

An abstract painting with a dark, textured background. The composition is dominated by deep blue and navy tones, with vibrant streaks and patches of red and orange. The brushwork is expressive and layered, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall mood is somber yet dynamic, fitting for a Lenten devotion.

Unfinished

A Lenten Devotion

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A Ministry of St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Eden Prairie, MN

February 22 - Ash Wednesday

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Remember. Remember your homework. Remember your work deadlines. Remember the recital on the calendar for your kids next week. Remember where you put the car keys. Remember that time when ...

Remembering - we do it all the time. Some remembering can sometimes feel second nature: we remember what day it is. Other acts of remembering are more existential: we remember who we are and what we are up to -- our plans, hopes, dreams.

Still other acts of remembering require specific intentionality. We collectively remember events from history, lest we forget and repeat the same ugly atrocities again. We remember what we never knew - re-examining both familial and cultural myths, peeling back the layers to uncover that which the myth has distorted or rewritten with a deceptively creative pen. We remember those we have loved and lost. Remember.

In her book, "The Spiritual Practice of Remembering," Margaret Bendroth says that "remembering is an act with spiritual meaning, pushing us against

the unknown." Ash Wednesday is an invitation into this kind of remembering. Marked with an oil and ashen cross, we hear the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." In this marking and in this speaking, we push against the unknown of our mortality because this remembering is rooted in Holy Baptism where buried in the water, we were raised to new life. Cross-marked and Spirit-sealed, we are God's own beloved.

In such a way, to remember that we are dust with oil and ash is to remember both who and whose we are. With this remembering, we journey into this Lenten season of renewal trusting that God is God. We are God's. God is with us. And God will bring us to new life.

PRAYER

Gracious God of all that is and all that shall be, in Holy Baptism you claim us as your own and call us beloved. Guide us now on this Lenten journey that cross-marked and Spirit-sealed we will be renewed by your grace to proclaim in word and deed your creative and redeeming love to all the world. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

February 23

REV. NATALIA TERFA

Jonah 1

Jonah may be one of my favorite stories in all of scripture. Mostly because he's so ... well... relatable. He's normal and human and flawed just like the rest of us. His story is funny and sarcastic and filled with adventure and action. And it begins with a set-up that will never get old.

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, saying 2 "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." 3 But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Notice that twice in one verse (vs3) the author makes sure to tell us the reason Jonah flees is to get away from the presence of the Lord.

God tells Jonah to do a thing he definitely does NOT want to do, and his response is to flee.

Anyone else ever felt this way?

PRAYER

Gracious God of all that is and all that shall be, in Holy Baptism you claim us as your own and call us beloved. Guide us now on this Lenten journey that cross-marked and Spirit-sealed we will be renewed by your grace to proclaim in word and deed your creative and redeeming love to all the world. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Of course we have.

Most of us may not take the drastic steps like Jonah, but the instinct to run from God's call is real.

The part of this that is so funny is that all of us - those listening to this story when it was first told, and those of us today - we all know that there is no place we can run where God is not already there.

It seems ridiculous to imagine a place where God cannot be with us, and yet we try and try and try again. And yes, this can be hard news to hear when we are running away, but it is the best news when we are in need of God's presence and care in our lives.

For Jonah, and for us, there is grace found in God letting him perform his escape. Sometimes we need a minute to let the call of God sink in. Sometimes it takes a big event to bring us back, but God is with us in all of it.

An Introduction to Vocare: A Spiritual Practice

Vocare is an ongoing spiritual practice designed to help you discern and embrace your various callings so that you can more intentionally live life on purpose for the common good. Through guided reflection on personal life experiences via the lenses of values, openness, call, attentiveness, regrets, and experiences of God's presence, the vocare practice nourishes discernment of three primary questions. Who am I called to be? What am I called to do? Why am I here?

Choose a quiet time and space, free of distractions to allow ample time for reflection and meditation. Your time of reflection may be enhanced by lighting a candle, playing meditative background music of your choice, journaling or drawing your responses, or choosing a particular, designated time or place for your meditation. Begin and end each time of meditation with moments of quiet, deep, intentional breathing.

Called by God to live life on purpose for the common good, vocare is a practice to nourish you amid the unfinished, in the space between no longer and not yet.

Blessings on the journey!

February 24

Vocare Practice: Called to Renewal

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Many congregations participating in Lent in a Box are using this spiritual practice to listen to God's call in our lives. Once each week, throughout this devotional booklet, you will be invited to answer these prompts that will introduce one concept of this spiritual practice.

This week, we will focus on renewal followed by values, openness, call, attentiveness, regrets, and awareness of God's presence.

Reflect upon how God is calling you to renewal in this season...

- Who am I called to be – in this “not yet” time?
- What am I called to do – in this “not yet” time?
- Why am I here – in this “not yet” time?
- What do I need for this “not yet” time?

PRAYER

Turn me toward you, O God, to Lenten practices that call me from death to life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

February 25

REV. NATALIA TERFA

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

In this season of Lent, there were (and maybe still are) traditionally three ways you could “work on” repentance – turning back to God. The first is by giving, the second is by praying, the third is by fasting. These are all the things Jesus warns about in this part of his sermon on the mount. It’s important to note that the sermon he is preaching isn’t just this part about giving, praying, and fasting, but it’s a continuation of the sermon that also contains the beatitudes, and reminders we are salt and light in the world for the Kingdom of God. It’s all one sermon.

