

Finding Hope in the Desert

What words come to mind when you think of a desert? Dry, sand, inescapable heat from a relentless sun, deadly snakes and prickly cacti, isolation, no water or nourishment, land unsuitable for growing things – hardly images that evoke hope! And yet, so many stories of our faith, from both the Old and New Testaments, occur in this barren landscape. Stories of God’s people who found themselves in the middle of this seemingly hopeless environment, yet they sought God’s face and moved into hope.

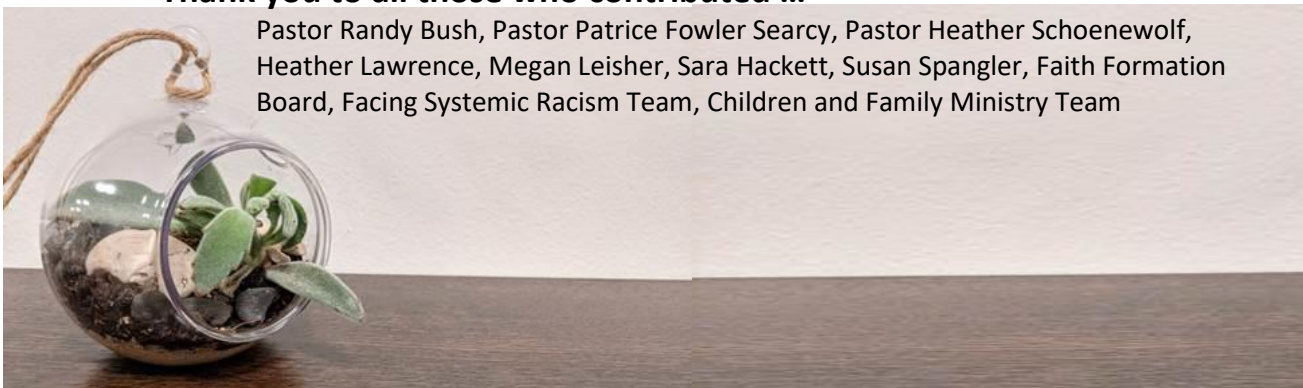
For many of us, this last year has been one of isolation and thirst for the usual daily activities and fellowship with family and friends. Perhaps the experience of additional losses has compounded your sense of hopelessness and sorrow, leaving you in a dry place. We invite you to take a journey with us into the desert to see what refreshment and truths it has to offer. You won’t be alone through this desolate space – your ELPC family will be journeying with you, and our God promises that we will never be forsaken. Join us as we move toward renewal and the HOPE that awaits God’s faithful disciples. Be listening for that “still, small voice” that will speak to your soul. Prepare to receive God’s manna and blessings of hope in the midst of seeming desolation!

Each week we are offering a 1) scripture and reflection 2) spiritual practice which can be practiced throughout the week 3) resources from the Facing Systemic Racism Team - a reading or podcast from FSR intended to help us see, name, and confront racism 4) instructions and supplies to build a terrarium as a visual reminder of the hope and life God offers in the desert 5) ideas if your family includes teens.

If your family includes elementary school or younger children, you might want to follow along with the separate Children’s Church School at Home companion piece.

Thank you to all those who contributed ...

Pastor Randy Bush, Pastor Patrice Fowler Searcy, Pastor Heather Schoenewolf, Heather Lawrence, Megan Leisher, Sara Hackett, Susan Spangler, Faith Formation Board, Facing Systemic Racism Team, Children and Family Ministry Team



Scripture

Luke 4:1-13

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

⁵ The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷ If you worship me, it will all be yours."

⁸ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

⁹ The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written:

*"He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully;*

*¹¹ they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"*

¹² Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

¹³ When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Reflection

One of the richest passages for reflection in the gospels is the story of Jesus being tempted just prior to the start of his public ministry. There are lots of words that are worth pulling out and meditating upon, such as the words "full of the Holy Spirit," wilderness," "forty days," "devil," and "tempted." What might it mean to be led by or "full of" the Holy Spirit? We assume that it is a good thing to be full of the Spirit, but does it also happen to us and if so, how would we recognize it? We think of a biblical "wilderness" as a sandy, dry, empty place, but what are modern wildernesses in which we wander? "Forty days" seems like a long time; aren't most temptations spur of the moment things? And what different forms do "devilish" voices take when we find ourselves tempted to do what is wrong?

