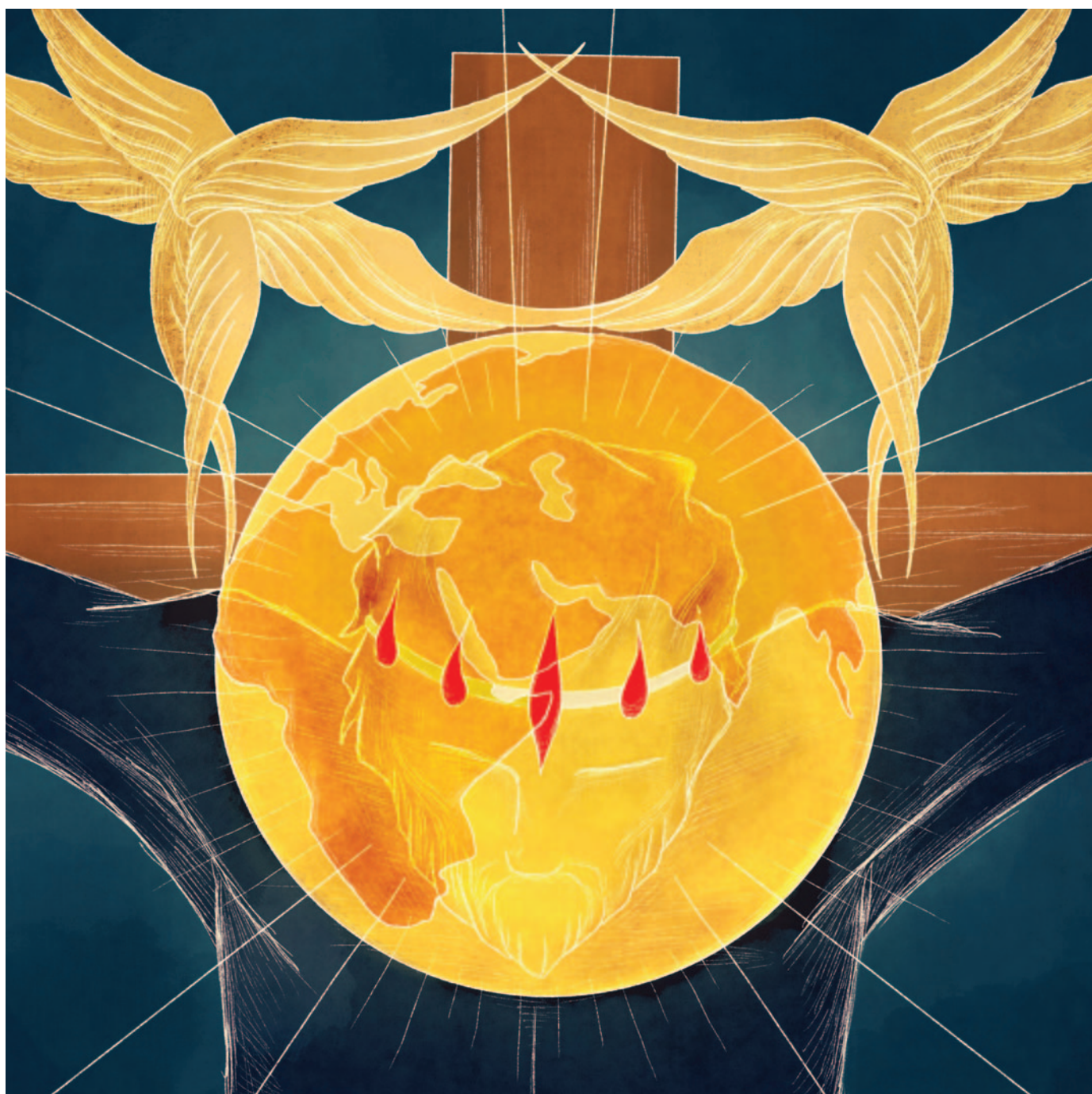




# Isaiah: Prophet of Rebuke, Prophet of Hope

A Lenten Devotional through  
the Communities for Spiritual Vitality





# Communities for Spiritual Vitality

**[WWW.COMMUNITIESFORSPIRITUALVITALITY.ORG](http://WWW.COMMUNITIESFORSPIRITUALVITALITY.ORG)**

The Communities for Spiritual Vitality is an initiative of the Diocese of Vermont and the Diocese of Massachusetts to foster a spirit of depth and abundance among our lay leadership community during a time of vigorous change in the reality of “church”.

## **OUR MISSION**

Communities for Spiritual Vitality supports cohorts of lay leaders through offering spiritual formation, a safe space for mutually vulnerable fellowship, and regular contact with pastoral companionship. Through these three tiers, leaders are strengthened in the Holy Spirit to bring spiritual renewal and living hope (1 Peter 1:3) more fully into the mission and practice of their local worship contexts.

The *Communities* also seeks to create, collect, and promote resources for the spiritual renewal of all God's people, with a special focus on opportunities in and for those in New England. Resources such as past devotionals, prayerbooks in the Anglican tradition, opportunities to pray with others, and calendar of events can be found on our website. If you worship in any of the New England dioceses of the Episcopal Church and have something you would like to offer, or to learn more, please contact us at [communities@diovermont.org](mailto:communities@diovermont.org).

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## ISAIAH: PROPHET OF REBUKE, PROPHET OF HOPE

**AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH**, someone comes up to me in a communion line with their hands crossed over their chest—they want a blessing rather than the elements. With my hand on their shoulder, I begin:

*Hear these words of God through the prophet Isaiah, “I have called you by name; you are mine... precious in my sight and honored and I love you...”*

Hand moved to their forehead, I seal the proclamation with the sign of the cross:

*And the blessing of this God—Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit—be with you this day and always. Amen.*

These are truly consoling words to a people on the cusp of return from exile. They shout aloud a message of belovedness, providence, and security that transcends all circumstances. Engaging any other reality (world calamities, the fall of a kingdom, the wasting of creation, the pain of our own sin—all known in different ways during the time of the prophet) without this prevenient truth can be deadly to the soul.

Perhaps we do well, then, to take a moment at the beginning of Lent, to cross and anoint ourselves for the wilderness season ahead. The words above will do. So would many others that you will discover in the weeks ahead as you read Isaiah with this devotional.

Isaiah<sup>1</sup> is truly a prophet of comfort. First, because of his affirmation of God’s love and his sure trust in the victory of God’s dominion. Second, because of his sheer *familiarity*. Isaiah is the prophet above all others that has captured the imagination of the Judeo-Christian faithful. Liturgical Christians will find that Isaiah drenches the liturgy—from the “Holy, Holy, Holy” of every eucharistic prayer, to three morning prayer canticles, to the many appointed readings in Advent, Lent, Holy Week, and even the Old Testament option assigned for Ash Wednesday. Isaiah is quoted by many New Testament writings and provides many of the psalms that comprise the prayer language of the Church. It is also a main proof text for Messianic hope in both Judaism and Christianity. As we turn toward Lent, we specifically do so under the banner of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant, oracles we have seen most fully embodied in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Yet, for all of its familiarity, very few of us actually read Isaiah from cover to cover. As modern mainline Christians, we take our bible in “sound bites,” just as much as our news! Our lectionary soundbites tend to omit the “cringy” bits that often hold our feet to the fire—not only pietistically, but ethically. There was real political intrigue behind the despondency of Isaiah’s people—Assyria, Babylon, Persia, the list goes on<sup>2</sup>. The Mosaic and Deuteronomy law that we find so dry as contemporary Christians is the backbone of Isaiah’s ethical indictments against practices such as “joining house to house” against poor neighbors. Isaiah’s people were so weary of trusting God that they had run to Egypt (seriously, Egypt) for political asylum, as if they had forgotten about the Exodus altogether—not just any spiritual freedom, but God’s mighty liberation *from* Egypt! Isaiah’s preaching is specific, contextual, and earthy; his rebuke—tart, not just to conquering empires but to his own people. Lectionaries seem to think we cannot handle that!

<sup>1</sup> Jewish and Christian consensus has long been that there are at least two authors of the book we now know as Isaiah: one writing shortly before the Babylonian exile and one writing shortly before or after its conclusion as people were resettling in Jerusalem. While a few of the authors in this volume touch on this reality, it is not essential to engaging the spiritual themes of the text. The editor holds the canonical view that the Spirit of God is the ultimate author of Holy Scripture and that She will always lead those who remain open to the true Word of God—Jesus Christ. It is He whom we seek in these weeks of Lent-Easter pilgrimage. Without a relationship—with the text, with a living tradition vis Church community, and with God—none of our scholarly discovery will provide the abundant life promised. With these things, God’s faithfulness will always lead us aright.

<sup>2</sup> Even in seven weeks, it is challenging to include every word of Isaiah. Thus, many of the oracles to the nations have been omitted from this devotional, though representative passages are included. Those who wish to read those oracles in full on their own are encouraged to seek out sound commentary and interpretive companions.



Yet, reading the reflections ahead, it is clear that most of us *know* we need the rebuke as much as the hope to call us back to ourselves, and especially to God. If God alone will be glorified, all other idols must fall. Isaiah and our writers lay bare how many idols can infest a human heart, let alone a society. For this reason, Isaiah really is a powerful Lent-Easter companion; his particular and contextual writing is as contemporary as ever. Thus, the many resonances you will find in the included reflections—with each other, world events, and ancient Israel are appropriate. If you persevere with Isaiah this Lent and into Easter, you will find that he uproots you and challenges you before he uplifts and plants you. He will trouble your spirit, poke into your politics, and call into question the genuineness of your social ethic and sincerity of your desire for justice.

Some may be tempted to skip over a passage that sounds repetitive, or a reflection that “speaks to the choir;” they may be content to find the easy target for the prophet’s words in the world about us. This would all be a mistake. The chisel is chipping at stone, seeking the heart of flesh that can at last drink with rejoicing from the spring of salvation when Easter comes.

Take your time with this devotional. Engaging with any prophet faithfully is arduous and takes time. May you be well supported by the companionship of the many people who have worked faithful to bring this journey to us, above all the Spirit of our Living God.



## HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

**THIS DEVOTIONAL** covers the days between Ash Wednesday and the Second Sunday of Easter. It generally moves chronologically. However, every Sunday is a mini oasis, offering one of the more hopeful passages of Isaiah. Additionally, the middle of Lent is often celebrated as “Rose Sunday,” a slight lifting in the rigor of Lent at the halfway point. That whole week, as well as Easter Week, features readings that reflect that tone, drawing from the lectionary whenever possible. Lent-Easter is really one cycle in the Christian year, and this devotional attempts to give a sense of that unity by including some of both seasons.<sup>3</sup>

Every day includes several elements: the **Collect of the Day** from Lesser Feasts and Fasts, an **assigned reading** from the prophet Isaiah (with live links in the digital version), and a **reflection**.

The most robust engagement with the material will progress through the page in the order presented. Start by praying the collect of the day as a means of inviting the Spirit into your devotional time and focusing yourself on the themes of the Lent-Easter season.

Next, read the Scripture before you read the reflection. What word or phrase **shimmers** or **stings** for you? What do you see, taste, smell, touch, and hear as you enter into the reading? Where is the passage speaking to world circumstances for you? Where is it speaking to your own inner reality? Consider: **who** is speaking and who is spoken about—the prophet, the nation, God, the Messiah, the human soul? A beautiful, mystical aspect of Isaiah is that many often blend together. There is a union of identities at times that will be most potently known to us in the human and divine natures of Christ and the union of Christ and the church/soul.

Then, take in the reflection. Again, notice where you are drawn in and where you draw back. Notice what causes your body to open and what causes it to contract. What is God saying to you through your fellow disciple?

CONTINUED

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the devotional, the page banners reflect the color of the season. Purple for Lent, Rose of Laetare Sunday and the week following, Red for Holy Week, and White for Easter.

Finally, close in prayer. Your prayer may be a confession, a petition, a gratitude, adoration, silence, writing, or a conversation. Just take some time, perhaps with a journal, to rest in what you have received before moving to the next thing. No matter what else you do, *pray for the person who wrote the reflection, their worship context, and their diocese.* Ask God to bless them throughout this day and give thanks for God's work in their life and their generosity to us.

Throughout the devotional, visual art offers additional meditations on the prophet or the season. The art is meant to offer a complementary way to meditate on the season. You may gaze upon a piece of art and ask the same questions offered in the above paragraph about the Scripture and reflection. God speaks in many mysterious ways!



## GRATITUDE AND A WORD ABOUT ART

**THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE** to thank in a resource of this scope. First, I offer overflowing gratitude to the bishops of Vermont and Massachusetts, the Rt. Rev. Shannon McVean-Brown and the Rt. Rev. Julia Whitworth, for their ongoing encouragement of collaboration in general, their enthusiasm for resources for our shared grown in Christ, and their support for the Communities for Spiritual Vitality initiative. Both bishops have also graciously offered reflections to this volume (Palm Sunday and Second Sunday of Easter.)

Thank you, also, to the fifty authors without whom this devotional would not exist. Partnering with them through many drafts has been the greatest delight of this project. I look forward to rediscovering each of them again in the days ahead. Their faithful wrestling with a challenging text, especially in January when people experienced much personal and collective upheaval, has been a generous, and for some costly, gift. Thank you.

Thank you to the many people who have supported the practical work of this project. First, Ms. Hannah Cooper, project administrator for The Communities, who worked alongside me from vision to completion in every aspect of the project. Second, Ms. Susan Kochinskas, who has contributed countless hours of graphic design to make this booklet as beautiful as possible. Her companionship through the minutia of that process was a real treasure, for a second year in a row. Finally, colleagues of the Province I formation network and beyond, who reached into their respective networks so that we could have every diocese of the Province represented this year. Thank you, all!

Finally, a word about the artwork. Thank you! Each person represented regards art as a ministry. At the same time, many of them rely on its proceeds and our goodwill for their livelihood. The artists and limited information about the artists' intent are at the back of the booklet. All work has been purchased or otherwise used under license. Please pray for the artists whose work you encounter here, and please respect their offering by not reproducing their work for any other purpose. For your covenant of respect and for their work among us, I give thanks!

And now, let us begin:

Hear these words of God, through the prophet Isaiah: *I have called you by name, you are mine, precious in my sight, and honored and I love you...*

The Rev. adwoa Wilson, ObjN  
Communities for Spiritual Vitality  
Dioceses of Vermont and Massachusetts

# Isaiah: Prophet of Rebuke, Prophet of Hope

A Lenten Devotional through  
the Communities for Spiritual Vitality



The Rev. adwoa Wilson, volume editor

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the broken-hearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*

— Isaiah 61:1-2a

*Today these words are fulfilled in your hearing*

— Jesus Christ (Luke 4:21)







## ASH WEDNESDAY



### COLLECT

*Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 58: 1–12

**As I sit down** to write this reflection in early January, images of the wildfires this month in Los Angeles and its environs are seared into my brain. The devastation is unreckonable. It may be that by the time I sit back down to read this in early March, not even two months later, new horrors, equally devastating, may consume all my attention, and I will look up and think, “Oh yeah, those fires were terrible.” If I’m good, I might even say a little prayer for the hundreds of thousands afflicted in southern California—those people, human siblings, who lost their lives, their homes, their livelihoods, and their sense of peace and safety. And then maybe I’ll say another little prayer for the victims of the latest disaster, natural or man-made. And then maybe I’ll make a small donation to a worthy organization doing on-the-ground work. And I will wonder, “Where are you God? Do you not see all this suffering?”

Every year I am struck by the powerful irony at the heart of our Ash Wednesday liturgy. In the name of the Church, I will invite my congregation to the observance of a holy Lent. The prayerbook lists some general examples: self-examination and repentance; prayer, fasting, and self-denial; reading and meditating on God’s holy Word. And yet the readings would have highlighted just how little God thinks about our pious observances when done for their own sakes.

“Look,” God says through Isaiah, “you serve your own interest on your fast day.” As for fasting, so for praying and self-denial in the wake of wildfires—I serve my own interest. I long to salve my own conscience for the part I know I play as a 21<sup>st</sup>-century American in superheating the planet, in sponsoring violence all over the world, and in ignoring the resulting impoverishment of hundreds of millions of human siblings.

But the fast that God chooses is radical. It is not a band-aid for guilt or a crutch for self-justification. God’s liberating action always starts at the bottom of our artificial hierarchies and turns them upside-down so that we all might be turned right-side-up. Yes, the prophet calls us to specific actions that are in every way as holy and necessary as what the liturgy instructs, to share my bread with the hungry and to bring the homeless poor into my house. Even these, however, can become as empty and performative as any rote prayer or insincere fast or the donation I have on autopay. God cannot be bribed, even if I were to have sterling social justice credentials.

No, these are not conditional clauses. We do not earn our vindication. God’s saving help is not a reward for our work, however well-intentioned. Rather, Isaiah commands us—just as our Jesus will—to liberate, feed, house, and clothe people because God’s light always shines there first, among the least, the lost, and the lowly. And if we—so tired of tripping over ourselves in the dark—want to finally see that light, we must dare to let go of our pieties and find God where She is to be found.

Isaac Martinez  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Melrose, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts

## THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY



### COLLECT

*Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 1: 1–20

*Only if we accept the whole Christ, for the whole of life, can everything be changed and renewed. It is a lie and a delusion to think that Jesus can be accepted in part, for only part of life. The spirit of life tolerates no choosing of guiding principles or elements of faith, no selecting from God's truth, by a self-willed spirit. Truth is indivisible.* —Eberhard Arnold (Inner Land, 1935)

**WITH ITS POETRY**, inspiring call for justice, and complex portrayal of God, Isaiah 1 is one of the most stunning chapters of biblical prophetic poetry. Themes of the fate of Jerusalem, desolation, and ruin, the nature of proper worship, lament and repentance, the hope of divine forgiveness, and the necessity of repentance. Many scholars think Isaiah 1 was put together to introduce the book as a whole, with the first verse functioning as a title. The chapter begins a conversation and is not necessarily the last word.

The poem is a call to living a holy life in all its fullness. The final quarter of the chapter is a very stiff tonic for the soul but an appropriate invitation for Lent.

*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. "Come now, let us argue it out, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land..."*

Verses 16–17 emphasize that God's demands are not limited to worship but also entail specific social and ethical expectations. This perspective may seem countercultural to some contemporary readers, who view religion as a private matter separate from other parts of life. However, for Christians, I interpret this as a call to "Thick Christianity."

The NRSV translation that our sins "shall" be like snow, suggests that forgiveness is inevitable, but "may" is another possible translation. This rendering would be more consistent with the final verses, in which the people's fate depends on their response to God's offer. Another wordplay highlights the starkness of the decision: depending on their choice, the people will either "eat the good of the land" or "be eaten (devoured) by the sword."

This open-ended conclusion enables the poem to transcend its likely historical context in eighth-century BCE Judah. Its direct address ("you, your") invites contemporary audiences into its world. Do we, too, enthusiastically worship God but fail to oppose injustice? Does our complicity in oppression give the lie to our prayer that God's kingdom will come?

Despite its stinging words of indictment, this text ultimately offers good news. Human frailty and failure need not have the final say. God remains committed to God's people, even in the face of repeated rejection by them.

## THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY CONTINUED

We who love God can still take solace in God's faithfulness to us. With this solace, we can accept the invitation to "Thick Faith" this Lent, as we learn to follow the whole of Christ.