One sermon that is systematically taking the typical way of doing things and flipping them all upside down. When you remember this, you realize that this part of the sermon is no different. Jesus takes the things that people usually do in order to repent, to turn around, to turn back to God, and says – why? Why are you doing these? For others? For yourself? For God?

“When you give, don’t blow a trumpet so everyone knows you do it. When you pray, don’t do it loudly and where everyone can see you, so they see how

holy you are. When you give something up, don’t put on a sad face so that people ask you what’s wrong.”

You know exactly what Jesus is talking about. It’s not that fasting, giving, and praying are somehow no longer good. Instead, Jesus wants people to think about their motivation.

Faith is not a holiness contest. It is not something you win by doing it the loudest and the best.

Lent is a season to reflect on our own motivations so we can turn around, repent, and then use those things (prayer, giving, fasting) instead to reconnect to God and each other – the way it was always meant to be.

PRAYER

Merciful God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, giving, and fasting. Help us see the ways in which we have used these gifts for our own gain, and instead help us use them to turn towards you and each other. Amen.

February 26

GLORY GODWIN
CONCORDIA COLLEGE STUDENT

Jonah 1

The journey of Lent may be a hard and scary one as the journey to Nineveh was to Jonah. Jonah does not know how the people of Nineveh are going to respond to the message he is bringing to them. Will they listen and repent? Or will they ignore and keep going in their ways? Or even worse will they turn to Jonah and persecute him because of the message he is bringing?

Jonah does not know and so he runs away from the unknown. Jonah does not even respond to God by either saying no I can't or I am scared. He simply flees from the presence of God.

But in the end we are reminded that God's will came to pass and Jonah ended up in Nineveh. As we reflect on Jonah we are reminded of our Lord Jesus Christ and His time here on earth. He responded to the question of "who shall I send" and said "Send me." Jesus knew what he would have to go through to rescue the world, but He still chose you and me.

It's not that it was an easy journey. He also was scared and became weak at some point, but with all that he still said

"May your will be done." How many times do we intentionally and willingly let God's will be done in our lives even when it means not getting what we want? This lent, as we reflect on the unfinished nature of our lives, let us ask for God's will to be done in our lives, our communities and our world.

PRAYER

Great God, our redeemer and friend. We thank you for the gift of your son Jesus Christ who humbly came to earth to rescue us and fulfill your will. Help us to accept your will in our lives and obey your voice as we rejoice in you knowing that you have great plans for us. Help us find peace in you through your son Amen.

February 27

REV. NATALIA TERFA

Psalm 139: 1-10

I think, sometimes, if we were really honest, we could admit we believe that there are parts of ourselves that God does not love. That if God really knew us, really saw us, that God would not, could not, love all of who we are.

And that's simply just not true. Psalm 139 reminds me regularly that God knows me, all of me, sees me, loves me and stays with me.

God sees, knows, loves, stays. What a set of promises!

This psalm says that no matter where we are or in what circumstance, God is there. Every time we aren't sure God is there, every time we aren't sure God loves us, it is precisely then where God shows up to remind us yet again.

If I'm honest, there isn't a day I don't need this reminder set before me. There is always something making me think I am unworthy. There is always something making me feel like I need to run away and hide. There is always something making me wonder if God really IS with me.

But that's why we have this promise in the psalm today: no matter where we find ourselves, God will be there.

My own paraphrase of this part of Psalm 139 says: On the best of days - God is there. And on the worst possible day of our lives - God is there.

Say it with me. God is there.

There is no place that God can't be.

Name a place.

God is there.

Name a moment.

God is there.

God is in birthing rooms and nurseries.

God is in chemo centers and oncology wards.

God is in cars on the freeway and on couches in homes.

Heaven or hell.

Land or sea.

Near or far.

Good or bad.

God is there.

Seeing all of you. Knowing all of you.

Loving all of you. In all of it.

PRAYER

Ever-present God, thank you for seeing me, knowing me, and loving me. Thank you for being with me through my own struggles with trusting your presence, and thank you for being the God who stays. Amen.

February 28

DR. DEANNA THOMPSON

Matthew 4:1-11

Scholars examining this passage often focus on what it says about Jesus' identity. The devil's temptation of Jesus begins with the words, "If you are the Son of God . . ." (4.3) trying to provoke Jesus to live into his identity through self-serving power and control.

But Jesus refuses, demonstrating his identity as Son of God is more about obedience and fidelity to God than it is to the use (and abuse) of power.

That's all interesting and helpful, but I'm still stuck on the part where Jesus is *led by the Spirit, into the wilderness, to be tempted by the devil.*

What sense are we to make of that?

First it seems that Jesus being led into the wilderness where he fasts for 40 days and 40 nights connects him to the Israelites' 40 years of wanderings in the wilderness. Like Jesus, they were tempted to follow their own path rather than God's. Jesus models resistance to temptation.

For Israel, for Jesus, for us: wilderness

is a kind of wildland that's not inhabited by humans. It's a place where we're not in the driver's seat, where we need to adapt to survive.

It's a place where the typical tools we rely on to navigate life are stripped away. Jesus was led by the Spirit to the wilderness to prepare for his ministry. And each time he is tempted and he turns to words of scripture to refute the temptation (cf. verses 4, 7, 10). Each time he identifies how the Word of God relates to the challenge of his life in that moment, and how the Word offers guidance on how to repel temptation.

PRAYER

Spirit of the Wilderness: Times in the wilderness are challenging. It's tempting to listen to voices that lead us away from You. Spirit of God encourage us, as You did Jesus, to seek God's wisdom and say "Be gone!" when the devil gets too close. In Christ we pray, Amen.

