

A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

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

Learn more about their work at sanctifiedart.org



everything [in] between

Meeting God in the midst of extremes



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Art, reflections, &
poetry for the
season of Lent



EASTER SUNDAY

everything [in] between grief & hope

Read Luke 24:1-12

Artist statement | Steve Prince

For me, to not know Christ is to live a life thirsty for truth, meaning, understanding, and purpose. We search and search and it feels like we cannot find the thing that we were hoping for. It is not until we surrender and trust in faith that we are able to find peace. We must open the door of our hearts to allow the Holy Spirit to enter and to do the work. Many will see us and not believe that the peace we exude is real, looking at us with skeptical eyes. Many will come thirsty, wondering from whence cometh our help, and some will know, and they shall rejoice for we have seen the light. Our daily prayer is that God will have us thirst no more and fill our cup.

Prompts for contemplation

- Look at the three women. What expressions do you see? How do their eyes, faces, and postures impact the mood of the image?
- Focus on the middle woman. What do you think the house in her body symbolizes?
- Notice the flow of energy and movement in the image. What direction does it seem to be moving in, and how does it impact the feeling or message of the artwork?
- What does the man's position in the image suggest about his role in the scene? How does he relate to the figures and the action surrounding him?



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Fill My Cup | Steve Prince
Pen and ink on paper

This year, we're letting the Gospel of Luke guide us through Lent. Beginning with Jesus setting his face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), this devotional flows through several familiar stories—the Good Samaritan, Mary and Martha, the fruitless fig tree, the Lost Sheep, Zacchaeus, and more. Many of these stories are well-known in both sacred and secular imagination, carrying cultural relevance and lore. For example, have you ever identified yourself as either a “Mary” or a “Martha?” The “Good Samaritan” title alone could reference a hospital, a charitable organization, a type of law, or a good deed. Perhaps you grew up singing “Zacchaeus was a wee little man” in Sunday School. So many of these scriptures hold significance in pop culture, church history, politics, and everything in between.

As we studied these scriptures, we were struck by how Jesus’ ministry disrupted the established social, political, and religious divides of his time. Jesus intentionally pointed out cultural and political extremes to emphasize the radical, inclusive, and surprising love of God. When we study these stories in their historical and cultural context, we see how they mirror the divisions many of us experience in our families, churches, and communities today.

Our theme, “Everything In Between,” invites us to navigate the polarities in our lives with more faith, intention, and openness to be transformed. You will see that each weekly sub-theme explores two supposed binaries, like “faith & works” or “rest & growth,” or “grief & hope.” We often consider these ideas to be opposing. However, as we explore these concepts within the scriptures, we find nuance and complexity. We find that these dichotomies are false. We might begin to see a full spectrum instead of black and white. We might find that God is present in between.

And so, this season, we invite you to look beyond black and white binaries and easy answers. We encourage you to engage in the weekly art and reflections at your own pace, imagining where God might be meeting us beyond the categories we create. This Lent, we're trusting that God shows up in shades of gray, rainbow hues, and everywhere in between.

Artfully yours,
The Sanctified Art Creative Team

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

About the SA creative team

Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Founder | Creative Director of SA

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

Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Director of Branding | Founding Creative Partner of SA

Lauren (*she/her*) is an artist, graphic designer, and theologian. She uses paint, metallic inks, and Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. As the Director of Branding, she visually packages, designs, and formats all of the Sanctified Art materials.

Hannah Garrity Founding Creative Partner of SA

Hannah (*she/her*) is an artist and an athlete, a daughter and a mother, a facilitator and a producer, a leader and a teammate. She is the Director of Christian Faith, Life, and Arts at Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA, an art in worship workshop leader wherever she is called, and a liturgical installation artist at the Montreat Conference Center, Montreat, NC.

Rev. Sarah A. Speed

Founding Creative Partner of SA

Sarah (Are) Speed (*she/her*) is the Head of Staff/Senior Pastor at Second Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, MO. Sarah feels called to welcome people into the church by using her energy and passion for beautifully scripted words, raw and relevant liturgy, and hands-on worship experiences to engage our longing for God and the need for justice in this messy world.

Rev. Anna Strickland

Creative Partner | Operations Support

Anna Strickland (*she/her*) looks for the Divine in the everyday like treasure in clay jars and first encountered God in the integration of her spiritual self and artistic self. She is a former teacher and college minister, a proud Texas Longhorn and graduate of Iliff School of Theology, a Baptist to the core ministering in ecumenical spaces, and a lover of chaos anchored by the belief that the Spirit is most active in the spaces between us.

EASTER SUNDAY

everything [in] between grief & hope

Read Luke 24:1-12

Commentary | Rev. Jeff Chu

Grief is liminal, not terminal

What makes an ember of hope flare up into a revivifying fire?

Sometimes it's a memory.

Then they remembered his words, Luke says of the women who had brought burial spices to Jesus' tomb. It took outside help, in the form of two angels, and it wasn't instantaneous. First there was terror, because it's not every day that otherworldly visitors come calling. But then they received a gentle word: *Remember*.

Sometimes it's a testimony.

The spark of the women's story gave Peter just enough hope to get up, run to the tomb, and seek more for himself.

Sometimes neither memory nor testimony will feel sufficient. The cold cloak of grief may still be too thick, as it was for Jesus' other friends. To them, the women's story was *λήρος* (*leros*). My Bible translates that Greek word as "an idle tale," but I think that lacks oomph. Really, it might be better rendered "nonsense" or "the mutterings of the delirious."

The other apostles' incredulity feels so relatable to me, especially in the context of our contemporary lives. In a world beset by so much sorrow, so much suffering, and so much heartbreak, a glimmer of good news can have such a hard time breaking my gloom. A glimpse of beauty, a flash of loveliness, can feel like foolishness amidst so much bad news.

This isn't to say, of course, that it's wrong to sit with grief. Our grief deserves our attention, because mourning is a bittersweet memento of love. We need not rank our griefs either. Even when it comes to the pettiest, tiniest things, we need to grieve so that we can make room for the better.

There's the key, though: our grief cannot become our everything. With memory, testimony, and time, we can recognize that grief is liminal, not terminal. And it need not crowd out other truths: that we have loved and been loved. That we are not alone. That there is still hope in the land of the living.

Reflect

On this Easter Sunday, what grief do you carry? Where do you find hope in the land of the living?

In the Direction of Hope

I am on my way.

Wait for me in the garden;

I will be there soon.

I'm not the fastest runner,

Lord knows that,

but these legs are moving.

I suppose I could blame my weary spirit for the
slow speed.

I could blame the grief I've shoved into my
pockets and

laid around my neck.

I could blame my own hesitation to hope,
a hesitation that clings like mud.

But I don't know that Jesus cares about my speed.

So tell God when you see them—

I am on my way.

Wait for me in the garden.