The Rev. Canon Dr. Walter B. A. Brownridge  
Christ Episcopal Church, Montpelier, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



IF WE PERSEVERE PERSEVERE | ELIZABETH WANG

## FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY



### COLLECT

*Support us, O Lord, with your gracious favor through the fast we have begun; that as we observe it by bodily self-denial, so we may fulfill it with inner sincerity of heart; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 1:23 – 2:3

**THE MAIN PRINCIPLE** of Improv is “Yes, and.” The idea is to embrace what the other person is saying and add onto it. This expands the scene as a broader experience unfolds—and that’s where the treasure lies. These words of Isaiah are a “Yes, and” challenge to embrace and live out God’s concerns, particularly during this reflective Lenten season.

Chapter 1 begins with the people of Jerusalem, who had rebelled against God. After pronouncing judgment on their meaningless religious rituals, they are told to “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.” (1:17)

He then focuses on Jerusalem’s leaders and rulers, who chase money and partner with those who help them use their power for self-interest. Those who are in need and oppressed are not “on the page or on the stage”—they are completely ignored. Yet, God himself, the Lord Almighty, will remove these leaders and install ones who transform Jerusalem to “the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City” (1:26).

In the “last days,” (ch. 2) God’s temple and worship will become prominent, and all nations will flock to it, and there will be a time of profound peace. This is because the people of the world are attracted to the ways of God and want to know how to live. The Message Bible describes the “why” this way: “He’ll show us the way he works so we can live the way we’re made.”

We are challenged to say “yes” to being transformed in this attractive new community. I grew up in a religious background that might be characterized as being mostly about me – my relationship with God, what God did in my life, and my influence on people in my immediate circle. From this lens, during Lent I’m challenged to consider how Jesus can impact all of my life, whether my spiritual activities are real (or just rituals), and whether I’m making a difference with others. I want to repent, be transformed, and renewed.

But there is an “And” to this “Yes.” We are to care not only about our own conversion but also to join God’s concerns about leaders in our country and world, as well. I find that uncomfortable and unsettling. During Lent, we can embrace our responsibility for the evils in our country and fast and pray for our nation and the world. Part of repenting is being ashamed of looking to human “mighty men” for short-cuts to prosperity and deliverance (see 1:29–31, 2:22). We are to take up the causes of the oppressed.

Finally, we’re encouraged to hope, long for, and pursue God’s kingdom where God directly brings peace and justice in all the world. How can we work for this now? Even when God is visibly on-the-scene, people are drawn to following Christ because they are attracted to the love, help, and wholeness that comes with Jesus-life. Let’s contribute toward that today, together. As Isaiah 2:6 says, “Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

Garth Johnson  
St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Southborough, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts



## SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY



### COLLECT

*Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth your right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 2: 3–17

**AT BERKELEY DIVINITY SCHOOL** in New Haven, CT, the seminarians carry a unique processional cross fashioned from reforged rifle barrels entwined with lilies. It is an acknowledgment of the arms industry that has shaped the region for 200 years, and symbolic of the words we read today from the second chapter of Isaiah:

*...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more” (Isaiah 2:4, RSV).*

In this remarkable processional cross, old weapons have been reshaped and repurposed into something new.

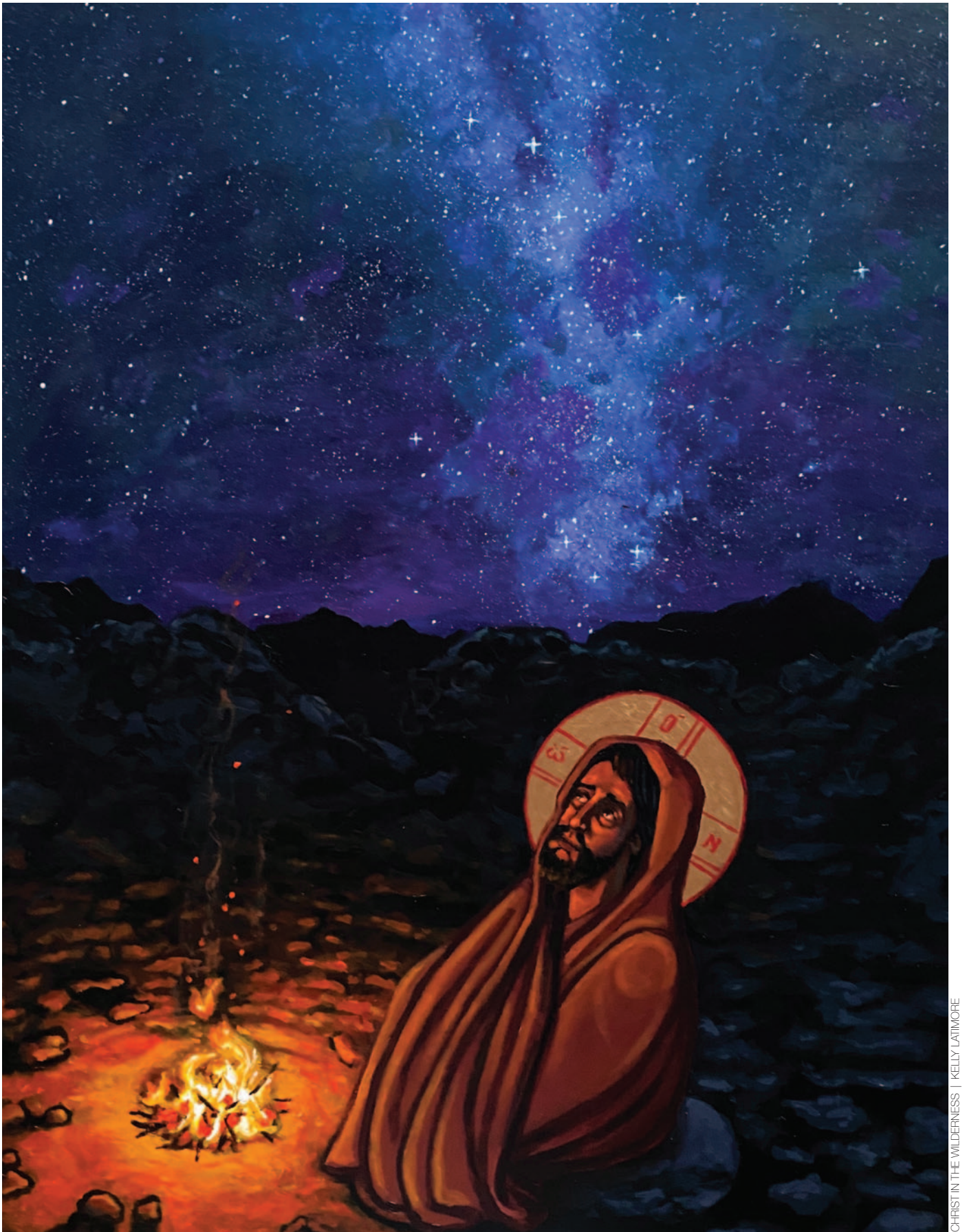
Yet when we examine today’s reading as a whole, we see that this is not a peace-filled passage. The prophet Isaiah speaks to God’s people during a time of conflict and decline, warning of exile and destruction. He points out their preoccupation with wealth and powerful armies, their leaders’ corruption and exploitation of the poor, and their idolatry—worshipping “what their own fingers have made” (vv. 7–8).

Those hopeful words about the end of warfare come in the midst of Isaiah’s prophecy about a day of reckoning “against all that is proud and lofty,” when “the haughtiness of people shall be humbled, and the pride of everyone shall be brought low” (vv. 14–17). Isaiah says conflict will cease because God “shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples” (v. 4). He offers a glimpse of God’s Kingdom, in which the mighty are brought low and the lowly lifted up; in which God is judge and arbiter, and the accoutrements of war are transformed into tools for growing food and sustaining life.

What do these ancient words call us to, as we prepare for the first Sunday of Lent? What kind of Savior are we seeking after, in this wilderness sojourn? Like Jesus’ first followers, we may be disappointed if we’ve been looking for a general. We may be surprised by a Messiah who came in human flesh and made himself vulnerable, who was tempted, hungered, felt anguish, and suffered pain.

As we journey through this Lenten season, what “weapons” are we being called to lay down? Can we release our desire to arbitrate, trusting instead in the justice and mercy of God? Imagine the transformation that might occur if we could only engage the world with our defenses down, as Christ did, reforging swords and armor into “plowshares and pruning hooks” for God’s work.

Heather Caulfield-Mills  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Shelburne, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS | KELLY LATIMORE

## FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT



### COLLECT

*Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 9: 1–7

**DO YOU EVER WONDER** how Jesus lasted 40 whole days in the desert? I, for one, would not last forty whole minutes in a hot, arid place like that, especially without food, water, or air conditioning. It just sounds really miserable. I guess that is what makes it so much more amazing that Jesus perfectly refuses to give into the temptations of the devil during his time in the desert. But how did he do it?

How do any of us get through the hard times? What is it that allows us to bear the trials of our life and come out on the other side of them?

I think it has something to do with hope, the kind of hope that Isaiah is speaking about here. Hope that there is another side to any struggle we encounter. Where the joy of a full harvest is waiting for us to arrive, where there is peace and no more gloom.

Isaiah spends so much of his time calling the people of Judah to turn back to God and forsake the evils that have pulled them away from their love of God. And he knows (because God told him) that these people are not going to pay attention. They will not turn back and instead will face disaster. But what does he do, knowing about the impending doom on the horizon? He mixes in a message of hope, a message that God is not abandoning them in the struggles they will endure.

Isaiah realizes that they will not be able to avoid all heartache or pain. We also know well the kind of pain that he foretold to his community. We live in a world that is broken and hurting, where the presence of heartache, violence, hate, hunger, and fear are realities that so many face each and every day. Isaiah's response to this reality is to remind us that when we find ourselves in the desolate deserts, tempted by despair, we can cling to hope in God.

He tells us that we can place our hope in Emmanuel, "God with us." It is because God is with us that we can make it through the deserts and wild places of our life and of the world. We can turn toward the hope that God has promised on the other side of struggle or grief. In Lent and in life, we are called to return our attention to God, who is the Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace, and away from the temptations that pull us toward the despairing.

George Swenson  
Youth Formation and Safe Church Coordinator  
Episcopal Church of New Hampshire



## MONDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully increase in us your gifts of holy discipline, in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; that our lives may be directed to the fulfilling of your most gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 3: 1–15

**WE LIVE** in a world of turmoil. We may ask...where is God?

It can be difficult at times to see or feel the presence of God, and it's certainly easy to blame God for the troubles of the world and for our own challenges.

The scripture for today, brings us the anguish of the people of Judah as their society breaks down, and all the blame is placed on God. The leaders will be replaced with inexperienced and naive rulers, resulting in social chaos including open oppression and violence. This perennial possibility resonates today as well, and it can invoke a sense of dread and sadness.

So where is God? Right where God has always been: in us, in all that surrounds us, and far beyond. The love of God has never diminished, but we may have lost the ability to connect with that love.

The power of mindful presence is vital to renewing and maintaining that connection; we can take this Lenten time to work on reconnecting. For us to be present with God and each other, we must first be deeply present to ourselves. Are we able to tap into our holy souls so we can claim ourselves as children of God before we help others?

Being present means quieting our minds and bodies so we can know ourselves and begin to know God and the world around us. It is to live with a heart open to unconditional love, even when the world around us seems to be falling apart. This may require taking a step back from a situation, taking a deep breath, and slowing down to reconnect with our inner selves. The people of Judah would have most likely benefited from these practices.

It's easy to find ourselves caught up in the chaos of change, injustice, and downright destruction, just as the people of Judah found themselves. By bringing our quiet, connected selves to a situation, we can interject that peace with hopes of helping others who are swirling in emotional and physical pain.

Lent is a perfect time to take on a new practice of being present to ourselves, to others, and to the presence of God. The practices may look different for all of us, but the goal is for each of us to open up to our humanness and to welcome the presence of God that already resides within us. What practice will you take on for your Lenten journey? Blessings as you find your way to your inner self and our ever-loving God within.

The Rev. Deacon Lars J. Hunter  
St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Brattleboro, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



## TUESDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Grant to your people, Lord, grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only true God; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

**Isaiah 3:18; 4:2 – 5:7**

**THERE'S A LOT** to unpack in today's reading, what with strange phrases like “the filth of the daughters of Zion.” In order to reflect, it's important to know some of Isaiah's terminology first.

“Daughters of Zion” refers to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the city itself symbolizing the entire people of Israel. “The heart of Jerusalem” represents the core of the nation's spiritual and moral life—in a city that was both a center of worship AND rebellion against God.

The Lord washing away filth and bloodstains, therefore, is the purifying from moral corruption, guilt, sin, and the consequences of that sin (particularly violence and injustice)—purification necessary for the people to be restored to a right relationship with God.

How heartbroken this vintner is! His pride and joy, the project into which he clearly put his heart and soul as well as his labor, has yielded sour grapes, despite all his efforts to set it up for success.

Now as then, instead of the justice and righteousness that should flow from God's care and provision for us, there is violence and injustice all around. So many of God's children live in fear and want. We do not yet have the collective moral compass to keep up with the challenges presented by manipulated “information” created by social media algorithms designed to keep us anxious and angry, and the explosion of artificial intelligence that further makes us question what is true or real.

But lest we strictly point outward at people in and with power, we need to examine the violence and injustice within us, too. As the kind of people who read devotional booklets through Lent, we may manage our inner violence so well that we forget it's there. But to one degree or another, it is, and it can be exploited. Depending on one's background and economic situation, it can be easy to overlook the ways in which we participate in injustice—and anxiously turn away when we catch a glimpse. But examine we must, if we are to grow in righteousness.

We have our work cut out for us in this strange time, but Isaiah makes it clear that right relationship with God involves us each acting justly and working together for justice without violence.

The good news is that God is always ready to accept our repentance, to restore us, and to provide us the refuge and shelter we need to bear good fruit.

Nanci Gordon  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Rutland, VT  
Diocese of Vermont

## WEDNESDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Bless us, O God, in this holy season, in which our hearts seek your help and healing; and so purify us by your discipline that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 5: 8–23

**GREED. LIES. ARROGANCE.** The description of social corruption in this passage feels ripped from the headlines. All around us we see the wickedness Isaiah calls out. And as with his nation, so with ours: such wanton depravity has brought about its collapse. The call of the prophet is not to repent and reform. No, it is too late for that. His vocation is to make the harsh pronouncement: Yahweh, the Holy One, has rendered his judgment upon ancient Israel. His sentence is declared upon the guilty. The land is to be conquered, Jerusalem destroyed, the people carried into exile. Nothing will stop it.

How did this happen? Isaiah diagnoses a sick society, bemoaning the gluttony of the rich and powerful. The elites of his day have accrued ungodly wealth, buying up estates and building ever larger mansions. As a result, the poor have been pushed to the brink: Israel's "multitude is parched with thirst." The prophet presents two mindsets at work—the abundant mind and the scarcity mind. In the abundant mind, we attend to the goodness of God's creation; we are grateful for its largesse, and share it equitably with our neighbors. This solidarity produces a flourishing society, where lambs "graze as in their pasture."

In the scarcity mind, we focus only on what we lack, obsessed with our own security. There's never enough—we must hoard it all, get ours first, push others out. When such lust and selfishness abound, we create the very situation we wish to avoid. We despoil creation, turning God's abundance into a wasteland. Isaiah marvels at this self-destructive path. The pride of Israel's leaders offends him most. They flaunt their decadence, mock God, dare him to intervene. They gorge their appetites with the mouth of Sheol. They attack the moral order itself, calling evil good and good evil. Given such sin, can we blame the Lord for his outrage? Abraham Joshua Heschel puts it starkly: "God's anger is fierce because man's cruelty is infernal."

Today, we feel that divine anger. Like ancient Israel, America has betrayed its mission. Instead of being a city on a hill, we have allowed injustice to grow unchecked. The scarcity mind has run rampant, breeding a political madness that now consumes every pillar of the republic. Choking aid to the poor; acquitting the guilty for bribes; assaulting innocent immigrants; obliterating the truth. It is the God of the universe—no mere mortal—who condemns this iniquity, dragged along with cords of falsehood. Now, he gives us over to his terrible swift sword. "We the People" are going into exile—from our rights, our freedom, our very humanity. In this dark time, we must pray. Not that the Lord may spare us, but that through the death of the old, he might give birth to something new—a land of righteousness, to his everlasting glory. Through our Lenten sacrifice, may we enter into such Easter bliss: an abundant future, where all feed among the ruins.

Nick Cocomma  
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Brookline, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts

## THURSDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Strengthen us, O Lord, by your grace, that in your might we may overcome all spiritual enemies, and with pure hearts serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 6: 1–8

**ISAIAH’S DESCRIPTION** of God is quite powerful. He sees a majestic God on His throne, surrounded by seraphim, the highest-ranking angels, who proclaim His Holiness so strongly that the foundation shake and the temple is filled with smoke. These visual and physical echoes of the seraphim’s message intensify the strength of the message. There is no question about God’s purity, holiness, and power.

Isaiah’s worry that he is now finished—in trouble because he has sinned and has now seen the face of God—is addressed by one of the seraphim purifying his mouth with a coal from the fire—a coal so hot that even the seraphim must pick it up with tongs. The seraph proclaims Isaiah thus redeemed and purged of his sin by the coal. I wonder if this was a painful purification—how much did that hot coal hurt? Even if the fire was symbolic only, doesn’t it imply that this purification hurts just like a real coal would?

Then Isaiah hears God asking, “Whom shall I send?” not directly speaking Isaiah’s name, but asking the question. Was God hoping that Isaiah would sign up for this task? Was He asking Isaiah specifically, or was He offering it as challenge that He hoped Isaiah would accept? And Isaiah, not knowing what to expect, immediately asks God to send him.

I often find myself saying yes to things I don’t know much about or don’t know how to do, but that for some reason I think would be a good experience for me, will have a good outcome, or will help someone. There is something both scary and exciting to sign up for something immediately, before much is known about it. What drives that decision for me comes more from my heart, or my gut, than my head. And I always feel I have learned and grown from the experiences, and looking back, would definitely do them again. Why did Isaiah immediately answer God’s call? Was he inspired by being newly purified of his sins? Was he grateful to have been purified of sin and feel more at home in God’s presence? Did he want to share that with others?

Lent is a time when Christians typically make sacrifices or “give up” things to repent for prior sins or to feel closer to God. It can also be a time to accept new challenges. Bringing God’s message and living it is often a challenge, but one with great reward. Answering God’s call to repent and be purified of sin so that we may authentically live out and carry God’s message to others is what I see and hear in Isaiah’s story. It is as relevant now as it was back then.

Pat Sorenson  
St James Episcopal Church, Groveland, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts

## FRIDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Lord Christ, our eternal Redeemer, grant us such fellowship in your sufferings, that, filled with your Holy Spirit, we may subdue the flesh to the spirit, and the spirit to you, and at the last attain to the glory of your resurrection; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 7: 1–16

**WE ARE LIVING IN FRAUGHT TIMES**, you and I. As I write this on the day before the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, the United States is on the brink of a major transition in leadership. Regardless of one's personal politics, the turmoil and division in our communities are undeniably present: just going about my daily life (both in “real” life and in virtual community), I encounter mistrust, misinformation, and a seething sense of outrage from people all across the political spectrum. This goes for the local, national, and even international levels. I don't know about you, but living as a person of hope in an age of dissension and cynicism can be exhausting.