March 1

REV. NATALIA TERFA

Psalm 139: 11-16

If I had to choose a theme for this section of Psalm 139, I'd choose the word "knowing." Over and over we are reminded that God knows you. All of you. From the very beginning of time, to the very end of time. You are known. Even before you were born, God was there.

God had a hand in making you YOU. In your becoming. And that becoming continues as you grow and are made new each and every day. God knows that too.

Sometimes, even more than we need the reminder that God made us in the first place, that God knows us from beginning to end, we need to hear that God makes wonderful things. Key word - wonderful. This is important. It's a reminder that we need when our bodies seem less than wonderful to us. When we are sick or struggling or even barely hanging on. You are wonderful. Right now. All of you is wonderful and God knows all of you.

Because God made all of you. And here's the kicker - God didn't create once and then stop, God is STILL creating. STILL knitting you together when you're broken. STILL making things new and wonderful. Even when things don't quite feel that way.

PRAYER

All-knowing God, thank you for your creative work in the world. Thank you that you never stop creating, including within me. Help me trust that I am wonderfully made, and that you know me and love me, no matter what. Amen.

This is a promise that I hold on to when things feel tenuous and shaky in my life. It's a promise I need when I start to believe God wrote suffering into my "book" (i.e. my life). It's tempting to blame God for suffering, especially when we read the final verses of this psalm as "God's plan" - but I think these lines say something different.

God wrote my book, my life, because God is the creator. God is the author. God, as creator, as author, knows the beginning and the end. Like I said, this psalm is about knowing.

What I put in my life, into my book, God leaves up to me. And in our broken world, where relationships break and hard things exist like loss and violence and pain and illness, God has promised to be with us, constantly and continually making things new.

We are not hidden from our God who loves us. We are known. And we are known and loved no matter what chapter in our book we are currently writing.

Alpha and Omega. Beginning and End. God is with us, and knows.

February 28

REV. DR. MATTHEW J. MAROHL

Matthew 4:1-11

When we feel unsure, we may project our fears onto others. For example, when we feel insecure in our relationships, we might ask, “Do you love me?” We might even question the loyalty of others. “Are you going to leave me?” Even when we are assured of the affection and faithfulness of others, our insecurities may make it hard for us to believe. We doubt ourselves, so we end up doubting them.

With the second temptation, the devil hopes to find Jesus insecure about his own identity. Immediately before his time in the wilderness, Jesus was baptized. The heavens opened and God declared, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Now the devil tempts, “I bet you don’t really believe that you are special – the Son of God; make God prove it. Throw yourself off of a high place and see if the angels catch you.” But Jesus stands firm in his identity.

Reflecting on this story invites us to consider our own identities.

Do we believe that we are a loved, forgiven children of God? If we wrestle with that identity, if we have doubts;

PRAYER

Let us pray. Loving God, in my relationships with others and in my relationship with you, I fluctuate between confidence and doubt. Remind me of your faithfulness, that in the promise of your presence I might find strength and peace. Amen.

do our doubts make us question the faithfulness of God?

This temptation raises an important question: do our fears or insecurities make it hard for us to hear the good news of God’s love? Or can we trust, that even in our insecurity and doubt, that we are beloved by God and in us God is well pleased?

March 3

Vocare Practice: Called to Values

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Vocare is an ongoing spiritual practice designed to help you discern and embrace your various callings so that you can more intentionally live life on purpose for the common good.

This week we are focusing on the first letter of VOCARE, values.

Reflect upon your values...

- What do I value?
- How have I lived my values today?
- How have my values been in conflict today?
- What do I need for tomorrow?

PRAYER

Lead me by your Spirit, O God, to value what you value. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

See page 5 of this booklet for brief instructions to make the most of your time with this practice.

March 6

REV. DAVE ADAMS

Jonah 2

“WHERE IS GOD?!?!?”

This is a question we all have asked ourselves when life is difficult.

We want answers. We want things to feel better. In short, we want God’s healing to come to us, to restore us, and to renew our faith. Still, when it feels as if everything is working against us, it often seems easier to run away from our problems...from our life...from God.

I have asked myself this question.

And, this question also hits me like a punch in the stomach when I consider the suffering, pain, confusion, and heartache that are present all around us. It makes me cry out to God for “HELP” on behalf of everyone who finds themselves at the bottom of the barrel, wondering how and when they will find their way out.

So, today I am thinking about Jonah, a man who tried to run away from God because he felt as though God was placing too much on his plate. In his attempt to flee from God’s presence, he found himself in the belly of a whale,

which is probably about as far away from God as one could imagine. And yet, even in this darkness, fear, and isolation, God was with him, reminding him that nothing could separate him from God’s love, grace, mercy, and providence.

“Out of my despair I cried to you and you answered me. From the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.” Jonah 2:3

For me, Jonah is a perfect example of a lesson I once heard in a sermon: “Thus far, no state of being has been without God’s presence.” Indeed, no matter how dark, slimy, painful, confusing, depressing, and lonely our story might be, God’s presence is still there.

And, as resurrection people, we know that through Jesus – who knows what suffering and pain feels like – we are able to *be* God’s presence for others, shining God’s love and mercy into life’s difficult moments.

PRAYER

*Holy God, hear me when I cry to you, helping me to see your presence in my neighbors. And help me to **be** your presence when my neighbors are crying to you. Amen.*

March 7

FIONA CARSON

John 3:1-17

“Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?’” (v. 9-10)

How did Nicodemus imagine his conversation with Jesus would go? His credentials as a leader of the Jewish people and Jesus calling him a teacher of Israel indicate he was well learned. Was he expecting a deep intellectual conversation where he could show off all he knew? I am guessing he did not want the conversation to go how it did, with him not understanding Jesus.

