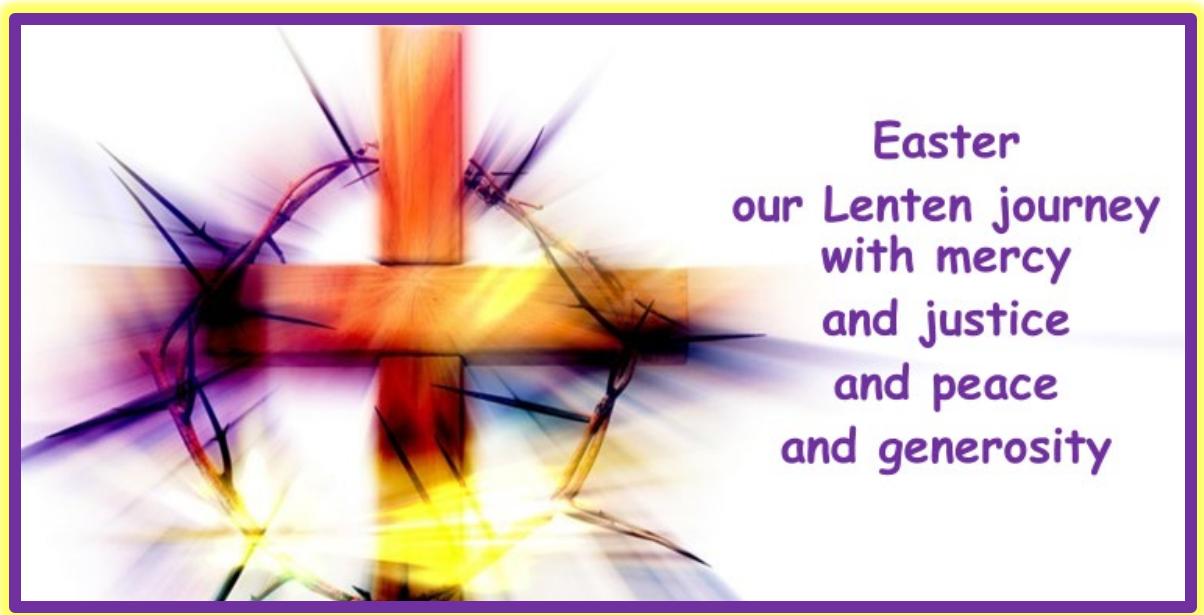
If you would enter into the wilderness,  
do not begin without a blessing.  
Do not leave without hearing who you are:  
Beloved, named by the One  
who has traveled this path before you.  
Do not go without letting it echo in your ears,  
and if you find it is hard to let it into your heart,  
do not despair.  
That is what this journey is for.

I cannot promise  
this blessing will free you from danger,  
from fear, from hunger or thirst,  
from the scorching of sun or the fall of the night.  
But I can tell you that on this path there will be help.



*Christ in the Wilderness,*  
Ivan Kramskoi

I can tell you that on this way there will be rest.  
I can tell you that you will know  
the strange graces that come to our aid  
only on a road such as this,  
that fly to meet us bearing comfort and strength,  
that come alongside us for no other cause  
than to lean themselves toward our ear  
and with their curious insistence whisper our name:  
*Beloved. Beloved. Beloved.*



## REFLECTIONS FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT ~ 13 March 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

In the Hindu tradition, there is a gracious bow of greeting and farewell accompanied by the Sanskrit word *Namaste* that is usually translated as, “The divine light in me bows to the divine light within you.” Today’s readings in the Liturgy of the Word reflect that same sense of the oneness, the connection, of all creation in the light that comes from God.



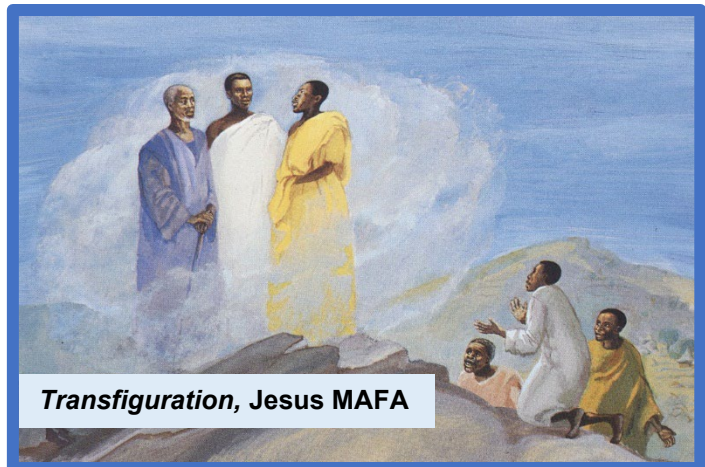
In the first reading, we learn more about the growing relationship between God and Abram. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram from his home in Ur in the Chaldees and promises that all “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). In today’s reading from Genesis 15, God promises that Abram’s descendants will be as many as the stars of the heavens (Gen 15:5). God then “cuts” a covenant with Abram, appearing as “a smoking fire-pot

and a flaming torch” (Gen 15:17) and promising Abram the land “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen 15:18).

Later in Genesis 22, when God has renamed Abram Abraham and his wife Sarai Sarah, God will bring all this together, “I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore” (Gen 22:17). These images of both light and oneness – the stars of heaven, the flaming torch, the sand on the seashore, the land from the river Nile to the river Euphrates – are threaded through the covenant, the relationship between God and Abram, between God and Abram’s descendants (including all of us), and between God and all creation.