I will be there soon.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed

About our guest contributors

Guest Writers



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Rev. Jeff Chu

Jeff Chu (*he/him*) is an award-winning journalist, author, preacher, and teacher. He serves as an editor-at-large at *Travel+Leisure*, teacher in residence at Crosspointe Church in North Carolina, and Parish Associate for Storytelling and Witness at the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley in California. He is also the co-author, with the late Rachel Held Evans, of the New York Times bestseller *Wholehearted Faith* (2021). byjeffchu.com | [@byjeffchu](https://twitter.com/byjeffchu)



Dr. Mindy McGarrah Sharp

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Guest Artist



Steve Prince

Steve Prince (*he/him*) is a native of New Orleans, LA, and currently resides in Williamsburg, VA. He received his BFA from Xavier University of Louisiana and his MFA in Printmaking and Sculpture from Michigan State University. He is the Director of Engagement and Distinguished Artist in Residence at the Muscarelle Museum of Art at William and Mary University. He has created several public and private commissions nationally and he has received numerous honors for his art and scholarship. Prince has shown his art internationally in various solo, group, and juried exhibitions. steveprincestudio.com

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GOOD FRIDAY

everything [in] between acceptance & resistance

Read Luke 23:32-49

Artist statement | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

I began this image contemplating Jesus' posture on the cross. The crucifix inherently spreads its victims' arms out wide, willing the body into the shape of surrender. There is no fighting back. It forces one to face death with open arms.

As I contemplated this, the iconic image of *Christ the Redeemer* in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, entered my imagination and my sketchpad.²³ While the sculpture was commissioned and created for several different reasons, I find it striking that the final design evolved into Christ with open arms and hands, intended to be a symbol of peace.

In this image, I referenced the *Christ the Redeemer* statue, drawing Jesus' dying position into a posture of warm embrace. I omitted his face in order to focus merely on his arms stretched wide. I repeated this pattern four times, which formed the shape of an open cross. As I worked, I realized the image resembles a cross crosslet, which carries as many varied meanings as the crucifix itself.²⁴ In this image, my intention is to thwart the brutality and violence of the crucifix with the imagery of a wide embrace, which will soon become a symbol of death-defying resistance.

In the negative space at the center, I placed two sheep. They primarily represent the two men—charged as criminals—who die alongside Jesus on the cross. I depicted them as sheep to recall the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7) and to portray them as what they are: vulnerable, desperate, helpless. One turns away; he sees Jesus' surrender on the cross as a pathetic and pointless defeat. The other trusts in the promise and sets his eyes on paradise. The one who turns away symbolizes all of the people who defy Christ at the end: those who cast lots, scoff, and mock him. The one who looks straight at us symbolizes all who remain steadfast: the Centurion, those who beat their chests, and those who stay, watching from a distance.

In the background, you will see glimpses of newspaper headlines and articles collaged together. In response to the noise and violence of this world, this image is a visual prayer for peace.

²³ Designed by sculptor Paul Landowski and built by engineer Heitor da Silva Costa in 1922-1931.

²⁴ Crosslet imagery originated in the Middle Ages and can represent the four Evangelists, the four cardinal virtues, the Trinity, and many things in between. Learn more here: symbolsage.com/cross-lets-and-meaning



A Wide Embrace | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Newspaper & gold leaf collage with digital drawing



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everything [in] between righteousness & mercy

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Reflection & prayer

Throughout this devotional, we invite you to explore the following polarities in the scripture readings, art, poems, hymns, and commentary. At the beginning of each week, return to this page to discern where you might place yourself on the weekly spectrum of values. Maybe you feel strongly aligned with one end or the other, or you're somewhere in between. Consider how your location on the spectrum reflects where you are in your faith journey. Is God calling you to move in a particular direction? As you journey through the week, or through the season, does your location change? When you are finished discerning, mark your location with a pen or pencil and write a short prayer of supplication, asking God to grant you what you need as you journey ahead. Use this as a tool for journaling or group conversation.

everything [in] between

intention action

prayer _____

stranger neighbor

prayer _____

faith works

prayer _____

rest growth

prayer _____

GOOD FRIDAY

everything [in] between **acceptance & resistance**

Read Luke 23:32-49

Commentary | Dr. Mindy McGarrah Sharp

We're still caught up in fleeing, freezing, fretting, and fearing

Resistance and acceptance: heavy, double-meaning words. Resistance refuses to budge, *and* resistance moves, modeling a way forward. Acceptance serves the status quo, justifying every single blessed or cursed thing, *and* acceptance welcomes death's mystery, the possibility of change, miracles of new life.

But in stress and trauma, it gets confusing. When to stay put? When to move?

The author of Luke packs a lot into this traumatic text. Creation and humanity predictably enact not just one "F-word," but a flood²² of them. In the text, we see numerous actions: *fleeing* to "safe" distances, *fighting* with sour wine and harmful words, *flexing* with material remains, *frosting* with repeated cruel taunts ("Save yourself! Save me!"), *freezing* by standing still, *fretting* with tears and breast-beating echoes, *fearing* they were wrong and it's too late. Darkness *falls*, the whole fabric in the temple *fragments*.

Jesus' neighbor on the cross suggests the biggest "F" of all: the risks and realities of *forgetting*. "Will you remember me?" he asks. "The 'me' who messed up, the 'me' caught up with you in this mess? Is it imaginable that my memory could shape a future beyond this painful death?"

This Luke text remembers Jesus' "F's" too: *forgiveness* and *freedom*. Jesus humanizes the ones betraying their calling: *forgive* them, for they know not what they do. Jesus *free*s his neighbor as they both hang dying, saying, "You're with me," an assurance of abiding accompaniment before using his last breath to *free* his own Spirit.

We're still caught up in fleeing, freezing, fretting, and fearing the emotional floodings that persist today. In your theology of the cross, where do you remember, forgive, and free? What do you forget? What do you resist? What do you accept? When do you stay put? When must you move?

Carry Good Friday's life and death questions into Holy Saturday's great in-between, resisting the urge to rush through it or to retreat from feeling it. Abide in between it all.

Reflect

As you journey with Jesus to the cross, which "F's" do you enact?

²² We know the power of capital "F" floods: everything's destroyed in the wake of water's awesome power. You may know this materially, and we all know it emotionally: flooding wipes out clear thinking, pulls us under, and threatens hard-won lessons, changed behaviors, resolutions, and even faith itself.

I've Been the Thief

I want my own miracle.

I read about the blind man and the woman who touched his cloak.

I read about Lazarus and the little girl who got up.

I have seen love after loss
and recovery after addiction,
so I want my own miracle.

And if it helps,
I'd be willing to beg and barter for it.
I'd be willing to kiss the floor,
to sell a portion of my days,
to press my knees to the ground,
to live with this ache.
I'd be willing to pray all night,
to pray until my voice is hoarse—
*Save yourself, and us, or just,
Save yourself, and me.*

But eventually, my demands soften.
Eventually, the edge in my voice smooths.
Eventually, time wears down my insistence,
and *Save yourself and me* will become:
*If you're there,
just don't forget me.
Please, don't forget me.*

Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed

lost found

prayer _____

righteousness mercy

prayer _____

shouting silence

prayer _____

power humility

prayer _____

acceptance resistance

prayer _____

grief hope

prayer _____



Both, Please

It's one thing to speak of love. It's another
to hold a newborn in your arms,
to sing someone to sleep,
to lean down and listen for their breathing.

