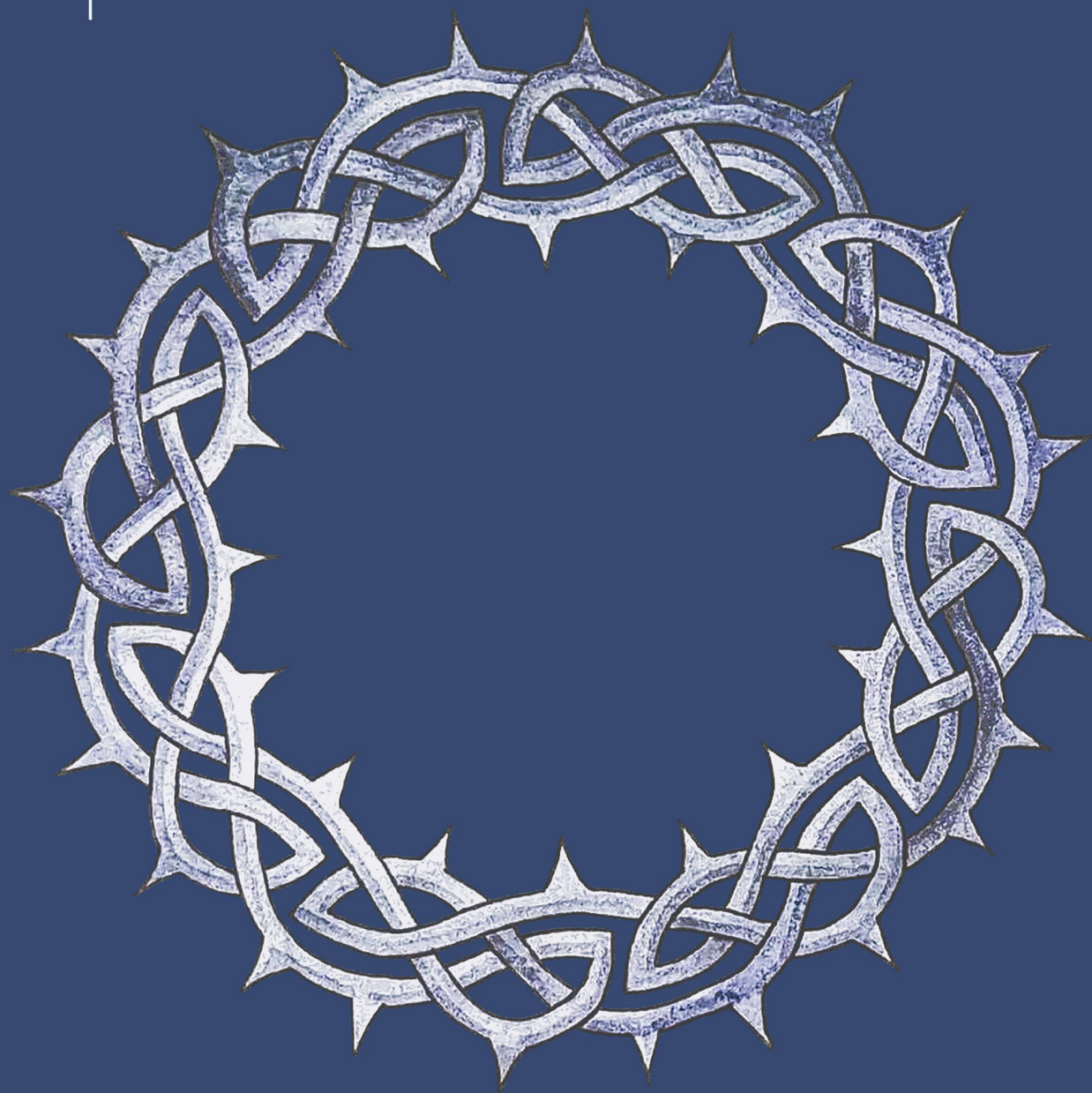


LEVEL

GROUND
mennonite church



2021 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL SERIES

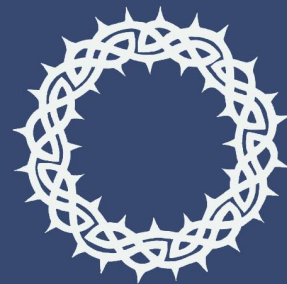
week four: mar 7 - mar 13

CONTENTS

Day 19: Mar 7, 3 rd Sunday in Lent.....	1
<i>Jesus and Nicodemus</i>	
Day 20: Mar 8.....	3
<i>Jesus and the Samaritan Woman</i>	
Day 21: Mar 9.....	6
<i>Jesus Sends out the Disciples</i>	
Day 22: Mar 10.....	8
<i>Come to Me All Who are Weary</i>	
Day 23: Mar 11.....	10
<i>Parable of the Sower and the Soil</i>	
Day 24: Mar 12.....	12
<i>Teaching on Prayer</i>	
Day 25: Mar 13.....	14
<i>Invitation to Isolation</i>	
Colouring Activity.....	16
Word Search.....	18