In the first verse of Psalm 27, we sing “The Lord is my light and my salvation.” And the second last verse of the Psalm reminds us that this is not a future happening. Rather “I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Ps 27:13). And, as descendants of Abraham and Sarah, we must not only see but be the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

This sense of the light of God as present among us and within us, intimately and vibrantly connecting us with God, with each other, and with all creation is at the heart of the story from Luke’s Gospel as Jesus goes up the mountain with his disciples. This story we name the Transfiguration, “while Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white” (Lk 9:29). We have seen this before, “When he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his



face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him” (Ex 34:29).

We read in Wisdom that Woman Wisdom is “a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of God’s goodness” (Ws 7:26). So, too, Jesus “is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of God’s nature” (Heb 3:1), and “the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4).



*Transfiguration of Jesus Christ*

Frank Vincentz

[GFDL](#)

Peter, James and John see Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus, thus visually connecting the Old Testament and the New Testament as our founding story. Then, after Moses and Elijah leave, there is a voice from the cloud saying, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” (Lk 9:35). A little while earlier, at the time of Jesus’ baptism, the voice from the heavens had said, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Lk 3:23). Now, not only does God declare oneness with the Beloved Son, but God invites us to listen to him, to become one with him.

The English poet and Anglican priest, [Malcolm Guite](#), describes this so beautifully in a poem,

The Love that dances at the heart of things  
Shone out upon us from a human face  
And to that light the light in us leaped up,  
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,  
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope  
Trembled and tingled through the tender skin.

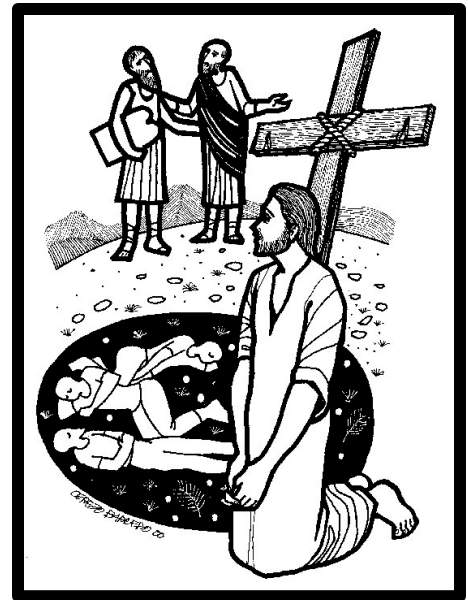
Where do you and I see God every single day? Where do you and I “catch” the light that comes when we see God and reflect it to one another? The poet, [Andrew King](#), gives us some hints of where we glimpse God every day:

Awaken us.

Awaken us in the fall of the snow, the drop of the rain, the crash of the rolling thunder.  
Awaken us in the song of the bird, the laugh of the child, the gentle hug from another.  
Awaken us in the flick of the fish, the leap of the fox, the lean of the weeping willow.  
Awaken us in the sift of the breeze, the lift of the hymn, the gift of a bed and pillow.  
Awaken us in the peal of the bell, the coffee’s smell, the feel of running water.  
Awaken us in the starlight’s gleam, the hot meal’s steam, the flash of the diving otter.  
Awaken us in the eagle’s flight, the mountain’s height, the joy of the talk with a friend.  
Awaken us in early morning calm, the medicine’s balm, the quiet of evening’s end.  
Awaken us in the sip of wine, the warm sunshine, the colour of leaves in autumn.  
Awaken us in the caring word, the truth that’s heard, the fragrance of spreading blossoms.  
Awaken us far, awaken us near, awaken us with your story.  
Awaken us from where we have come to be here, awakened to all your glory.

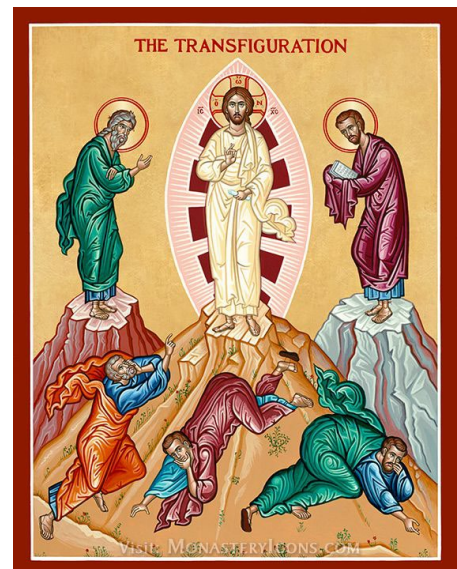
Yes, we glimpse God in the most amazing ways every single day. If we truly believe and trust, our faces will shine, reflecting the light of God now flowing through us to others. And, if we truly believe and trust, that same light of God will shine in the faces of others (human and other-than-human). Ruth Burrows (Rachel Burrows ocd) says it so simply, “If I let God take hold of me more and more; possess me, as fire possesses the burning log, then I give off light and heat to the whole world even though the influence be completely hidden.”

Like Jesus himself and Peter, James, and John, we cannot stay on the mountain and enjoy the glory of experiencing God’s light. Instead, they and we must return to the everyday, to our ordinary lives, so that our shining faces will be signs of hope and love for those with whom we journey and so that they in turn will build up our hope and love with their faces also shining in the reflection of God’s light. [Jan Richardson](#) shows us the beauty and the wonder of this blessing you are I are given, not to hold to ourselves, but to share with all creation:



**Transfiguration, Cerezo Barredo**

Believe me, I know how tempting it is  
to remain inside this blessing,  
to linger where everything is dazzling and clear.  
We could build walls around this blessing, put a roof over it.  
We could bring in a table, chairs, have the most amazing meals.  
We could make a home. We could stay.  
But this blessing is built for leaving.  
This blessing is made for coming down the mountain.  
This blessing wants to be in motion,  
to travel with you as you return to level ground.  
It will seem strange how quiet this blessing becomes  
when it returns to earth.  
It is not shy. It is not afraid.  
It simply knows how to bide its time,  
to watch and wait, to discern and pray  
until the moment comes when it will reveal everything it knows,  
when it will shine forth with all it has seen,  
when it will dazzle with the unforgettable light  
you have carried all this way.