Temptations are generally things that pull us in unhelpful, even dangerous directions. They cause us to veer from the straight line we hope to travel - bad detours from the path we ought to follow. They also pull our eyes off the goal that God has set before us, causing us to focus on something else or believe a different goal has more value. When Jesus was hungry, the Tempter tried to get him to break his solidarity with humanity and make stones into bread (something no human can do). Then Jesus was tempted with absolute power, yet of an unholy form. Finally, it was suggested Jesus test God by throwing himself off a high tower and see if God would protect him. All were distractions from Jesus' true mission, and all were rejected. Thinking of temptations as distractions can be a helpful reminder to "keep our eye on the prize" and trust that God will always give us the strength we need for the journey ahead.

Families with TEENS: Avoiding temptation doesn't mean saying no to the things we want for some arbitrary reason; it means making sure we can say yes to the things that are most important.

Have everyone in your family write down three important things they want for their future. Then share those with each other.

Is there anything you might have to say no to ... to make sure you can say YES to these important things?

Practice

Spiritual Practice: Releasing Temptation

"In our zeal to become landlords of our own being, the ALL of God dies in us and the sterile nothingness of our desires becomes our God."

James Finley

"The greatest human temptation is to settle for too little."

Thomas Merton

Find time and space for prayerful stillness. Take a few long, slow breaths in, and a few long, slow breaths out. Let your mind rest on the feeling of your body breathing as you let your body rest into your seat. As the mind settles, and the body becomes still, prayerfully engage this contemplation:

What am I holding onto that, when released, will open a doorway to feeling closer with God? Rest, and listen for an inner response.... Give yourself time to reflect, and, if helpful, to journal. (A helpful journaling prompt may be to write across the top of a page, "What I am ready to release to feel closer to God is...." and let yourself see what comes in response.)

When an answer has come, and you feel ready, collect a measure of sand in your hand. Close your hand around the sand as you bring awareness to what you have been holding onto. Feel what it's like to be holding on. Now, notice what it feels like to be ready to let this go, to release whatever for you keeps you "settling for too little," for anything less than the ALL of God. When you feel ready, bring your hand over the opening of your terrarium and slowly release the sand into this vessel as you release attachment to what you have been holding onto. Feel your heart opening to the presence of God as you release. When complete, let yourself rest quietly in God's presence, feeling God's love for you, receiving God's blessings.

Terrarium

Pour the enclosed sand into the bottom of your terrarium to create a base for planting. This layer should be ½"- 1" deep.

FSR Resource

During this Lenten season, study and reflection looks different for each of us. With that in mind, we offer some additional, multimedia resources relevant to our Lenten Theme. We hope you'll consider these podcasts and videos, which were shared alongside other FSR resources this summer, as supplements or alternatives to the written offerings.

This week's scripture looks at how Jesus responded to being tempted in the wilderness. In episode 14 of Seeing White, Robin DiAngelo, author of White Fragility, talks about how white people respond to being confronted with society's and their own racism. [You can listen to the whole series here](#)

Excerpt from the podcast:

Robin DiAngelo: Sometimes I'll ask the folks of color in the room, "how often have you given white people feedback on our inevitable and often unaware racist patterns and had that go well for you?" [Biewen laughs.] And of course, they laugh. And usually the answer is never, or very very rarely. And I then ask, "what would it be like if you could simply give us feedback when we step in it, as we will, and had us receive the feedback with grace, reflect, and then seek to change the behavior? What would that be like?" And I'll never forget this man of color raised his hand and said, "it would be revolutionary."

Scripture

1 Kings 19:11-12

¹¹ The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

Families with TEENS:

Jeff Wright @JeffRightNow makes me laugh every time he imagines God’s voice and the interactions between God the Father and Jesus. Show the grown ups a few of his TikToks (I just want superpowers too and Christmas in Heaven are my favorites!)

What do you think God’s voice is actually like?

Have you ever had an experience when you heard God?

Reflection

Sometimes life can be overwhelming. We may be stressed by the circumstances of our day, afraid for our future, and tired of doing what is right. For better or worse, the Bible assures us that we are not alone. So many of the stories we hear – from Hagar to Paul – remind us that life can be difficult. People can work against us or try to harm us, even when we’re trying to do our best. There are times when we too feel like we’re alone with no one to lean on or no place to go. So what do we do?

The Bible offers us the promise that God is with us, even when we find ourselves in desperate places with no idea of what to do next. God sees us. God cares for us. God provides a way through the desert with a reminder that God will never leave us alone.

Today read the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19. He is a prophet of God but has found himself alone and afraid in the wilderness. He is ready to give up. But God takes care of him – feeding him and providing him with some rest. Then, God blesses Elijah but drawing near to him in the “still small voice.”

This week our prayer practice of Lectio Divina and our Creative Response invite you to listen for God’s still, small voice calling to YOU – offering comfort, guidance, and hope.