DAY 19: MAR 7, THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Theme: Jesus and Nicodemus
Scripture: John 3:1-20
Prepared by: Isaías Rodríguez



For most people, the first things that stand out in this passage are the new birth in the Spirit (v. 5-8) and the recognition of Jesus as the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind (v. 16-17). However, the first thing that stood out to me was not those two central aspects, but something more general in the context of the story:

**The way that Jesus used simple language
that makes sense to everyone there.**

He explained to Nicodemus in everyday language a number of fundamental ideas of his message for humanity: his origin, his mission on earth, the way to salvation, as well as the importance of the new birth in the Spirit.

While reading this passage of the Bible, I was blown away by the communication skills of Jesus and his phenomenal capacity to bring complex ideas together. He instructs Nicodemus on essential and profound topics by using common words and easy-to-understand analogies: wind, light, darkness, birth. Despite his knowledge of Scripture, at the beginning of their dialogue Nicodemus does not seem to clearly understand what Jesus is explaining to him. I think this discussion with Jesus ended up being a starting point for a profound transformation of Nicodemus's life. Perhaps the fact that he was one of the people helping to bring Jesus's body to the tomb after his crucifixion speaks of the deep transformation that he experienced.

When I look at this passage focussing on how Jesus communicates, I see that he is giving a message to his followers nowadays:

**How important it is to share his teachings in a
clear and understandable way for our audience.**

This means making sure that as a church* we are sharing a relevant message, taking into consideration the reality of our audience: their social, political, economic, religious and cultural context. This is exactly what Jesus did with Nicodemus.

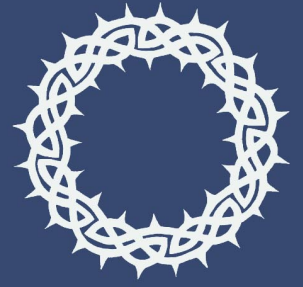


John 3:17

For God
did not send
his Son into
the world to
condemn the
world, but to
save the world
through him.

(NIV)

*When I refer to the church, I refer not only to Level Ground, but to the church of Christ in general.



Jesus knew that Nicodemus was a figure of authority and power for the Jewish people, a teacher who was possibly a member of the Sanhedrin, as well as an “expert” about the Scripture and law, a key person in the political and religious structure of that time. Perhaps, he was not randomly chosen to have this dialogue.

When reading the text, I was wondering,
what is the gist of the message that we are sharing as a church?
And who do we consider our audience?

When we as the body of Christ focus on communicating in a way that understands the reality of our audience, this leads us to have a greater positive impact on our society. How to do it is a question that we need to be asking ourselves on a regular basis. Improving the understanding of our context should be at the centre of our work. Then we will be able to more clearly see and figure out how to be salt and light in the context where God has put us.

May this time of Lent be a time of reflection on our role as a church in the context where we are, as well as a time to double check how we are communicating with society around us.

Prayer:

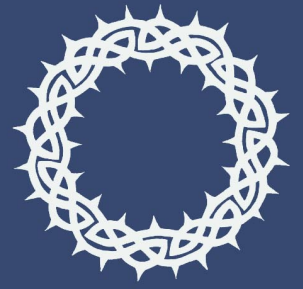
Lord, give us wisdom to understand and communicate your message of life.
May we, as your church, be light for the context in which you have put us.
May our message be relevant in the midst of a society
that needs you more and more every day.

DAY 20: MAR 8

Theme: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

Scripture: John 4:1-42

Prepared by: Crystal Wildeboer



To be Known is to be Loved

I've always been fascinated by this story from the time I heard it as a young girl. I would sit carefully on the floor of the dark church basement in my Sunday dress, lace socks and black velvet shoes (with a gold heart on the buckle), listening to the Sunday school bible story time. Honestly, I couldn't wait to get to the craft time, and I always hoped it was more than a colouring sheet.

I don't know if most of us understood the concept of living water. Already then, I knew that if there was something called living water, there had to be something called dead water, and that confused me. I vaguely remember being told that we needed water to live, so therefore (as if it made all the sense in the world), we needed God to live. God and water are the same. And then we skipped away to craft time, excited for every chance we got to use the glue bottles and sprinkles.