It's one thing to speak of faith. It's another
to press your forehead to the floor,
to cry out in prayer,
to ask the hard questions and still
thank God for the meal.

It's one thing to speak of the Divine. It's another
to walk under a tunnel of wisteria,
to stand barefoot at the edge of the sea,
to hear the birds sing as the sun returns
and whisper, *Thank you, thank you, thank you.*

It's one thing and another, so I pray,
Give me both, please. Show me both, please.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed

Read Luke 22:1-27

Artist statement | Hannah Garrity

This summer my family traveled back to Okinawa and mainland Japan, the places we lived during my infant and toddler years. Those years molded the family lore and marked a pivotal shift in my parents' lives. They traveled with us this summer, returning after 40 years. As you might imagine, I was amazed by everything.

I was particularly taken by the great deference that the human-made physical structures held for creation. The waters have power and everything reflects that awareness. Vegetation is grown and walls are built between the houses and the water. We stayed by the water for 4 days while local children were still in school. Even on the weekend, though, we were some of the only ones swimming in the East China Sea by our AirBnB.

This artwork reflects that deference—the humility in the face of the power of the waters—through an adaptation of the Okinawa wave pattern that is found on pottery throughout the island. Here, each wave represents a disciple around a circular table. Judas's wave flows the opposite direction from all of the others, creating discord in the pattern and in the narrative. He seeks a worldly type of power.

Within the table, four rivers flow out from Jesus, who is represented as a 13th wave flowing in the midst. These rivers represent the four rivers of Eden, the four spirits in Revelation, and the multitude of followers across time and place. Patterns tell the story of this last table: money seeding discord, wine and bread becoming symbols of the faith, bread breaking, hands reaching toward one another in right relationship. The Jesus symbol of water in the midst flows through each of these sections and breaks the borders of the artwork.

How might I walk forward from this table with Jesus? Tacking toward humble strength in the face of oppressive power? Nurturing community? Breaking the barriers of oppressive influences?

Read Luke 9:51-62

Commentary | Dr. Mindy McGarrah Sharp

Lent calls us to step forward, even when we're not fully ready

Are you ready to move toward transformation? Are you ready to listen for good news in seemingly impossible spaces, even as a divided people and planet? Ready to set Lenten intentions, even with this year's challenges? Ready, even with some good reasons to wait a little longer to begin?

Getting ready shifts intended journeys to active practices of packing, strength-training, and starting farewells. The disciples had already asked about itineraries: Where will we sleep? What will we eat? Whom should we trust or fear along the way? They raise concerns about rejection and prepare to retaliate.

Regarding readiness, the more I research listening, the more I rethink it. It's tempting to consider listening a skill set: don't cross your arms, make eye contact, be curious, avoid intercultural offenses. Learn the skills, then you're ready to go.

If mastering skills precedes listening well, how long will that take? Is it possible to be completely ready? How are we supposed to listen for good news in the absolute worst, most inconvenient times?

But zoom out to communal readiness: activating intentions to change while the fresh death of old, harmful—yet beloved—ways of life hasn't even begun to be collectively buried and grieved. In this scripture, I don't hear Luke denying the grief work that keeps getting bumped off our to-do lists that are utterly overwhelming. I hear: How long will this humanity ask for extensions? How long will we say, "Hold up, I'm almost ready."

When important preparation remains undone and fresh deaths remain ungrieved, the time to move is today. What if listening is a practice on the move, a learning as we go, a birth crowning at the gravesides of yesterday? This is the day. Lent is here. Are you ready?

Reflect

As Lent begins, how will you align your intentions with your actions?



Four Waters at Table | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace with watercolor



Toward Jerusalem | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting

MAUNDY THURSDAY
everything [in] between power & humility

Read Luke 22:1-27

Commentary | Rev. Jeff Chu

A leader like one who serves

The story of the Last Supper has become so many things—the source material for world-renowned art, an inspiration for historical reenactment, the origin point of liturgy. So it’s easy to forget that it was originally also something else: a cautionary tale.

After all that Jesus had done and said and taught, after a myriad of miracles, healings, parables, and teachings, Jesus’ friends still couldn’t help themselves. Worldly temptations, lust for power, and desire for prestige crowded around the table as uninvited guests. There was Judas, cutting backroom deals with the authorities. And Jesus had hardly finished telling the apostles what they were to do in remembrance of him when bickering broke out about who among them was the greatest.

This was especially ironic given that the Passover meal, the feast that celebrated God’s goodness, was always focused on the lamb. Was there ever a culinary centerpiece that so embodied unblemished purity and utter innocence, faithful vulnerability and otherworldly strength?

In the blank space between the verses, I imagine Jesus sighing the deepest of sighs. I see, too, the complicated feelings and the human longings that are familiar to anyone who has sat through the messy, beautiful, and hard realities of a family dinner.

If it was tempting for Jesus’ apostles to forget what they had witnessed and what they had been taught, it is no less so for the Church today. Hopeful as we might be, we’re still so prone to wander. We miss Jesus’ warnings of how easy it can be to betray him and his teachings. We clamor for power and authority, struggling to remember that the greatest must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves. And we, too, neglect the glory and the loving sacrifice at the heart of it all: the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Reflect

How does Jesus define power? How does Jesus model humility?



Power Like a Seed

In a world that wants power like a machine gun,
 power like a bomber plane,
 power like a gated fence to keep the hungry out,
 I want power like a seed—
 power that will crack me open and grow
 something good;
 power like an open door,
 an invitation that says, “Come on in;”
 power that feels like a strong spine with a soft heart.
 I want the power to listen, to lean in, to ask follow-
 up questions.
 But more than anything, I want the power to bring
 us together, to lift you up.

There are different kinds of power.

One will build a wall.

One will plant a garden.

We should know by now, only one will bear fruit.

Poem by

Rev. Sarah Speed

Read Luke 9:51-62

Artist statement | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

The relationship between the Jews and Samaritans at the time of Jesus’ ministry was defined by centuries of political upheaval resulting in foundational cultural and religious differences. Instead of centering Jerusalem as their religious and cultural hub, Samaritans built their temple on Mount Gerizim.¹ I think that Jesus’ unwavering focus on Jerusalem was a non-starter for the Samaritans. Perhaps feeling disrespected or even judged, the Samaritans were unable to receive Jesus. Their intention to remain faithful to their religious traditions made it difficult for them to embrace Jesus’ message.

When James and John saw the Samaritans reject Jesus, they were enraged. It is certainly not difficult for me to imagine being triggered by people with different worldviews, as I find myself similarly dealing with lots of anger that is difficult to process. In their fury, James and John seek to call down a consuming fire from heaven upon the Samaritans, an action antithetical to their intention as disciples to follow the way of Jesus.