What is God saying to YOU?

Practice

Lectio Divina

Elijah prophesied and performed miracles of God’s faithfulness in the mid-500’s BCE during the Babylonian Exile of the Jews (Fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE). He defended the worship of the one True Hebrew God over that of the Canaanite deity Baal. His very name means “Yahweh is my God”, although the wicked Israelite King Ahab (who worshiped Baal, as did his wife, Jezebel) called him the “Troubler of Israel”. When Jezebel threatens Elijah’s life, he flees and eventually meets God at Horeb. God tells him to stand on the mountain, for the Lord is about to pass by and will tell Elijah what to do. There comes a mighty wind, a rumbling earthquake and a scorching fire, but still Elijah does not hear the Lord in any of these great commotions. Then comes an overwhelming silence, and in that silence, a still, small voice. Now Elijah hears the voice of the Lord offering him direction and hope!

Life is noisy. People talk and yell, devices beep and buzz, so many things vying for our attention and drowning out the Divine. How do we arrive at a spiritual place in which we can hear that still, small voice of Truth and assurance? This week, we will focus on the ancient practice of praying the Scripture called Lectio Divina, which means “divine reading” or “sacred reading”. During Lectio Divina, one listens with the heart to the Scripture for the message he or she receives through the text. Lectio Divina includes four steps: **Read** (Lectio), **Reflect** (Meditatio), **Respond** (Oratio), and **Rest** (Contemplatio), which will hopefully open our hearts to the calling of the Holy Spirit.

Go to a quiet place and put your body in a comfortable position. Leave your phone out of eyesight and earshot. Choose a favorite passage in Scripture, maybe a Psalm or a parable or even a single verse. Read it slowly, either aloud or silently, and work your way through these steps:

- **Read** (Lectio) - Read the passage in full, opening your Spirit to God’s guidance.
- **Reflect** (Meditatio) - Read the passage again, in part or in full, considering which phrases or images call to you. What draws your focus? Which words speak to your heart and experience?
- **Respond** (Oratio) - Pray, draw, journal or move your body, heart, mind and soul in response. Express the meaning and significance of the message you’ve received.
- **Rest** (Contemplatio) - Sit in contemplative prayer, perhaps using one of the phrases as your centering word or image. Rest in your experience, expressing gratitude for God’s revelation to your heart!

Second Sunday in Lent
Elijah encounters God in the “still small voice”

for the week of February 28

Terrarium

Use the Model Magic air drying clay to create a symbol of God’s presence in your life or your family’s life. Let it dry next to your terrarium and we will add it in after we add the dirt next week. Model Magic can be decorated with permanent markers or waterproof paint.

BSR Resource

As we make space to listen to God, let us also make space to listen to one another. Listen in to this conversation with Ralph Lowe and Brian Wallace, both on staff at Pittsburgh Presbytery as they talk about a variety of race-related conversations including growing up in Pittsburgh as a black man, growing up in the suburbs as a white man, encounters with law enforcement, playing the “race card”, interracial marriage, choosing where you shop based on race, and more.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYxBBljXGPA&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=PittsburghPresbytery

Scripture

Exodus 16:1-8; 31

16 The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. ² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" ⁸ Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD."

³¹ The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.

Reflection

Crisis or wilderness experiences, whether precipitated by daily need or physical suffering can lead to a crisis of faith. In the Exodus passage, just days after being freed from Egyptian bondage, the Israelites find themselves in a state of perceived danger. Obviously, the Israelites had forgotten about God's provision of water in Elim, just a few verses before. They find themselves, once again in a wilderness place, murmuring and complaining about their perceived lack of food and nourishment. Food instability and lack of access to secure food are realities for far too many people, and most especially for children, in this the land of plenty. Therefore, we cannot minimize the need or fail to hold our government responsible for providing access and resources to secure food, or minimize our responsibility to ensure that people who are hungry are fed.

It is complicated when, we who have more than we will ever need, or use – be it food, money, clothes, or any other material goods – complain that we do not have enough, ignore others in need, or heaven forbid – misuse or waste our God-given resources. Just as God provided sustenance for the Israelites during their forty-year wilderness experience, God provides for us in times of need, as well as in times of plenty. God's provision is often overlooked or discounted when we are not in need. Terrence Fretheim writes, "The all-too-common effect is to absent God from the ordinary and every day and to go searching for God only in the deep-sea and mountaintop experiences. Consequently, the people of God will not be able to see in the very ordinariness of things that God is the one who bestows blessings again and again."