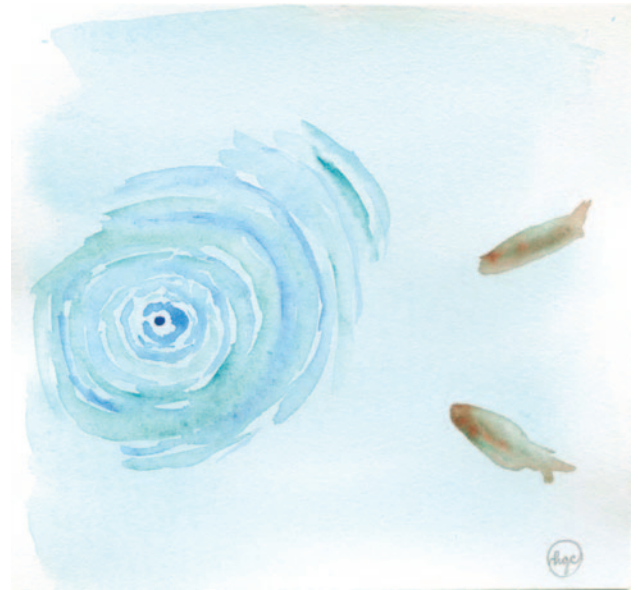
As a long-time pastor, I have often felt called upon to speak, act, and lead in decisive ways in times of trouble; that's what our culture values and encourages, I have found. It has taken me until my middle-aged years to understand myself more fully as a contemplatively-oriented Christian, and to realize that there is a place for deep stillness alongside action in our times of pain.

My heart finds comfort in the fact that, through the prophet Isaiah, God has a word to speak to contemplatives even (especially?) at such a time as this. Maybe it caught your eye as you read Isaiah 7, too: “Take heed, be quiet, do not fear.” That's what the Lord has Isaiah speak to Ahaz in his troubles.

Of course, many of us know that one of the most common pieces of good news throughout Hebrew and Christian scriptures is the admonition not to dwell in fear, but I was particularly drawn to the words right before that reminder: be quiet.

As a contemplative in times of turmoil, I find that I am most able to maintain my steady faith if I remember not only to be quiet, but to seek quiet—to go still in body and mind, which, for me is the only way to make space to hear God's powerful, loving, and courage-giving wisdom.

The voices of antagonism, vitriol, distrust, and disease are strong. The voice of Love that lives in silence is, I maintain, stronger. Thanks be to God!



RIPPLES | HANNAH GRUBE COOPER

The Rev. Susie Webster-Toleno  
Hospice Chaplain  
Brattleboro, VT



## SATURDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O God, by your Word you marvelously carry out the work of reconciliation: Grant that in our Lenten fast we may be devoted to you with all our hearts, and united with one another in prayer and holy love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 8: 11–22

*This is what the Lord says to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people.*

**HOW IS IT ISAIAH SPEAKS** to us from ~600BC? I know what he's describing, I have lived this life.

It is today.

People around us are talking, they're worrying about something. Whispers and closed-door conversations spill out into the street. Headlines panic the masses whether you read the articles or not. Our own friends and family become concerned. The worries knock at your door; they enter your house. We feel tension in the air, something isn't right. We justify to ourselves that "this many people can't be wrong, could they?" What started as a thought keeps growing and suddenly, all we see around us is the prevailing opinion that we should be panicked.

This feeling of dread can so easily sink its talons into us. When the worry is so big and widespread that we can't begin to imagine how we could fix it, it's not a big leap to want to flee. A desperate urge can grow, telling us to run from the problem. People begin looking in all sorts of places for refuge. Vices of all measure mask the problem and trick us into thinking we will feel better. We seek guidance from anyone who will listen, yearning a perspective that can help make sense of the chaos.

But you; be on your knees in the center of this storm. It spins around you and it grows in intensity. For those embroiled in the confusion, their perspectives will change at a disorienting rate as they thrash about. You can remain steadfast. You don't need to seek perspectives that ensnare you or pull you deeper into the storm. You have the Lord Almighty. Consult in His instruction. He is the center of all things, the calm, the Holy Place, and you, his child, can be a reminder of this for others. The Lord is a father whose love for you has no limits. He tells you with all sternness and compassion wrapped into one, not to get swept up. Listen to his advice, heed his warnings and you will be fine! You will be protected.

Isaiah tells us "They will see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness." That does not need to be our story.

For me, there is a different path, and I do not walk it alone.

Heather Belden  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Stoughton, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts



## SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT



### COLLECT

*O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 27: 1–6

**WHO, OR WHAT, IS LEVIATHAN** to us today? Is it the creature God made “for the sport of it!” as the psalmist says, or is it the seven-headed dragon, the symbol of chaos, that God subdued at the dawn of creation but is due to return at the end of the present era, to be defeated by YHWH’s holy and massive sword?

And where is the vineyard, tended and guarded by God?

Isaiah is referring here to Israel, God’s chosen: a people and a place. And YHWH will protect that vineyard against foes from the outside who attack it. He will march against those enemies and burn them out like briars and brambles that have invaded the vineyard. But if the chosen people choose not to live in right relationship with their God, they will have exiled themselves from their relationship to YHWH. Then God himself will enter the vineyard and burn to the ground all the briars and brambles that have polluted Israel’s determination to follow Him.

And when the people choose to return to YHWH by making peace with Him, returning from their moral and/or physical exile and re-entering into right relationship with Him, then they will enjoy the peace and security that comes from following God’s ways. They will prosper and flourish in the land.

In these fractious times, who or what are the Leviathans in our lives? Who or what brings disturbance, and keeps us from a right path? We can think of global issues and national ones, but isn’t it the personal ones that keep us from acting locally, where we can make a difference? Don’t we all have our “petite Leviathans”: habits or addictions that keep us from being the most whole version of ourselves we could be?

And what or where is the vineyard that keeps us secure? As ‘spiritual descendants’ of Israel, perhaps our vineyard is our hearts, the dwelling place of God’s Spirit. The people Israel were chosen and instructed and loved by God, agape’d<sup>1</sup> into being His people. And God loves so much that He never takes away our ability to say “no”. And God loves so much that He never takes away the consequences of our decisions. The brambles and briars grow up and choke the vineyard of our hearts, burying God’s teachings and love under the thorns and making God’s cleansing fire the only way to get to the root of His being within us, that we have allowed to be hidden.

The people Israel learned in exile from their vineyard that YHWH was contained not in a box, the Ark of the Covenant, or in the temple in Jerusalem, but was found within them in the words of the prophets, in the law of the Torah, in the lives they lived even in exile.

So too for us, God is contained not in buildings, but in bodies; not in liturgies, but in the spirit within us. That is our vineyard, waiting to be watered, protected, and tended by God. Whenever we say “yes.”

Susan Gratz  
St. James Episcopal Church, Arlington, VT  
Diocese of Vermont

<sup>1</sup> *Agape refers to the Christian concept of selfless love best portrayed in the voluntary and called death of Jesus.*



## MONDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Let your Spirit, O Lord, come into the midst of us to wash us with the pure water of repentance, and prepare us to be always a living sacrifice to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 10: 1–4, 12–20

**THIS IS PLAINLY** a very political passage. Isaiah accuses his own people, and especially the rich and powerful among them, of severe injustice toward the needy. In doing so, he prophesies that God will, in turn, subject Israel to the same injustice, conquest by a greater power. But he insists that this injustice will itself be punished, that the conquest is simply a tool by which God will humble the proud and the powerful, both of his own people and of the foreign peoples.

We can of course draw a political exhortation from this reading: do not oppress the poor, do not abuse the vulnerable, do not neglect the needy, because it is wrong and because any ill-gotten gains from doing so will be temporary. This is all true, and right, and good; it is a necessary component of the life of the Christian to participate in the upbuilding of a more just society and work for the common good. But we should also understand this passage in terms of its outlook on God, justice, and hardship in a broader sense.

Isaiah here depicts God as one who cares for justice, and one who will allow societies that behave unjustly to fall into destruction. This is not arbitrary, but rather, it is reaping what one sows; injustice inflicted by a society is in turn inflicted on that society. Those guilty of evil fall into evil. In a season of repentance, this should be a solemn warning cry for us all, to live by the principles we adhere to as Christians, not simply to assent to them, but to discern, both in our external actions and our internal dispositions, what is true, and good, and just, and holy. If we don't, we build a spiritually shoddy edifice with a cracking and rotting support structure; if we ignore that, eventually the walls will come tumbling down. It is better, then, to do the hard work of self-examination, of asking God to reveal that within us, as Christians individually and as the Church collectively, is inconsistent with the justice and holiness to which we are called, and to mend that wound before it festers uncontrollably.

This is a difficult thing to do. It is easy to paper over these things and hope they go away. It's more comfortable and less stressful, and dealing with them now can feel unnecessarily urgent. But this misses a deep opportunity to actually co-labor with God in what we might call God's "creative destruction." God does not send Assyria into Israel in order to destroy Israel, but rather to break down so that something better may be built. This isn't wanton destruction to appease unbridled fury, but the uncompromising wisdom of the artisan at work, who knows precisely what the issue is, what to remove, and what to add back in. That removal and destruction of our own predilection to sin, injustice, and evil is scary and painful. It is also necessary for our own salvation. This passage puts before us the choice; will we be like those rich and powerful, hiding behind their ill-gotten gains and hoping to get away with it? Or will we be the remnant who endures, returning once again to rely on the Lord in truth? Only the latter option—even in the midst of the painful process of self-examination, discernment, and repentance—is consistent with the hope of eternal life. It is only the endurance in truth that can yield justice.

Br. Lucas Hall  
Society of Saint John the Evangelist  
Diocese of Massachusetts



## TUESDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O God, you willed to redeem us from all iniquity by your Son: Deliver us when we are tempted to regard sin without abhorrence, and let the virtue of his passion come between us and our mortal enemy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 11: 1–12

**WE TYPICALLY READ** this passage as a prophecy of Jesus, end stop. But this year I hear its multiple levels of resonance.

First Isaiah (roughly 740–700 BCE) faced a chaotic and troubling world: superpower Assyria threatening war; division between the two kingdoms of Israel; a crisis of legitimacy for those in power (kingship had fallen out of the Davidic line, the “root of Jesse”).

In the midst of this danger and uncertainty, God speaks to Isaiah in a vision. A vision of right rulership. A vision of a world in harmony and at peace. A vision of a God-filled world.

Isaiah’s longed-for ruler stands before God in humility and awe. He is guided by wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, both in counsel and in might—that is, both in consideration of action and in the wielding of power. He is filled with and wrapped in the Spirit of God. He delights in God. He judges with righteousness and equity, especially concerning the most vulnerable. He is girded in righteousness and faithfulness, the way a warrior girds his sword. His words strike the earth and slay the wicked.

In Isaiah’s vision, the natural and domesticated worlds reside in perfect harmony. There’s room for lion, leopard, bear, and wolf, as well as kid, calf, cow, and ox. Predator and prey, animals wild and domesticated, the world of God’s free Creation and the natural world as we’ve remade it rest and feed side by side. There’s even room for poisonous snakes—and room for us, too, at our most vulnerable: a little child.

On God’s Holy Mountain, nothing is hurt, nothing destroyed, and God’s Spirit—“as boundless as the sea,” to borrow Shakespeare—infuses everything.

Reading and praying on this passage in our current world fills me with longing and despair.

On the human level, we face a wielding of power the opposite of Isaiah’s vision: a reign of greed, corruption, lawlessness, and cruelty. And in the world of Creation? Well, we’ve just witnessed, yet again, the hottest year on record—yet we keep consuming. We’re punching more and more holes in the intricate web of nature, accelerating species extinction at a rate unheard of since that God-sent asteroid took out the dinosaurs. But we aren’t God. We are a small, flawed part of God’s wondrous Creation, smashing it apart as we glut ourselves.

So here we are. Nature is on a cross. Vulnerable people are on a cross. Decency and truth are on a cross. What will it take for us to turn to God, to let God’s spirit of Holy Wisdom rest on us and guide us? How can we journey to God’s Holy Mountain, this place of sacredness, justice, and peace?

Then Spirit reminds me: Jesus, our branch of Jesse, walked the way of the cross and in doing so showed us that God is always willing to be with us—especially in the hardest moments—and that God can transform even the

CONTINUED

## TUESDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT CONTINUED

ugliest and most brutal parts of our world—for what was a Roman crucifixion but a deliberate spectacle of ugliness, brutality, and power?—into a way of God’s beauty, tenderness, justice, and peace.

Gaen Murphree  
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Middlebury, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



ISAIAH 10: 5, 15 | CHRISTOPHER POWERS

## WEDNESDAY IN 2 LENT



### COLLECT

*O God, you so loved the world that you gave your only-begotten Son to reconcile earth with heaven: Grant that we, loving you above all things, may love our friends in you, and our enemies for your sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 24: 1–13

**GOD’S CALL TO REPENT**, or to ‘change course,’ is one we both desire and resist. It often comes at a time when we know something needs to shift but we feel stuck and ashamed. In this passage, the prophet Isaiah’s call to repentance throws us into the abyss of lament and woe that is unpacked verse by verse. We may try to grasp at the cliff’s edge to keep from falling, but our grip is loosened word by word, as we sink into the impending realities of desolation, scatteredness, waste, and despair that shame evokes.

Walter Brueggemann writes that the psalms and prophets consistently show us the threefold movement of our relationship with God, neighbor, and self: orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Isaiah 24 clearly entrenches us in the land of disorientation, exposing our need for repentance. If we allow ourselves to be fully in this place, we notice that the shadowed gloom is so consuming we can barely breathe. It is only when we acknowledge what needs to be repented that we are able to catch our breath, which then gives our brains enough oxygen to get our bearings and move from reaction to action.

Isaiah makes it clear that no one is spared from the need to repent or the grief that accompanies it. There is an even-handedness to the despondency sketched out in these verses. Lament is a complex spiritual discipline that doesn’t play favorites. We may be tempted to distract from this agonizing and exhausting disorientation, but staying with it also means we learn the dimensions of the pain that has brought us to this place, which in turn can move us toward healing.

In Black Liturgies, Cole Arthur Riley expresses this beautifully. “Maybe you were taught that sadness is more dangerous than liberating. But healing comes when we are at last able to point to where it hurts. Lament is not a threat to our survival but a means to it. It’s how hope’s salve knows where to go.”

So, imagine as we are slowly lowered—or flung wildly—into the withering curse of these verses, that hope’s salve is waiting for us there at the bottom. And that somehow, we will still have the strength to point to where it hurts. And when our wounds have been tended, and the long, slow process of healing begun, hope will accompany us as we engage in the work of climbing out of the pit and help us to see how the reconciling of heaven and earth has already, miraculously, begun.

*For reflection:*

How do you enter into the spiritual practice of repentance and lament? Can you think of a situation where you witnessed someone examining the truth of their pain and prayerfully staying with it? Sarah Nannen writes that when inviting those who are grieving into our lives and homes, we should make sure we are including space for their grief and for our own, and for the capacity to laugh together in the midst of the tears.

Sr. Ana Clara, Superior Order of St. Anne Arlington, MA  
The Rev Dr. Dawna Wall, Chapel of St. Anne, Curator Arlington, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts

## THURSDAY IN SECOND WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O Lord, strong and mighty, Lord of hosts and King of glory: Cleanse our hearts from sin, keep our hands pure, and turn our minds from what is passing away; so that at the last we may stand in your holy place and receive your blessing; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

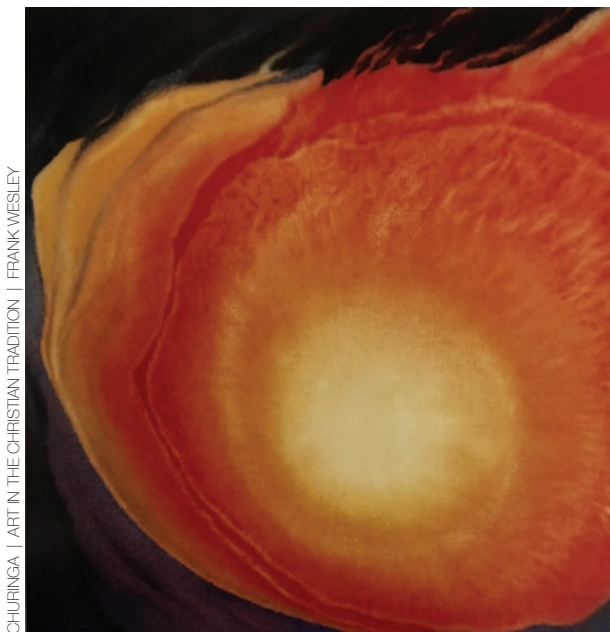
### Isaiah 24: 14–23

**ONE THING** I really like about Isaiah is that he shows us the “Big Picture.” The panoramic scope of his prophetic vision is awesome: the vastness of the earth, the immensity of the heavens...but all this is nothing compared to the glory of God. In the passage for today, this immensity is also terrifying: the Pit into which we shall fall, the opening of the windows of heaven (the same image from the start of Noah’s flood in Genesis), the foundations of the earth tremble, earth is utterly broken and staggers away as a drunkard—all beyond our comprehension.

Where are we, where are you and I, my dear friends, in this “Big Picture?” For Isaiah, the prophetic vision is for the collective, the formation of the people into community. As a people, they are taken to Exile. As a people, in the midst of their oppression, they look for deliverance, and it is by the glory of God that this collective will be transformed into beloved community, as “the repairers of the breach and the restorers of streets to live in” (58:12).

Where are we? We, too, are Exiles, and like our spiritual ancestors, by God’s grace this Lent we can turn our eyes and open our souls to the glory of God. We pray today for the King of glory to cleanse our hearts, keep hands pure and minds turned from what passes away to Christ’s holy place where we all live in blessing. This is our place in the journey through Isaiah’s “Big Picture.”

The Rev. Earl Kooperkamp  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Barre, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



CHURINGA | ART IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION | FRANK WESLEY



## FRIDAY IN SECOND WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Grant, O Lord, that as your Son Jesus Christ prayed for his enemies on the cross, so we may have grace to forgive those who wrongfully or scornfully use us, that we ourselves may be able to receive your forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 26: 1–13

**ONE OF THE TRICKY THINGS** about a passage like this is that the lines are drawn so clearly between the righteous and the wicked, the upright and the down low, **the “us” and the “them.”** This passage could be read by two very different people with very different backgrounds and values, and both could interpret it as being written to or about or in support of themselves and what they would like to see happen in this world.

When we read this passage, of course we want to believe that we have a strong city waiting for us, **we** are the righteous nation, the ones who keep faith. **We** want to be the steadfast minds who are kept in perfect peace because we trust in God. **We** want to be the ones who, though misunderstood in this world, will triumph when judgement comes, who will be proven to have been right all along.

But do we really believe that’s what our God, the God who created us all in God’s image, wants for us?

Do we really believe that God wants us to act as though we are the only ones who can claim God’s favor, we are the only ones doing God’s will, we are the only ones who will be right in the end?

When we believe like this, we block out the “other side,” and while this can make our day to day lives seem easier, **it’s not what God wants for us. Or them.**

Jesus says in Matthew 5:44, “...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...” and in Luke 6:27 and 28, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

This is where my spirit says, “Really, God? Why?” This is when I want to start listing all the reasons why it’s not worth it, why it’s not going to matter, why it’s not going to change anything. And then I think of what I tell my children on a regular basis, “The only one you’re in control of is you.” Ugh.

So, I wonder, if I did take some time, and truly prayed for those who stand on the “other” side—dwelling with them in a spiritual sense, considering what they are facing, how they got there and why their perspective is what it is—what could God do with that?

How could God change me? How much more available to God might I be? How might God speak to me or use me? How might I come to better understand another perspective, and how might that open up the possibility of conversation?