Jesus is central to this image, urgent in his stride, with his eyes set on Jerusalem at the horizon line. His clothing is patterned with doves and olive branches as he faces the city of peace. Behind him, James points accusingly at the Samaritans while John tugs on Jesus’ garment. Their clothing holds patterns of fire raining down from heaven. In front of Jesus, a group of Samaritans are altogether unreceptive. Their clothing is patterned with Samaritan distinctions like mountains representing Mount Gerizim, and scrolls, stone tablets, and shapes in sets of five to reference the Pentateuch as their holy scripture.²

What might trigger you toward unproductive rage or to resist the work God is doing in the world? How can we be resolute in our calling, like Jesus, despite distractions and adversity? What would it look like to align your actions with your intentions?

¹ For historical context on and discussion of the Samaritans (Strong’s G454), please visit: blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4541/esv/mgnt/0-1/

² Ibid.

Never Met a Stranger

When we talk about God, we say
she's never met a stranger.
She makes friends at the airport.
She waves to babies in the check-out line.

When we talk about God, we say
she'll leave the porch light on.
She'll have warm bread in the oven.
She'll have all the time in the world.

When we talk about God, we say
she'll look you in the eye.
She'll love you as you are.
She'll call you by your name.

When we talk about God,
we never have to talk about
which side of the road she might walk down.
Wherever you are,
that's where she'll be.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed*

Read Luke 19:29-40

Artist statement | Steve Prince

It is said that the true confession that flows from one's heart and lips and professes that they are a sinner and desire to be healed, is essentially the key to unlocking one's salvation. Amid a sometimes turbulent and chaotic world, if we enter with faith and Christ in our hearts we shall be delivered. The figure's hands are lifted in praise as he navigates the flood of life which can be overbearing. He recognizes that the flood of life is symbolic of sin and separation from God. He closes his eyes, humbles himself before God, and he is delivered into a new chapter of his life, triumphant.

Prompts for contemplation

- Look closely at the waves. What does the flood of life represent for you?
- Notice the contrast between the house on one side and the man on the other. What emotions or thoughts do these images evoke?
- How does the image of Jesus on a donkey influence your understanding of this scene? What do you make of its placement in this work?
- Notice the abstract shaded area at the top. Does it feel like a cloud, storm, or something else? Does this texture remind you of God's presence?



I Believe | Steve Prince
Pen and ink on paper

everything [in] between
stanger & neighbor



Scan to hear
the tune!

I Saw a Stranger

KINGSFOLD ("O Sing a Song of Bethlehem")

Words: Anna Strickland, 2024 Music: English trad., arr. Ralph Vaughn Williams, 1906



 I saw a stran-ger on the road in need of help and
 I laid there des-perate by the road in need of help and
 In our em-brace the mem-o-ry re-turned from E-den's



 care No clues to their i-den-ti-ty, just hu-man
 care As one by one they passed me by, too bu-sy
 dust Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, my kin whom



 flesh laid bare A thought had flut-tered through my
 or too scared Then one ap-proached and my first
 I can trust The ar-ti-fi-cial walls we



 mind: "Is this one of my own?" My tri-bal mind
 thought was "Do they mean me harm?" To my sur-prise
 build a-round the tribes we claim Make us for-get



 made me for-get that they're bone of my bone
 they met my eyes and held me in their arms
 the gos-pel truth: "Be-lo-ved" is your name

THE FIRST WEEK IN LENT
everything [in] between stranger & neighbor

Read Luke 10:25-37
Commentary | Rev. Jeff Chu

To love is what it takes to truly live

In his last speech before being assassinated, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about the story of the Good Samaritan.³

King had visited the Jericho Road in 1959. He saw its twists and felt its turns as it wound through the hills and sank into a valley outside Jerusalem. Along the way were so many potential hiding places for robbers to lie in wait, ready to ambush weary travelers. “I’m going to tell you what my imagination tells me” about the priest and the Levite, he said. “It’s possible those men were afraid.” Perhaps, he suggested, they fearfully asked themselves, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?”

The Good Samaritan, King said, “reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’” Then he urged his listeners to imagine themselves on contemporary Jericho Roads. Could they—would they—ask that same question when they saw others struggling?

King’s speech offered a master class in wrestling with complexity. He empathized with the Levite and the priest—how utterly human to be fearful on the Jericho Road! He also praised the Samaritan’s “dangerous unselfishness.”

Another layer to King’s complexity: Privately, he had misgivings about the story. “I of course like and respect the Good Samaritan, but I don’t want to be a Good Samaritan,” King told a friend. “I am tired of seeing people battered and bruised and bloody. . . . I want to pave the Jericho Road, add street lights to the Jericho Road, make the Jericho Road safe for passage by everybody.”⁴

³ An annotated transcript of King’s final speech can be found here: [nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/02/us/king-mlk-last-sermon-annotated.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/02/us/king-mlk-last-sermon-annotated.html)

⁴ Author John Hope Bryant recounts this conversation between Rev. Dr. MLK, Jr. and ambassador Andrew Young in his article, “Fixing the Jericho Road,” published on HuffPost, May 25, 2011. [huffpost.com/entry/fixing-the-jericho-road_b_422612](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fixing-the-jericho-road_b_422612)

PALM SUNDAY everything [in] between shouting & silence

Read Luke 19:29-40

Commentary | Dr. Mindy McGarrah Sharp

Between stony silences and snarky shouts, solidarity arose

Stones have seen a thing or two. Grabbed in rage, they’ve absorbed the shock of violence. Balanced in meditative towers, they’ve marked graves and birthed centering peace.

In an Arizona courthouse, I wasn’t thinking about stones. I was thinking about students’ passionate shouts and silent death stares. We had traveled to the borderlands to listen in a place about which there is much shouting and even more silencing. A most progressive student and a most conservative student grudgingly traveled together, carrying histories of screams and silences into that courthouse. In the pre-trial explanation, we heard that doors would open, and we would all rise. But this would be no triumphal entry, no cloak-lined path, no donkey willingly lent from a neighbor, no rejoicing. Just hand sanitizer and instructions: Silence! No photography!

We were entering Operation Streamline’s²⁰ public gallery, the daily hearing where up to eighty humans are tried en masse for immigration violations. Since 2005, this has continued through Democratic and Republican administrations. Chained by ankle, wrist, and waist, human beings walk to a judge six-by-six, clanging, pleading. It would be over in under an hour, and then we’d go on about our day.

Unexpectedly, the polarized students joined voices: *This cannot be!* One quoted scripture: the Imago Dei, neighbor love, caring for strangers, remembering Jesus’ own journey as a migrant. The other quoted law: due process, presumption of innocence, amnesty, constitutional rights. Between stony silences and snarky shouts arose some solidarity. Together, they witnessed what we humans can do to each other and the lengths we go to make it all make sense.

Bearing witness complicates things. Divisive soundbites crumble, north and south get confused. But, stones certainly know the violence, graves, and peace prayers held in this sacred, desecrated land.

On a borrowed donkey from a gracious neighbor, on crowd-sourced paths accompanied by loud rejoicing, Jesus wept on arrival,²¹ knowing full well what we humans are capable of doing to each other. He rode right into what stones have seen: criminalization and death-dealing decisions, dehumanization and denial of dignity, disregard for expansive beauty. What would stones shout? What do you shout? What do you silence?