Authors who have written commentaries on this passage point out that the last words we hear from Nicodemus in the Bible are “How can these things be?” – probably not how he would have wanted to come off to the world.

However, Nicodemus’s experience of this conversation, of it not going the way he planned and not fully understanding, is something that many of us can relate to in our faith journeys. Biblical scholar Karoline Lewis notes that we should be asking the question “How can these things be?” more often as we wrestle

with what faith looks like.

And I think many of us do ask similar questions. How can there be so much suffering in the world when we know our God is a God of love?

How can Christinity be used in the name of violence around the world when Jesus preaches compassion and justice?

How do we carry doubts about our faith?

These questions are powerful, and while we want to understand and want to come off self-assured about our faith, maybe we don’t have to. Maybe in this wrestling, we are birthed in the water and Spirit as we contemplate what it means to be faithful.

PRAYER

God of wonder, guide us through our questions and doubts. Stay with us as we grapple with the state of the world and what the Incarnation means for us. Help us to wonder, to reach out, and to remember to listen for the Spirit. Through Jesus Christ, our teacher and Savior, Amen.

March 8

Vocare Practice: Called to Openness

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Vocare is an ongoing spiritual practice designed to help you discern and embrace your various callings so that you can more intentionally live life on purpose for the common good.

This week we are focusing on the second letter of VOCARE, openness.

Reflect upon your openness...

- How do I typically respond to invitations or expectations to be open?
- To what was I asked to be open today?
- To what did I say “yes?”
- To what did I say “no?”
- What do I need for tomorrow?

PRAYER

Open my heart, O God, to the mysteries of your saving love. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

See page 5 of this booklet for brief instructions to make the most of your time with this practice.

March 9

FIONA CARSON

John 3:1-17

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (v. 16)

This is one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. It's comforting - reminding us of God's deep love for the world and our salvation through Jesus. But once again, I come back to Nicodemus's point of view in the conversation. At this point, he hasn't said anything for a while and I imagine his confusion at this statement. He is already struggling to understand what Jesus is saying and it seems that he would not know this statement is referring to Jesus's ultimate crucifixion and resurrection.

We, readers of the passage, don't share this specific confusion as we know Jesus's full story. However, maybe another confusion lingers, a confusion that I find myself grappling with: why is sacrifice necessary to grant eternal life to the world? Why did God have to “give” Jesus up to crucifixion for us to be saved? What does that mean for us - that we need to sacrifice things we love as well?

It seems like there could have been a different path. Why couldn't God have saved the world any other way, offering mercy without sacrifice? But through this confusion, maybe a comfort comes back. A comfort as you remember that God Incarnate came to Earth and felt the joys and sorrows of being human. That maybe Jesus needed to experience death, a part of human life, to fully grasp the human experience. And maybe the sacrifice isn't reflective of what we need to do at all - it's God choosing to come be among us.

PRAYER

God of life, in this season of Lent, remind us to stay nourished in body, mind, and spirit as we move through the devastation of crucifixion and the joy of resurrection. When we encounter times of trouble or mourn the injustices of the world, remind us that you have not condemned us but saved us. Through Jesus Christ the Redeemer, amen.

March 10

DEACON JON M. LEISETH

Psalm 130

In the past, when I read the phrase “out of the depths” in a psalm, I imagined the depths of despair and suffering, the depths or lows of depression, low spirits and the like.

In writing this devotion, though, it finally dawned on me that there is also a physical topography of lows and highs at work in Psalm 130. Jerusalem is hilly, after all. Sometimes Jerusalem is referred to as Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives, the hill which is Golgotha and other physically high places are part of Jerusalem. Sure enough, I found a few commentaries on the Psalms of Ascent (120–134) and read of these psalms as pilgrimage songs, sung while going up to the hills of Jerusalem from the surrounding valleys.

Uphill climbs are simply part of being human though, right? They are definitely a part of my life and the lives of those I know best.

Sinning can make for an uphill climb, but not all uphill climbs are caused by sin! Several people I love most dearly are currently climbing some particularly rocky hills; hills which they did not choose and which they did nothing to deserve; hills which have no summit in sight.

What do we do when there is very little or even nothing to be done and hope is wearing thin?

In Psalm 130 we find the sentence, “I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.”

Do you feel a sense of longing in this sentence? Perhaps longing is simply another form of hoping, and perhaps this is what we are called into together, not only in life’s uphill climbs, but in the season of Lent.

PRAYER

*O God,
we long for you.
We long for your forgiveness,
your mercy,
your love.
We long for you as watchmen wait for the
morning.
When living our lives feels like stumbling
uphill in the middle of the night,
send your Spirit to awaken us to your
presence
in these and all the steps we travel in life.
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ,
who traveled to crucifixion and
resurrection in Jerusalem.
Amen.*

March 13

REV. MATTHEW IAN FLEMING

Jonah 3

As a preacher, Jonah 3 provides one of the most comforting messages in all of scripture. Even our lousiest, most lazy, least prepared words can have an impact because of God's goodness and love.

Jonah takes a few steps (only part of a day's journey into this biggest city of all time!) into Nineveh. He steps up to his podium and starts to preach. Now I didn't receive the highest marks in preaching class, but I think I would have been laughed out of the chapel if I gave the five-word sermon (in Hebrew) that Jonah offered: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" No mention of God. No mention of a call to repent. No grand vision like Isaiah. No wild imagery like Daniel. Just a few measly words and Jonah takes a hike up a hill to watch the fireworks.