And if we all did that—surrendered our rightness and treated **all** those made in God’s image with love—it seems like that’s the only way to ensure we’re truly on **God’s** side.

CONTINUED

## FRIDAY IN SECOND WEEK OF LENT CONTINUED

As the verses that precede this reading promise, “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples,... On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces... The LORD has spoken.” —Isaiah 25:6–8

Julie Carew

The Episcopal Church of Saints James and Andrew, Greenfield, MA  
Diocese of Western Massachusetts



## SATURDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Grant, most merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 26:16 – 27:1

**IN ISAIAH 27:1**, we hear about Leviathan—the big, scary Leviathan. The sea monster. The fleeing serpent. The twisting serpent. We don't hear much about Leviathan in Isaiah. In fact, this is likely the only place we find Leviathan spoken of by the authors of Isaiah. And even when we look more broadly, there aren't many more references to this sea creature. But imagine for a moment this Leviathan—the dragon that is in the sea. Imagine something larger than larger; scarier than scary. A serpent. A monster. A dragon.

When we do read about Leviathan in Scripture, it's often in reference to a dangerous, foreboding presence and not to be taken lightly. A scary, larger-than-life, distressing presence. And in the passage we read today from Isaiah, it's likely Babylon, the looming enemy of the people to whom Isaiah was writing.

"O Lord, in distress they sought you..." Whatever this looming enemy—Babylon or otherwise—the people of Israel were distressed. And this passage from Isaiah, quite frankly, does little to quell stress and anxiety. Giving birth to the wind: beyond disappointing! Winning no victories: what even is the point? God punishing the inhabitants of the earth: surely that's not me!

There's a contrast here that I think we need to pay attention to. The distress is very distressing; but the victories are great (maybe too great): The dead shall live and corpses shall rise. The sword is great and strong that punishes the Leviathan. Big language to describe big victory.

I wonder if something dangerous and scary is looming over you. Something that feels so big—maybe, metaphorically as big as Leviathan. Something that keeps you up at night. Something that feels insurmountable and distressing. These words from Isaiah remind us that the Lord is with us, even there. In the most distressing spaces of our lives, God seeks us out and finds us.

Perhaps the invitation today is to remind yourself that God holds you in the spaces where the distressing pieces of your life loom large. That God has strength and mercy beyond measure. Truly, beyond measure. The transformative power of God exceeds our imagination, even the imagination that conjures up the monstrous imagery of Leviathan.

Grant, most merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Rev. Canon Rebekah Hatch  
Canon for Lay & Ordained Vocations  
The Episcopal Church in Connecticut





WOMAN OFFERED #5 | JANET MCKENZIE



## THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT



### COLLECT

*Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 56: 1–8

**WHEN ISAIAH PROPHESES** to eunuchs (56:3–5), he addresses people who are liminal and marginalized. I qualify. God gifted me with masculinity in a body that’s somewhat incongruent. I’m trans.

Since the inauguration, my marginalization—and that of my dearest ones—has already increased. What’s coming is likely to tax us legally, financially, socially, and emotionally. At minimum, the narrative that we’re different and worse than ‘regular’ citizens has already been amplified.

Isaiah meets me here—facing increased marginalization and feeling discouraged—with an inclusive message and a call to work and worship. I am not ‘a barren tree (v3).’

*These are the words of the Lord: The eunuchs...who choose to do my will and hold fast to my covenant...all who keep the sabbath unprofaned and hold fast to my covenant: these I shall bring to my holy hill and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar... (Isaiah 58:3–4).*

A biblical prophet anticipated a role for me in God’s kingdom and taught that I’m not precluded from striving towards God: I’m invited in my minority to work and to find happiness in prayer. I share with everyone the responsibility to be faithful with God.

That’s big.

Equally big is my return to a church I left forty years ago. I left thinking there was no place for me and with no language for my inner struggles. In rural Virginia, it was still considered impolite to discuss the existence of gay people in general company. I didn’t know anyone like me. I assumed I was unique, bad, and alone.

I’d been baptized at ten, mutinous after being shoved into a tight scratchy dress replete with white lace, pink smocking, and an actual petticoat, my godmother endlessly reciting, “how pretty.” I knew I’d be made to stand all wrong in front of God and everyone. It would feel like a lie and it would feel like sin while I received a sacrament.

I decided church wasn’t for me. I knew God’s love, though. I knew God knew how it was with me—about my weirdness.

I prayed. I sought silence, stillness, and simplicity. I continued a conversation with God that’s endured as I’ve become an orphan, a student, a parent, a worker, and a husband. That conversation has been a private, quiet gift.

The chain of circumstance and coincidence, goading and grace bringing me back to church is a mystery I can’t explain and don’t fully understand. I didn’t expect to reconnect with God in any church, let alone in an

CONTINUED

## THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT CONTINUED

Episcopal church, my childhood denomination. When I finally stepped in, I told myself I was only going for the music. What I've actually found: ways to serve – baking bread and giving rides; companions – in prayer, scripture study, and spiritual conversation; and the cherished gift of communion, which I once feared I did not deserve. I'm learning that Christ is my way back to a God who didn't abandon me. I still know the same God I walked with the past forty years, but I know him more deeply through coming to know His church.

Here, I'm drawn out of aloneness, given a place to stand and people to stand with.

God is bringing me to a place in today's church. Isaiah reassures me I've long had a place in God's Kingdom. I can hear both messages of inclusion anew; I'm grateful and inspired.

Cary Storm  
St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Brattleboro, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



ISAIAH 11: 1-2, 9 | CHRISTOPHER POWERS

## MONDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Look upon the heart-felt desires of your humble servants, Almighty God, and stretch forth the right hand of your majesty to be our defense against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 28: 1–13

**TODAY’S COLLECT AND PASSAGE** from Isaiah invite us into a familiar dichotomy, contrasting the enemies of God’s righteous will—presumably the enemies we pray to God to defend us from—and God’s righteous and humble servants.

The poetry of the prophet Isaiah names and draws a dramatic and unpleasant picture of the corrupt in Ephraim, the city of Samaria, against whom the prophet preached: they are drunkards, bloated with rich food, staggering around and eventually soiling the whole place with their vomit. Isaiah promises that the Holy One will bring judgement and justice and will be a source of strength as well as offering rest to the faithful who have resisted temptation.

In the broken and divided world we inhabit, it’s very tempting to find easy parallels, and to settle into a place of comfortable self-righteousness. We can certainly observe that the concerns and priorities of those currently in power in our nation favor the preservation of advantage rather than the needs of the vulnerable. Religious folks throughout time have been eager to cast stones at those they identify as the unrighteous, however, and we do well to heed Jesus’ own warnings about clearing the logs from our own eyes before we go after the specks in others’ (Matthew 7:3–5).

With what rich foods are we bloated? What convenient consciousness-altering substances have we allowed to hide from us our own complicity in the world’s suffering? When the Holy One of Israel comes like a destroying tempest, which of our shortsightedness will be revealed? Our opportunity in Lent is to look deeply and to tell ourselves the truth.

Let us pray to God for help in defending against the enemy within.

The Rev. Molly Scherm  
St Mary’s in the Mountains, Wilmington, VT  
Diocese of Vermont

## TUESDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O Lord, we beseech you mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom you have given a fervent desire to pray, may, by your mighty aid, be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 28: 14–22

**SOBER UP!** This is the punchline of the message to the leaders of Jerusalem at the beginning of Chapter 28, whom Isaiah refers to as “drunkards.” Today’s passage addresses them as “scoffers.” A scoffer is someone who mocks or ridicules another person or idea to demean or shame. They are arrogant and puff up their own egos.

Looking at the use of the word “scoffer” in other parts of Scripture, specifically the Book of Proverbs (e.g. 9:7–8), adds another layer. To paraphrase: “A person who corrects a scoffer is then abused themselves, whoever rebukes the wicked faces hurt. A scoffer who is rebuked will only hate you; the wise, when rebuked, will love you. Give instructions to the wise and they will be wiser still.”

The prophet risks facing abuse. Wise leaders will receive prophetic critiques as an opportunity for deepening wisdom. The ability to do this comes from trusting the source of the message. People who are fearful have difficulty trusting. They are defensive and reactive, often going on the attack.

By Isaiah’s assessment, these are the leaders who make their covenant with death, rather than God, seeking refuge in falsehoods and lies (v.15). Arrogance masks fear and panic, and living with the illusion of being in the center, not God.

By contrast, “One who trusts will not panic (v. 16).” God is the only sure foundation, the cornerstone (v. 17). Justice and righteousness will be our guide, not death-dealing ego driven behavior when the scourge comes through (vv. 18–21).

If you and I dare to make a “sober assessment” of ourselves: how do we live fearfully and mock others, cast judgement outward unwilling to hear rebukes or critiques that force us honestly to examine our own lives and frailties?

For me, the writer James Baldwin is a prophet. His essay, “The Fire Next Time,” written to his young nephew, addresses Black people and implores them to pray for white people who are “trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it.”

White people live with the illusion that they can escape death. Black people are reminded every day that they exist in a society designed for their destruction. They do not have the luxury of this illusion. Baldwin declares: “We cannot be free until they are free.” His message is a gut punch to me. It shines a light on how much my own leadership and life choices have been shaped by patterns of fear and self-reliance.

I invite you to consider for yourself: Where do I feel panic in my life? What are the fears I do not want to confront? Who are the people and prophets who provoke my conscience and connect me to the sure foundation of trust in God?

Elizabeth Moriarty  
Episcopal Church of New Hampshire



## WEDNESDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Give ear to our prayers, O Lord, and direct the way of your servants in safety under your protection, that, amid all the changes of our earthly pilgrimage, we may be guarded by your mighty aid; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 29: 13–24

**THERE IS A GREAT SONG** in the musical *Hamilton* called “The World Turned Upside Down” which describes the American Revolution’s Battle of Yorktown. It is the turn of the war which brings about the defeat of the British Army. David beats Goliath.

In our passage today, the prophet Isaiah chastises corrupt leaders who plot in secret against the people. They act like they are God, like they are in charge. Isaiah scolds them “You turn things upside down!” As though any human being could elevate themselves above the Almighty.

Isaiah looks at the corruption of the leaders and the unfair oppression of the people, and he proclaims that God is on the way.

“On that day the deaf shall hear...  
the eyes of the blind shall see.  
The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord,  
and the neediest people shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.”

In God, the world truly does turn upside down. Or perhaps it is right side up! Those who are oppressed, vulnerable, and needy are the very ones, in the Reign of God, who will leap for joy, while “the tyrant shall be no more.”

In what ways does our world not match Isaiah’s proclamation of the coming Reign of God? In what ways might we dream of the world turned upside down? Conversely, in what ways do we fear a deviation from the status quo? If some are lifted up, then others may be brought down. Perhaps those others are us. What do you discern is God’s will in our own time, and what role do we have in its fulfillment?

The Rev. Stephanie Bradbury  
St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Southborough, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts

## THURSDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Keep watch over your Church, O Lord, with your unfailing love; and, since it is grounded in human weakness and cannot maintain itself without your aid, protect it from all danger, and keep it in the way of salvation; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 30: 8–11

**IT SEEMS ALMOST TOO OBVIOUS** to say that all of us—frail and flawed human beings—are grounded in weakness and need help. Like those in Isaiah’s time, we can either learn to rely on God or rely on ourselves to our shame and peril. To understand our own times, we must consider Isaiah’s role as prophet in fearlessly proclaiming God’s words to a deaf and apathetic people—from the king on down.

Consider this: Isaiah was called to be a prophet in Judah, the Southern Kingdom, in the year of King Uzziah’s death. His years of being a prophet spanned the reigns of three more kings: Jotham (a “good” but weak, vacillating king who did nothing to stop the people with their idol worship), Ahaz (an “evil” opportunist who sought alliances with Assyria to stave off attacks with Israel’s Northern Kingdom, Aram, and those perennial troublemakers, the Philistines), and Hezekiah (who did “what was good and right... sought God with all his heart, and prospered”).

But as we catch up with Isaiah in chapter 30, he is being critical of King Hezekiah’s alliance with Egypt. In opposing this alliance, he earlier calls it “a covenant with death.”

From kings on down, Isaiah calls his own people rebellious, faithless children who only want to hear pleasant things and have no patience in listening to God by arrogantly replying to Isaiah, “let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.”

We have often heard about “the patience of Job,” but how about the remarkable patience of God in dealing with his own chosen people? It is evident in that God does not cease to send prophets who speak to three generations of kings. Is it possible that God is being patience with us, too? The answer should be an emphatic “Yes!” Consider this country’s generations of deplorable treatment of Native Americans, African Americans, women, prisoners, the homeless, and more. Do we see any similarities in America with seventh century Judah when Isaiah was a prophet? Are we a rebellious people, faithless children who only want to hear pleasant things and have no patience listening to God or to God’s modern-day prophets? If we don’t, we should; God is still patiently waiting.

One question we might ask ourselves is this: How can God’s pending, imminent judgment be turned away? It seems we must take Isaiah’s judgments and turn them on their head. A “rebellious people” can become an obedient people. Scripture says obedience is better than sacrifice. We often think we are obeying God along the lines of tipping a server at a restaurant. We will give God a “tip” as it were of our time, thoughts, and worship. We expect more than a 20 percent “tip” in our relationship—and God does too.

“Faithless children” can become faithful children. Faith is more than mere trust; faith is devotion and confidence in the one whom we love, adore, and serve—the God of Heaven and earth, Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount, and the Holy Spirit, who is the fire of God’s love.

## THURSDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT CONTINUED

And lastly, arrogant impatience can become humble patience. We listen and we learn. Even when we feel sheared as lambs on a blustery, cold day in March, God tempers the wind. God is fully capable of tempering judgment. As the little epistle James will say centuries after Isaiah, “judgment will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy, mercy triumphs over judgment.” On this Lenten day, embrace the virtues of obedience, faithfulness, humility, and patience that were cast aside by Isaiah’s listeners. We might just have a different outcome than Judah who was conquered by the Babylonians and sent off to a miserable 70-year exile.

Ed Nilson, Oblate, OSB.  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Newport, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



A WIDE EMBRACE | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

## FRIDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Grant us, O Lord our Strength, a true love of your holy Name; so that, trusting in your grace, we may fear no earthly evil, nor fix our hearts on earthly goods, but may rejoice in your full salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 32: 1–8, 16-20

**“A KING SHALL REIGN** in righteousness.” This statement asks us to consider who we consider “king.” To whom do we answer? Who rules us? According to this passage, a righteous king brings about clear vision, insightful listening, an understanding heart, and eloquent speech.

Can a king or—in the United States—a president create such pervasive internal effects on citizens? Or even consider the opposite: can an unrighteous ruler sow the seeds of prejudice, intolerance, hard-heartedness, and lies?

If a ruler can have that kind of influence, then is that our true ruler? Who is the ultimate ruler to whom we owe our devotion and faithfulness? You can see where this is going. God has to be the ruler to whom we turn each and every time. Only God can be our steadfast refuge and shelter, guiding us to a righteous relationship with the Divine.

To see clearly with our eyes wide open, not only to hear but to listen, to reach understanding even in moments of intense emotion, and to speak both sensitively and honestly can only come from divine presence. No human of any rank can enrich our lives in this way. With God as our ruler, we can be an instrument which brings righteousness, peace, and tranquility to a world which is badly in need of these blessings.

Tracy Rubin  
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts



BURNING BUSH | JOE SCHUMACHER



## SATURDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

[context Isaiah 36–37: 38] Isaiah 38: 9–20

**A FEW YEARS AGO**, having spent half my life in denial, I finally admitted that I need glasses. After getting them, I walked around amazed by everything, even the texture of the grass under my feet. I got to see every part of the world as if for the first time—like the first winter storm that year, when I rushed out the door to see, in full detail, a forest coated in snow. Today it still stuns me when no one else stops to stare at a spectacular sunset or a flight of birds or the city lights seen from an airplane window.

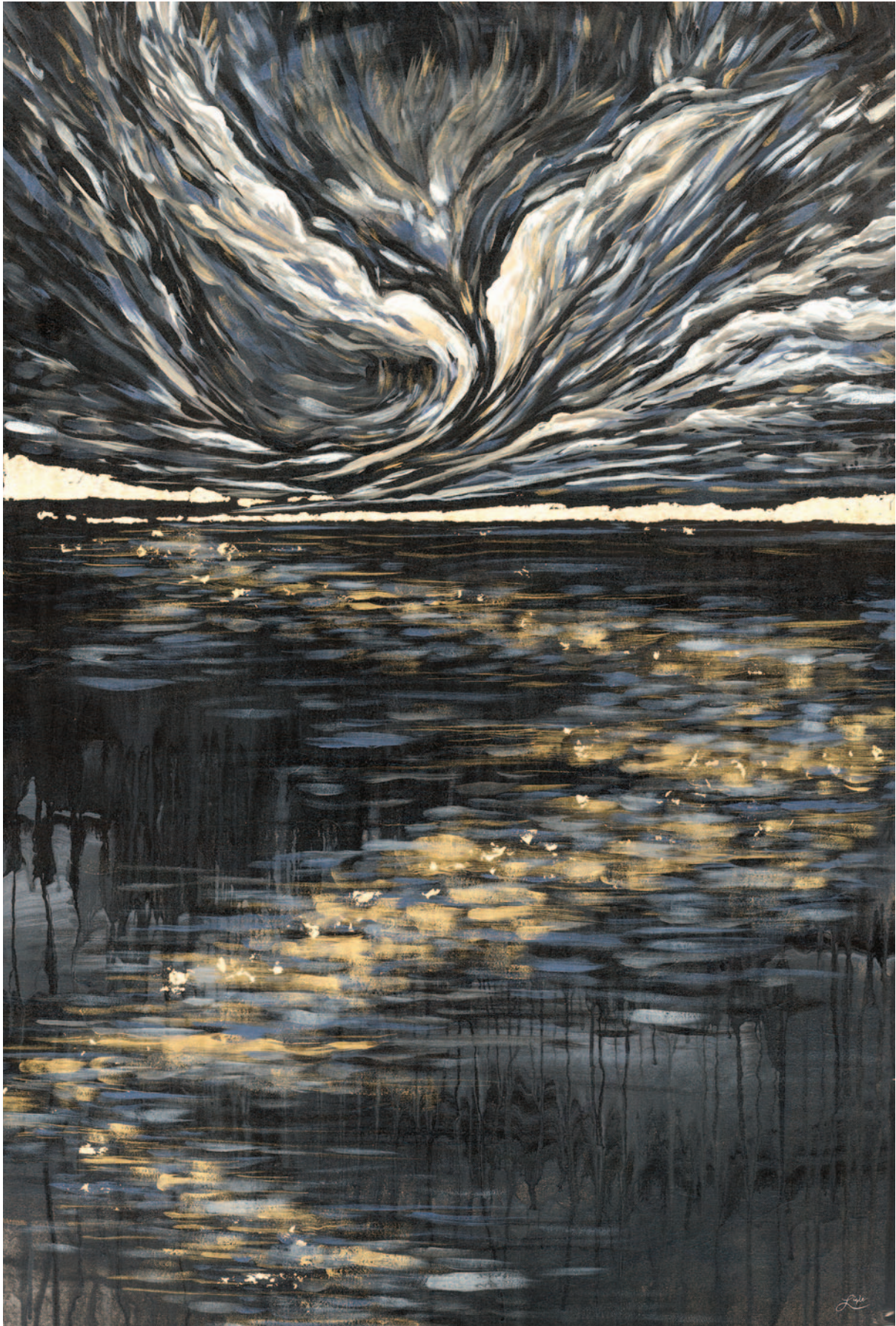
And: there was also a first time in my life when God became startlingly real, no longer distant and fuzzy. Yet like a person trudging with downcast eyes beneath an astounding sky, days or weeks or even months can go by when I don't stop to notice God's presence. But God is never far away. When I want to see the beauty of the world, I reach for my glasses. And when I want to see the beauty of God, there are places and practices for that, too: a monastery chapel, a poem or book, a song of worship, a gathering of friends. I know what I can do to find God; I just don't always make the effort.