As I read this story now, I am drawn to the raw honesty and vulnerability within it. The curiosity. The back and forth conversation as the Samaritan woman was trying to figure out who this man was, and why He was talking to her. She's not afraid to engage with Jesus. I'd even venture to suggest that she was feisty, witty, and well-educated. Pay attention to how she was answering Jesus's questions by firing questions right back; immediately, almost chastising him for talking to her.

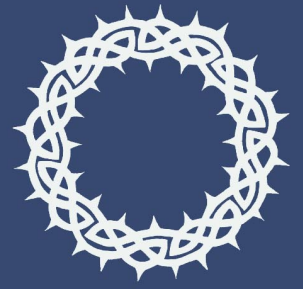
A tiny bit of background to this story: No one went to the well at noon (during the hottest part of the day) to get water. To avoid the glances, whispers and judgments, she went alone—exactly when she was sure no one else would be there.

Except JESUS was.



John 4:9-10

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (NIV)



This story touches my heart deeply. I, too, have tons of questions and secrets. I have a past. I can relate to the shame of feeling like there are those talking about me behind closed doors. I, too, have wanted to hide and isolate to avoid pain. Haven't we all? Aren't there times we are afraid of being seen and known?

This woman had a past—one she maybe didn't want him to know.

Except JESUS knew.

An interaction with Jesus results in this woman's life being changed. One encounter. One meeting. In his eyes, she saw something that she rarely saw: love and compassion. Scorn and rejection was normal for her.

Except JESUS loved.

Jesus purposefully sought out this woman. It's also interesting to note that the water He was offering her wasn't to cleanse her of her sins or to make her clean. It was to quench her spiritual thirst. He was seeking her.

He was willing to cross geographical barriers.

He was willing to cross ethnic barriers.

He was willing to cross religious barriers.

He was willing to cross social barriers.

He was willing to cross gender barriers.

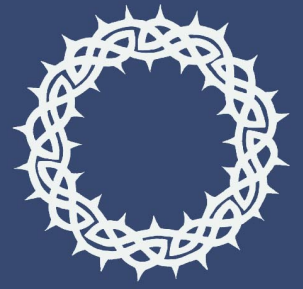
Check out this modern day monologue version of what the woman might have said to Jesus.
(Click [HERE](#) to watch)

JESUS is here with us.

JESUS seeks us.

JESUS knows us.

JESUS loves us.



I have so many questions (as I usually do). Maybe you can relate to some of these as well.

What am I longing for,
looking for, or thirsting for
in my life?

What are some basic
fears of being loved?

Can Jesus meet me where I
so desperately want to hide?

Is there anything that can
disqualify me from being
loved and accepted by Jesus?

How does Jesus approach me?

What would I see when I look at His face?

What would He say to me?

How would He treat me?

How does Jesus differ from the
way I've imagined Him to be?

How would my life change if I had an encounter
like this with Jesus— if I could truly understand
how loved and accepted I am?

Jesus, remind us who we are.

Song:

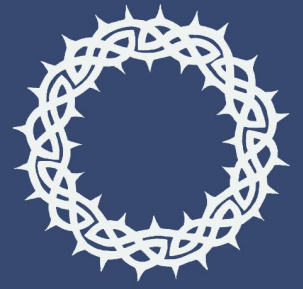
Remind Me Who I Am, Jason Grey
(Click [HERE](#) to listen)

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for seeking us, and for seeing us as who we really are—not who we want to be. Thank you for loving us no matter our secrets and for meeting us where we are—even when all we want to do is hide. Thank you for seeing our hearts, and that you come to us with love and compassion.

DAY 21: MAR 9

Theme: Jesus Sends out the Disciples
Scripture: Mark 6:6b-13
Prepared by: Curtis Fast



In this passage Jesus is sending out his twelve disciples in pairs for the purpose of preaching repentance, casting out demons and anointing people with oil so they would be healed by God. He was basically charging them to be the voices, hands and feet of God to everyone they come across; the same calling that we have today. He tells them to be people of great faith as well:

"Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. ¹⁰Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town."

**Know and trust that God will take care of your needs,
no matter where you are!**

This all sounds great doesn't it? This sounds like a great sort of charge to give before a local mission trip, or before doing some inner-city outreach or after the next 6-week course on sharing your faith with others or _____ (fill in the blank). But take a look at the stories on either side of this passage. Everything in scripture is there for a reason so why did Mark place this story where it is?