But something happens with those words!

The people listen. From the king to the cows, everyone puts on sack-cloth and repents.

Perhaps God will save us.

PRAYER

Dear God, be with me in the unfinished business of my life, in the places where I don't have the time or attention to make a difference. Work your wonders with my incompleteness and show me watch the fireworks of your love in creation rising like the dawn. Amen.

If there is a weary preacher in your life, give them an encouraging word.

If you are one of the said weary preachers, your words matter.

And God will do abundantly more than you could ask or imagine with them.

Hear the promise that our preparation and time and focus are only a small piece of the preaching of good news. God will always show up and God will always bring love and mercy and grace and forgiveness, even when we can't see it.

March 14

KATHARINE KENNEDY
 MDIV. STUDENT, WARTBURG SEMINARY

John 3:1-17

The Lenten season in North America can feel external to us; the dark sky, the frigid air, they sap strength from us and chill us to the marrow of our bones. The lack of light can exhaust us and throw our rhythms into chaos; we want to sleep but lie awake at night, unsettled by the day. We can become overwhelmed by the busyness of days that offer little light and harsh outside conditions.

In the story of Nicodemus, Jesus offers us inner nourishment. He tells us that his words are misunderstood when we view them in an earthly way; we miss their meaning, which is food for our weary souls. To the disbelieving Nicodemus he says, “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?”

Bread is spiritual food given by God through Jesus, who is the “bread of life.” Water is the symbol of the Spirit, given to believers when Jesus had been glorified. He reminds us that our external circumstances are powerless in the face of the spiritual food of Christ,

and that the dark time of Lent paves the way to the joy and blessed assurance of the Resurrection.

We can use this darkness of winter to nourish our inner spaces.

We can choose bodily rest and soul renewal, nurturing ourselves for the spring to come.

PRAYER

Mothering, Fathering God, fill us with your Holy Spirit in this Lenten season. Remind us of the gifts you offer our weary souls, from the bread of life in Jesus to the water of the Holy Spirit. Be with us on our journey through the dark Holy Week to the bursting light of the Resurrection, when we are assured that Jesus lives and so do we, in Your eternal space and time. Amen.

March 15

Vocare Practice: Called by God

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Vocare is an ongoing spiritual practice designed to help you discern and embrace your various callings so that you can more intentionally live life on purpose for the common good.

This week we are focusing on the third letter of VOCARE, call.

Reflect upon the voices that call to you...

- How do I typically decide which voices I listen to?
- What voices called to me today?
- Which ones did I listen to?
- Which ones did I not listen to?
- What do I need for tomorrow?

PRAYER

Inspire me, O God, to trust in your call upon my life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

See page 5 of this booklet for brief instructions to make the most of your time with this practice.

March 16

REV. NATALIA TERFA

Jonah 3

What a contrast between Jonah and the Ninevites. Jonah flees from and fights the Word of God in his life, and the Ninevites listen, take heed, and repent the Word of God in theirs.

The word we often use in the church to describe repentance is *Metanoia*. It means, literally, to turn around. And it's something we ponder a lot in Lent. It's a whole season of repentance. We take stock of our lives and our faith and see if there is anything that may be pointing us in the wrong direction. *Metanoia*, then, is a kind of spiritual about-face.

One of the things I love about this part of Jonah is that the repentance we hear of in this chapter is communal. It's not just individuals taking care of themselves and themselves only. There is a whole community doing this repentance together. There is no judgment, no recording how one person has to do more than another or how it's all that person's fault and not mine.

All together, the entirety of Nineveh practices *metanoia*.

I find this gorgeous. And it makes me wonder if we aren't missing out on something by making our Lenten practices and our repentance so individual. What would it look like to practice communal repentance? How might your church, your community, your family, your neighborhood, look honestly at the ways in which you are facing the wrong direction and work as one to change together?

Many of us get a small taste of this when we confess together in worship. In that small moment, we get a reminder that we are in this together, that our freedom is bound up in each other, and we can work together, that we can practice *metanoia*, for the liberation of all.

PRAYER

Gracious God, thank you for creating us in your image – not solo beings but people inextricably bound together. Help us see the ways in which we are being called to repentance, and give us new eyes to see each other as parts of a whole, who are called to move and grow together. Amen.

March 17

REV. NATALIA TERFA

John 4:5-42

The story of the Woman at the Well has always felt like poking at a bruise. Painful and vulnerable. She is an outsider three times over. She's a Samaritan (1), a woman (2), and she has a less than stellar reputation (3). I could take a long, long time to talk about why that last point isn't quite right - but to keep it short I'll just remind you that in this time a woman could not initiate divorce on her own and likely had very little say over her own marital status, so calling her a "fallen" woman is to miss the point entirely. Despite all that, it is still likely she was divorced and/or widowed a few times over. Because she avoided the well at the time when most women and children would visit, it meant that she was excluded from the communal act of drawing water.

Like I said, she was an outsider.

Jesus does what no one else has done for her and with her in a long time - he engages with her. He doesn't look away, doesn't walk away, doesn't pretend he doesn't see her. He sees her and tells her he knows all of her story. He presses on the bruise.

PRAYER

O God, you are the water of life. Help us trust that wherever we are thirsty, you will find us, gather us in, and return us to life with you. Amen.

This painful moment is why I have always struggled with this story, but it is also the reason I have learned to love it.

Because it is here that Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, stands with the outsider to end all outsiders, at high noon, all pretense stripped away, and offers her living water.