Reflect

Where is your voice needed now? Where are you called to silently bear witness?

²⁰ Operation Streamline, formed in 2005, is a joint initiative of the US Dept. of Homeland Security and Dept. of Justice to prosecute immigrants entering or reentering the country without authorization. Streamline courts were created to fast-track criminal court proceedings en masse.

²¹ Luke 19:41

If You Really Listen...

In the city you'll hear horns, the clatter of the subway,
mothers calling to their children, saying,

"Take my hand before we cross the street."

You'll hear church bells, Salvation Army bells,
people asking for spare change, while others ask
for directions.

You'll hear the whistle from the traffic cop,
the exhaust from the bus,
that a train is arriving in two minutes.

You'll hear mothers selling fresh mango,
theater kids selling tickets,
and religious groups selling ideas.

But even with all that shouting,
even with all that noise,
the birds still sing.

Against all odds,
thanks be to God,
the birds still sing.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed*

King's reading rebukes tidy delineations between us and them—and I'm going to tell you what my imagination told me when I pondered it: We're all fellow travelers. Some might be more neighborly than others. But there are no strangers in this story.

Vulnerability appears in manifold ways in one short passage: The Samaritan's risky mercy. The humanity of the priest and the Levite. Also, the innkeeper's trust; he takes a small down payment, believing the promise of more. There's the boldness of the legal expert too; he instigates this whole thing by asking a testing question—and it's quintessentially Jesus to meet even the self-righteous by staying in conversation.

Candor invites us to see ourselves in each of these characters. Some days, I covet vindication of my own goodness. Other days, I have only enough courage to scuttle down the road, afraid of what might lurk in the shadows. On my better days, I'll meet others in good faith, believing their promises. On my best days, I'll encounter the world mercifully, staying tenderhearted enough to be "moved with compassion," even on roads that fill others with fear.

I suspect Jesus recognizes all these aspects of what it means to be human. I imagine, too, that he extends us the same grace he offered the legal expert, remaining ever-patient and always eager to remind us: To love is what it takes to truly live.

Reflect

Consider each character with compassion. Do you see yourself in any of them?

THE FIFTH WEEK IN LENT
everything [in] between righteousness & mercy

Read Luke 19:1-10

Artist statement | Lauren Wright Pittman

I had a lot of fun discovering new layers to this familiar story. I learned that Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore fig tree, which was a food source for poor people because the fruit was bitter and generally undesirable.¹⁸ I had always imagined a fruitless tree, but the presence of fruit opened up interesting avenues to explore. The root word for sycamore tree is σῦκον, meaning “fig,” and as I did a study of other key words in the text, I noticed this same root word in συκοφαντεω, or “defrauded,” which was used to describe what Zacchaeus did to his community. It was curious to me that the root word for “defrauded” was “fig,” so I dug deeper to find that the Greek word was from the phrase “fig-informer” or a person who would notify authorities if one was exporting figs from Greece without paying a tax. It seemed that these “fig-informers” would use the threat of exposure to extort money from fig farmers. This is where the word “sycophant” comes from, which evolved to more generally describe a “malignant accuser from love of gain,” which perfectly describes Zacchaeus.¹⁹

Jesus calls Zacchaeus out of his identity as “sycophant” into his new identity as “repentant host” who invites Jesus into his home and redistributes his ill-gotten wealth. Zacchaeus’s clothing holds a repeated pattern of four figs and halves of coins, referencing the fruits of his transformation.

The area where Zacchaeus sat in the tree is fruitless and dying. His actions were destructive and oppressive to his own community. The crowd is correct in grumbling about him; their anger is righteous, but Jesus offers mercy. In this visual metaphor, Jesus removes him from the tree so it has a chance to heal and nourish the whole community. Jesus’ clothing is patterned with suns, representing righteousness, and water, representing mercy, because it is through his merciful actions that righteousness for the community is achieved.

¹⁸ *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, by United Bible Societies. (United Bible Societies, 1980). 179-181.

¹⁹ For discussion of the word “sycophant” (Strong’s G4811), please see: blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4811/kjv/tr/0-1/



Neighbors | Steve Prince
Pen and ink on paper



Zacchaeus | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting

THE FIRST WEEK IN LENT everything [in] between stranger & neighbor

Read Luke 10:25-37

Artist Statement | Steve Prince

Each individual carries generations within them, made up of billions of people who have occupied this earth before us. We have an individual and collective responsibility to be good stewards (Good Samaritans) of our bodies, neighbors, and communities, rooted in love. Every day we make a dance of life and death—celebrating the entrance and exit of life, the progression of age and maturity, and the expansion of our tent, grafting to people who share our blood and our beliefs. We are the structures, those temporal buildings that weather the storms, that creak and wither away daily, but are fortified by our relationships to each other and with the sharing of the good news planted by the Heavenly Father. This dance is an open profession of our vow to live by God's commandments and find a way to collectively preserve the truth of our origin while moving as one communal body into an untouched future.

Prompts for contemplation

- Observe the figures' posture and movement. Do you see connection, conflict, or both? How does this reflect your own relationships?
- Focus on the textures and shading. What story might these elements tell about resilience or fragility?
- Pay attention to the empty spaces around the figures. What do these spaces evoke for you?
- Imagine yourself as part of this scene. What role would you play in this dance of connection, tension, and movement?

Wildfire

I can picture it—salty sweat, accumulating in her bangs. The scent of toasted sesame seeds, crushed oregano, sumac, and cumin. Flour on her hands, painting streaks of white in her hair when she ties it back. The sweet date she samples—the way it stretches and clings to the back of her teeth, leaving the taste of honey in her mouth.

I can picture Martha in that kitchen, plating meals, eager to see their eyes close. Their heads nod. To hear the swell of approval that rises from their lips. And I can picture her sister. Brows scrunched. Fingers fidgeting, wishing for a pen, for paper, for a way to write it down. I can see her mouth part like a fish in the air, questions forming and reforming on her curious lips. I can see her lean in, knees tucked, eyes bright. I can see her imagining the world he dreamed of.

And I can picture how, for generations, this story of two brazen women in scripture, a story of two women so close to Jesus, may have felt like an untamed wildfire. I can picture the way we put these women in boxes. I can imagine how people saw their full hearts, their untamed energy, and decided to label that as good and bad, better and worse. I can imagine how Martha's questions were interpreted as nagging, or the interruption interpreted as needy.

I can picture how it happened, but what if it was all more beautiful than that? What if these sisters discovered a ministry of cooking? What if they discovered the faithfulness of learning, the kind of friendship that allows you to ask questions, or something in between?

I can imagine it. Can you?

Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed

The good teacher would want to be in the home of that despicable, unrepentant sinner? I say “unrepentant” because, before Jesus invites himself over, the vertically challenged Zacchaeus has done nothing except climb a tree to get a better view, again setting himself apart from his people. He hasn't admitted wrongdoing, resigned his position, or confessed his sin. Still, Jesus says, I will abide with you.