Right before this passage the disciples were in Jesus's home town and things weren't going very smoothly. People were not taking Jesus seriously; miracles weren't flowing as freely as normal and Mark writes that Jesus himself was amazed at people's lack of faith. They were ridiculed, likely laughed at and the town held an overall offence to their presence.

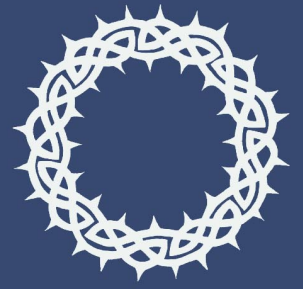
**That's when Jesus says,
"ok guys, now you go do what I just did."**

In the story following this passage, John the Baptist has told King Herod to repent for marrying his brother's wife Herodias. John's message earns him the distinct honour of being thrown in prison, beheaded and having his head brought on a platter to Herod's next dinner party.



Mark 6:12-13

They went out
and preached
that people
should repent.
They drove out
many demons
and anointed
many sick people
with oil and
healed them.
(NIV)



So why does the placement of this story matter? It matters because it tells us that Jesus tells the disciples to go in the midst of hardship. They didn't just come out of an excellent time of ministry all fired up over the work of the Spirit. They had just been ridiculed and ostracized for their message. John had recently been put in prison for doing exactly what Jesus has called his disciples to do and he is about to be beheaded. Yet they are still called to go.

Maybe you miss being in church and the encouragement that comes from hearing what God has been doing in the community. I know that I sure do. Maybe you are frustrated at that lockdowns and feel they are unjust. Maybe somewhere deep down you think that if we could just get together again, we could organize something so our community could meet Jesus through us.

Jesus tells you today, don't wait. There is no perfect time to go. Grab a friend, your shoes and a walking stick; don't take anything else with you.

Go and tell people about me.

Tell them of my love for them.

Tell them to repent and pray with them.

Teach them about the way I intended life to be.

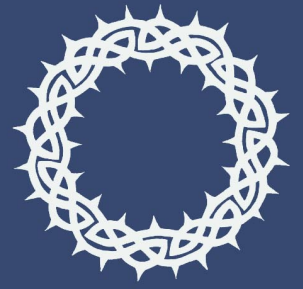
You may not always be liked or received well and that's ok, just move on to the next person. I promise to be with you no matter what happens.

DAY 22: MAR 10

Theme: Come to Me All Who are Weary

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30

Prepared by: Shelley Stout



Weariness and burdens; overwhelming struggles. Let's call them the storms of life. I think we have all experienced times in our life when we have found ourselves deep in the middle of a storm, and it seems that clear skies are not in sight. We live in a restless world that can leave us exhausted and defeated. As it turns out, Jesus has the answer to all of our storms in life. It seems simple enough ... but not always easy. Especially for those of us who have tried to live life without Jesus. So let's take a look at the scripture:

Jesus says,
"Come to Me, all you who are weary
and burdened, and I will give you rest"

It's about meeting Jesus in the storm. Jesus knows exactly what it's like to navigate life in an ungodly world, where mainstream society desires instant gratification, self-sufficiency, buying, adding, acquiring more stuff, more security, independence ... and anything goes. It becomes so exhausting. We will also experience loss, pain and grief.

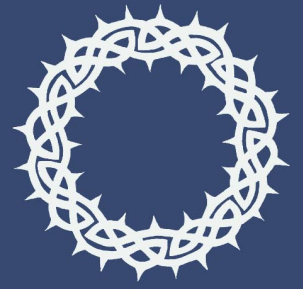
I know that in my life when I have experienced struggles, I have tried to resolve them on my own first, using my own will, mixed with pride and fear. Without bringing God into my struggle, the choices I made, followed by the consequences, were less than ideal. I was striving to do it all on my own and failing miserably.

Jesus invites us to come to him. He wants us to come to him personally, where there is nothing between Him and us. He doesn't give us "10 Easy Steps to Ease Your Weariness", however he does promise to walk with us and lighten our load. Perhaps Jesus allows us to linger in our storms long enough to see a message, learn something and experience growth. I have found that when I submit my troubles to Him, I feel peace and rest.



Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to me,
all you who are
weary and
burdened,
and I will
give you rest.
Take my yoke
upon you and
learn from me,
for I am gentle
and humble
in heart, and
you will find rest
for your souls.
For my yoke
is easy and my
burden is light."
(NIV)



"Take My yoke upon you"

That sounds a little daunting! A yoke is placed on a heavy animal in order to do some work. How do I take his yoke? Does He want me to work or rest? I think that God wants us to believe in Him who he has sent to deliver us from ourselves, and all that is required of us is that we place our faith and trust in Him, and we will find rest.