The year 2020 proved to be a year of rolling wilderness experiences, extraordinary to say the least...inordinate numbers of people sick, unimaginable numbers of deaths, job losses, financial and food instability, loss of housing, and natural events; fires, floods, mudslides, tornadoes. And yet, just as God was with the Israelites providing water in Elim and manna and quail in the wilderness, God was and is with us. Much like it was with the Israelites, Fretheim explains, "it is in discerning the presence of God in connection with the daily

needs that they (*and we*) will be able to return once again to the confession: Yes, we now know, Yahweh is the one who brought us out of Egypt,” and yes, God has sustained us.

God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and supplied food and water for the people every day, for forty years in the wilderness. I suspect that God’s extraordinary provision of manna in the morning and quail in the evening became ordinary, maybe even monotonous, to the Israelites over the course of all those years. May we take time to identify and give thanks to God for ordinary provision that we may otherwise take for granted: air that fills our lungs and the gentle breeze that kisses our cheeks; the silent beat of our hearts; the rising and setting of the sun and moon every day; the wonder of new life experienced with the birth of every child and the innocent laughter of children; sharing a simple meal with people we love. May we never take God’s ordinary provision for granted or fail to recognize how extraordinary God’s provision is.

Families with TEENS:

Spend some time coloring the included coloring pages together. While you color talk about ...

What gifts has God given to your family?

What needs do you see in your community?

Practice

Mindful Eating Meditation: [AUDIO Available Online](#)

Mindful eating can be a prayer, a sacrament. When we eat mindfully, each moment is holy.

Preparation: Find a comfortable place to rest, and bring with you a piece of bread or gluten free cracker. If you don't have bread or crackers, you can substitute with any food you have available. Raisins or small pieces of fruit are wonderful for eating meditation.

If possible, turn off your phone and other electronic devices so that you can relax, uninterrupted...simply give yourself time and space to rest in the present moment for a moment or two. (It's ok if this brings a gentle smile...) If someone is present with you, you might ask them to read the meditation to you slowly, guiding you as you practice.

Begin by letting yourself rest in your seat, breathing in and out, knowing you are breathing in and out. Let your awareness include your surroundings...the sights, sounds, scents of the place you are in....And let yourself simply slow down...let yourself just be right where you are in the moment. Take a moment to savor simply being here, breathing in, and breathing out. Nowhere to go, nothing to do, no one to be....You might let the next out breath be long and slow, letting go with the out breath...

Now, slowly bring awareness to the piece of bread before you. Linger for awhile, simply aware of the bread that is here for you. This is a deep practice. As you look deeply, you may see that this bread is an ambassador from the whole cosmos. As you pick up the piece of bread, pause, and look at it for a moment, look mindfully to really see the piece of bread. As you look, you know that this is a piece of bread. You know it with your mindfulness: "I know this is a piece of bread." It only takes a moment.

If you look deeply at this piece of bread, you can see the whole universe in it - the sunshine that helped the wheat to grow, the rain that nourished the seeds, the richness of the soil...the farmer who grew the wheat and threshed the grain...the truck driver who transported the grain...the bakers who made the bread....the shop keeper behind the register....you can see the earth, the rain and the sky. It has come from the whole cosmos for your nourishment.

When you are mindful, you see and feel the bread you are holding in your hand. As you put it up to your mouth, you know that you are putting it up to your mouth. Simply pause. Take a moment to appreciate the scent of the bread, the texture. You might turn the bread over in your hands or fingers, seeing the patterns, the crevices, the shades of light and shadow...

Notice how your body responds to bringing the bread close to your mouth...does your mouth water? Does your belly gurgle? Do you feel an urgency to put the bread in your mouth? Simply notice....so many movements of life in this simple gesture...

You may like to smile to the bread before you put it in your mouth, appreciating God's gift of nourishment, giving thanks....

As you slowly place the bread in your mouth, what happens? What do you notice as you very slowly begin to chew? Do you feel an urge to rush? To quickly swallow? What's it like to slow down...to let the bread linger on your tongue?

As you chew, let yourself simply be aware of chewing. Let go of putting anything else into your mouth, like projects, worries, fear...just the bread. And when you chew, let yourself chew only the bread. Let yourself be in this present moment of savoring bread in the here and the now. It is simple, but needs some practice to let yourself just enjoy this piece of bread. This miracle.

What's it like when the bread becomes liquid in your mouth? What do you notice as you swallow? Can you feel this bread begin to nourish every cell of your body? Pause a moment to simply appreciate being nourished by this, God's gift of bread to you.

Take a moment to linger, and smile, and give thanks....

Included is a bread recipe from Deedee Frye if you want to make your own bread this week for mindful eating.

Terrarium

Gently pour soil over the layer of sand. This layer should be about 1" or so deep. Add in your dry clay symbol from last week.