It's striking that Jesus never called Zacchaeus out—no loud shaming, no public humiliation. Rather, this seems like the gentlest calling-in. Faced with Jesus' tender warmth, Zacchaeus descends from the tree, rejoins the people, and immediately pledges restitution—a two-pronged act of reconciliation with both God and neighbor.

Confirmation of this remarkable turnabout comes in Jesus's declaration: “Today salvation has come to this house.”¹⁷ Our ears might be tempted to hear an absolution of individual sin. But Jesus says “to this house,” not “to this man,” which hints at something broader. The Greek word σωτηρία (*soteria*), translated here as “salvation,” also means “deliverance.” Woven into σωτηρία is a suggestion not just of cleansing but also of wholeness. In the communal culture of Jesus' day, salvation meant the wholeness derived from belonging. By repenting, Zacchaeus had been delivered from broken relationship with his people back into the wholeness of community.

We can't know how Zacchaeus would have responded if Jesus had instead tried loud condemnation. We do know that what worked was winsome grace, gentle mercy, and a love so attentive—and so offensive—that it healed.

Reflect

When have you witnessed or experienced someone being “called in” instead of “called out”?

¹⁷ Luke 19:9

Read Luke 19:1-10
Commentary | Rev. Jeff Chu

A love so attentive—and so offensive—that it healed

“God has a really bad habit of using people we don’t approve of,” Rachel Held Evans¹⁵ once said. “What makes the gospel offensive is not who it keeps out, but who it lets in.”

I might tweak Evans’s formulation and put it this way: God has a really bad habit of loving people we don’t approve of. Or maybe this: God has a really bad habit of showing mercy to people we don’t approve of. Or maybe: God has a really bad habit of extending grace to people we don’t approve of.

All are true, as is evident in Jesus’s encounter with Zacchaeus.

In those times, tax collectors were loathed. The phrase “tax collectors and sinners” appears multiple times in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in one testy exchange with the chief priests and elders, Jesus tosses a rhetorical grenade into their midst, saying, “The tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.”¹⁶

Tax collectors were stooges of the Roman Empire. They betrayed their own people and enriched themselves in service to the oppressor. And Zacchaeus was no average corrupt bureaucrat. He’d amassed immense wealth, climbing on others’ backs to the rank of chief tax collector. In other words, he was a senior deplorable.

So it especially galled the gathered crowds that, of everyone clamoring for Jesus’s attention that day in Jericho, he would choose to stay with that man. Can you believe it?

¹⁵ Rachel Held Evans was an American Christian blogger and *New York Times* bestselling author. She died suddenly in 2019. The commentary author, Jeff Chu, was a close friend.

¹⁶ Matthew 21:31



Scan to hear
the tune!

Ministry and Presence

EIN FESTE BURG (“A Mighty Fortress is Our God”)

Words by Anna Strickland, 2024

Music by Martin Luther, 1529



When Je - sus passed near Mar - tha's home she had no
Her sis - ter Ma - ry took a seat to spend time
He said, "You are both gifts to me with diff - erent



hes - i - ta - tion "Please treat my house like it's your own,"
with the tea - cher In - tent - ly listen - ing at his feet,
ways of be - ing. I won't take that from Ma - ry



she gave the in - vi - ta - tion She wan - ted all the best
his words drew her in dee - per But Mar - tha took of - fense
whose place is right here with me. You have no - thing to prove



To serve her hon - ored guest Her check - list grew and grew
At Ma - ry so con - tent With all there was to do
So let your heart be moved. Just one thing do I need:



Her time was all con - sumed With min - i - stry a - bound - ing
She need - ed Ma - ry too And asked for Je - sus' back - ing
To feel your love in deeds Of min - i - stry and pre - sence."

Read Luke 10:38-42

Commentary | Dr. Mindy McGarrah Sharp

“Are you a Mary or a Martha?” is the wrong question

Are you a Martha or a Mary? This familiar question reminds me of two former bosses. The first valued photographable work: build something tangible, make something quickly, sell something profitably. Don't just stand there, do something!

The second valued relational depth and learning across differences: linger with people, let it disrupt other tasks, for this is the work. Don't just do something, sit there!

The first go-getter had portfolios of success, but lacked depth and mutuality. The second sit-with-er had stories, but no material buildings to show for it. Which is better?

At first glance, this text forces an either/or, especially when we read Jesus' words with dripping condescension in translations that choose “the better part”⁵ to describe Mary's actions (Luke 10:42). Should we be a workhorse or build relationships? Surely, no one has time to always do both well.

Recall what happens in Luke just before. When asked about what a disciple has to do, Jesus' Good Samaritan story screams, “Don't just stand there (or pass by), do something!” Receiving Martha's frustrated question about unshared labor (where theological education was being counter-culturally offered to a woman), Jesus appears to scold, “Don't just do something, stand (or sit) there!”⁶

This could lead to a simple discernment—one choice better, one worse: choose better. But, when we read the Good Samaritan alongside this text, we see that Jesus blesses both: do something and sit there.

⁵ A more literal translation of the Greek might be: “Mary has chosen the good portion.”
⁶ “Don't just do something, stand there!” is also a foundational saying in family systems theory.

everything [in] between
righteousness & mercy



Scan to hear
the tune!

Righteous Mercy

HYFRYDOL (“Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus”)

Words by Anna Strickland, 2023

Music by Rowland H. Prichard, 1830;
harm. Ralph Vaughn Williams, 1906

Since our child-hood you have taught us what is wrong
Though there's wide-ness in your mer-cy, let us not
Far too of-ten we hold on-to an-ger dressed
and what is right Nur-tur-ing our sense of
a-buse that grace Called in-to this Chris-tian
as righ-teous-ness We for-get we serve a
jus-tice, fuel-ing us to work and fight Keep that
jour-ney, let our lives re-lect our faith When we
God who calls us to re-la-tion-ship So when
fire for jus-tice burn-ing in the sha-dow
fal-ter and fall short of our com-mit-ment
those who caused us harm re-pent and choose a
of our fear E-ven there your Spi-rit's stir-ring,
to your will Hold us, wrap-ping us in your love
bet-ter way Spi-rit move our venge-ful hearts
light-ing us a path that's clear
as we work toward whole-ness still
to choose love in-stead of wrath

Righteousness & Mercy

As children, we were taught to tell the teacher.

(Justice was dealt when we spoke up.)

As children, we were taught to always be kind.

(Friends were made when we spoke with love.)

As children, we were taught that Zaccheus climbed a tree.

(But we cut that tree down a long time ago.)

So what are the rules for this day and age?

Can we turn black and white into shades of gray?

Do we call each other out, for righteousness' sake?

Do we call each other in? Do we grab something to eat?

As always, love is somewhere in between.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed*

Further, Mary and Martha are sisters. They're related. My second boss was right about working hard for right relationship. My first boss was onto something too: what are you making together?

Rather than showing which is better, my back-to-back bosses raise deep questions about productivity and relationality. "Are you a Mary or a Martha?" is the wrong question.

What might it look like to shift our imagination from the ever-tempting mode of sibling rivalry—aiming to outdo each other, a tendency found in sacred texts and in contemporary families, cultures, and countries? What might a faith/works, works/faith healthy sibling relationship look like? What practices and habits would that require?