Not forgiveness, since there's nothing to forgive, but offers her life and life abundant.

Life that cannot be taken away like a husband or a reputation.

This is my story and your story too.

Jesus meets us right where we are, in the bright light of the noonday sun, and lays us bare, everything good and bad, honorable and awful. And then the Messiah, the one who saves, hands us living water: life that cannot be washed away, erased, or lost.

March 20

REV. NATALIA TERFA

John 9:1-41

“Who sinned – this man or his parents – that he was born blind?”

What a loaded question. While the answer matters, and we’ll get to it, the question itself tells us a lot about those who are asking.

First, there is an assumption that disability is bad. Any time spent with disability activists will teach you the exact opposite. This story has such a prejudice against disability built right into its foundation it can be hard to get past it.

But being honest about the things we believe and the prejudice we carry, even if we don’t acknowledge it out loud, is important.

Jesus doesn’t mince words in his reply. “Neither.” He says. No one sinned here. That’s not what this is about. This isn’t a cause and effect. This isn’t a punishment for bad behavior. But, let me show you what God can do within it.

This is what disability activists have taught me. God does amazing and incredible things with what we have often

assumed was bad luck, consequences of bad behavior, or outright punishment. We assume that disability is always bad. But in the midst of disability, God can do some pretty incredible things.

Of course in this story Jesus heals the blind man, but sometimes, that’s not what happens. We all know this. And then we find it frustrating when it seems like God heals some people but not others.

But what if the healing isn’t the point of this story?

Yes, Jesus gives this man his sight back, but what if the point isn’t to gain sight but to dismantle systems that assume disability is the result of sin?

We believe in a God who redeems, restores, and renews. We believe in a God of resurrection.

But God does this work in many ways, in individuals and in systems, and we miss out on the power of God’s work in the world when we assume healing only looks one way.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we are so thankful you are a God of resurrection. Help us notice your handiwork in things we have previously dismissed as bad or a result of sin. Open our eyes to how you renew all things in every way, and through all people. Amen

March 21

GLORY GODWIN
CONCORDIA COLLEGE STUDENT

Jonah 4

Jonah was not so happy with God because God forgave the people of Nineveh, “why send me while you knew they will repent and you will not destroy them?”

Won't we also be angry if we knew that God forgave the people we do not think deserve forgiveness? Well I think we all do not deserve God's forgiveness. And this is where we see and are reminded of how merciful God is.

And hence this is the purpose of Jesus coming to earth. Jesus came to save us from our sin sick souls and to bring us to God's glorious light, not because we are worthy but because God is a merciful and graceful God.

This is the same lesson God teaches Jonah as he is angry because God spared Nineveh and yet he pitied the plant that was made in a night and died overnight. God said to Jonah “Shouldn't I pity the city of Nineveh (the people that God created) who did not know their right hand from left?” God showed care to the people of Nineveh and they did repent and turn from their ways and were saved.

We are no different from the people of Nineveh, let us all use this time to turn back to God and repent, for God's mercy and grace is sufficient and God will forgive us. Let's walk the walk of Jesus and rest all our burdens at the cross for He came so that we may be free and be free indeed.

PRAYER

Merciful and eternal God, you find us in our weaknesses and send your word to heal us. Give us ears that listen to you and hearts that long for you. Help us accept your mercy in our lives and in the lives of others and rejoice with them as you save us and bring us back to you. In your holy name, the name above all names we pray, Amen.

March 22

Vocare Practice: Called to Attentiveness

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Vocare is an ongoing spiritual practice designed to help you discern and embrace your various callings so that you can more intentionally live life on purpose for the common good.

This week we are focusing on the fourth letter of VOCARE, attentiveness.

Reflect upon your attentiveness...

- How do I typically decide where I invest my attention?
- What captured and held my attention today?
- Where do I wish I could have invested my attention today?
- Did my attention align with my values?
- What do I need for tomorrow?

PRAYER

Turn my attention to you, O God, that I might recognize you at work in my life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

See page 5 of this booklet for brief instructions to make the most of your time with this practice.

March 23

REV. NATALIA TERFA

John 9:1-41

I think one of the things I love most about this story is not just that the man is healed of blindness but how he uses his voice afterwards. He can finally see, but he spends his time talking. He talks and talks and talks about Jesus and how Jesus healed him. He goes from blind beggar to preacher in an instant.

And no one believes him.

Are you sure? Are you really that blind guy? Can you tell us what happened one more time? Even his parents won't speak for him, they say, "he is of age, he will speak for himself."

And he does. "Jesus healed me" he says, over and over and over again. He doesn't change his story. Not once. Even when the most powerful people in his church come to see him, he isn't bullied or intimidated. He just keeps telling the story and speaking the truth.

And the result is his removal from the community. Which just seems impossibly unfair. You'd think he would be welcomed as one who is healed, as living proof of what God can do, but

instead he represents a threat to power. He is driven out. Out of his town, out of his church, out of his community.

And then? Jesus finds him.

Jesus hears that the formerly blind man has been cast out of society and seeks him out in order that he might offer him restoration once again. This story is about the blind man in so many ways, but at its core, it's about Jesus. Jesus who sees and restores.

This work of Jesus continues today: Jesus sees you, heals you, and restores you to community.

PRAYER

God of grace, heal us from the ways we cannot see. Help us see those who have been driven out, those who have not been believed, and those who long to be healed. We thank you for your relentless pursuit of our wholeness, and the ways you continually see us, heal us and restore us. Amen.