In their Chapter last August, the Sisters of Mercy promised that they would live this commitment, *Mercying: Imaging the Face of God in all Creation ~ Misericordiendo: Siendo Imagen del Rostro de Dios en Toda la Creación*. Today’s readings give them and all of us the confidence of knowing that God’s light, the divine light, is in all creation, in every one of us. Let us bow to the divine light in each other. Let us rejoice in our privilege to have faces shining with the divine light of the One who creates us, who holds us in love, and who gives us the energy to be light for each other. Let us rejoice in the blessing of walking among all whose faces shine with divine light and share that divine light with us. This week let the divine light in me bow to the divine light in you!

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT ~ 20 March 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

“The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, God’s boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good.” These words were written by Pope Francis in his *Laudato Si’* (#84). In today’s readings from the Liturgy of the Word on the third Sunday of Lent, we are invited by the biblical writers to parts of the universe which were remembered by them as “a caress of God.”



**Icon with Moses before the Burning Bush, early 13th century, Byzantine**

In the first reading from Exodus, we meet Moses, and we share his memory of God’s call to him. Moses was a poor shepherd, working for his father-in-law Jethro. In the course of his everyday work, he leads the flock to the Horeb, the mountain of God. It is not the mountain which he remembers but the burning bush from which God calls him. God tells him to remove his sandals for the place on which he is standing is holy ground. Moses was frightened and hid his face – he gave God all the reasons why he was the wrong person to lead the people. He says that he does not even know this God’s name. God reminds Moses, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex 3:6) – Moses’ ancestors. And God then tells Moses why this is so important, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry” (Ex 3:7). The name God gives is somewhat mysterious, “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14) – the “I am.” We know that Moses eventually loses his argument with God and does lead the people out of Egypt, through the wilderness, into the Promised Land.

It is worth noting that God chooses to communicate with Moses through the burning bush. In making the covenant with Abraham, God had come as a flaming torch. A pillar of fire will mark God’s presence with the people as they journey through the wilderness. But this first communication between God and Moses happens on holy ground before the flaming bush. The bush is one of Earth’s creatures, surviving in the wilderness, intimately connected to the land – what God calls “holy ground”. This is the first time the word “holy” is used in the Bible – and it is used to describe the place where the ordinary bush grows! It is from this ordinary bush that God chooses to be present, to speak with Moses, to remind Moses of God’s presence with all the ancestors, God’s presence promised to the people suffering now, and God’s promise to be with the people into their future “for all generations” (Ex 3:15).

The sacredness of this moment is marked by ordinary ground and an ordinary bush. Two reflections from Hildegard of Bingen speak to



**Burning Bush ~ McAuley Convent**



God's presence as fire not only in the bush but in all being, "All living creatures are sparks from the radiation of God's brilliance, emerging from God like the rays of the sun," and "I am the fiery life of the essence of God; I am the flame above the beauty in the fields; I shine in the waters; I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars. And with the airy wind, I quicken all things vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life." We remember the first lines of Gerard Manley Hopkins' famous



**Moses and the Burning Bush**  
Keith Haring

poem, *God's Grandeur*, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil."

Rabbi Nahum, in teaching on this passage from the Torah, says that the important aspect of the story is not that the bush is burning but that Moses notices. Elizabeth Barrett Browning says the same thing in her lovely poem, *Aurora Leigh*, "Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God, But only he who sees takes off his shoes; The rest sit round and pluck blackberries."

leader, God's presence among the people of Israel gives them hope in their suffering and pain. What is the burning bush in your life? Where is the holy ground where you take off your shoes in awe of its holiness? Where do you and God meet in the ordinary everydayness of your life?

The second caress of God comes in the memories called forth by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians as he recalls the story of Moses and the exodus into their time. Here Paul uses the images of the cloud, the sea, food, and drink to describe that pivotal moment in their sense of their new identity as a people of God, chosen by God despite their own flaws and failings – a source of comfort for all of us!



Paul also uses the image of the rock to help us better understand the person of Jesus the Christ. This same image is used of God in the Old Testament who is frequently referred to as the "Rock of Israel." God is also imaged as a living rock, and, even more, a rock that gives birth, "You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth" (Deut 32.18). Jesus, quoting the Old Testament (Ps 118.22), refers to himself as a stone, "He looked at them and said, 'What then does this text mean: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?'" (Lk 20.17). Later in the New Testament, Jesus is also called a living stone, and we, in following him, become living stones, "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house ((1 Peter 2:4-5). Find a rock or stone to hold in your hand. Imagine the life within its very being, foreign to how we usually imagine life. How does this stone have its own identity



and its own integrity, its own holiness? What does this stone say to you about God as a living stone, about Jesus the Christ a living stone? How are you a living stone?

In the Gospel reading from Luke, we find a third caress of God in the fig tree, used by Jesus to further describe God's presence among us. Fig trees are foreign to most of us since they grow in warmer countries. However, they are mentioned sixty-six times in the Bible, including the description of the Promised Land, "The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs,

flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey (Deut 8:7-8). There are roughly 700 varieties of fig trees. Figs can grow on trees, shrubs, vines, and even epiphytes (plants that grow on other plants). A lot of rainforests contain fig trees, and their fruit is used to feed thousands of types of animals, including monkeys, birds, and even bats. Almost every fig tree is pollinated by its own fig wasp, an interesting example of co-evolution. Some types of fig trees have very deep roots, with some of them having roots that go down to 120 metres (400 feet) below the ground.