**"Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls"**

We are also called to learn from Jesus. Study how he lived his life during his time on earth; what was important to Him? He ministered to and provided healing to the broken, vulnerable and outcast people in the world. Jesus was gentle and kind and he had a humble heart. We are called to be His hands and feet here and now in this broken world. In my work, I encounter so many broken souls who feel defeated and hopeless. When I share the love of Jesus and follow his ways, I find rest for my soul.

"My yoke is easy and my burden is light"

Under the yoke of Jesus, I understand that when He is really in control of my life, I will find rest. When I put my faith and trust in Him, I will not worry and stress about the pandemic or the circumstances of this broken world. I know the end result. God has already won the battle. Through the blood of Jesus we are saved!

I think it's the greatest invitation we will ever receive!

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

**We thank you that you came down from Heaven to
reveal yourself to us by sharing all that it means to be human.**

We thank you for your grace and forgiveness even though we don't deserve it.

**Help us to be your hands and feet in this broken world,
show us how to love others as you love us.**

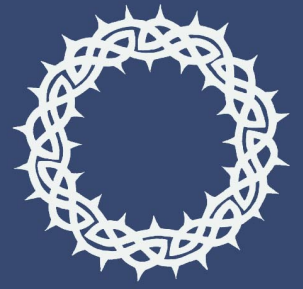
**Fill our hearts with compassion and empathy for our neighbors near and far and
give us opportunities to share your truth and to be a bright light to others, through you.**

In the name of Jesus,

Amen.

DAY 23: MAR 11

Theme: Parable of the Sower and the Soil
Scripture: Matt 13:1-23
Prepared by: Andrew Haak



How's your soil?

I remember the summer we moved onto a new farm. I was 16, thrilled to finally have my own bedroom and a little anxious about starting at a new school in a strange small town. But it was the work it took to get our farm started that I recall the most. In between feeding calves and milking cows, my brother and I spent the summer clearing the fields of rocks. The farm was 300 acres or so in total: some of that was bush, some of that was flood plain, but about half of it was harvestable land. And of that, about 50 acres was in rough shape: rocks galore. My dad was a sensible man and wanted the fields clear of debris to maximize the harvest and minimize the potential damage to the machinery. So for days and weeks my brother and I walked acre upon acre scanning every inch of dirt for rocks that were fist size or more. It was tedious, frustrating, and exhausting work under the hot Okanagan sun, but it was worth it: the crop yield was sound and the machinery was kept in good shape.

In his teaching Jesus used ordinary, everyday scenarios to illustrate his mission and his message.

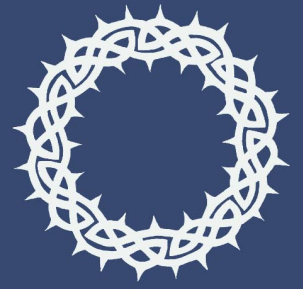
To the crowds listening that day, he used dirt to get his point across even though the seed is really at the centre of the story.

In this parable the sower casts the seed everywhere. Unlike Jesus's original audience, we have the advantage of knowing that the seed represents the kingdom of heaven. The sower in this story is generous, not selective or arbitrary as he plants. So likewise, the seeds of the kingdom are indiscriminately made available by our heavenly farmer.



Matthew 13:23

"The seed falling
on good soil
refers to someone
who hears the
word and
understands it.
This is the one
who produces a
crop, yielding a
hundred, sixty
or thirty times
what was sown."
(NIV)



A seed is small and hardy, but can be easily overlooked and squandered. So too the kingdom can be missed if one is not paying attention. A seed takes time, care, and the right conditions to germinate, grow, and yield fruit. The same goes for kingdom seed: what God is nurturing in us (and on a large scale how God is cultivating his kingdom in our world) doesn't just happen overnight in a flash of might and awe: it is slow ordinary toilsome work. It requires us to pay attention: to open our eyes, our ears, and to prevent our hearts from getting rocky. We need to make sure our soil's condition is conducive for nurturing life.

God may be growing something in us that we aren't even aware of yet:
it can take time for seeds to reveal themselves and reach full bloom.

Farming and tending soil is ongoing work. Years later, as luck would have it, my dad decided it was time to replace the teeth on the plow. The old teeth were worn out due to years of tilling; dull and stubby, they could no longer reach as deep as they were supposed to. The new teeth of course were sharp and at their full length. And wouldn't you know it: more rocks were tilled up to the surface. Yup, another walk to clear the field of rocks was warranted. If you want to get deeper, you're probably going to dig up more rocks.