March 24

REV. NATALIA TERFA

Jonah 4

Jonah has given his enemies a harsh word, the whole city repented, and the story says that God relented and did not destroy them. What does Jonah do?

He throws a tantrum. He is just so mad that God offered grace to people who he was sure didn't deserve it. (Very relatable, Jonah.)

After Jonah is done yelling at God for being so good and gracious and loving, God gently places the truth in front of Jonah by saying "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Now, to be clear, anger is not the issue here. There are plenty of times in the Bible where anger is justified. There are many times where God gets angry, where the prophets get angry, and where the people of God get angry. Yet those times are about anger in the face of injustice, anger for a lack of care or compassion, anger at evil at work in the world, or even anger when life is just impossibly hard.

That kind of anger seems to have a welcome place in the life of faith, and thank goodness because I rage at God all the darn time.

PRAYER

Gracious God, you are in and around all of our feelings, including anger. Help us to be angry at the right things, and teach us to harness our anger on behalf of justice, in the face of evil, or where inequality reigns. Amen.

But to express anger at grace? At love? At the care of an entire community? No. That's just not right. And since Jonah has a well-tended rage fire going about that very thing, God simply asks a pointed question, meant to bring Jonah back to what matters.

God is gracious and merciful.

That's the whole point. God is those things for us and to us, and God is those things for others and to others too. We don't get to decide how God offers grace.

I'm so thankful for that when it's about me. But I feel a lot like Jonah when it's not. I've put this question (is it right for you to be angry?) up where I can see it regularly. I know I spend a lot of time raging about the unfairness of God's grace, when God wants me to rage about the unfairness of people's lack of love and care for each other. And I'm thinking that's exactly the point of the question.

Is it right for you to be angry? The answer: it depends. Does my anger move me to act on behalf of others? Or does it create a cauldron of rage that I keep stirring? God poses a good question. So let's keep asking it.

March 27

REV. NATALIA TERFA

Matthew 8:23-27

I am not a fan of storms. That's even an understatement. When severe weather rolls in, my spouse and teenager will be on their way outside to watch and marvel at the power of nature and you'll find me on my way to the basement, NOAA radio in tow and the radar loop on my computer screen. That first beep of the weather alert sets my heart rate skyrocketing, even though I know that I will most likely be just fine.

So, needless to say, I find the disciples fully relatable in this part of Matthew's Gospel. They get caught in the middle of a fierce storm and Jesus is fully unbothered, taking a nap. When there are storms in my life - literal or metaphorical - what I don't want is God to be sleeping through them. I would very much like God to be freaking out with me. Napping Jesus is not my favorite Jesus. So I feel a lot like the disciples, as they shout - WAKE UP JESUS THINGS ARE REALLY BAD OUT HERE. IT WOULD BE NICE TO GET A LITTLE HELP.

What I so often forget in this story is that Jesus isn't afraid, because he already knows the end of the story. And what I

forget during my own stormy moments is that Jesus might be taking a little nap, but he is in the boat with me. He's not watching from some far away tower or safe shelter. He's not standing on the shore waving me home. He's right in it with me. And he knows what happens next, even when I don't.

I'm not saying that makes my fear go away, oh I wish it did, knowing I'm not alone in the storm is something.

Maybe it's even everything.

PRAYER

Loving God, you stay with me through every moment, every storm, and every calm. Help ease my fears when I move into panic, and remind me of your presence, even when things feel out of control. You are God in the storm: calming the storm, and calming me. Amen.

March 28

REV. MEGAN GRAVES

John 11:1-45

Nope, no hope there.

No chance of anything good coming from that person.

Oh, that stinks. I don't want to go near it.

That's been too far gone for too long there's no hope of any life coming from that anymore.

How many times have you looked out at the world and said one of these things to yourself? Often we look at circumstances that others find themselves in and write them off as a complete loss – there's no hope for them, nothing good could come of it, no change possible.

Martha, though she hoped for a different outcome, held this attitude that there was no hope for her brother in this passage. She believed Jesus's presence could have changed the outcome earlier, but now there was no hope of anything but what had already come to pass. Outside of the tomb, she proclaims, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."

PRAYER

Life-giving God, help us to live and move in the spaces we are called to inhabit in such a way that we know the glory of God because of our belief. We give thanks for your continual work of bringing hope to the hopeless. In your name we pray, Amen.

As she continues to feel hopeless about the situation, Jesus challenges her lack of faith: "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

What happens to the world when we no longer live as though we believe in the power of God?

What happens when we lose hope in the movement of the Holy Spirit?

Scripture shows us that Jesus showed up to heal the sick, feed the hungry, to raise the dead, and more. When we believe that God still moves in such transformative ways, when we expect these things to happen in the world, and that sometimes God invites us to participate in making them happen, what a difference it can make. If we believe that God still moves in life giving ways, we will see the glory of God all around us.

March 29

Vocare Practice: Called to Regret

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Vocare is an ongoing spiritual practice designed to help you discern and embrace your various callings so that you can more intentionally live life on purpose for the common good.

This week we are focusing on the fifth letter of VOCARE, regrets.

Reflect upon your regrets...

- How easy it is for me to name and learn from my regrets?
- What are my regrets from today?
- What insight do I gain from them?
- What do I need for tomorrow?

PRAYER

Help me, O God, to learn from my regrets so that I might live more faithfully in each tomorrow. In Jesus name, Amen.

See page 5 of this booklet for brief instructions to make the most of your time with this practice.