Fig trees speak to us about diversity, community, rootedness, and lifegiving energy. There is little wonder then that a fig tree that does not bear fruit causes grave concern. The owner of the vineyard in Jesus' parable wants the unfertile fig tree to be cut down. But the gardener intervenes, asks that it be nurtured with digging and manure to give it the opportunity to grow and bear fruit. I love that Jesus speaks about God as the gardener who uses manure to bring new life and hope!

The context for the parable of the fig tree is a lesson for us about repentance, about turning from ways of fear to hope, from ways of self-centeredness to self-giving, from ways of taking to sharing. Henri Nouwen describes repentance as a three-fold conversion movement. We need to move from being a bystander to being a participant, from being a judge to being a repentant sinner, and from speaking about love to actually letting ourselves be loved. There is a simple but profound prayer by Steve Garnaas-Holmes which helps describe this essence of repentance and of the willingness of God the gardener always to nurture us:

Surely. I would never betray you, never deny you. Surely?  
 Beloved, give me the faith to doubt my righteousness.  
 Give me the assurance to question, to examine myself honestly, to ask.  
 Give me the confidence to wonder how I might betray your perfect love, to see.  
 Give me grace to confess how my promises are broken, my heart broken.  
 Give me the peace to be troubled by my smugness, and repent.  
 Open my eyes to see that you see, you know,  
 and knowing, you keep right on eating with me.

Our final reflection of yet another caress of God in our universe is this moment in the year's cycle

. On Friday night past, we saw the beautiful Worm Moon, the last full moon before the equinox. Today, March 20, is the first day of spring or autumn (depending on your hemisphere) – the moment when every place, every creature, and every person on Earth experiences the same amount of dark and light. After that moment, the days will lengthen in the northern hemisphere

and shorten in the southern hemisphere. In six months, we will have the second moment of equal day and night with the next equinox on September 22. On April 16, we will see the Full Pink Moon, the one signaling the coming of Easter which is the first Sunday after that full moon.

As we continue our Lenten journey, strengthened by knowing that all creation shares this journey with us and continually reflects “sparks from the radiance of God’s brilliance,” we conclude with this prayer-poem from the Scottish minister, Roddy Hamilton:

May the dust of the wilderness hold our footprints  
Lovingly

shaped as they are by your hurt  
for dust remembers

May the journey into wilderness unfold  
honestly  
for honesty is the gift  
your soul recognises as you

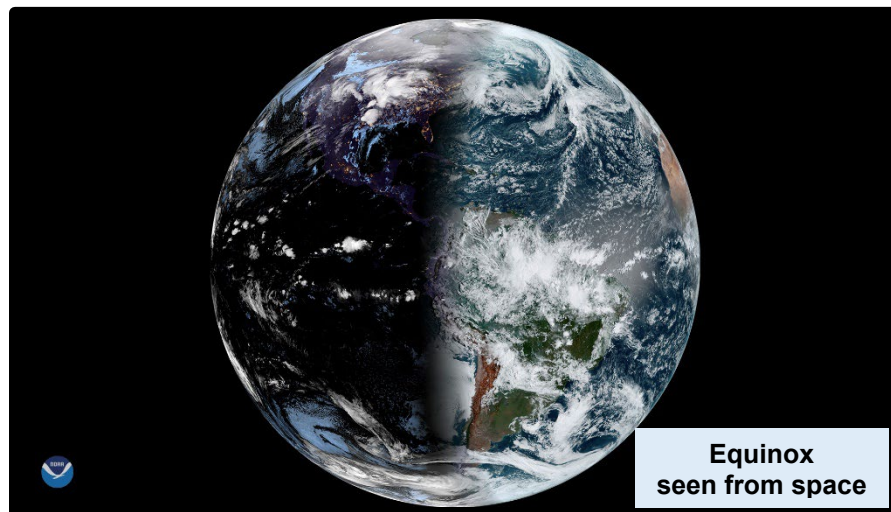
May your time in this wilderness  
be shaped by space  
rather than minutes  
so there is time enough for all of you

May the stones in this wilderness  
cry out your name loudly  
that your spirit recognises the voice  
that has been calling you always

And may you know this wilderness  
has been expecting you  
and you find between the stones  
a promise growing



**Worm Moon, 18 March 2022**



## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT ~ 27 March 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Two meals shared on coming home – two meals shared after a long, pain-filled journey – two meals shared to celebrate a new beginning. Today's Liturgy of the Word begins and ends with the two meals, among the best-known stories of the whole Bible: the Passover meal and the parable of the Prodigal Son.