Creator God, Gardener of my soul, grow in me the fruit of your kingdom.

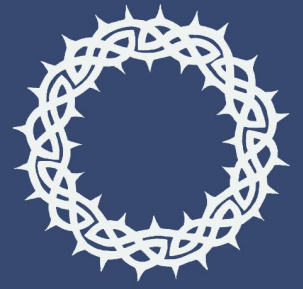
Reflect:

Where do you see yourself in this parable?

When was the last time you had to remove some rocks or weeds from your soil?

How is the kingdom of heaven germinating within you?

Theme: Teaching on Prayer
Scripture: Luke 11:5-13
Prepared by: Caroline Pon



In the preceding passage, the disciples say to Jesus, "Teach us how to pray". What follows is an abbreviated version of the Lord's prayer and two stories.

The first story is of a neighbour giving in to an inconvenient request. The second story is how earthly parents would want to give something good to their children.

Next is an invitation:

*"Ask and it will be given to you;
Seek and you shall find;
Knock and the door will be opened
For everyone who asks receives;
the one who seeks finds;
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."
(Luke 11:9-10)*

This passage has always troubled me. How audacious! He is the Lord almighty, but really, ask anything? How many times have we been disappointed because our "vending machine" version of God has seemingly failed us?

He is inviting us to see him as loving and to trust that He is wanting good for us.

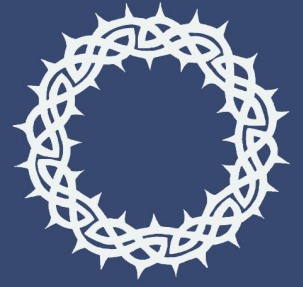
"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13)

So the invitation to ask, seek and knock really is an invitation into a relationship. A relationship of living in the Spirit.

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26)



He is inviting us to
see him as loving
and to trust that
He is wanting
good for us.



First

Lauren Daigle (Listen [Here](#))

Before I bring my need, I will bring my heart
Before I lift my cares, I will lift my arms
I wanna know You, I wanna find You
In every season, in every moment
Before I bring my need, I will bring my heart
And seek You...

First, I wanna seek You, I wanna seek You
First, I wanna keep You, I wanna keep You
First, More than anything I want, I want You
First

Before I speak a word, let me hear Your voice
And in the midst of pain, let me feel Your joy, ooh
I wanna know You, I wanna find You
In every season, in every moment
Before I speak a word, I will bring my heart
And seek You...

You are my treasure and my reward
Let nothing ever come before
You are my treasure and my reward
Let nothing ever come before
I seek You...

Prayer:

Lord, we want to bring our hearts before you. We want to see you as you are.

Help us to see your sacrificial love for us.

Help us to see your plan to love us before we knew you.

Help us to see you as one who wants good for us and has eternity in mind.

As we continue these readings during Lent, may we see you more and more.

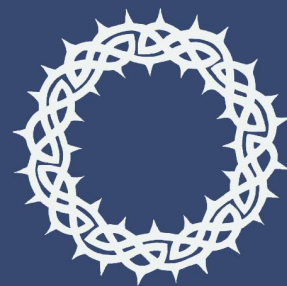
Amen

DAY 25: MAR 13

Theme: Invitation To Isolation

Scripture: Mark 6:30-46

Prepared by: Irene Ens



"Come over for a cup of coffee."

It's been a long time since I've had an invitation like that. To relax at a friend's house enjoying companionship, conversation and of course coffee, sounds like something out of a fairy tale. An invitation indicates that someone cares about me. It's an escape from the ordinary or from the hectic pace of life. Being together with a friend is a time for sharing burdens and giving or receiving encouragement. An invitation to isolation, which has gained a rather negative connotation in the past year, is another matter.

The disciples have just returned from their first on-their-own teaching tour. Jesus listens to their report, allows them to share the highlights and the stresses of their journey. Then he invites his disciples to get away from it all, away from the demands and crush of the crowds. Jesus must have been tired too and could have said, "Now that you're back, you take care of these folks, I'm taking a break," but Jesus includes his hungry disciples in the escape plan. The boat ride across the lake must have provided a welcome-back to what was familiar. They were home. Unfortunately the retreat was short-lived because the crowd got there before they did. They had to work a bit longer, but were well fed along with five thousand others before Jesus finally sent his disciples home to rest. He, on the other hand, headed for the hills for a quiet time. Scriptures provide many examples of Jesus's need to meet with his father away from the crowds.

Jesus cared about his disciples and knew they needed rest and nourishment.