Decades after two very different bosses, I still have questions. What kind of relationships do the works we produce, photograph, and celebrate reflect? Is there shared labor and fair compensation? Does everyone get enough time and space to rest, reflect, and learn? Is theological education accessible to everyone across genders, sexualities, races, nationalities, abilities, ages, and every other difference? How would we know?

What new work could we create together with the benefit of sitting with each other, listening and learning each other's stories? Don't just work, reflect on what your faith requires: sit and listen. Don't just rest in faith, put it to work: respond through just relational networks. Repeat.

Reflect

In your own life, how are you valuing both productivity and relationships, active faith and faithful works?



Mary & Martha | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting

THE FOURTH WEEK IN LENT everything [in] between **lost & found**

Read Luke 15:1-7

Artist statement | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

I began my artwork for this series by collaging together strips of newspaper articles. Along the torn edges, I added gold leaf. Then I photographed the result and edited the images in black and white. These photos became the backdrop for my pieces, as I wanted my digital drawings to emerge within the noise of the world's deepest pains and divisions.

On September 27, 2024, I began drawing the Good Shepherd with the lost sheep tenderly wrapped around his shoulders. As I worked, rain pummeled our roof, saturating the ground with an endless deluge as tropical storm Helene¹⁴ reached my town of Black Mountain, NC. The next day, winds roared and threw trees to the ground like dominos. We lost power, water, and cell service. We didn't know it yet, but every creek and river had swelled with enormous force, sweeping away everything in their path. Landslides and extreme flooding ravaged all of Western North Carolina, taking homes, towns, and lives.

We were miraculously spared, with no flooding or trees on our roof. As soon as the storm relented, we set out to find family and friends by foot. We walked through our town, which had become a maze-like wasteland, changing routes due to downed trees, power lines, and washed-out roads. When we found loved ones and neighbors, with relief and urgency, we asked: "Do you have enough water? Do you need food?" It would be nearly 6 days before emergency relief arrived. Meanwhile, neighbors survived by the help of their neighbors. Churches opened their doors. Firefighters persisted, despite perilous rescue missions. Helicopters air-lifted people to safety.

When I began this artwork, I naively hoped to gain insight into Jesus' parable of the lost sheep. I did not wish to *become* the lost sheep and live through the greatest natural disaster to hit my hometown in over a thousand years. Now, over 6 weeks after the storm, what strikes me is the shepherd's singular pursuit of the lost and vulnerable. He steadies the sheep on his shoulders and steps out of the frame toward us. His gaze finds mine, and I almost hear him whisper, "I will never stop searching for the lost. I will never stop rejoicing when one is found."

¹⁴ At the end of September 2024, Hurricane Helene hit the Southeastern US, devastating many regions, particularly Western North Carolina. Catastrophic flooding caused billions of dollars of damage, took hundreds of lives, and left many lives unaccounted for.

THE SECOND WEEK IN LENT
everything [in] between faith & works

Read Luke 10:38-42

Artist statement | Lauren Wright Pittman

Growing up, I felt I had to decide whether I was a Mary or a Martha. I never identified with Martha because the culturally-prescribed roles of a woman were my weakness, and I didn't identify with Mary either because she seemed more earnest than I felt.

Diving into the Greek of this text helped me work through my very well-worn opinions to find some nuance. Martha's work was not limited to cooking and cleaning; the Greek word used for her many tasks is *διακονία* which also means "service, ministering, and promoting religion."⁷ With this layered meaning in mind, it is clear to me that Jesus' response is not about Martha's ministry, but her preoccupation with Mary.

I think the most pivotal shift in translation is found in v. 42 where it is often translated, "Mary has chosen the better part." When you look at the Greek, however, it can also be translated as, "a good portion" or "a useful share."⁸ In light of this, I believe Jesus is not offering a value judgment between them, but assuaging Martha's worry by affirming that Mary is doing a good portion of the work too.

Mary sits at the feet of Jesus, a place that was reserved for men. I wonder if Martha was concerned about what might happen to Mary for being out of "her place." Jesus' response is radical because he affirms she has chosen a good portion of the work, and even though she is not where she is expected to be, no one can take that away from her. Jesus protects her right to assume the position of a disciple.

In this image, Mary eagerly reaches toward Jesus. Her clothing is patterned with mustard seeds and flowers because her faith may seem small, but her boundary-breaking faithfulness will nurture her faith to grow beyond what seems possible. Martha reaches toward Mary to pull her into more "appropriate" work. Martha's dress is patterned with open hands to image her vital ministry of welcome, service, and cultivating space for Jesus' message to take root. I imaged Jesus equally affirming both Mary and Martha's lived-out faiths. He is green, the combination of Mary and Martha's colors (yellow + blue), showing that he embodies the integration of both faith and works.

⁷ blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1248/kjv/tr/0-1/

⁸ Strong's Greek Lexicon, G18 and G3310.



Lost and Found | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Newspaper & gold leaf collage with digital drawing

Slow Growth

There's a vine in the South that covers everything.
It chokes out the light. Grows up to twelve inches per day.
In a matter of years, it will blanket a forest.
If you saw it from space, you'd marvel at its reach.
If you saw it from the passenger seat, you'd weep at
what it covers.
Those looking for fast shade plant this invasive vine.
Who can blame them? We're all impatient.
But if it's fruit you want—
the tart cherry,
the sticky sweet kumquat,
the soft side of a peach,
the crisp bite of an apple—
then bless the rain.
Thank the sun.
Put your hands in the dirt,
and wait.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed*

I assign readings from often-invisibilized theologians who honor their mentors, one generation to the next across multiple generations. These readings also clearly describe the finding of the authors' own unique and powerful voices.

Tracing generations of Asian Feminist, Womanist, Liberationist scholars in theological trajectories teaches about the kind of mentoring it takes to help scholars find their voices. Readings themselves become mentors to many students, including the two mentioned here. While diverse representation in readings is just a start, it's not enough. I seek to read what has existed for generations, but has been left out, lost, unread, unpreached, unassigned, unknown. Who noticed? Who searched?

One commentator suggests calling this the parable of the found instead of the lost sheep because this search continues until the final finding. It doesn't stop, doesn't tire of noticing the missing. Have you found your voice? Have you found your freedom? Have you found your anger? Have you found your joy?

Reflect

Whose voices have you not yet noticed? Which ones are missing, unread, unpreached, unheard?

Read Luke 15:1-7

Commentary | Dr. Mindy McGarrah Sharp

Maybe none are found until all are found

"I've found my voice!" The class beamed with excitement, sharing in palpable joy. This student had been quiet for years, almost never speaking. One day, they spoke, then again, building steam throughout the semester, deepening their vocal participation and contributing mightily to collective learning.

"How did I not know about this?" asked another student in a different class. They had been studying for years and had already devoted countless hours to various ministries. "Now that I found this out, I am free! And I am also mad!" That class joined in palpable joy and righteous anger.

How did these students find their voice and freedom? Both exclaimed that the assigned reading invited them in, showing that their voices were welcome, their freedom was at hand, and that people who look like them have been calling them through generations to find their voice and freely join the conversation.