Just like our bodies are fed by food and plants are fed by soil, our spirits are being fed as we worship, pray, read and reflect this Lent. Take a moment to reflect on what you hope is being nourished and growing in you during this Lenten season.

FSR Resources

13th is a thought-provoking documentary in which scholars, activists and politicians analyze the criminalization of African Americans and the U.S. prison boom. The Exodus narrative, where God leads the Israelites to freedom (which our scripture this week is a part of) should move us to look seriously at our own country's justice system and how it exploits people for power and profit. You can [watch 13th on Netflix](#)

Resmaa Menakem, in his groundbreaking book, **My Grandmother's Hands**, reveals how the history of racism and trauma is held and replayed in our body's survival responses. He offers us body-centered practices for healing as part of a roadmap for personal and collective steps towards eradicating racism, resolving trauma, and healing our nation. You can find excerpted practices from [My Grandmother's Hands online](#) and attached. [AUDIO Available Online](#)

Scripture

Ezekiel 40

40 In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down, on that very day, the hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me there. ²He brought me, in visions of God, to the land of Israel, and set me down upon a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city to the south. ³When he brought me there, a man was there, whose appearance shone like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand; and he was standing in the gateway. ⁴The man said to me, "Mortal, look closely and listen attentively, and set your mind upon all that I shall show you, for you were brought here in order that I might show it to you; declare all that you see to the house of Israel."

Psalm 137

Lament over the Destruction of Jerusalem

¹By the rivers of Babylon—

*there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.*

²On the willows there

we hung up our harps.

³For there our captors

asked us for songs,

and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,

"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

⁴How could we sing the LORD's song

in a foreign land?

Families with TEENS:

Laments can be expressed as words, pictures, or songs.

Two songs that are laments to me are Coal War by Joshua James and Turntables by Janelle Monae. Listen to one of these or find a song you love that is a lament and listen to it together.

What hard/sad/unjust thing is the song expressing? What is this song asking God to hear or do?

Reflection

God's people experienced a season of exile – in which many were sent away from their homes; the temple was destroyed; an enemy was in power of their land. In this time, God's people wondered, among MANY OTHER questions, things like: How long will this last? Where is God? How can we be God's people in this context?

Exile is an experience of being separated from your home – not just the place where you live but the places and people that help you be YOU, your most complete and authentic self. Exile is a time of being separated from those you love – from family, friends or community. Exile is a season of having the world as you have known it completely disrupted by forces out of your control, leaving you with no solid idea of how to get back to “normal.”

Although many of us have spent A LOT of time at home over the past year, many of us also have been experiencing a sense of loss. We haven't been able to go to familiar places, gather closely with those we love, or worship in our church together. We've had to think about how to adjust to the disruptions in our life, how to adapt as individuals and as a community, how to preserve a sense of who we are and whose we are.

In the Bible, God's people spent time in Exile offering a Lament – they cried out to God in sadness or anger or confusion to name their sadness, pain and even experience of injustice. They knew that God could handle it. But they also had confidence that God would hear them and that God was good. They trusted that God would right the world's wrongs and renew their hope in God's promises.

This week we will explore the spiritual practice of Lament together – reading a Psalm of Lament, praying our problems and our hopes. We will also name this season of loss and hope creatively, by painting a rock that symbolizes our absence from our church building, but the unity of our church family nonetheless. We hope you will bring your painted rock to ELPC for our outdoor Palm Sunday Processional, as our stones will be placed in the Sanctuary on Easter morning – a visual representation of the steadfast reality of our unity in Christ, even in a season of feeling scattered.

Practice

Prayer of Lament

Ezekiel was a prophet who preached during the time of Israel's exile in Babylonia. From atop a mountain, God gave him a vision of Jerusalem and of the rebuilding of the Temple there, a prophesy that provided great hope and blessing for the Israelites. His vision of restoration and of a future was desperately needed, as the Israelites were lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem:

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion...How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?” Psalm 137

Lament is a form of sacred prayer that can be found throughout the Bible, from the book of Lamentations to the Psalms to the words of Jesus as he hung on the cross. This week we will seek to name some of our deepest pains and bring them before God as we write and address our laments to God, trusting that God hears us and welcomes our honesty and boldness. Laments generally include 4 sections: Name and describe the grievance or concern and express this to God, affirm one's faith in God's love and mercy, call upon God to act, and restate your confidence in God's faithfulness and sovereignty.