What would it take for us to see everything anew, and what would it take for us to find in ordinary moments a reason to thank God, and what would it take to hold onto that awe and not let it fade? Would it take, like it did for Hezekiah, a deadly illness and a new lease on life? Or can we choose at any moment to see the world with eyes of wonder?

Michael Zahniser  
The Crossing, Boston MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts







THE PROMISE | LISLE GWYNN GARFITY

## FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT



### COLLECT

*Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 35: 1–10

**ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT ASPECTS** of change is believing that a new way is possible. It's not the planning, or the behavior shifts, but truly **trusting** that what you hope for might come to pass.

This is what makes the prophetic words of Isaiah so powerful—in the middle of chaos, Isaiah claims the truth that God will reign and Israel will be restored. Isaiah lays hold of this hope, not by denying their current existence, but by simultaneously acknowledging pain and possibility.

We, the Church, continue in the same lineage as Isaiah. We, too, are called to the work of prophetic hope—to name the pain that surrounds us and to do the (seemingly insurmountable) work of imagining a world in which God's reign is made complete.

This work of *Prophetic Imagination*, as Walter Bruggeman names it, requires that we see ourselves, in the words of verses 9 and 10, as God's ransomed or God's redeemed. Claiming ourselves, our communities, our churches, our countries as redeemed draws us into a new way of being. It disrupts the idea that we are made for the world as it is and reminds us that we are made for the world as God intends.

Each night our family prays the following versicle as part of our nightly prayer with Bedtime Chapel: Into your hands, O God, I commend my spirit;

For you have redeemed me, O God of truth.

Praying these words repeatedly has etched this truth on our hearts: we are redeemed, created for the waters that break forth in the desert and the hymns of everlasting joy.

Lent calls us to remove distractions and focus on the essential aspects of our faith—could there be anything more essential on which to pray than the truth that we are redeemed? When we fully claim this identity, we begin to see ourselves as God's own, God's partners in co-creating blossoming abundance. It is from this identity that we can imagine, proclaim, and embody a way of being that reflects God's reign.

The Rev. Deacons James and Natalie Thomas  
Christ Church Parish, Plymouth, MA  
Co-Hosts of Bedtime Chapel: Family Prayer Podcast  
Diocese of Massachusetts



## MONDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O Lord our God, in your holy Sacraments you have given us a foretaste of the good things of your kingdom: Direct us, we pray, in the way that leads to eternal life, that we may come to appear before you in that place of light where you dwell for ever with your saints; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 40: 1–11, 27–31

**THE CHANGES** we've experienced in this country make me feel like I am living in exile, without packing a box or moving a mile. As a result, I see that Isaiah 40 is not just speaking about comfort, but finding this comfort in a strange and confusing land.

Isaiah 40 begins with comforting words spoken tenderly by God to people suffering the grief of a decades-long exile. However, the text also implies that the people being comforted may have done something wrong. Divisions in society and polarization are often about becoming somebody's designated wrongdoer. And being designated as a wrongdoer is its own kind of exile. The Babylonian captives, the original listeners to this text, were uprooted from their familiar land and left exiled in a strange place. For them, exile was the punishment. For others, illness may be a kind of exile, especially when people withdraw out of discomfort. But the comforting words of Isaiah are not just pity, they are forgiveness, an offer to pay the penalty for wrongdoing and to end the exile. With these words, the captive may feel a sense of relief as anxiety melts away and the possibility of freedom rises again.

If we say that comfort pays for transgressions, or debt or wrongdoing, can we say that comfort may be a sign of forgiveness or forgiveness itself? The comfort proclaimed in Isaiah 40 restores peace and cancels debt. Does this mean that forgiveness is what leads to healing? This connection between forgiveness and healing shows up again and again in Jesus' teachings. When presented with a paralytic man, Jesus offers forgiveness before healing the man (Matthew 9:1–7). Jesus also did this to a man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1) and a man born blind (John 9:1–12).

The shifts in society that are occurring this year include a reduced priority on mercy and compassion and a disturbing increase in revenge and retaliation, which one could call a system rooted in unforgiveness. Retaliation occurs when someone has done something wrong, and punishment is the only response. When the response to a wrongdoing is forgiveness, comfort is shared by both the giver and receiver.

Imagine a world without forgiveness. How does one survive if existence depends on never making a mistake, or at least not getting caught? What kind of life must one live to avoid penalty, punishment, or retaliation? Is this even possible?

Fortunately, what God offers are words of comfort. And there is nothing as comforting as being forgiven. Perhaps forgiveness is as much about being comforted by loving arms as it is about the payment of our debts. As it says in verse 11, "He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep (Isaiah 40:11)."

The Rev. Dr. Valerie Bailey  
Priest Associate, St. John's, Williamstown and a chaplain at Williams College  
Diocese of Western Massachusetts



## TUESDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O God, with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light: Quench our thirst with living water, and flood our darkened minds with heavenly light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 41: 1–14

**“DO NOT FEAR,** for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” Ever since the age of eight, I would say my prayers, turn out the light, and turn onto my right side. I would then whisper these words from Isaiah into the darkness of my room. They were words that not only comforted me but gave me the confidence that God was with me—no monster under the bed, scary nightmare, or strange noise in the closet could hurt me now. Just like I nestled into my blankets before I closed my eyes, so I also nestled into these words of promise.

To have someone alongside me when I’m facing things I’m afraid of is powerful—even now, when I’m no longer eight. It’s a reminder that I’m not alone, because one of the worst things fear does is make me feel alone. It’s a reminder that I’m more than my fears, because someone wants me to face them with strength and courage. I’d like to think that’s what Isaiah 41:1–14 is doing, as well—there are threats of war and destruction, but God is with God’s people of faith. They do not have to be afraid because their God is with them and will choose them and their flourishing again and again and again. That is a promise that should make coastlands tremble.

Sarah Louise Woodford  
Canon for Communications & Media  
The Episcopal Church in Connecticut



HAND OF GOD | ANONYMOUS ARTIST

## WEDNESDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O Lord our God, you sustained your ancient people in the wilderness with bread from heaven: Feed now your pilgrim flock with the food that endures to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 42:10 – 43:4a

**MUSIC SPEAKS** to our soul—as many have asserted, it is a “universal language” that all understand. Wikipedia describes music as “an expression of emotions through harmonic frequencies,” and it is those harmonic frequencies, I believe, that make music so singular. Modern string theory posits that all of reality is made of string-like particles whose harmonic vibrations—whose music—is what determines the form and structure of creation. Music, according to this theory, is what causes us to be. If that theory sounds oddly familiar, it could be because we have heard it before in the book of Genesis: God spoke, and the cosmos came into being—all of reality the harmonic frequencies of God’s love; music the indwelling seed of creation.

A few years ago, I sang in a community production of “The Sound of Music.” I was, however, in for a surprise. At the first rehearsal, the musical director assigned me to the alto section (rather than soprano) and then made us sing 4 to 6-part harmony—acapella—without a companion voice nearby. It was one of the hardest roles I have ever had. Singing harmony simply did not come naturally to me, and I had to work at it for the entire show.

This harmonizing experience popped to mind when I read the first line from this passage of Isaiah: “Sing to the Lord a new song.” The book of Isaiah is known for being a prophetic book that follows the biblical wisdom tradition – a tradition that entails what biblical historian Charles Strohmer calls, “[a] *deep commitment to human mutuality, to the basic and shared interests and concerns of all peoples everywhere.*” *In this tradition, wisdom is not how we use the word today, reaching inside of ourselves to use our personal knowledge and experience to make good decisions. Wisdom is about reaching out in love and seeking harmony with the world around us, through growing in God’s ways.*

For, while God’s song does dwell within us, we each hear it a bit differently, and if ours is the only song we listen to, we can begin to think that we don’t need any other parts. But Isaiah calls us to a new song; to open our deaf ears, listen to and harmonize with the songs of everyone—people from very different places than our own—from the deserts to the mountains to the cities to the coastlands; and to lift our voices and join the symphony of God’s song of love and care.

And, just like my own experience in chorus, it can be hard. In fact, as Isaiah notes, harmonizing with everyone else sometimes sounds and feels more like labor pains than a song. But in seeking, appreciating, and singing with the other parts, knowing that without them our own is empty, devoid of the life and breadth and depth and meaning that the others bring to it, we are always birthing a new song. Sometimes we might have the melody, sometimes the harmony, but when we join our voice with the vast and diverse choir of life and creation, we find a richness in our own individual lives and in the creation chorus as a whole. And God, Isaiah reminds us, will guide us—the great conductor who created every voice. For we each one are precious in God’s eyes—honored and loved and a part of one majestic choir of love.

Judy Castonguay  
Christ Church, Island Pond, VT  
Diocese of Vermont

## THURSDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Almighty and most merciful God, drive from us all weakness of body, mind, and spirit; that, being restored to wholeness, we may with free hearts become what you intend us to be and accomplish what you want us to do; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 43:22 – 44:5

**GROWING UP AS A LUTHERAN KID**, repentance seemed for a long time to be a very Catholic concept. Surely this was an extension of my understanding of the practice of confession as gleaned from my classmates, but as I have grown into my faith and assessed myself to have a rather Lent-oriented temperament, my relationship to the concept of repentance has shifted. In true form, I take Luther's First Thesis—"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance"—as my own first precept. What, then, does it mean to repent?

Repentance, as with most practices, may take many forms, but in this particular prophetic message, God excoriates the people of Israel for their supposed failure to make their proper sacrifices as they would have been understood during the First Temple period. Despite this failure, the passage tells us that eventually we will turn back to God and claim our identity as God's people, and we will be welcomed back into the fold. God will "pour my spirit upon your descendants and my blessing on your offspring." In response, we will say once again, "I am the Lord's," joining us to the source of our redemption.

What is essential in order to understand this message from Isaiah is that, at least on the surface, the people have absolutely made their sacrifices as the laws say they should. However, there is an insurmountable gap between action and intentions; the implication is that people have not been making their sacrifices with a truly repentant heart. The lamb burns upon the altar, but our hearts are not present in the act. We resist the deep transformation God offers us, but God remains constant.

If we find ourselves on our knees, week in and week out, reciting the words to the Confession of Sins but not truly presenting ourselves in heart, soul, and mind to God, it is not too late. We still have the opportunity to find our footing, to repent truly and feel the extraordinary lightness that, as today's collect describes, would allow us to, "with free hearts[,] become what you intend us to be and accomplish what you want us to do." God wills that for us, but repentance demands we will it for ourselves, too. Only when we open ourselves honestly and vulnerably before the Lord will such liberation be ours.

Do you want that for yourself? Read the Collect of the Day again. What might you turn over to God to experience the lightness this Collect describes?

Bird Treacy  
Christ Episcopal Church, Needham, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts

## FRIDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O God, you have given us the Good News of your abounding love in your Son Jesus Christ: So fill our hearts with thankfulness that we may rejoice to proclaim the good tidings we have received; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 44: 6–8, 21–28

**ACCORDING TO TODAY’S PASSAGE,** God can command praise from the voiceless creation; [She] can rebuild ruined cities just as surely as she can liberate slaves. This God can dry up the deeps, spread out galaxies, use foreign rulers for good, thwart liars, and inspires prophets. God is providential and active in [Her world]—its creation, history, and inner thoughts. Can this God possibly need anything from us? Yes! The passage suggests two things:

Remember. Witness.

Remember.

*Remember* that I have shown you great wonders and signs.

*Remember* that I have swept away your sins.

*Remember* that I have redeemed you.

*Remember* that I knew you in the womb.

*Remember* Egypt, manna, water from rocks, barren births, and unlikely kings.

Remember, God says, because God’s people are the greatest testimony to [His] goodness. In the courtroom drama that God envisions (v. 6–8), the people are called as witnesses on [His] behalf—the verdict about God rests on their testimony!—and in order to do this, they must remember.

Remember, so that you may witness.

God spoke this truth again in Jesus who said to his disciples,

*Remember* the loaves (Matthew 16:8-9)

*Remember* my word and remember that I told you (cf John 15:20 and 16:4)

Do this for *remembrance* of me (Luke 22:19)

All this so that by the power of the Spirit, we may be for Christ “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).” The God who has created all, and in Jesus has redeemed all, needs us still today as witnesses to [Her] goodness lest the world, in its malaise, come to the wrong verdict about the Holy God, our Rock. In order to do this, we must remember.

We remember every time we come to the communion table. At that table we recall what God has done, and we also re-member God into the world—becoming the Body of Christ together, blessed, broken, and sent out once again.



## FRIDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT CONTINUED

We also remember every time we re-baptize our attention, our thoughts, and our narratives in the saving acts of God in history, as well as in our own lives. There was the time that God healed. The time that a job was received. The time we learned and grew into a more loving servant through that piercing disappointment from which we never thought we could heal. There was... What would be on your list? In Lent, we pare back our regular glut of food, behaviors, thoughts, and conversations in part to recall the sufficiency, goodness, nearness and majesty of God alone.

Once we remember, we can witness. This is a world full of goodness—for God made it. Even if everyone complains and life presses hard, it is still good – God redeemed it. Though it really does seem like we are at the brink of extinguishing ourselves, we renew our hope and our action—God sustains us.

Yet, God needs us, too.

As with ancient Israel, buckling under its exile, God also calls us to remember and proclaim the many restorations God has *already* performed in our lives. We are God's witnesses! What testimony does your memory, your attention, your conversation give?

The Rev. adwoa Wilson, ObJN  
Communities for Spiritual Vitality  
Dioceses of Vermont and Massachusetts



THE SOUL IS LIKE A CAVERN | ELIZABETH WANG

## SATURDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Mercifully hear our prayers, O Lord, and spare all those who confess their sins to you; that those whose consciences are accused by sin may by your merciful pardon be absolved; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Isaiah 45: 8–12, 18–19, 22–25

**WIKIPEDIA DESCRIBES LENT** as “the solemn Christian religious observance in the liturgical year commemorating the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert and enduring temptation by Satan.” It goes on to say, “Lent is a period of grief that necessarily ends with a great celebration of Easter. Thus, it is known in Eastern Orthodox circles as the season of “bright sadness.”

A period of grief! The season of bright sadness! Interesting! I like those words. They fit me right now. I am grieving big time! What has happened in this country since the recent swearing in has me spinning! And yes, I am going to get a bit political. For over 40 years, I worked as an equal opportunity professional. It was my job to try to right the wrongs that have been done over the years to members of protected groups. And now I have to sit back and watch the rug being pulled out from under them! A period of grief indeed!

So, what about the other words, “bright sadness”—what on earth does that mean? What about the words in this scripture reading from Isaiah? “I will send victory from the sky like rain; the earth will open to receive it and will blossom with freedom and justice, I, the Lord, will make this happen.” This sounds pretty great to me: the earth blossoming with freedom and justice! Isn’t this my life’s dream? Indeed, it is. But where’s the reality? Where’s the grief?

Here’s the rub. I am in so much pain right now, describing myself to others as being profoundly sad. My feelings are legitimate! My disorientation is real. I just don’t see any brightness.

Yet, allowing myself to sit in this grief, unchecked, also affects my life as a lay leader. A member of my parish approached me about my “mood” recently and said, “but you taught me how to be hopeful.” I had no response. I had got caught up in solemnity and grieving. Lent just gave me an excuse.

But, as my Bishop says, we are Easter People! He’s so right! While I am profoundly sad, if I am truly a Christian, I must take comfort in the words Isaiah left for us, “I the Lord, will rescue all the descendants of Jacob...” That’s me! As hard as it is, I can’t do this alone. If I let Him, the Lord will rescue me. I need to let go and let God. I can’t tell you how, yet. I am too raw for that. Still, in faith, there’s my brightness! And it starts right where I acknowledge my grief.

Valarie Stanley  
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT  
The Episcopal Church in Connecticut



MIKE MOYERS | GUIDANCE—NIGHT AND DAY





VESSEL | HANNAH GARRITY

*Hannah Garrity*



## FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT



### COLLECT

*Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 43: 8–21

#### IMAGINE IF GOD WAS LIKE:

Summon all the People of Boston  
Including the weak and malnourished  
Not a soul may be forgotten  
This is where America first flourished  
I want everyone even those without faith or foundation  
  
Even the youth playing Sony PlayStation  
Bring me the poorest person from each nation  
First responders, drug dealers, and scarred mothers  
Bring everyone I don't care if it's Danny Glover  
Right here, for I am the Savior of all saves  
  
I am still "He" but hot dang it feels good to be me  
I'm the Gigas King you seek  
I can delete cigarettes, wars, and greed  
The absolute greatest like Iron Sheik  
Your wicked leader wannabe-me type beat  
  
I can wave split down the harbor  
Connect you to the Titanic  
Or I can hop around disguised as a rabbit  
I respond way smarter  
Precisely two millennia ago I had Jesus walk on water  
  
Forget that flask along with your troubled past  
Let's start anew without any of that Ghast  
At last you have all made it here, you've all passed  
You gave meaning to life while the devil harassed  
Thank the mighty God on your next podcast.

Jesus Vargas  
MANNA Community Member and Black Seed Writer  
Diocese of Massachusetts

*Note: Jesus Vargas often uses pop-culture references in his writing that may be unfamiliar to some readers here, including references to wrestlers and video games. I appreciate the perspective he offers through this lens, particularly in response to this reading from Isaiah. God is doing a new thing! How will we recognize and describe the actions of God in new ways? MANNA is a congregation of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston which accompanies and empowers the unhoused and unstably housed community of downtown Boston.*

## MONDAY IN FIFTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Be gracious to your people, we entreat you, O Lord, that they, repenting day by day of the things that displease you, may be more and more filled with love of you and of your commandments; and, being supported by your grace in this life, may come to the full enjoyment of eternal life in your everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 46: 3–13

**IT SEEMS NOT MUCH HAS CHANGED** since Isaiah delivered his polemic against false idols at least three thousand years ago to the people of Israel who were failing to remain faithful to the one, true God who was always faithful to them. The world is as full of false gods now as it was in ancient Babylon.

Isaiah has just finished calling for the end of idol worship, speaking the words of God to the people of God, reminding them of God's faithfulness and care. Why do we always need to be reminded? How often do we forget the myriad ways God has rescued humanity from itself; rescued each of us from ourselves or the calamities of life? How often do we need to be brought up short when we default to the world's gods instead of our one, true, loving, and steadfast God? Why do we not learn from Israel's experience with God?

God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land, and yet they adopted the local gods as their own. God sent prophets and judges, and yet God's people failed to turn away from their false idols. Now, in exile in Babylon, the Temple destroyed, God still has a plan to rescue God's people; Isaiah offers them this hope and promise. And yet they stubbornly continue to make gold and silver gods over their lives. These false gods that must be carried, set in place, are what they choose instead of the living God who moves in and through their lives, ready to deliver them from their distress, offering the hope of salvation.

And then, two thousand years ago, God again saves. God comes to live among us in the person of Jesus, to show us the magnitude of God's love for us. Yet, even today, we turn toward celebrities and politicians as our saviors. We worship material wealth rather than the riches God offers us in God's kingdom with its love, justice, and peace. We rely on ourselves, trusting it is solely us who can fix the brokenness in our lives, because in many ways we have made ourselves gods, too. When will we learn?