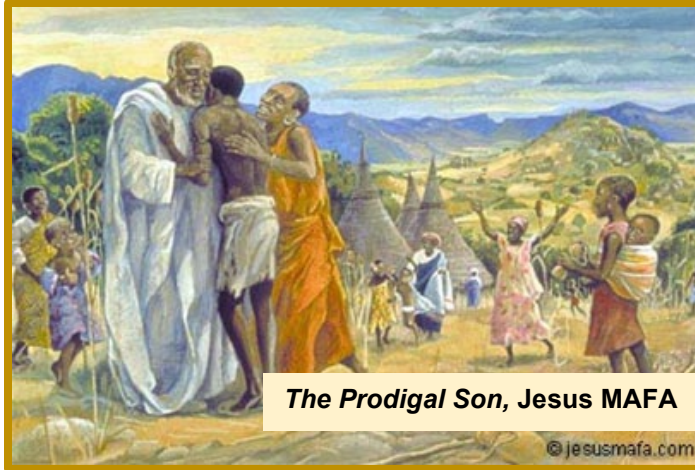
The first Passover was celebrated in Egypt just before God saved the Hebrews from slavery and oppression. Called to do so by the compassionate God, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam led the people through the wilderness for forty years. The second Passover is celebrated when the people, now led by Joshua, cross the Jordan River and come into the Promised Land, “a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing” (Deut 8:7-9). During the years in the desert, they had been eating manna, but from now on, beginning with the celebration of Passover, they will eat the produce of the land (Josh 5:11). Their time of wandering in the wilderness has ended. They have finally come home to the place where they will become one people, the people of Israel.

Despite the richness of the description of the land in Deuteronomy, at this Passover the people eat “unleavened cakes and parched grain” (Josh 5:10). This is an important reminder to us about the “theology of enough,” about meals as places of welcome and community and as moments of sharing with those who have less than we have. In Rabbi Ellen Bernstein’s words, “Passover is the path back to basics – the earth, the wheat, and water – and our essential selves. Passover teaches that freedom comes when we rid ourselves of the burden of too much. The telling of our story begins with wide-open arms. The Seder bids us to invite those who are hungry to partake of our meal. It also bids us to invite those who are hungry in spirit – lonely, lost, heartsick. We bring everybody into the circle, regardless of gender, sexuality, race, age, and religion. The freedom we aspire to depends on our sharing.”

The first meal – the Passover – is part of our story as a Christian community. It marks the Exodus, the most significant moment in the Old Testament when God becomes the God of the Israelites and brings them into the Promised Land. Not only the actual event of the Exodus but the telling of the story over and over becomes the sign of God’s living presence among us. In the Christian tradition, the Passover becomes the model on which our founding story is shaped – the event of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the Christ and the telling of that story over and over, ensuring us that the Risen One continues to rejoice with us and to suffer with us, to be God-with-us.



The meal in the story of the prodigal son is also a celebration of coming home after a long and pain-filled journey with the promise of a new beginning.



There is an irony in the title, *prodigal son*, which is not in the biblical story but has been given the parable over time. The son is prodigal because he wastes his inheritance in a recklessly extravagant way. The father is prodigal because he forgives and welcomes home the lost son in a recklessly extravagant way, giving him a kiss (a sign of forgiveness), a robe (a mark of distinction), a signet ring (a sign of authority), and sandals (footwear for his new journey). The father prepares for him a banquet with music and dancing,

sharing the joy of his return with the household and the community. The father also reaches out to the self-righteous older son in an equally recklessly extravagant way, missing him from the table, going out to him when he refuses to come in, calling him “son,” and assuring this son of his place in the father’s heart and home.

Unlike the Passover meal, the meal in the story of the prodigal son is unfinished. Like parables generally, this parable calls us to look deeper and listen more carefully. We do not know if the older son comes back to the table, recognizing his own failures and being grateful for the depth of his father’s compassion and love for him as much as for his younger brother. Only then will that family’s reconciliation be complete. Only then will the father be able to rejoice fully.

And we do not know if there are daughters or where the mother is. We can only imagine the mother’s suffering and pain when her younger son goes away to live such an irresponsible life and her older son remains home, resentful and unhappy. How often she must have looked down the road in hope of seeing him come home! How often she must have spoken to the older son in hope of his becoming a loving member of the family once more! How she must have prayed for reconciliation within her family!

Let us reflect on the mother’s hidden place in this story with this poem by an unknown author:

Where is the mother of the prodigal son  
On that day so long ago?  
What were her thoughts  
And what were her fears  
As she watched him turn to go?



**The Return of the Prodigal Son**  
Pompeo Batoni

How many times in the dark of night  
Did the tears slide down her face?  
Did she get out of bed  
And fall on her knees,  
Just to pray that her boy was safe?

How were the days when she did not know  
Was he alive? Was he warm? Was he well?  
Who were his friends?  
And where did he sleep?  
Was there anyone there she could tell?

But, oh, on that day when she looked down the  
road  
As she had looked since her son went away,  
Did love unspeakable flood her soul?  
Did she cry?  
What did she say?

I think when the father had welcomed their son  
And the boy had greeted his brother,  
That the servants made a path  
For him to enter the door  
And the waiting arms of his mother.

This week, I invite you to recall a meal that has a special place in your memory, a meal that somehow marked your life with welcome, community and “holy enough.” It may have been a time with family, an anniversary celebration with community, a moment of coming home, the end of a painful period in your life’s journey, your first meeting with someone who is now precious in your life. Take time to thank God for all the meals which have nourished you – physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Thank God for Earth whose fruits have given you these meals. Thank all those whose work has produced the meals for you.



***The Prodigal Son***  
**George Pemba**

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT ~ 03 April 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Today we reach the fifth Sunday in Lent and the last Sunday before the beginning of Holy Week. Key to our understanding of the readings in today's Liturgy of the Word is the verse from the reading from Isaiah: "Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Is 43:18-19).