Rather than being a list of complaints, the lament offers a means to express the kind of sorrow or pain that comes from events or experiences that are out of our control and that seem irreparably damaged. Instead of surrendering to anger and paralyzing grief, the act of lament enables us to name the grief and to acknowledge that the Kingdom of God is not yet a reality in our daily life. We know God is loving and just, but we also know that pain is part of the human experience. Consider the opening verse of Psalm 13:

“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?”

Yet even amid such pain, one who laments before God does so as an act of faith in God and also as an affirmation of one's relationship with our ever-present God. We boldly name the injustice and pain, and we dare to ask for God's comfort and help. Biblical lament often includes a statement of trust that God will change the situation or right the injustice, which one might call the “But...” moment. After the vivid description of one's grief comes the recognition of one's reliance on and affirmation of God's faithfulness. The “But...” moment later in Psalm 13 puts it this way:

“But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with me.”

And finally comes the confident call upon God to act with grace, as in Psalm 10:

“Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed.”

Try writing your own lament, referring to the 4 sections outlined above.

- Name your pain or concern:
What is the pain upon your heart this day? What troubles your soul?
How does this affect you? How does it make you feel?
If you were sharing these emotions with a dear friend, how might you describe them?
- Affirm your faith in God’s love and mercy:
What experiences in your past remind you of God’s faithfulness to you?
What evidence of God’s glory and sovereignty do you see in others or in nature?
What Scripture passage brings you encouragement and hope?
- Call upon God to act:
What do you want God to do?
What specific outcome would you like God to direct?
How can you make this request in the most honest and trusting way?
- Close your lament with a statement of assurance that God has heard your petitions and that you trust God to act with mercy and justice, or perhaps voice the new hope and strength you’ve received through your “conversation” with God.

Terrarium

In your box are a few small rocks for your terrarium and a large rock to share as part of our Palm Sunday processional. Paint on your rocks something that symbolizes our absence from our church building, but the unity of our church family nonetheless. We hope you will bring your large painted rock to ELPC for our outdoor Palm Sunday Processional, as our stones will be placed in the Sanctuary on Easter morning – a visual representation of the steadfast reality of our unity in Christ, even in a season of feeling scattered.

Place smaller rocks on top of soil leaving room in the center for your plant.

FSR Resource

Here is a prayer of lament, written by a member of ELPC.

Great and gracious God of love,

You have warned us that the true cost of discipleship is high.
And yet, we sit in the comfort of our homes, lamenting the racism we see in our streets,
but not in our own hearts. We lack the courage to put ourselves at risk for the cause of
justice.

Let your disciples be disciples again.

We claim to worship and serve your people and bare angry thoughts and words to those
who dishonor your name.

And yet, we fail to see the injustice of our own lives and service.

Let our lives and service reflect our token words of worship.

We condemn those in our country who abuse power and privilege.

And yet, within our own denomination, there are those who experience that same abuse
from their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let the church be your church again.

And Lord, we rail against white privilege, racism and white fragility in other congregations.

And yet, we are blind to the privilege, racism and fragility within our own witness.

Let the Cathedral of Hope be the cathedral of hope again.

Let the Cathedral of Hope be.

Let the cathedral be hope.

Scripture

John 12:1-8

12 Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Reflection

The writer of the gospel of John was both a literary master and a gifted theologian. For example, the story of Jesus being anointed with an expensive perfume had already been told in the earlier gospel of Mark. (Go back and read Mark 14:3-11.) The woman in that earlier story is never named, nor is any reason given for her act of incredible generosity. After she finishes, Judas Iscariot leaves the room and sets in motion his plan to betray Jesus. But in John's gospel, this story is moved to a time right after the raising of Lazarus, and the act of lavish devotion is assigned to Lazarus' sister, Mary. And the main objector to this act is now Judas Iscariot, who is described as a thief and a hypocrite.

By placing the story here, immediately after the raising of Lazarus, the theme of love even in the midst of death is emphasized. Lazarus's resuscitation is a miracle that is both attracting crowds and disturbing the religious leaders. Symbolically he has about him the "aroma of death" having only recently emerged from a literal tomb. Similarly, Jesus is heading for his final days, and the nard poured over him was a perfume used to anoint the dead - something which Jesus alludes to in verse 7. So, the gift of Mary becomes a powerful way to see Jesus as the Lord over both life and death.

Questions for reflection: Think about the courage it took to disrupt a meal, an event crowded with people, by performing an act of loving devotion all could see. Have there been moments when you have been willing to acknowledge your devotion publicly? Have you ever been the recipient of an act of generous devotion or caring? What are gifts we can give for which cost is not a factor? Think of one or two generous women you've known in your life and offer a prayer of gratitude for the blessing they've been to you.