Lent is a time to reflect on all that God has done and is doing for us. It is time to reject the false gods that do little more than make noise in our lives. It is a time to acknowledge that the world can only, ever, offer us gods which can never answer when we cry out. It is time to practice faithful living with real intention, even as we live in a broken and unfaithful world.

As we edge closer and closer to Holy Week and Easter, this is the time to repent, to return to our one, living, loving, and faithful God and offer our worship and praise to God alone. Then, as our collect for today says, we "may come to the full enjoyment of eternal life in your everlasting kingdom."

Rev. Susan Wrathall  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Cranston, RI  
Diocese of Rhode Island

## TUESDAY IN FIFTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Almighty God, through the incarnate Word you have caused us to be born anew of an imperishable and eternal seed: Look with compassion upon those who are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant that they may be built as living stones into a spiritual temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 47: 8–15

**WHEN I STARTED MY FINAL YEAR OF SCHOOL**, I was darn sure of the rules I had to follow and the ones I could easily ignore. I was a favored son in a family that was respected for its professional achievements, its spiritual commitments, and the contributions it extended to the school my siblings and I attended. But as my family's middle child, I was among the missing when the rules of discipline and personal expectations were communicated by parents and teachers. For reasons unknown, I failed to take their attitudes and values seriously; my focus was on whatever was easiest, what felt good, and what made me happy.

That mindset crashed when I was caught violating rules and norms that were honored by my community. I was expelled and learned hard lessons about the inescapability of stigma and the consequences of guilt.

Ironically, the depth of my situation brought forth the supportive voice of a teacher who took me under his wing and called out my recklessness, holding nothing back. He challenged my selfish and narcissistic attitudes, questioned my naive assumptions of maturity, and warned me, quite convincingly, of the kind of life that was before me unless I began looking elsewhere for direction.

His name was Marty but today I hear in him the voice of Isaiah speaking to the Babylonians. Marty saw in me *“a lover of pleasure, lounging in (my) security and saying to (myself) ‘I am, and there is none besides me.’”* He was an Eighth-century BC prophet reincarnated to challenge the life choices of an impressionable, self-centered young man.

Isaiah speaks forcefully of the citizens of Babylon who have created a world of selfish pleasure and wickedness, a world in which magic spells conjured by astrologers and sorcerers serve as powerful, controlling life forces. Within the state of Babylon, pervasive decadence and tyranny have created a corrupt system in which people view themselves as completely self-sufficient, safe, and untouchable. Their arrogance blinds them to the approaching disaster that will not be deflected by their material wealth and misguided wisdom.

This same “Babylonian” mindset influences our society’s attitudes toward political injustice, social exclusion, greed, and economic inequality. We allow ourselves to be moved by skilled practitioners of carefully crafted media content delivered with exhausting repetition that plays to our lowest, selfish instincts. These are the modern-day stargazers, astrologers, and sorcerers that Isaiah called out, the ones who were at the heart of a degenerating Babylonian civilization. The ones who lead much of our world today.

Isaiah reminds us that ultimate power and personal security reside with God. Relying on worldly means amounts to nothing; overconfidence in one’s power and pride only serves to highlight our vulnerability, which results in our inevitable downfall.

CONTINUED

## TUESDAY IN FIFTH WEEK OF LENT CONTINUED

Marty taught me humility. I pray that Isaiah's words do the same to create a world that sees salvation through Christ Jesus.

Peter Lloyd Johnson  
St. Mary's in the Mountains, Wilmington, VT  
Diocese of Vermont

### *Reflections:*

1. Where in my life am I relying too heavily on my own abilities?
2. What can I do to grow in humbleness and dependence on God?



THE BETRAYAL | JORGE COCCO SANTANGELO



## WEDNESDAY IN FIFTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*Almighty God our heavenly Father, renew in us the gifts of your mercy; increase our faith, strengthen our hope, enlighten our understanding, widen our charity, and make us ready to serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 48: 1–4, 9–13, 18–22

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN** to receive great gifts and struggle to use them rightly? That is where we are, together in the beauty and brokenness of the everyday. Each new morning is a gift, and every breath we take sustains our body and enlivens our soul. Imagine the beauty of the Earth; the resources that allow our life and lifestyle, and the community of love surrounding us; all are gifts from God. We have been blessed.

And yet, that somehow doesn't make it easy to walk in the most righteous of paths. Every decision we make involves weighing shades of grey; rage and hate is often more enjoyable than the hard work of peacemaking, and justice sometimes feels like it demands too much of us. It is much easier to let someone else step forward and fix things. Things are not well with our society, with our communities, and all too often with our souls.

We are called by God, called by name, to the commandment to Love, to treat our neighbors with dignity, respecting and treating each person as an image of God in all of God's splendor and majesty. God will never let us go, even when we fail to exercise that love. God's love is with us in each new morning and in each breath. God's loving, patient mercy accompanies us when we experience the consequences of our actions and inactions, will be with us as we are refined by trials of adversity, and will lead us to mutual liberation from the captivating forces that chain us to injustice. Peace is the fruit of justice, and God's love will lead us towards that peace.

Each breath, each new day, is another gift from God. How have these gifts sustained you and your spirit during this Lent? How is God calling you to use your gifts? What will you declare with a shout of joy when Easter comes?

Will Harron

The Episcopal Church of Saints James and Andrew, Greenfield, MA  
Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts

## THURSDAY IN FIFTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O God, you have called us to be your children, and have promised that those who suffer with Christ will be heirs with him of your glory: Arm us with such trust in him that we may ask no rest from his demands and have no fear in his service; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 59: 1–9

**IT'S NOT GOD'S FAULT...** it's yours! So is the message from Isaiah, whose prophetic voice echoes through the millennia, calling us to stop blaming God when God seems distant and things don't go our way. Take some responsibility, the prophet pleads! Accept your role. Stop blaming others. Stop casting aspersions. Do you not see that it is "your iniquities that have been barriers between you and your God, and [it is] your sins [that] have hidden [God's] face from you"?

Ouch! That's tough to hear, even in this final week of Lent. We'd rather not accept such full responsibility for our own faults and failure of faith. We don't want to be blamed for God's absence. We would rather cast blame elsewhere than admit our own sins have consequences.

And when these tough truths come from the voice of an ancient prophet, we tend to dismiss them altogether. This text has nothing to do with me, we decide. My sins do not rise to the level of iniquity. My lies are not so wicked. My deceit is no big deal. It's others' sin, not mine, that is to blame. It's God who has chosen to remain distant.

Isaiah reminds the people that "God's hand is not too short to save, nor God's ear too dull to hear." It's not God who fails us, it's we who have failed God! God is ever faithful, ever true, ever committed to relationship with God's creation. God has held up God's side of the Covenant again and again. God's hand can save. God's ear can hear. It is we who have gone astray.

Accepting responsibility for one's sin is an act of faith that is not often seen these days. It is easy to blame others for... everything, without taking responsibility for much ourselves. We do this with God, too, expecting God to do all the work, while we wait passively for God to appear and reassure us that all will be well. We forget that faith requires repentance and action.

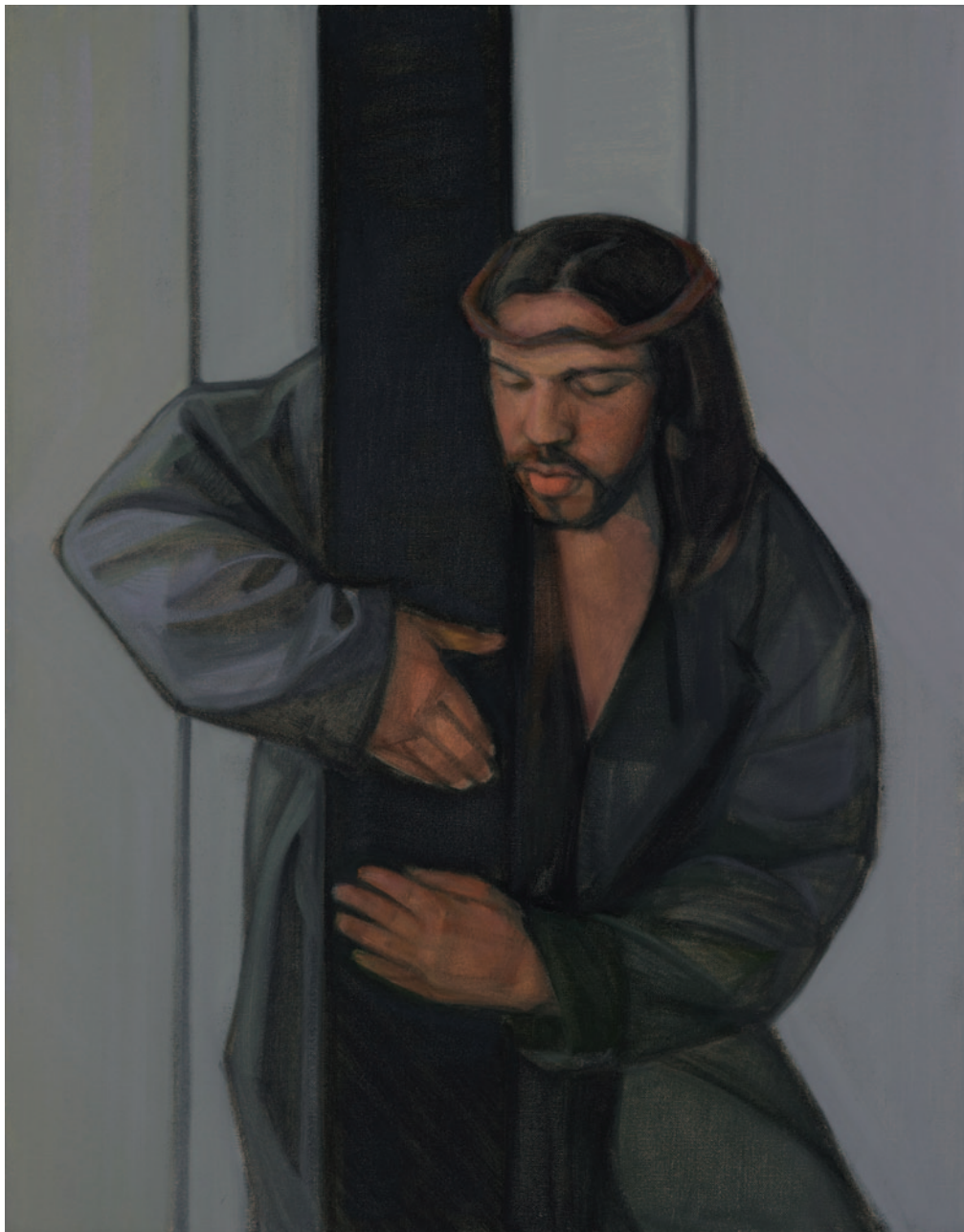
God is always the author of our salvation, yet with the gift of God's salvation and grace comes great responsibility. We are to persevere in resisting evil and whenever we fall into sin, repent and return to God. This commitment made at our baptism is part of our assent to a renewed relationship with God that demands new behavior: the proclamation of Good News, love for neighbor, a commitment to justice and peace, respect for the dignity of every human being, protection of all creation. When we do these things, not only do we live into the Covenant of baptism, we see God face to face.

In these days, when justice seems far from us and righteousness does not reach us... as we wait for light, but see only darkness, let us remember that God does some of God's most creative, fertile, life-giving work in

## THURSDAY IN FIFTH WEEK OF LENT CONTINUED

darkness: birthing, speaking, proclaiming, promising, transfiguring, raising... all done in the dark. Let us do our part by repenting our sins and doing all we can to remove the barriers between ourselves and God and our neighbor. "Arm us with such trust in God that we may ask no rest from his demands and have no fear in his service." Amen.

The Rev. Eleanor Applewhite Terry  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Acton, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts



STATIONS OF THE CROSS 9 | JANET MCKENZIE

## FRIDAY IN FIFTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O Lord, you relieve our necessity out of the abundance of your great riches: Grant that we may accept with joy the salvation you bestow, and manifest it to all the world by the quality of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 63: 1–19

**THE FIRST SECTION** of this reading is not pretty. Verses 1–6 are filled with grotesque violence; the voice sounds the same as the last two verses of Psalm 137, which move from grief—“How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”—to rage—“Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall.” Here the prophet is letting the psalmist’s rage be fully vented. I have looked at four versions of this from the Orthodox Jewish version to The Message. Nothing can soften this vivid and grisly picture of clothes spattered with human blood, of a warrior god stomping bodies to death.

The rest of the chapter is a psalm, extending through all of chapter 64. It is a psalm of lament and reproach and is almost certainly by a different author and from a different moment in Israel’s history than the first six verses.

As with all poems, myths, and dreams, there are layers. One layer is history: though these are probably from different historical moments, they are both part of the larger moment. The writer(s) are bitter against their neighbors who have betrayed them, and they are confused and reproachful that their god seems to have abandoned them. Though the second writer recites their historical sins, they blame God for hardening their hearts. And then they want to know, “Where have you gone? It is as if you had never known us, never loved us.” It is a psalm of deep honesty and yet incomplete self-understanding. It does not move into a comprehension of the part their sins have played in the disintegration of their society, a disintegration more clearly seen in other passages of Isaiah. But here the poet seems to see only the part that others, including God, have played in abandoning them.

Almost all of us find ourselves somewhere in the middle of that as individuals. And we find ourselves in the middle of that as a people now. We are suffering frightening enmity with some neighbors, and some of us are suffering bewildered grief as other neighbors are dragged from their homes. Or perhaps we are those people who fear being dragged away, or losing our jobs or even being killed by vigilantes. Others are triumphant, congratulating God, as they understand God, for victory.

We are a people like Isaiah’s people—in a very incomplete state of self-understanding, blaming others and asking, as a friend recently asked in her grief, “Where is God in all of this?” As I listen to this anger and confusion in Isaiah and in Western society tearing itself apart, I know this is a time to be fiercely honest with our grief. It is time to go down deep and find where these voices of rage and confusion and abandonment are lurking in us.

It is also long past time that we understand what the prophet does understand that we often miss: that Israel is one, a community, and that they have betrayed that fact by thinking too much of their individual desires. They understand that it is not just individuals that call on God, but a whole people.

All this mess and confusion—it is not pretty. But it is real. And my experience is that in that honest desert is where I often find Jesus—waiting for me. How can a people allow itself to go there? This people, in this crucial hour.

Meg Vittum  
St. James Episcopal Church, Essex Junction, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



## SATURDAY IN FIFTH WEEK OF LENT



### COLLECT

*O Lord, in your goodness you bestow abundant graces on your elect: Look with favor, we entreat you, upon those who in these Lenten days are being prepared for Holy Baptism, and grant them the help of your protection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 65: 1–9

**THE PHRASE “HOLIER THAN THOU”?** The one we use to describe someone who thinks they’re better-than, more moral, self-satisfied, and just plain superior?

This is where it comes from, today’s passage from Isaiah, and specifically, Isaiah 65:5. In the King James Version, source of so many turns-of-phrase that still shape the English language, the rebellious and God-resisting folks in the prophecy say to those around them: **“Come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.”**

As Chapter 65 begins, the prophet shows us God longing for the company of beloved humans—and tipping towards frustration and anger as the people reject God’s searching desire for them.

But surely—we might say to ourselves—surely that’s not me? Not me, given that here I am, after all, with my devotional booklet open, keeping my properly Holy Lent...

Can we hear, first of all, the prophet warning us not to be the ones putting on airs, not to be the ones persuaded by our own confidence in our own right ways?

That’s the first through-line of this passage: human insistence on doing things their own way. And that prompts an appropriate question for this season of Lent:

**Where might I notice myself preferring my own way, pursuing my own dreams and desires, walking in any other way than the one God steadily calls me into?**

Claiming to be “holier than thou”? Boasting that “I am much too holy, myself, to keep company with the likes of you”? Consider closely, and you’ll recognize how foolish it is to compare someone else’s holiness to yours, or yours to mine: **In the radiance of the Holy One, all our efforts pale.**

The other through-line in today’s passage is this: God’s unquenchable longing to bring those willful humans into a right and loving relationship. In God’s mercy, God always finds the “and yet.” Look here: There’s good juice for wine yet, even in this most unlikely bunch of grapes.

That, too, is worth pondering:

**What a wonder, that God’s call and God’s welcome persist, even when we do our best to wander beyond where God’s voice can reach us.**

The Rev. Canon Kelly Sundberg Seaman  
Canon for Formation and Vocation  
Episcopal Church of New Hampshire



THEN THEY REMEMBERED | LISLE GWYN GARRITY



## SUNDAY OF THE PASSION—PALM SUNDAY



### COLLECT

*Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 55: 1–11

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,” says the Lord. (Isaiah 55:8)*

Perhaps Jesus had this in mind, as he made his way down the path astride that humble beast. The people called out, “Hosanna!”, expecting that he would immediately deliver them from their distress—from an oppressive dictator, from colonialism, from death-dealing empire. Their hope was as thick as the layers of cloaks and palm fronds they threw before him to pave his way with adulation and anticipation.

“Your ways are not my ways,” he must have thought. “You expect the wrong things of me. I am going to disappoint you. And you will leave me to die at the hands of our oppressors.”

Still he went onward in this ragtag procession. Processions have long been a way of performing power, in the ancient near east and now. Whether staging empire, victory, or governance, parades model might and the colonial project by taking public space. They also can provide means for transgression. We may dress up, line up, and process to inspire awe, reverence, and scale... but some parades serve to represent the underrepresented, to undermine the mighty. Thus, Jesus’s procession inverted the norms of empire, using humility, hope, and love to demarcate a path of new dominion for us all.

*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your earnings for that which does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. (Isaiah 55:2)*

Like those ancient Judeans, it is so easy to seek the wrong satisfaction. To desire the wrong redemption. They likely thought Jesus would vanquish the Roman Empire with violence and might. In their desperate circumstances, they could not see that his victory was not of their time, but over time itself. His was not a display of military dominance, but of ultimate spiritual strength. His was not to be a victory over Caesar. It was a victory over death itself.

Still, we look for the solutions of this time, especially in the face of our own oppression and fear. No military or political leader will save us from the Pit, will walk with us in the shadow of the valley of Death. Only Christ, in humility and love, can deliver from the powers of this world to the power of the Almighty.

In his suffering, death and resurrection, we are shown the way of Life. This week we walk the way of that suffering, and throughout our lives we are invited, compelled in fact, to lead others on this path of Love as well. In his Body and Blood, we all share the food of Life. At the foot of the Cross we comprehend, again, our own complicity in his ongoing betrayal. In the empty Tomb we find our hope, for ourselves and for the world.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways,” says the Lord. Help us to follow your Way, O Lord, that we may follow it all the way to everlasting life in You.

The Rt. Rev. Julia Whitworth  
Bishop  
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

## MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK



### COLLECT

*Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 57: 11–21

**OH, WHAT FRAIL CREATURES** we humans be!

The picture that Isaiah paints of humanity is disquieting because it is so accurate and reflects our human weaknesses so unnervingly! Despite all that God has done for the Israelites, despite the promises that demonstrate so clearly the love and tenderness of God, we continue to choose the way that, in the end, cuts us off from those very promises and leads to destruction and death.

God begins by asking what it is that we so fear that the fear of it blinds us to the very hand of God in our lives. Heavenly silence is no excuse for giving in to that fear. Verse 12 and 13 give a surprisingly human bent to God's scolding of the Israelites: "Your actions will find you out every time! You chose idols; let them get you out of the mess you're in! Just remember, if I choose, I could end those idols, and you, in an instant!"