His invitation also comes to us.

We need physical, emotional, and spiritual rest, a quiet place, time to recharge. Jesus offers an open invitation, no need to RSVP (and no masks required). The invitation can be accepted at any time and may be needed more during this strange time of pandemic and the fear of Covid19. However, the invitation needs to be acted upon. I know I often think I will do just one more thing and before I realize it, I've missed my opportunity for quiet communion.



Mark 6:31-32

Then Jesus said,

"Come with me

by your-selves

to a quiet

place and get

some rest."

So they went

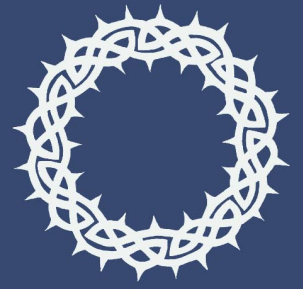
away by

themselves

in a boat to a

solitary place.

(NIV)



Jesus invites us to be solitary, away from crowds and noise in order to hear what God the father has to say to us. This is not solitary confinement, but a time for freedom to fellowship with God. A spiritual director told a client, "You are like a jar of river water all shaken up. What you need is to sit still long enough that the sediment can settle and the water can become clear." It is not an easy thing to become quiet, especially if you are a doer like I am. I have to realize that my worth is not dependant on my daily accomplishments.

Henri Nouwen said, "Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to him." I have a choice how I respond to the invitation. Jesus does not coerce, he invites. I want to make time to accept Jesus's invitation and to learn how to become quiet in God's presence. Please join me. Begin by accepting the invitation to isolation as you meditate on Christ's journey to the cross during Lent.

A favourite hymn of mine, *Near to the Heart of God* (C.B. McAfee, 1901), inspires me to search for that quiet place.

There is a place of quiet rest, a place where sin cannot molest
There is a place of comfort sweet, a place where we our Saviour meet
There is a place of full release, a place where all is joy and peace
Near to the heart of God.

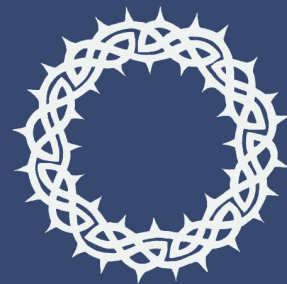
Chorus/Prayer: O Jesus blessed redeemer, sent from the heart of God,
Hold us who wait before thee, near to the heart of God.

Listen to the beautiful promise [HERE](#)
Sung by: Tiffany Coburg, 2019

I have just discovered the book, *Invitation To Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*, by Ruth Haley Barton (2004). Some references in the devotional are taken from it. It will be available in LGMC library as soon as I've finished reading it.