Practice

Seeing Blessing in Others

Each time you see another person today, practice seeing their goodness - their courage, their wisdom, their vulnerability, their unique beauty. Know that, just like you, this person wants to be happy and free of suffering. Know that just like you, they face their share of human struggles. Silently offer - "I see you. I see your goodness, Thank you for being here." And offer a silent wish for their well-being - "May you feel held in God's love." "May you know your beauty in God's eyes."

All we encounter in creation is everything that God loves. To behold God in all things is to live in complete joy.

Julian of Norwich

And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being.

Black Elk

"Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only we could all see ourselves as we really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other."

Thomas Merton

Terrarium

Terrarium instructions – Tie a rope or ribbon onto your terrarium as a symbol of the ways we are connected to one another. We encourage you to stay connected this week to our church family by BEING a blessing to someone else. Here are a few suggestions ...

1. make a phone call
2. write a note/card
3. offer to do an errand
4. offer to do a chore-shovel snow,
work in garden, clean
5. cook/bake something
6. take someone to a doctor's appointment
7. send/drop off some flowers
8. pick up some books from the library/bookstore
9. rent a movie
10. serenade someone

BSR Resource

John Lewis talks about love in action and redemptive suffering (two things we see in Mary's actions in this week's scripture and Jesus' life) and about how his faith shaped his work for racial justice. In an extraordinary conversation with the late congressman, taped in Montgomery, Alabama, during a pilgrimage 50 years after the March on Washington. It offers a rare look inside his wisdom, the civil rights leaders' spiritual confrontation within themselves, and the intricate art of nonviolence as "love in action."

<https://podcast.app/remembers-john-lewis-e108507796/>

Families with TEENS: in the first 10 minutes of this episode John Lewis talks about his childhood and how at age 15 he heard Martin Luther King talk about our ability to change things. He had hope that was often met with disappointment, but he continued to have faith. Listen to the first 10 minutes of this interview and then discuss as a family ...

What do you hope will change in this world?
What gives you faith/hope that will happen?

Scripture

Matthew 26:36-46

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." ³⁹ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." ⁴⁰ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹ Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³ Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Families with TEENS:

Go on a walk together. Let your teen(s) choose the path.

As you walk play a game of I-spy (I know this is a kid's game but it can be fun for all ages I PROMISE!). You can look for colors but you can also get creative.

I spy something delicious ...

I spy something fluffy ...

I spy something stinky ...

Reflection

Jesus knew that Judas had departed to set his betrayal in motion. Jesus leaves the place where he has shared the Passover meal with the disciples, and the eleven who remained accompanied Jesus to the place called Gethsemane, the place of the oil press at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Leaving eight disciples at the entrance to the garden, Jesus goes further into the garden, taking Peter, James, and John with him. Jesus is tired, sorrowful, and distressed, and grieved to the point of death. As he has done many times before, Jesus seeks his Father in prayer. Jesus knows his death is imminent.

Jesus retreats to the place of “pressing” to pray. When we are surrounded by others, distracted by noise, or our attention is divided it is difficult to hear from God. When we experience despair, sorrow, and grief, retreating into our prayer closet, finding a quiet place, or taking a walk to commune with and entreat God’s assurance, comfort, and peace is fitting. Three times Jesus returns and finds that Peter, James, and John have fallen asleep. Although Jesus is disappointed and angered by the disciples’ inability to stay awake, this is a “cup” that only Jesus can bear, bearing the sins of humanity on the cross. The three disciples’ spirits are willing to be obedient and to honor Jesus’ command to stay awake, but their bodies are tired, their flesh is weak.

In Peter, James, and John, we witness the fundamental struggle between our flesh that resists God, and our spirit that responds to God. Paul confesses, *“For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh [my human nature, my worldliness—my sinful capacity]. For the willingness [to do good] is present in me, but the doing of good is not”* (Romans 7:18 Amplified Bible Version). Five weeks ago, we began our Lenten journey. I suspect that we have grappled with our flesh, as often Lent is much like the beginning of a calendar year, a time when we try to reset, to reorient, to overcome habits or establish new ones. I trust that over the course of the forty days of Lent, like Jesus, we have taken the time to steal away, prayed, and sought God’s strength, comfort, and peace, and found that we are never alone, for God is with us, always.

Practice

Walking (or *Moving) Meditation [AUDIO Available Online](#)

from Zen Teacher Thich Naht Hanh and Christian Contemplative, James Finley

“Meditation means to be in the process of realizing that God is wholly present in each step along our way. It is to be slowly awakening to the divine destination of our journey manifesting itself in the divinity of our own breathing, our own beating heart, of this simple step, of this simply being who we are.” James Finley

In our ordinary lives, we often feel pressured to move ahead and to get somewhere. We often feel we have to hurry. When we practice walking meditation, we let ourselves slow down. We don't walk in order to arrive somewhere, but simply to enjoy walking, being nobody going nowhere with nothing to do. The purpose is to be in the present moment and, aware of our breathing and our walking, to enjoy each step. When we are able to take one step peacefully and happily, we are working for the peace and happiness of the whole world. Walking meditation is a wonderful practice.