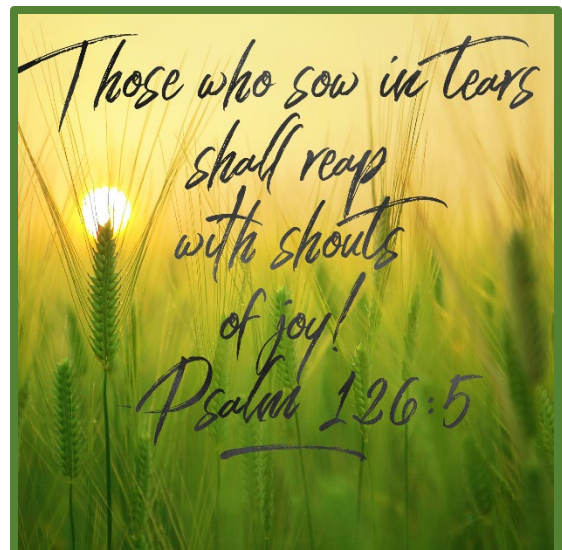


Chapter 43 of the book of Isaiah was written during the time the people of Judah were in exile in Babylon. In that time, the people had lost everything – their king, their temple, their land – and they feared that they had even lost their God. Yet, from that time of what could have been deep depression, we have in chapters 40 to 55 of this book the most hope-filled of all the books of the Bible. Therefore, it would make sense that the “former things and things of old” in the above quotation would be referring to the losses of the exile. Not so! The “former things and things of old” are actually the best things that had ever happened to the people.

It is not difficult to see the reference in the words, “the Lord who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior” (Is 43:16). It brings us back to the crossing of the Reed Sea and the Exodus from Egypt when God remembers the people, hears their cries of pain and suffering, and sends Moses to lead them through the wilderness into the Promised Land.

The previous verse of this passage, missing in today's Liturgy, reads, “I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel” (Is 43:15). Combined with the emphasis on the sea and the mighty waters (“the face of the waters”), this link to God as Creator brings to mind God's first incarnation in the creation of the universe as described in Genesis 1.

The surprising conclusion is that the “former things and things of old” are the most positive interventions of God in history in the minds of the people of Judah – the moment of creation and the Exodus leading to the Promised Land. Now the “new thing” will be a new creation with a new way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, the jackals and ostriches honouring their God, and new hope for the chosen people. Psalm 126, written after the return from exile, echoes exuberance, elation, and hope in response to this new thing – “mouths filled with laughter,” “tongues with shouts of joy,” “rejoicing.” In this very short psalm of six verses, the phrase “shouts of joy” is repeated three times.



In his letter to the Philippians (a joy-filled book in the New Testament), Paul speaks about his experience of “the new thing which springs forth.” He says that he is willing to give up everything

he has for the sake of gaining Christ and being found in him, knowing the power of Jesus’ resurrection. While he is not quite there yet, he echoes Isaiah’s words in a Christian context, “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14).



**The Woman Caught in Adultery**  
Cerezo Barredo

In the story in John 8, we see the realization of “the new thing” in the life of an unnamed woman. She has been accused of adultery – there is no mention of the man who has been engaged in the adultery for which she is being condemned. She alone is being shamed, she is forced to stand in front of her accusers, and she is about to be stoned. She is being used by the scribes and Pharisees as a way to trap Jesus. Jesus has to choose either to allow the woman to go free and publicly disobey the law of Moses or to approve of her killing and lose his reputation as a friend to sinners.

Jesus bends down, not standing with her accusers. He writes something on the ground and then speaks the challenging words, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (Jn 8:7). He repeats his actions by bending down again and writing once more. It is worth noting that all the men walk away, led first by the elders! In the words of Eleonore Stump, “Only when it is clear that her accusers have been caught in their hypocrisy and shamed by it, does Jesus lift up his eyes and look at her. Of all those who came to Jesus because of her, she is the only one left standing by him at the end of the story. And she is the only one who calls him “Kyrie” (“Lord,” “Sir”).” Jesus forgives her and restores her dignity, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (Jn 8

There two other connections from the Old Testament between the law and writing, “When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God” (Ex 31:18). Jesus seems to be interpreting the Law of God given to Moses in a new way by echoing God’s writing on stone



with his writing twice on the ground. A second interesting connection of the writing on the ground comes from Jeremiah, “Those who turn away from you shall be written in the underworld, for they have forsaken the fountain of living water, the Lord” (Jer 17:13).



Can you imagine how the woman's life was changed by this encounter with Jesus? In what could have been the moment of her tragic death becomes instead a new moment in her life, a moment in which she is forgiven, and her dignity restored. The Jesuit, John Foley, says "This scene could refashion the whole earth. If we could each accept our own sinfulness as well as the forgiveness that surrounds it, we would have peace. We would drink in the compassion of God, who has been there all along, tracing in our souls." [Irene Zimmerman osf](#) writes a beautiful poetic re-telling of this story:

From the angry crunch of their sandaled feet  
as they left the courtyard, Jesus knew,  
without looking up from his writing on the ground,  
that the Pharisees and scribes still carried their stones.

The woman stood where they'd shoved her,  
her hair hanging loose over neck and face,  
her hands still shielding her head  
from the stones she awaited.

"Woman," he asked, "has no one condemned you?"  
The heap of woman shuddered, unfolded.  
She viewed the courtyard - empty now -  
with wild, glazed eyes and turned back to him.  
"No one, Sir," she said, unsurely.

Compassion flooded him like a wadi after rain.  
He thought of his own mother - had she known such fear? -  
and of the gentle man whom he had called Abba.

Only when Joseph lay dying had he confided  
his secret anguish on seeing his betrothed  
swelling up with seed not his own.