The last two verses of this reading provide an intriguing view of the wicked. Imagine the shore after a particularly nasty storm at sea – after the maelstrom of wind and waves, detritus of every stripe litters it and its contours may have even changed as what was on the bottom of the sea is thrown up on the shore, covered in "mire and mud". All those things we so wish to hide under the waves, far beyond the view of God, are as clear as day to God and will be brought to light for all to see in the end.

The key to verse 20 is in the second phrase—"which cannot rest", while verse 21 completes the thought—"There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." The consequences of giving in to fear is that we can never rest. If we stop, even for an instant, that which we fear may overwhelm us. We are willing to do just about anything to escape...just about anything, except reach out to the One who calms our deepest fears.

Just consider for a moment all the promises of God for those who face the fear. God promises that those who take refuge in the Almighty will inherit the land and possess God's holy mountain. Though God is worthy of all praise and glory, and dwells in the high and holy places, God promises to come to us in the dark and lift up the lowly and enliven the hearts of the contrite. God chooses to heal the brokenness of our willfulness and sin, to comfort those who indulge their fears. God promises peace to all, both far and near.

More importantly than anything else on this first day of Holy Week, it is important to remember, as our collect for today reminds us, that we face nothing that our Lord and Savior has not already faced. God provides peace and comfort to us precisely because, unlike those idols we keep trying to put in God's place, God has walked our path. By doing so, Jesus has redeemed that path, crowning it with life and peace through our risen Savior by the power of the Holy Spirit. May we all stay on the path so that, in the end, we can enjoy the blessings God promises! Amen!

Diane Holland  
Christ Episcopal Church, Montpelier, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



## TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK



### COLLECT

*O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 42: 1–9

**I SEE THIS PASSAGE** in Isaiah as a message of hope for the people of Israel as they are rescued from captivity hope that God has not abandoned them, even though they abandoned God. We as Christians believe this prophecy is fulfilled through Jesus as God's beloved and chosen servant. John 12:18–21

God's promise of hope and justice for not just Israel but the world is a welcome message in a time of upheaval and turmoil. The promise of God to provide fair justice and liberation for oppressed people of the world is comforting and consoling. God reminds us in Isaiah of God's covenant with us as creation. God also reminds us of God's strength, forgiveness, and refusal to yield power or authority to another.

As we have seen and some of have experienced firsthand, human justice is flawed and easily swayed by outside influences. But God's saving justice and judgment, which is embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus, is a message of hope and promise for all people living in uncertain and tumultuous times then and now. As a person of faith, I feel called to trust in God's covenant with humankind and struggle to live in hope.

Mary Ann Johnson  
Green Mountain Online Abbey  
Diocese of Vermont



ISAIAH 11:6, 9 | CHRISTOPHER POWERS

## WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK



### COLLECT

*Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 49: 1–7, 14–21

**EVEN THE MOST FAITHFUL** of God's children can sometimes lose heart and lose sight of who we are.

In hard times of uncertainty and struggle, we can feel overlooked, forsaken and forgotten. In despair we cry out: "I have labored in vain and spent my strength for nothing." It is an act of spiritual courage to choose perseverance: to turn away from destroyers who seek to swallow us up, and open our ears to receive nourishing words of divine reassurance.

We are beloved. Indescribably precious. We are written on the hands of the Holy One in permanent ink. We have been held close all our lives. God cannot be separated from us. And the Lord intends to manifest even greater wonders through us in the days to come.

On Spy Wednesday, Jesus knew the time of his sacrificial agony was drawing near. He was preparing to fulfill the prophecy intended for his Name long before he was born. As he prayed during those difficult days, with full knowledge of the betrayal to come, he also held full knowledge of the Everlasting Glory about to be revealed through him.

Most of us will never be whipped or spit upon as Jesus was. But fulfilling God's will for our life and ministry may lead to acts of rejection, and even betrayal, by people we thought were on our side.

Are we willing to bear being dismissed when we speak truth, derided when we behave with honor, despised as we work to feed the hungry with good things? Are we willing to spread good news when all around us others make their fortune spreading evil? Are we willing to be a light to all the nations when powerful forces would much rather have people stumbling through the wilderness in the dark?

Whatever trials we are facing this Lent, our task is to hold on to hope that the suffering of the present time will pass, and trust with all our heart that God is speaking words of hope, restoration, reward and abundance over us, even in the moments when we feel most cast aside.

We must keep reminding each other who we are: we are chosen, honored, and blessed, and we carry the power of the Holy Spirit. Even in the darkest hours, we are called to be a source of Christ Light and compassionate Love for all who cross our path.

The Rev. Leslie K. Sterling  
Diocese of Massachusetts

## MAUNDAY THURSDAY



### COLLECT

*Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 50: 1–11

**UPON FIRST READING,** Isaiah 50 sounds harsh, confusing, disjointed, and disorienting. In many ways, Maundy Thursday can feel the same. This is the night of betrayal, of bitter weeping, of scandal, and yet, it is my favorite night of the year. This is one of the most sacred nights in Christian tradition: it is the opening of the Triduum, the Great Three Days. The Liturgy ends without dismissal. Instead, there is a silent call to abide and keep watch for one bitter hour. The Altar is stripped bare and the Tabernacle yawns wide and empty. Yet there is hope in the stark bareness, a promise that the long Three Days will bring New Life—Love that is stronger than Death.

The longer I sit with Isaiah 50, the more clearly I see a similar hope in the words of the exiled Prophet. Isaiah 50 speaks of the Covenantal Relationship between God and the people. The people have been living under exile, they have endured suffering under the might of Babylon, and they feel abandoned by God. Has the Covenant been broken beyond repair? Has God cast us away? It may feel like that is the case in the midst of the long exile, but God is the One who begins the act of Covenantal Restoration.

In the middle of this chapter, we hear the beautiful, hopeful, poetic words of the Third Servant Song that comes to sustain the weary with a word. This Suffering Servant stands in the middle of the people as if to say “The Covenant is not broken! Reach out your hand and you will not fall. You can continue to turn away and join those who caused your suffering, or you can come home.”

On Maundy Thursday we are given the same choice: to sit isolated and alone or to reach out for the Grace that is freely given. Reaching out will not cause the rest of our lives to be easy, but it will give us the strength to endure. The pain of Good Friday is still to come. The mourning of Holy Saturday is still to come. The awesome anticipation of the Vigil is still to come. The One who Mary thought was the Gardener is still to come to whisper your name, to lift you out of the dust. Remember the Loving Servant washing our feet. Remember Jesus at the table with the Disciples, with us, taking, blessing, breaking, giving, and being the Living Bread that night, and this night. May this night give us the strength and hope to endure the difficult days to come. The One who loves us, who suffers and rejoices alongside us, will never abandon us.

The Rev. Jimmy Pickett  
St. John's Episcopal Church, Athol  
Diocese of Western Massachusetts

## GOOD FRIDAY



### COLLECT

*Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 52: 13–53: 12

#### Forest for the Trees

Suffer not, you steady servants, take solace in the search  
exalt the power in your bodies, learn to flex on your perch  
mortal trappings, stall anxiety, in depression lurch  
startle nations, motivation: in the oak and the birch

Timely strength, ignite indignity, the leaves in their books  
and at length, incite dissent to harbor none in the nooks  
stomp the crooks, rooted in evil pesky weevils and kooks  
scrutinize your simulacra, nanoscopic in looks

Call the spades, demise of comfort in this world of unrest  
done with tests, invite your sins to stay, amoral is best  
in our chest, beaten with anguish, languish here in the West  
pour some blood, questions ignored, the former done with some zest

Perverse zeal, suggestion demented grows more in their maniacal loom  
shadowy weaves, these thieves bring elephants and sticks in the room  
a funny thing happens when digging your tomb  
the trees go right on growing, unaware of past doom

Avi M., aka The AVATAR

MANNA Community Member and Black Seed Writer, Boston, MA

Diocese of Massachusetts



ON THE CROSS | ELIZABETH WANG

*Note: MANNA is a congregation of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston which accompanies and empowers the unhoused and unstably housed community of downtown Boston.*



## HOLY SATURDAY



### COLLECT

*O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 64: 1–12

**IN THE 1983 MUSICAL DRAMA *YENTL***, Barabara Streisand sings one of the most iconic songs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “Papa, Can You Hear Me?” In it she prays to God amid a single flickering candle. The song carries with it a desperation and longing, the character begging for forgiveness, understanding, and strength. It is an emotional experience that translates through every fiber of our beings because of its raw and realistic presence in the human condition.

The 64<sup>th</sup> chapter of Isaiah rings out like Streisand’s song etched in scripture. That’s why Streisand’s song is so powerful. That’s why the morning after Jesus’ death is so powerful. In the non-stop marathon of Holy Week when there are many moments of Jesus’ last days worthy of deep prayer and contemplation, it is in the utter emotional depravity and dissolution that existed for his disciples between his crucifixion and resurrection where we as followers of the Jesus Movement find Yentl comfort.

It is easy to love God and to be a strong proponent of faith when things are going well. It is much harder to hold to our beliefs when their evidence and their prosperities fall short. In the deprecation and sorrow that flows from Isaiah’s 64<sup>th</sup> chapter and from all the Holy Saturday moments that might be in your life, let any sadness and depression not just wash over you but also release from you like a hose that has finally run dry; and in that cathartic release know that God has heard you and that God will hold you, always.

The Rev. Jeremy Means-Koss  
St. James, Arlington, VT, and St. Peter, Bennington, VT  
Diocese of Vermont



RIVER OF LIFE 3 | WAYNE FORTE



ISAIAH 60:1 | CHRISTOPHER POWERS

## EASTER DAY



### COLLECT

*O God, who made this most holy night to shine with the glory of the Lord's resurrection: Stir up in your Church that Spirit of adoption which is given to us in Baptism, that we, being renewed both in body and mind, may worship you in sincerity and truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

### Canticle 11 (Book of Common Prayer p. 87), Isaiah 60: 1–3, 11, 18–19

**THIS SONG** was written for the people who had returned from exile to a city in ruins. The call to arise and shine inspired them to rebuild Jerusalem and their lives after experiencing unimaginable losses. They lost even the temple, the place where their God's feet rested, the Holy One of Israel. They had made offerings to God at the Temple to ensure peace and prosperity. What went wrong?

Darkness and light come in cycles, as night follows day. "For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples..." Darkness will fall over the earth again and again, and we may observe this truth in the seasons—in nature and in the Church. Winter returns every year, and so does spring. Lent returns every year, and so does Easter.

Rather than dwell on past suffering, Isaiah's song offers a vision of light and glory, of God arising upon them, and God's glory appearing over them. Peace and prosperity will return, because God is ever faithful. The temple is destroyed, but they will build a new one. They will enter into a new life.

In our darkest moments, these words bring comfort, because they speak to our deepest longings. "Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders..." Oh, how we long for peace. Even when our nation is not at war, even when our cities are intact, we live in a state of anxiety.

The solution to living in fear and darkness is to turn on the light. On Easter morning, the risen Christ calls to us, "Arise, shine; for the light has come..." The days are growing longer. Spring is coming. The warmth of the sun will thaw the frozen earth, including our fear-filled hearts, and inspire us to rebuild our world. When the light of God's love shines in our lives, our perspective changes. We are able to love even our enemies. As Simeon sings, we won't need the sun or spring to cue us. The Lord will be our everlasting light, and our God will be our glory.

Arise and shine on Easter morning, knowing that you are a child of God whose goodness and mercy flows through you into the world.

The Rev. Anne Hartley  
All Saints, South Burlington, VT, and St. Paul's, Vergennes, VT  
Diocese of Vermont

## MONDAY IN BRIGHT WEEK



### COLLECT

*Grant, O Lord, that we may so live in the Paschal mystery that the joy of these fifty days may continually strengthen us, and assure us of our salvation; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 12: 1–6

**TODAY IS A BRIGHT MONDAY MORNING** as I write this reflection on Isaiah 12:1–6. It is January 20, and the sun is hitting freshly fallen snow as I contemplate the arc of justice that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. advanced in his lifetime and witness a new President’s inauguration. Readers will read this reflection on another “Bright Monday”—the day after Easter Sunday and a happy continuation of the joy of Easter that is celebrated particularly in the Orthodox church.

The prophet Isaiah predicts “You will say in that day ...” What will my past self today say to my future self on another Bright Monday in April? After having experienced the wilderness of Lent, walked with Jesus to the cross during Holy Week, and waited for the empty tomb of Easter? I hope the prediction of Isaiah will ring as true and hopeful to me as it does today: “I will trust and not be afraid.” Today I am deeply comforted by the infinite power of the story of our faith and the way our church calendar invites us to embody it—that God was born among us, walked with us and loved us, gave up life for us, and redeemed life for us and for all creation. Today and every day I claim what Isaiah has said to us: God has forgiven. God comforts. God saves. God is great.

As we come down from the mountaintop that is Holy Week and Easter Sunday, and pick back up the threads of a routine week, I will say to myself: “With joy I will draw water from the well of salvation!” Because I do not have to draw water from a well as a daily chore, I will also enter Easter saying “With joy I will find my salvation in my email, in shared cooking, in school board meetings, in yoga, in wood chopping, in the struggles of young people, in food pantry donations ....” and no matter what the future brings, I will claim the strength that God has given me, not just on my own behalf, but by lending my strength to others. And together, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr. “we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.” May this Monday indeed be bright with joy and with praise, for great in our midst is the Holy One.

Tina Pickering  
Canon to the Ordinary  
Episcopal Church of New Hampshire

*Bright Week is the designation in the Orthodox Church for the first week of Easter season. It is the week when the “bright sadness” of Lent becomes full joy through the Paschal mystery.*



## TUESDAY IN BRIGHT WEEK



### COLLECT

*O Lord, you have saved us through the Paschal mystery of Christ: Continue to support your people with heavenly gifts, that we may attain true liberty, and enjoy the happiness of heaven which we have begun to taste on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 25: 1–9

**DO YOU STILL FEEL THE EASTER JOY?** It's Easter Tuesday, and while the elation of trumpets and incense, Easter dinners, and time with friends and family may have waned, are you still stirred in your spirit by the joy of the resurrection and the promise of true liberty in Jesus?

Are you joyful in your celebration of Earth Day,<sup>1</sup> today? Convicted in your renewal to right action for our Earth? Are you singing praises to God in thanksgiving for the trust and care God has shown us through the gift of Creation?

Today, we celebrate both the Easter season and Earth Day, even while we acknowledge there is tension in our celebrations. While we offer thanksgiving and praise to God for the miracle of Creation, we know the sharp reality of our shortcomings in caring for it. We have sinned in our use of the earth. We have failed to use its resources rightly. We lament the reality in which we now live, with compromised soil to grow our crops, diminished environments for plants and animals, and the impact of climate change inordinately affecting the most vulnerable among us.

Throughout the passage appointed for today, while crying out to God in anger at times, Isaiah describes God's tender care for us via elements of the natural world: the earth as God's invitation to solace. God's refuge for the needy is a "shelter from the storm," and "a shade from the heat" because the "breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall and like the heat of the desert." The author turns to Creation to make sense of difficult life experience; to lean into God's constant providence and care through "common" experiences like the relief of shade in the desert. Might we, too, lean into our earthly home for signs of God's promises and faithfulness?

The collect for today invites us to petition God for continuation of our "heavenly gifts" so that we might attain true liberty. True liberty, even in a time when some of us feel restricted in our ability to enact the change necessary to build God's kingdom on Earth: to improve our stewardship of the environment, to care for our neighbors. We are called by our faith into challenging spaces to be ministers of the Good News, proclaiming hope and life, even when what we see around us is destruction and despair. Isaiah points us to a feast to which all people are invited, some shade in the desert sun for weary followers. Here, people will celebrate that God can be trusted to produce fruit from any circumstance, that God cherishes those who are dispossessed, and that God remains with us, unending. There is a kingdom to build together that defies the realities of this life, and God is inviting us into it. Everyone is invited to this feast.

CONTINUED

<sup>1</sup> In 2025, Earth Day in the United States fell on the second day of Easter Week. This meditation reflects on that connection.

## TUESDAY IN BRIGHT WEEK CONTINUED

Though we live amongst brokenness and pain, we are promised true liberty from that oppression by a God who persists in seeking us, loving us, and caring for us. What joy, offered by God who gives shade and shelter for our use, from God's own Creation. May we trust our Easter joy, convicted on this Earth Day, to rise to God's invitation and return that love to one another and our Earth, singing, "O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name."

Emily Keniston  
St. Peter Episcopal Church, Portland, ME  
Diocese of Maine



HANNAH GARRITY | ARISEN

## WEDNESDAY IN BRIGHT WEEK



### COLLECT

*O Lord, the life of the faithful, the glory of the saints, and the delight of those who trust in you: Hear our supplications, and quench, we pray, the thirst of those who long for your promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 51: 1–11

**AFTER SEVERAL DAYS** of contemplation, I chose January 20, 2025, to begin writing the devotion for Bright Wednesday, the Wednesday of Easter Week. On that day, the 47<sup>th</sup> president of the United States was inaugurated. On that day, we celebrated the life and teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr. On that day, half of our country lamented and half the country celebrated. Within the couple of weeks since then, we in the United States have begun to see a wave of changes that seem to keep all of us on edge.

Jumping ahead to April 23, 2025, Wednesday in Easter Week, we are re-assured that Christ has indeed risen from the grave. Even as we rejoice, celebrating the resurrection, where do we look to find the strength to endure and to keep moving forward as the world around us becomes unsteady, at best? Where do we look when we need hope and encouragement?

The words of Isaiah 51 tell us where to find the strength to endure and moving forward.

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness (v. 1)

Listen to me, my people, give heed to me, my nation (v. 4)

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath (v. 6)

Listen to me, you who know righteousness (v. 7)

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord (v. 9)

We are promised that the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (v. 11) It is Easter; we are the ransomed of the Lord.

MLK Day on inauguration day reminded me that the Good News we proclaim is beyond any earthly structure. The Kingdom of God does not rely on partisan politics to be enacted. Dr. King's words call us to continue to use our voices to speak truth to power.

I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits. (Martin Luther King's Nobel Acceptance Speech)

We are called to continue to use our voices to speak for those who have no voice. To lament, yes, but to move through our lament, clinging to the paschal hope and proclaiming the prophetic message that is desperately needed. The Easter, my resurrection prayer for us is found in familiar words from the Book of Common Prayer:

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## WEDNESDAY IN BRIGHT WEEK CONTINUED

Lord God Almighty, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with your gracious will; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (Collect for the Nation, BCP 258)

The Rev. Kathy Hartman  
Supply Priest  
Diocese of Vermont



MOURNING LIGHT | LISLE GWYNN GARRITY



## THURSDAY IN BRIGHT WEEK



### COLLECT

*Let your people, O Lord, rejoice for ever that they have been renewed in spirit; and let the joy of our adoption as your sons and daughters strengthen the hope of our glorious resurrection in Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen*

### Isaiah 52: 1–10

**“AWAKE, AWAKE,** put on your strengths O Zion!”

In the collision of our ridiculous hope of the Easter season and the excruciating realities of this time in our country, I am feeling more like I want to “Sleep, sleep.” I want to shut off the world and find comfort in God alone. This section of Isaiah, chapter 40-52 opens with verses about God’s people being comforted: “Comfort, O comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid.” And now in chapter 52, we are not only to awake but sing joyously, like the sentinels who see the return of the Lord to Zion. Salvation is at hand.

How am I to find comfort and joy in the chaos of our times? Our world is so divided...