Find a place where you can walk slowly. If you are inside, find a place where you can walk for a few feet, turn around, and walk in the other direction. Begin by pausing, standing still, feeling your feet on the ground. Let your arms and hands rest in any way that feels comfortable; your eyes relaxed with the gaze slightly downward. Take a long slow breath in and a long slow breath out. Breathing in knowing you are breathing in, and breathing out knowing you are breathing out, helps you to arrive in the present moment. “Standing still, with your gaze lowered, breathing slowly and naturally, stand in the whole-hearted awareness of simply standing. Standing in this way, with deep devotion, is itself a deep practice, one empowered to awaken an intimate realization of the divinity of standing. When it feels interiorly right to you to begin your first step, shift your weight to your right leg. Slowly and mindfully lift your left foot from the ground, move it forward in space, and let it come to rest again on the ground ahead of your right foot. Then, in one continuous slow movement, shift your weight to your left leg. Neither pausing nor rushing, slowly begin lifting your right foot from the ground. Move it slowly forward and lower it gently ahead of the left foot. Walk on like this in one continuous movement.” (James Finley)

Aware of the breath, and aware of the contact between your feet and the earth, walk slowly and gently, as if you are kissing the earth with each step. The essence of the practice is childlike wonder with each step. Each mindful step is life, each step is peace. That is why we don't have to

hurry. That is why we slow down. We move slowly forward, but we don't go anywhere. We're not being drawn by a goal. We let ourselves be nobody going nowhere with nothing to do. Letting ourselves be moved in this way, we smile....

When the mind wanders and you find yourself lost in thought, please do not worry. Once you notice you are lost in thought, you are no longer lost. The practice is simply to let go of following thoughts and to gently return awareness to the feeling of the soles of the feet as they touch the earth, and the feeling of the breath flowing in and the breath flowing out. You might imagine that, with each step, a flower blooms. If you are walking outside and wish to enjoy a beautiful tree or a passing cloud or glistening snow, simply stop walking. Then, while maintaining awareness of your breathing, let yourself really enjoy what is before you. Bring a half-smile to your lips and maintain it naturally. After awhile, continue walking again, returning attention to your steps. Enjoy walking meditation in this way each day for 10 to 20 minutes, or as long as you are able. When you practice regularly, life will gradually transform. You will become more aware of what you are doing. All beings, from near and far, large and small, will become peaceful as you take your peaceful steps.

*Moving Meditation: If you are in a wheelchair, or using a walker or cane, you can also enjoy this meditation. Let your movements be slow, mindful of breathing in and breathing out as you move slowly forward with awareness of the world around you. When the mind wanders, simply let go of following thoughts, and return again to the feeling of movement, and of the breath flowing in and flowing out. You might also enjoy practicing walking meditation by watching someone near you who is walking mindfully. Notice the feeling of relaxing as you watch this person practice walking meditation, and let awareness include the sensation of the breath flowing in and out as you gaze.

Terrarium

Our succulent represents the hope and life God gives in the deserts of our lives. Using your fingers gently dig a hole in the center of your terrarium for your plant. It's okay to dig to the bottom of your container. Take succulent in hand and gently squeeze pot to loosen and release plant from pot. Gently break up the soil/roots of the plant and place in terrarium. Depending on the size of your plant you may want to plant it more on its side and allow the plant to drape over the edge of the opening. Gently pat soil around succulent and rearrange your rocks as necessary.

Water the plant lightly- enough to moisten the soil but not so much that water pools up in the bottom. Start with 1/8c. of water and add more if necessary. You may use a spray bottle as well.

Succulents like a lot of light and not a lot of water. Keep your terrarium in a place where it will receive the most sunlight and only water once the soil is bone dry. It's better to under-water especially since there are no drainage holes.

PSR Resource

Like Jesus called the disciples to awaken, we are called in *The Hill We Climb* by Amanda Gorman to rise up. [Watch her read the poem here](#)

So let us leave behind a country
better than the one we were left with.
Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.
We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west.
We will rise from the windswept northeast,
where our forefathers first realized revolution.
We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states.
We will rise from the sunbaked south.
We will rebuild, reconcile and recover.
And every known nook of our nation and
every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful.
When day comes we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.