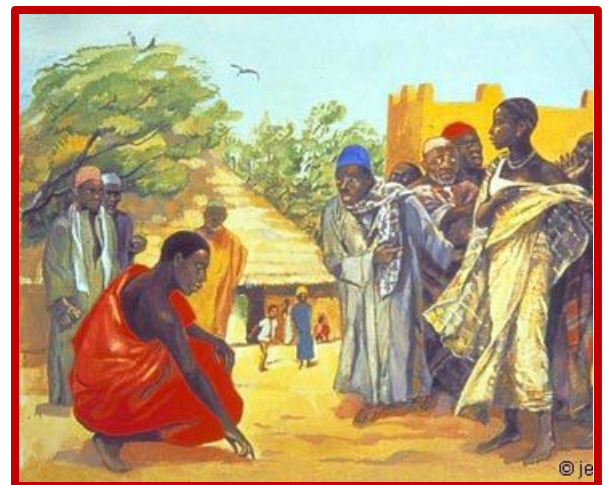
"Neither do I condemn you," Jesus said.  
"Go your way and sin no more."

Black eyes looked out from an ashen face,  
empty, uncomprehending.  
Then life rushed back.  
She stood before him like a blossoming tree.  
"Go in peace and sin no more,"  
Jesus called again as she left the courtyard.

He had bought her at a price, he knew.  
The stony hearts of her judges  
would soon hurl their hatred at him.  
His own death was a mere stone's throw away.

As we come closer to Holy Week, let us hear again the promise from God in Isaiah, "Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Is 43:18-19). How is the new thing springing forth in your life, in the life of your family or community? While it may not be as dramatic as the experience of

***The Woman Caught in Adultery***  
**Cerezo Barredo**



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the Jews in exile in Babylon or Paul's call to become a follower of Jesus or the woman's being forgiven by Jesus, each one of us will experience the living out of this prophecy.

[Sheenagh Pugh's](#) poem, *What If This Road*, is a reminder to us that God is showing us the new thing. It is our choice about whether or not we accept it:

What if this road, that has held no surprises  
these many years, decided not to go  
home after all; what if it could turn  
left or right with no more ado  
than a kite-tail? What if its tarry skin  
were like a long, supple bolt of cloth,  
that is shaken and rolled out, and takes  
a new shape from the contours beneath?  
And if it chose to lay itself down  
in a new way, around a blind corner,  
across hills you must climb without knowing  
what's on the other side, who would not hanker  
to be going, at all risks? Who wants to know  
a story's end, or where a road will go?



## REFLECTIONS FOR PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY ~ 10 April 2020

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

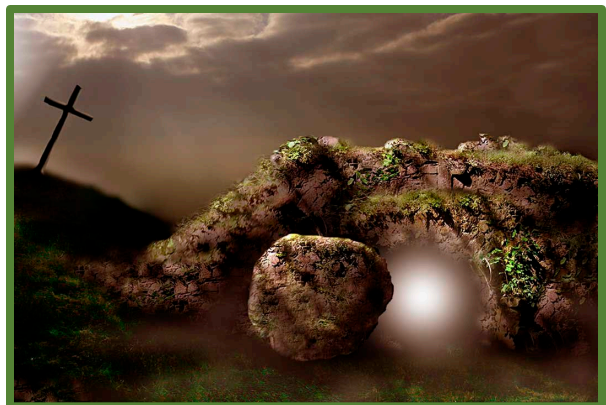
**Holy week – holy time and holy space.** Today we enter Holy Week, a period of seven days which lead us through the passion and death of Jesus into the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ. This is a Week so familiar to us that it is easy to take it for granted and simply go through the motions of the rich liturgies.

**Holy time** – all time is holy, but there are moments in time that are especially precious. Holy Week is a time of seven days with Jesus resting in the grave on Saturday, the seventh day. After that day, Jesus rises from the dead and new life emerges. We reflect that the six days of creation described in the book of Genesis are followed by the seventh day of rest. God rests as the cosmos comes into being and our world emerges. Both the first act of creation and the new creation which emerges with Jesus' death and resurrection are threaded through with the same themes: word, light, water, and living ones.



God's word is spoken simply, "Let there be. . ." and the cosmos (the heavens and Earth) comes into being. In the six days leading to the new creation, Jesus speaks little with his final words, again so simply stated, "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), and "It is finished" (Jn 19:29). Light is created from the darkness as God's first act in Genesis; the sun's light fails as Jesus dies (Lk 23:45) and is restored when Jesus rises on the dawn of the Resurrection Day. The Paschal candle is lighted at the Easter Vigil to mark this return of the light.

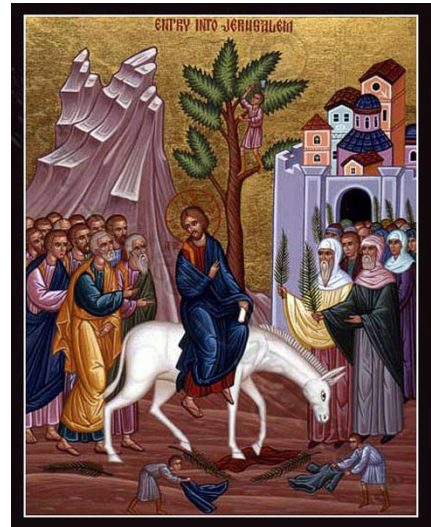
Water is there from the beginning of creation, but it is carefully integrated by God into the creation of the heavens and Earth. Jesus washes the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper, a sign of inclusion of all in the communion of all creation. As described in Genesis, life is created, first with the plants and trees, then the fish of the sea and birds of the air, then the animals (wild and domestic) of the land, and then humans. In the Holy Week story, the welcome into Jerusalem is heralded by a colt and palm branches, Jesus changes the bread and wine (fruits of Earth), the cock crows to remind Peter of his denial, Jesus is crowned with thorns, he is nailed to a cross of wood, and he is buried in the tomb protected by the stone. Earth creatures accompany Jesus every moment of the seven days.