For a teacher, bearing witness to a student who finds their voice is joyous. With newfound courage, freer students glow. What they did or didn't realize was lost is now found! The whole room shifts when a voice found adds something to the group that was lost without them. When a found voice claims its rightful power, there is almost always rejoicing.

But it's also maddening. Voices aren't disembodied utterings, but embodied precious people worthy of being heard. Bearing witness to the joy of found voices also bears witness to obliviousness that voices were missing. Even with deep conviction and contrition, it's painful when the almost-always-heard realize they never noticed anyone missing in readings, historical genealogies, or learning environments.



Scan to hear
the tune!

Beneath the Soil

WINCHESTER OLD ("God Is Our Refuge and Our Strength")

Words by Anna Strickland, 2024

Music by George Kirbye, 1592



Be - neath the so - il in the dark there's
Re - mem - ber when the world de - mands more
The rest and nur - ture we re - ceive will
In ev - ery sea - son of our lives the



growth too slow to see A trans - for - ma - tion
than you can pro - duce We each grow at a
turn to fruit in time For God made us to
Spi - rit is at work To nur - ture us to



not dis - played in bran - ches, fruit, and leaves
diff - erent pace and growth starts at the roots
grow and change as toward the sky we climb
bear good fruit while root - ed in the earth

Read Luke 13:6-9
Commentary | Rev. Jeff Chu

Slow down. Do your part. Remember the promise.

Two years ago, I planted asparagus crowns. The farmer who sold them to me said, "You know you'll have to wait a couple of years to harvest, right?"

Of course I did. I had Googled: "how to grow asparagus."

Still, the next spring, when a slender spear rose from the midst of the previous autumn's fallen leaves, I could barely restrain myself from harvesting it. I immediately imagined charring asparagus, and squeezing some lemon and grating some parmesan over the top. Ooh—and how about a slightly runny fried egg?

Then I remembered the farmer's counsel: "You know you'll have to wait a couple of years to harvest, right?"

After briefly congratulating myself for my self-control, I tucked my dream back into the vault of future possibility. It wasn't yet time for our homegrown asparagus. It needed that year, then another, to concentrate on its largely invisible labor: finding purchase in the soil, extending its roots, gathering strength to flourish.

Like my asparagus, the fig tree can't be rushed. Jesus' original, agriculturally sophisticated audience would have known that a fig seedling needs several years to bear fruit. They might even have found the vineyard owner's question laughable. They would have understood that absence of fruit on a young tree wasn't a sign of failure. Maturity requires time and care, attention and patience.



Scan to hear
the tune!

Lost & Found

BEACH SPRING ("Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service")

Words by Anna Strickland, 2024

Music by B.F. White, 1844



In the flock I am sur-roun - ded by my sib - lings
The ho - ri - zon starts to brigh - ten as I quiet - ly
As I wan - der down the quar - ry a fa - mi - liar



and my friends Safe at home and feel - ing groun - ded with my
slip a - way I can feel my spi - rit ligh - ten with each
voice cries out It's my shep - herd search - ing for me; reck - less



shep - herd to de - fend But an ach - ing, long - ing feel - ing
cau - tious step I take Un - fa - mil - iar paths un - fold - ing
love has tracked me down Though I left my place of re - fuge,



as the stars shine late at night Draws me in, my dreams
as ex - cite - ment blends with fear All cre - a - tion now
he has fol - lowed all a - long But I had to lose



re - veal - ing and I know I'm not quite right
en - folds me like the flock I hold so dear
my - self to find my - self where I be - long



The Good Shepherd

*Jesus said, "Who among you wouldn't leave the 99?
Who among you wouldn't look for the one?"*

Someone in the crowd probably rolled their eyes.

Someone squirmed and looked at their palms.

Someone sighed and thought to themselves,
*"This man doesn't understand the business.
What fool would leave 99 to look for one?"*

But maybe God was not talking about us.

Maybe God was talking about
her own reckless love.

Maybe God was talking about
her own willingness
to turn the world upside down
for me.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed*

It has always struck me as odd that a common reading of this parable imagines the vineyard owner to be God. (Such is our temptation toward hierarchical thinking that the most seemingly powerful figure in a parable must always be God.) That interpretation runs up against our belief that God is "slow to anger and abounding with steadfast love."⁹ And surely a call to faithful waiting seems more apt and necessary for God's ever-impatient people. As God reminds Habakkuk, "There is still a vision for the appointed time. . . . If it seems to tarry, wait for it. It will surely come."¹⁰

Faithful waiting doesn't mean doing nothing: The gardener waters, weeds, and fertilizes. And modern science is teaching us what happens in the meantime. Contrary to the peevish vineyard owner's assertion, nothing is wasted. Down below, the fig tree isn't just gathering strength; it's also building relationships. Soil-borne fungi are finding home in its roots, boosting the tree's capacity to resist disease and take in nutrients. In return, the tree feeds the fungi.

Perhaps this parable is better read as a gentle rebuke against those of us who are all too comfortable with our on-demand, instant-gratification culture—and who believe the lie that we can control more than we actually do. Perhaps, too, this parable was a word that Jesus needed to preach to his very human self. After all, he's the one who, in Matthew and Mark, curses a fig tree for failing to give him fruit when he wants it.¹¹

Perhaps this is our invitation: Slow down. Do your part. Remember the promise. Whether asparagus or fig, the harvest will come.

Reflect

In your own life, what do you need more of: rest or growth, or a little of both?

⁹ Exodus 34:6

¹⁰ Habakkuk 2:3

¹¹ Matthew 21:19; Mark 11:13-14

THE THIRD WEEK IN LENT
everything [in] between rest & growth

Read Luke 13:6-9

Artist statement | Hannah Garrity

At our church retreat a few months ago, we offered a session on eco-spirituality. Our instructor led an exercise that focused our attention on a single, natural object. I selected a wilted flower. We were to draw it, then tell its narrative. We were to refer to it as a "one." This one. We were to affirm the one and be affirmed by the one.

That exercise resonates with me here as I revisit the parable of the fig tree. In this circular image, two figures lean in over the tree; their heads are full of ideas for fruiting, their bodies are full of dead fig leaf patterns.¹² Their ideas and dreams have not born fruit. They converse about how to cultivate growth. Then one pushes back against the other and creates tension, discord. From that tension comes an opening, letting the fig tree have its time and space to thrive.

In this paper lace piece, the fig tree is full of life, representing its potential when given the time and space to grow. As I wonder about God's presence here in the parable, I see that the God figure could be the fig tree. "Let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it,"¹³ the vineyard keeper replies. As I breathe into the gift of another day, where do I see potential in need of my honor, my care, and the space and time to grow?

Or perhaps the God figure here is in the space between them all, between the three. The fig tree, this one, begins its leafing in the in-between.



Fig Leafing | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace with watercolor

¹² The two circular shapes with fruit seeds inside of them represent the figures' heads; the branch-like imagery beneath the heads represent their shoulders.

¹³ Luke 13:8, NRSV