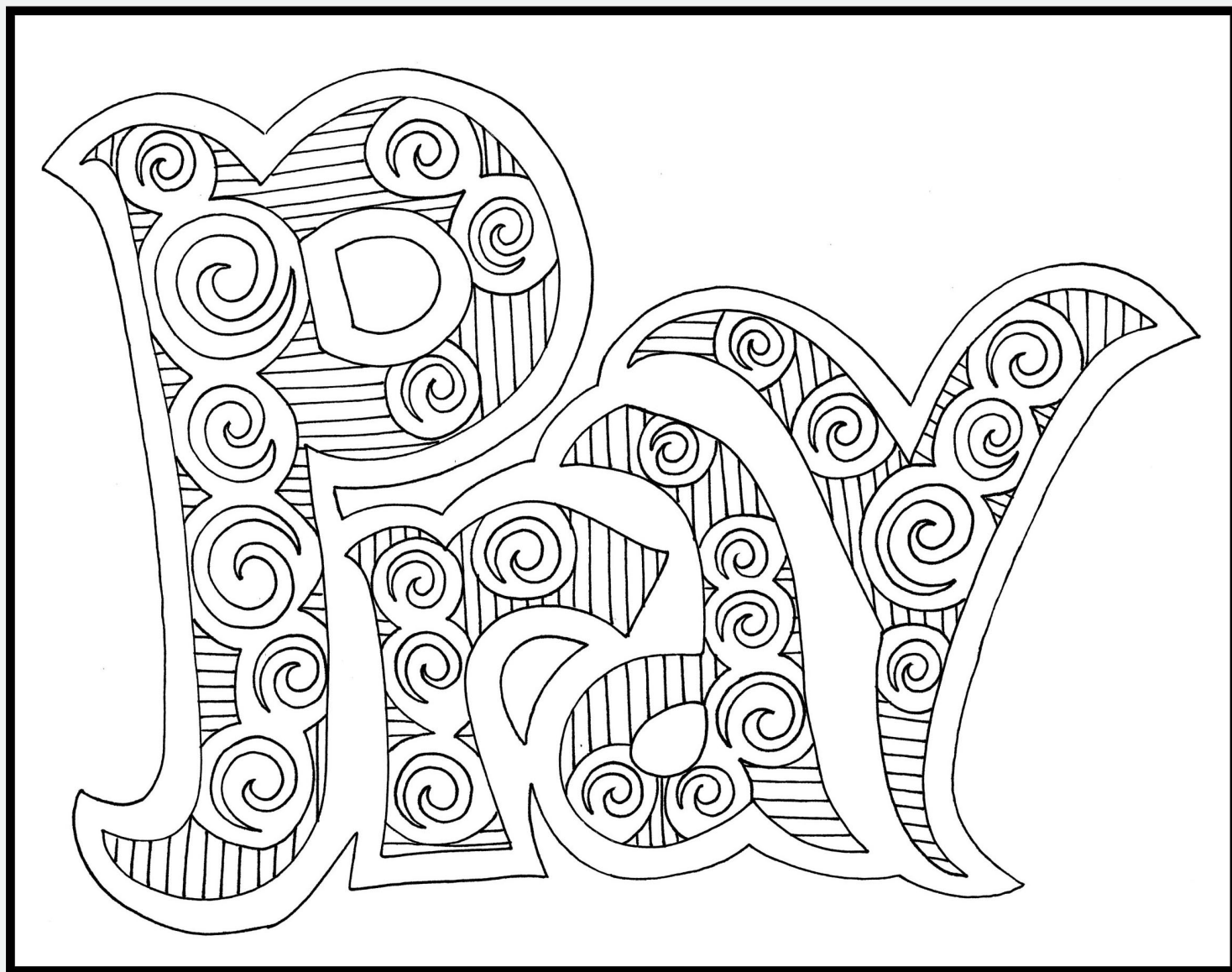
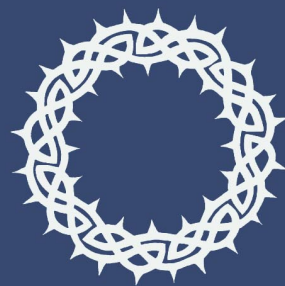
COLORING ACTIVITY

For all ages of contemplative
colourers, sensational scribblers
or meditative makers.



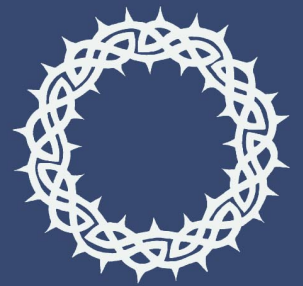
FOR GOD
DID NOT
SEND
HIS SON INTO THE WORLD
TO CONDEMN THE WORLD,
BUT THAT
THE WORLD
THROUGH
HIM
MIGHT BE
SAVED.

John 3.14-21 © Mary Fleenon / www.lindisfarne-scriptorium.co.uk 2020



WORD SEARCH

'Calling the twelve to Him, He sent them out two by two.' Mark 6:7
Can you find everything the disciples need?



O	J	B	B	L	Q	D	T	U	N	I	C	Y	H	A
S	X	H	A	O	R	R	Y	R	C	M	B	R	L	H
T	K	L	G	B	X	O	J	G	E	Q	L	P	C	T
A	M	B	J	O	U	R	N	E	Y	P	R	O	Q	M
F	V	P	R	E	A	C	H	A	J	X	E	P	R	Q
F	I	R	P	E	C	H	H	N	E	E	N	N	L	P
M	L	K	P	V	A	W	F	O	D	U	S	J	T	M
G	L	W	W	C	K	D	S	Q	D	S	A	U	J	A
C	A	Y	T	T	E	A	C	H	I	N	G	O	S	W
T	G	P	A	O	E	V	I	L	S	M	O	N	E	Y
W	E	R	K	O	T	S	P	I	R	I	T	S	Y	S
E	L	J	E	A	U	T	H	O	R	I	T	Y	R	T
L	H	P	J	Q	H	E	A	L	E	D	T	K	N	P
V	F	S	A	N	D	A	L	S	O	T	M	E	W	V
E	Q	F	Y	N	O	T	H	I	N	G	S	Z	Z	X

AUTHORITY	TWELVE	TAKE	REPENT	SANDALS
SPIRITS	JESUS	TUNIC	MONEY	BAG
EVIL	VILLAGE	JOURNEY	BREAD	HEALED
TEACHING	STAFF	SENT	PREACH	NOTHING