God rests on the Sabbath, making it "blessed" and "hallowed" (Gen 2:3). Jesus dies on the evening of the Sabbath and rests in his tomb during the Sabbath. This blessed and hallowed day marks new life emerging, for the first time at the creation of the universe, and once again as Jesus prepares for his Resurrection and the promise of Resurrection for all.

Creation marks God's first incarnation as God's love overflows into the created reality of the universe and of Earth and Earth's creations. Jesus, in the incarnation of God in human form (Phil 2:7), marks a new creation, new light, and new connections among all Earth's creatures.

**Holy space** – all space is holy but there are spaces which hold us in a special embrace in special moments. In this Holy Week, Jesus walks the road up to Jerusalem, stops at Bethphage and Bethany, rides on a colt on the road into Jerusalem, celebrates the Last Supper at the upper room in the house in Jerusalem, laments on the Mount of Olives, is betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, is brought to the high priest's house and is condemned in Pilate's court and then in Herod's palace, carries his cross on the road to Golgotha, and is buried in the rock-hewn tomb. Earth is present to Jesus throughout his suffering and death and will be there to welcome his Resurrection.



Let us reflect further on two of these holy spaces: the table and the road. The table has become a symbol of inclusion. It is a universal sign of the gathering of people to eat, to celebrate, to be in communion. One sign of God's saving love for the chosen people is the invitation to the banquet, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines" (Is 25:6). It can be a sign of radical inclusion if we choose to make it so. The first three signs of the following of Jesus, as named in Jesus' parable in Matthew 25, make this explicit, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matt 25:35). At the table of the Last Supper, Jesus makes the same connection with the bread and wine and the washing of the disciples' feet. Jesus is known and condemned for "eating with tax collectors and sinners" (Lk 5:30).



In this Holy Week, Jesus will walk two very different roads, the road into Jerusalem where the people are praising him with waving palm branches and shouts of Hosanna, and the road to Golgotha marked by the carrying of his cross and the encounters with Simon and the daughters of Jerusalem. On the road into Jerusalem, Jesus accepts the praise of the people even though he knows that it will not last. On the road to Golgotha, Jesus shares his suffering and pain with Simon of Cyrene who is forced to carry his cross with him and the women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. His response to them is surprising, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children" (Lk 23:28).

In these days when we see the suffering experienced by so many with the loss of species every single day, the COVID pandemic, and the suffering of the people of the Ukraine, we can understand why the daughters of Jerusalem felt so helpless in the face of Jesus' suffering. It is not difficult for us to understand why Jesus cried out the words of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Richard Rohr ofm gives us hope with his words, "When the weight of the suffering of the world closes around us, we can easily feel suffocated from the grief and pain. What would happen if in these moments we reached out to connect with others? In grief and

pain, together. Not alone. Together.” He follows these words with a reflective poem, [“It Can’t Be Carried Alone”](#):

How can we not feel shock or rage at what is happening  
to the people of Ukraine—  
As we watch their suffering unfold in real time  
from an unfair distance?  
Who of us does not feel inept or powerless  
before such manifest evil? In this, at least, we are  
united.  
Our partisan divisions now appear small and trivial.  
Remember what we teach: both evil and goodness are,  
first of all, social phenomena.  
The Body of Christ is crucified and resurrected  
at the same time. May we stand faithfully  
Inside both these mysteries (contemplation).  
In loving solidarity, we each bear what is ours to carry,  
the unjust weight of crucifixion,  
in expectant hope for God’s transformation.  
May we be led to do what we can on any level (action)  
to create resurrection!  
The people of Ukraine have much to teach the world.



***Palm Sunday***  
**Ivan Tvorozhnikov**

We conclude our reflections on this Passion Sunday with the opening words of the Liturgy of the Word from the book of Isaiah, “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning God wakens – wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught” (Is 50:4). This verse was used to describe Catherine McAuley by the sisters who wrote in their annals after she had died. The verse holds special meaning for us as we begin this Holy Week. In these times of suffering and pain, whether globally through the pandemic or war in Ukraine or locally in our personal lives, we are invited by our God to “listen as those who are taught” and then, taught and nourished by God’s word, to sustain each other with a word.

During the first days of this Holy Week, I invite you to choose one image of time or of space associated with Jesus’ suffering and death (word, light, water, one of Earth’s living ones, the table, the road). Hold the image in your imagination and in your heart. Let God waken your ear to hear. Be surprised and delighted by new wisdom. Then you can sustain another with a word. Who is that “other” (human or other-than-human) who needs your sustaining, supportive, and mercy-filled presence? Trust the confidence that God has in you to be that compassionate presence.

Let us go now into the pain and the hope of Holy Week, encouraged by this [poem-prayer](#) of Roddy Hamilton:

may we remain here to whisper our hosannas  
throughout this week in every moment  
when the world goes silent on the cause of God  
may we remain crying out the beat  
the hosanna beat that marks the rhythm of this week

in the sound of the breaking bread  
hear the broken hosanna still we believe in love's way  
in the sound of coins being counted  
hear the betrayed hosanna still we trust in love's choice  
in the twisting of the crown of thorns  
hear the tortured hosanna still we believe in love's way  
in the sound of the lashes, all thirty-nine  
hear the scourged hosanna still we trust in love's choice  
in the sound of nails being hammered  
hear the crucified hosanna still we believe in love's way  
in the sound of silence  
hear the empty hosanna still we trust in love's choice  
may we remain here to whisper our hosannas  
throughout this week in every moment  
may we remain with you O Jesus  
still believing, still following, still your companions  
and let the stones remain silent