Isaiah gives me the answer, reminding me “how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion ‘Your God reigns.’” Jesus is that messenger that we celebrate this Easter week, when Jesus has triumphed over not only the empire that killed him, but also death itself. If I remember that the coming of the Messiah was foretold by an oppressed people long ago and that the Jesus I believe in and follow is the messenger of peace and love, then I am (or should be) comforted and awakened to the joy that the faith and knowledge of God’s love brings me.

Jesus comes to all of us, every single one of us. No political party or nationality or race divides us in Jesus’ kingdom, and there is great joy in that fact, if only we stay awake to the presence of God in our lives and those of all God’s beloved children. Awake!

The Rev. Deacon Hilary V. Greene  
Church of the Good Shepherd, Wareham, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts

## FRIDAY IN BRIGHT WEEK



### COLLECT

*God of infinite mercy, you renew the faith of your people by the yearly celebration of these fifty days: Stir up in us the gifts of your grace, that we may know more deeply that Baptism has cleansed us, the Spirit has quickened us, and the Blood of Christ has redeemed us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 61:10 – 62: 7, 10–1

*I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)*

Isaiah expresses the joy of Jews returning to Jerusalem from captivity through the metaphor of a couple on their wedding day. On that day the man wore robes that could have many purposes, hence the garland like a priest. For women, jewels were the only items they truly owned, and wearing them at a wedding was an independent expression of faith and cosmic. The hope of return was the proof of God's covenant of love for the people.

Jerusalem has this same poignant importance for many today. In the film *the Kingdom of Heaven*, Jerusalem is surrounded by an invading army. A knight leaves the city to negotiate the surrender with the conquering general. The terms offered and accepted, inhabitants could leave without harm ahead of the conquering force. The knight asked the general the worth of Jerusalem. The general replied, "It's worth nothing," then said, "it's worth everything!" Just as in Isaiah's time, the return to Jerusalem was a concrete hope that gave courage to the Jewish exiles. We should continue to seek the peace of that wounded land, so God's will (not ours) can make real the hope that peoples of faith have for the region today.

Spiritually, the church is also a new Jerusalem. We, too, are guided by radical courage to stand for the justice and truth expressed by Isaiah 61:10: *I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

We have the courage—and the means of power—thanks to our baptism in Christ and Christ's resurrection from the dead. Through the water of our baptism we are imbued with the Spirit of righteousness in Christ. We are sealed with jewels of faith as expressed in the Baptismal Covenant: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers? Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

Many years ago, a Protestant Pastor said that when we are faced with moral issues, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I going to be a loyal liar or truthful traitor?" In times of darkness, are we able to stir within us the love and courage seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, rejoicing in God's love, which Isaiah foretold? And can we express that love in thoughts, words, and deeds as beautiful as the prophet's message, the bridegroom's garland, and the bride's precious jewels? Can we pray and act in concrete ways that prove our belief that God is still preparing a beautiful wedding garment for places like the Holy Land, enshrouded in blood?

May that be our Easter commission! Now, go in Peace to Love and serve the Lord. Amen

The Rev. Deacon James David Ballard  
St. Luke's Episcopal Church St. Alban's, VT  
Diocese of Vermont

## SATURDAY IN BRIGHT WEEK



### COLLECT

*O God, by the glorification of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit you have opened for us the gates of your kingdom: Grant that we, who have received such great gifts, may dedicate ourselves more diligently to your service, and live more fully the riches of our faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 65: 16–25

**My initial reaction,** on reading through this very familiar passage of Isaiah during Inauguration week (2025), while the LA fires still burned, was: “Nice vision, and so totally where we are NOT!” But then I dug more into the previous chapters and the history behind the reading. It’s set in Jerusalem, years after some of the Jewish exiles (really, their descendants) returned home from Babylon to rebuild the city and their lives. Some progress has been made, but much of the city is still in ruins. There is hunger, opposition, in-fighting, and blatant practices defying Jewish faith and laws. This passage is God’s response to the chaos and complaints of the people.

A key theme over the last few chapters is about calling, hearing and responding. Challenged by difficulties, the people perhaps feel that God is silent, and so seek for answers in all the wrong places—from the dead, from idols, from secret rituals that confer “holiness.” But in the beginning of chapter 65, God says, in essence, “I’ve been here, waiting for you to call upon me, but you didn’t; you went your own way, pursuing your own ends and ignoring me.” Then in this passage, God answers that, rather than ignoring the people, the one who created everything to begin with is creating a new world, a world characterized by joy, one that God also delights in. The former things—former sins, former destruction—will not be remembered. The passage provides the contrasts of the former (that is, present) life with the new life, such as weeping turning to joy, early death to long life, futility of labor to enjoying the fruits of labor, including children destined to blessing, not calamity.

And the promise is that the Divine One will answer even before the people call out. That the Holy Community is there and will be there, always ready to communicate and respond to their people.

The message is given precisely to people who are in the midst of multiple and complex difficulties and threats. It encourages them to look for hope and guidance from the Creator of all that is good, to hold on to—and work to manifest—the vision of a new and better life, and to believe that they are not abandoned, always heard. AND it affirms that there is accountability for how they believe and behave—they are called to stop seeking false sources of hope and guidance.

The message does apply to us as well. Surrounded by the burning up and tearing down of so much in our society, physical and social, we may feel like running and hiding, burrowing into despair, or seeking out any and every source of solace and hope. Instead, in this Easter Week, we are invited by the Creator, the resurrected Jesus and the Holy Spirit to turn to them, listen, follow, and step into their vision of a new world, not one we are passively waiting for, but one that we actively choose as a pattern for co-creation, one of joy, community, and justice. May it be so!

The Rev. Lise Hildebrandt  
MANNA Community Boston, MA  
Diocese of Massachusetts





GRACE POURS UPON CHRIST'S PEOPLE | ELIZABETH WANG



## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER [EPILOGUE]



### COLLECT

*Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### Isaiah 61: 1–4, Luke 4:16–21

After his baptism and his Spirit-provoked 40-day “retreat” in the wilderness, Jesus went to his hometown synagogue. Out of all the places he could have chosen in the scroll given to him, he went to Isaiah 61:1–2a. *And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Scripture was not simply part of his daily life; it was how he defined his life; it was his life. Jesus was scripture, God’s Word come to life. Jesus based his mission in scripture and that is a good place for us to start as we engage in the lifelong work of understanding our identity as children of God, siblings of Christ.

Let’s take a closer look at Jesus’ Isaian mission statement. The ‘year of the Lord’s favor’ was also known as the year of jubilee. It was a year of liberation, grounded in God’s grace and abundance. Every 7th year—Jubilee—any debts were erased, everything was restored, people were reconciled within the community and freed from enslavement. Even the land was given rest from production of crops. The people in Jesus’ hometown welcomed this hope of Jubilee among them until...

The people spoke well of him until he explained that his ministry was to more than just the people who were like them, the marginalized & forgotten in society. It would be for *all* people. Oh yes, and the second part, which he had conspicuously omitted from the Isaiah passage—vengeance; there would be no vengeance as part of his Jubilee. Both oppressor and oppressed would need to stretch their understanding of God’s abundant love.

Jesus didn’t just want them to claim jubilee for a year, but for a lifetime and for all people.

By choosing this passage from Isaiah, Jesus announced the one mission he believed could change our hearts and change the world. In particular, the year of Jubilee lets us know that this isn’t just about personal piety, but about God’s agenda of grace and abundance. This agenda refutes the lie told to us by the evil spirit of greed—that there isn’t enough—a lie that enslaves society and church alike. A lie that turns us against each other, ourselves and God.

Jesus says there is abundant room in God’s plan for welcome and inclusion, but it has no room for coercive power, vengeance, hoarding up wealth, disrespect for the outsider, or hating our enemies.

A note: Inclusion of our enemies means that the same grace offered to us is extended to our enemies. It doesn’t mean capitulating to evil. Like the prophet Isaiah—like Jesus—when there are enemies in our midst, we owe it them, ourselves and the vulnerable to call for amendment of life and adoption of Jesus’ mission as a measure of community standards.

CONTINUED

## SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER [EPILOGUE] CONTINUED

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” is a moral measure—a guide. It is a powerful and succinct tool to clarify the acceptable behavior to which we hold each other accountable. How we live or don’t live in this world reveals our true heart and impacts our society.

If the church and her members are not striving for the year of the Lord’s favor today, why are we surprised by the state of our world?

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called this Isaiah 61 passage, “guidelines for a constructive church.” He preached, “*The church has a Purpose and Guidelines it must follow (1) seek to heal the broken-hearted; (2) bring deliverance to those who are captive, slaves to fear, slaves to prejudice; (3) proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord—not a period beyond history, “it can be this year” “any year when [people] decide to do right”...*

Isaiah, Jesus, King—these men put to us an active challenge. We are an Easter people, who have just been renewed by the Easter proclamation. A wholeness beyond history has been given to us by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His Spirit is upon us, asking how we will advance his mission with this new life we have been given—this year, today.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to...

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Shannon McVean-Brown  
Bishop  
Episcopal Diocese of Vermont



**Artist info**—The artists in the devotional represent a range of Christian denominations/faiths, known and unknown. Brief statements from many about their vocation as artists or their specific works are included below.

**Christopher Powers, [fullofeyes.com](http://fullofeyes.com)**

Several pieces in the booklet are from this artist. His website states:

“The need that drives me to the work of Full of Eyes is that there are many who have not yet seen Jesus as soul-compellingly beautiful, many to whom He is boring at best and hateful at worst (there are also many who have seen some glimpse of Him and long to see more, I would put myself in this camp). My desire—by the grace of God and the work of His Spirit—is to see this change. Full of Eyes seeks to visually proclaim the glory of God in Christ as taught in scripture.”

**Elizabeth Wang, [radiantlight.org](http://radiantlight.org)**

Several pieces in the booklet are from Elizabeth Wang. The Radiant Light website states:

“Radiant Light is a movement within the Roman Catholic Church. It seeks to encourage people to grow in holiness by believing and living the Catholic faith in its fullness.... This work has been produced by Elizabeth Wang at Christ's invitation, in order to increase and illumine our faith.”

**Janet McKenzie, [janetmckenzie.com](http://janetmckenzie.com)**

Much information can be found about Ms. McKenzie, a Vermont artist well-beloved in the Episcopal Church, among others, on her website. Three works have been licensed for this volume, about which Janet writes:

*Station 15—The Resurrection*: “‘Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.’ Attributed to Martin Luther”

*Station 9—Jesus Falls the Third Time*: “The ninth station reminds us to face our suffering regardless of how difficult it may be. As Jesus bore the weight of the cross for the third time, we must also find the courage to try again. If we do something unexpectedly new will be born in each one of us.”

*Woman Offered*: “Can this woman image Christ to us? Must this woman be an image of Christ for us to care? Is she offered for our failures to see all people as made in (God's) image, according to (God's) likeness? (Gen. 1:26–27).” Read more [HERE](#).

**Lisle Garrity, [lislegwynngarrity.com](http://lislegwynngarrity.com), [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org)**

Lisle (pronounced Lyle), is a Presbyterian pastor, retreat leader, artist, and founder of A Sanctified Art: “a collaborative ministry providing art and multimedia resources for worshiping communities.” The website offers a *visio-divina* guide for each purchased artwork. However, artist statements can also be found for these works on [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org), by title.

**Nicolette Peñaranda, [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org)**

Nicolette is a Lutheran pastor and author whose art is offered through A Sanctified Art. *Golden Hour*, the piece featured in this volume, is a mediation on John 13:1–20 with detailed African symbolism within its imagery. You can find read more about the weave of culture and faith in this image on A Sanctified Art, by title, or [HERE](#).

**Jorge Cocco, [jorgecocco.com](http://jorgecocco.com)**

Jorge is a Church of Latter Day Saint artist from Argentina known for his secular, biblical, and Mormon artwork in various media. *The Betrayal* is one of the artist's scriptural meditations on the events of Holy Week.

CONTINUED

## ART APPENDIX BY ARTIST

### **Mike Moyers, [mikemoyersfineart.com](http://mikemoyersfineart.com)**

The artist says of his ministry: “I firmly believe that art is a communion with the soul. Through my art, I strive to make known the beauty and wonder of life and faith. The pieces in this website are inspired by things that have touched my life in a meaningful way. They range from plein air and impressionism to abstract and conceptual. My hope is to successfully communicate those inspirations so that you might be touched as well.”

### **Hannah Garrity, [hannahgarrity.com](http://hannahgarrity.com), [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org)**

Garrity writes about *Arisen*: “In this image, Mary Magdalene appears surprised. She also seems wiser and more aware in this moment as she looks toward Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified two days prior. How had he rolled away the stone? This was truly a miracle! In this moment, Mary knows.... She never wonders if she is dreaming. She never questions whom she saw, though everyone she tells does not believe her.... She can see clearly.”

### **Hannah Grube Cooper**

Hannah is a singer, amateur visual artist, and administrator for The Communities for Spiritual Vitality.

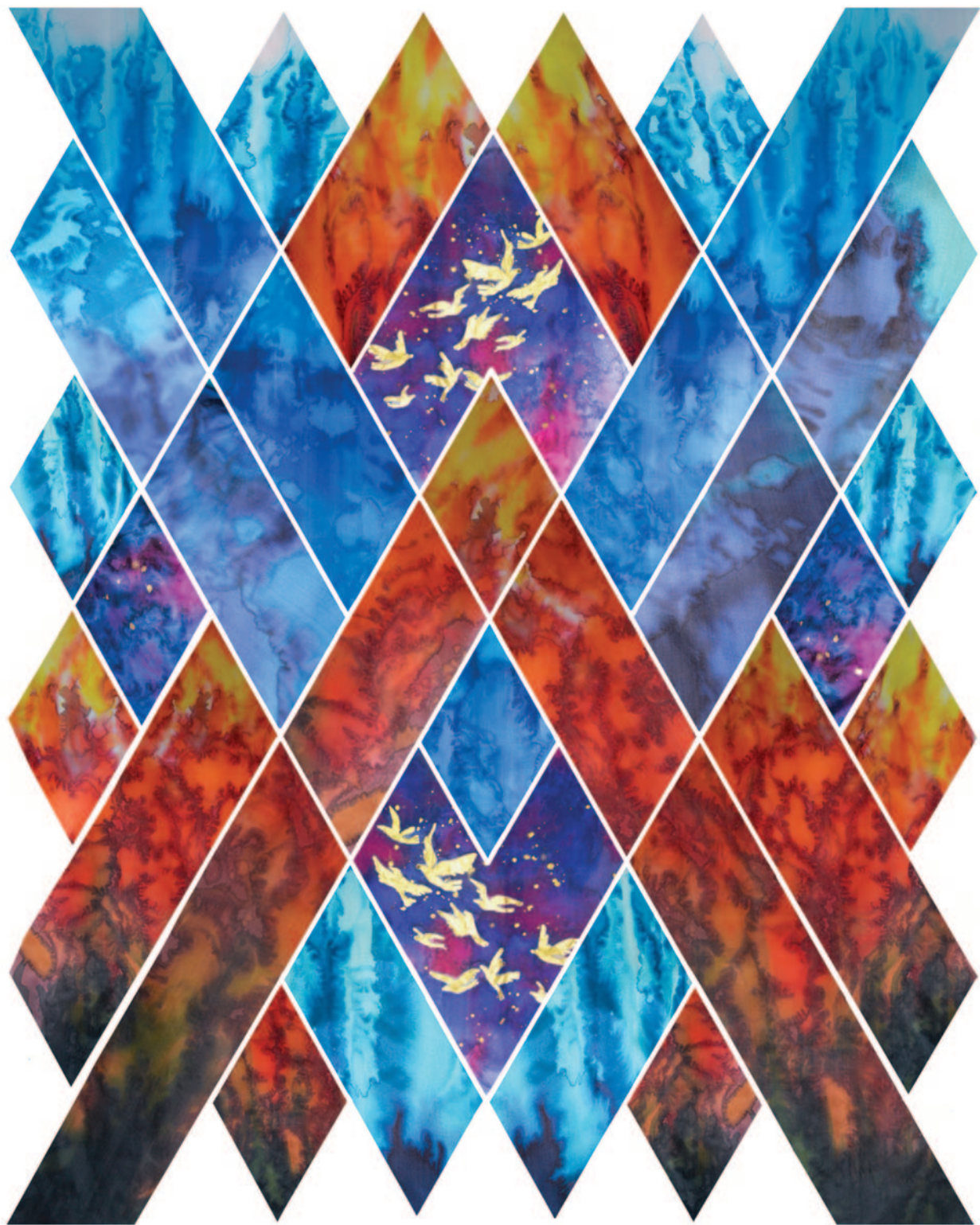


## ART APPENDIX BY PAGE



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Page 3	Elizabeth Wang   T-00070-OL   <i>If We Persevere</i>   © Radiant Light   radiantlight.org.uk
Page 6	Kelly Latimore   <i>Christ in the Wilderness</i>   kellylatimoreicons.com
Page 12	Hannah Grube Cooper   <i>Ripples</i>
Page 14	Elizabeth Wang   T-00081   <i>Christ is our bridge to heaven</i>   © Radiant Light   radiantlight.org.uk
Page 18	Christopher Powers   <i>Isaiah 10: 5, 15</i>   fullofeyes.com
Page 20	Frank Wesley   <i>Churinga (pure light, glory of God)</i>   Art in the Christian Tradition, The Vanderbilt Divinity Library
Page 22	Nicolette Peñaranda   <i>Golden Hour</i>   A Sanctified Art
Page 24	Janet McKenzie   <i>Woman Offered #5</i>
Page 26	Christopher Powers   <i>Isaiah 11: 1–2, 9</i>   fullofeyes.com
Page 31	Lisle Gwynn Garrity   <i>A Wide Embrace</i>   Sanctified Art
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Page 34	Lisle Gwynn Garrity   <i>The Promise</i>   A Sanctified Art
Page 37	Anonymous Artist   <i>Hand of God</i>   Art in the Christian Tradition, Vanderbilt Divinity Library
Page 41	Elizabeth Wang   T-00350-OL   <i>The soul is like a cavern</i>   © Radiant Light   radiantlight.org.uk
Page 43	Mike Moyers   <i>Guidance—Night and Day</i>
Page 44	Hannah Garrity   <i>Vessel</i>   A Sanctified Art
Page 48	Jorge Cocco Santángelo   <i>The Betrayal</i>   jorgecocco.com
Page 51	Janet McKenzie   <i>Stations of the Cross 9, Jesus Falls the Third Time</i>
Page 54	Lisle Gwynn Garrity   <i>Then They Remembered</i>   Sanctified Art
Page 57	Christopher Powers   <i>Isaiah 11:6, 9</i>   fullofeyes.com
Page 60	Elizabeth Wang   T-01137-OL   <i>On the Cross</i>   © Radiant Light   radiantlight.org.uk
Page 61	Wayne Forte   <i>River of Life 3</i>   © 2025   Eyekons
Page 62	Christopher Powers   <i>Isaiah 60:1</i>   fullofeyes.com
Page 66	Hannah Garrity   <i>Arisen</i>   Sanctified Art
Page 68	Lisle Gwynn Garrity   <i>Mourning Light</i>   Sanctified Art
Page 72	Elizabeth Wang   T-00442   <i>Grace pours upon Christ's people</i>   © Radiant Light   radiantlight.org.uk
Back Cover	Lisle Gwynn Garrity   <i>When You Pass Through the Waters</i>   A Sanctified Art



*Lisle*

WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH THE WATERS | LISLE GWYNIN GARRITY



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