March 30

REV. NATALIA TERFA

Matthew 8:23-27

I love to paint a mental picture of a particular moment in this story. It's the minute or two right after Jesus calms the storm. I imagine the disciples all sitting there, silent and still, just looking at each other in total shock. I imagine Jesus acting normally, no big deal, like he didn't just rebuke nature and like nature didn't just listen to him, and the disciples are coming down off one adrenaline rush and heading right into another because DID THAT JUST HAPPEN?! WHO IS THIS GUY?!

No one wants to say anything, but also they all want to say something.

It makes me laugh to picture it.

The disciples quickly go from afraid to terrified. For very different reasons, but still, they aren't done with their big feelings quite yet. They have watched Jesus heal people, feed people, perform miracles, cast out demons, and yet this is what makes them afraid?

Yes. This is when they realize how powerful God is.

PRAYER

Awesome God, thank you for the ways you show us the bigness of your creation and love. Thank you for the gift of awe, and help us draw us closer to you each time we experience it. Amen.

When Martin Luther wrote his Small Catechism, he kept using the language of "fearing God." It took me well into adulthood to understand that what he spoke of was the very feeling that the disciples shared when the storm listened to God and the sea went calm. It's awe, but more.

I'm not sure we have too many opportunities to experience this same thing, but I think leaving room for awe in our lives can get us a little closer.

What inspires awe for you?

For me it's big nature - like the sky at night, or mountains, or the ocean. Things that remind me of my smallness, and the beauty of God's bigness.

Awe.

I wonder what it might feel like to make a little time for awe in the days we have left in this Lenten season. How might you cultivate a bit of the awe that creates space for faith, just as it did for the disciples on that boat in the moments of calm right after the storm.

March 31

REV. MEGAN GRAVES

John 11:1-45

Jesus weeps.

Life, at times, gets hard.

People die, relationships splinter, illness happens, jobs are lost, and any number of other things turn our world upside down. When those things happen it often feels like you are alone in the feelings, the struggle, the situation. Our culture does not encourage us to show grief. We can acknowledge loss, but we should move past it quickly. When people ask how we are doing, how many of us really feel like we can be honest?

At the death of Lazarus, Mary experiences something different. In her grief she is surrounded by people who weep with her, who join her in her grief. Scripture tells us that upon seeing this Jesus “was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” After asking where Lazarus was laid, Jesus too began to weep.

Jesus knows what it is to grieve and meets us there because he too grieved the death of those he cared about. In our connection to Jesus, when we weep,

when we grieve, when we mourn, so too does Jesus. This connection with the divine and with each other allows us to connect on a deeper level if we allow it.

This is part of being the Body of Christ—when one part hurts, the whole body hurts.

When we hurt God feels it, when others hurt God feels it and as part of the Body of Christ we can feel it too and find or give the support that is so needed at those times.

PRAYER

Gracious God, grief, sadness, and tears are a common experience and yet one where we can all feel so alone. As we remember Jesus and the others who wept with Mary, let us remember as part of the Body of Christ we can do the same for others. Even in our deepest grief, your presence does not abandon us. Amen.

April 2 - Palm / Passion Sunday

Vocare Practice: Called to Experience God's Presence

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Vocare is an ongoing spiritual practice designed to help you discern and embrace your various callings so that you can more intentionally live life on purpose for the common good.

This week we are focusing on the last letter of VOCARE, experiencing God's presence.

Reflect upon your experiences of God's presence..

- When, where, and how have I encountered or experienced the presence of God today?
- What surprised me about where I encountered or experienced the presence of God today?
- What do I need for tomorrow?

PRAYER

Reveal yourself to me, O God, in the everyday experiences of my life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

See page 5 of this booklet for brief instructions to make the most of your time with this practice.

— Holy Week Poetry

Throughout Holy Week, we invite you to spend time in the spaciousness of this poetry written by Rev. Dr. Char Rachuy Cox.

After each poem, spend some time in prayer, listening to the ways that this story stirs in your spirit.

May you encounter Jesus anew during this Holy Week.

April 2 - Palm / Passion Sunday

Then
Jesus
Went ahead
Crowd. Palms. Cloaks. Shouts.
Holy Messianic expectations.
He,
Humble,
Blessed One
Road on to die.
The world will never be the same again.

CHARLENE M. RACHUY COX
double tetractys

Palm
Joyous Jubilation
Waving, Shouting, Dancing
Riding a donkey, Carrying a cross
Mocking, Suffering, Dying
Bloody Betrayal
Passion

CHARLENE M. RACHUY COX
Diamante

April 3 - Holy Monday

Scattered, broken palms
 Ground to dust along the way
 It's Monday. Now what?

CHARLENE M. RACHUY COX

Haiku

April 4 - Holy Tuesday

God
 Entered
 In anger
 That holy space -
 My house shall be called a house of prayer - now.
 Eyes
 Focused
 Holy rage
 Indignation
 Temple tantrum turning tables - Tuesday.

CHARLENE M. RACHUY COX

double tetractys

April 5 - Holy Wednesday

Anointed with oil
Jesus' body was prepared -
Judas plotted death

CHARLENE M. RACHUY COX

Haiku

April 6 - Maundy Thursday

He
Knelt down
Back bending
Water pouring
Sin soaked feet washed and dried in holy love.
No
They said
Not knowing
What was coming.
Soon Death's angel would not pass over him.

CHARLENE M. RACHUY COX

double tetractys

April 7 - Good Friday

Just
Seven
Breathed out words
Sacred exhale
God from God. Light from light. True God. Not made.
Thirst.
Mother.
Paradise.
Father Forgive.
Forsaken. Committed to you. Finished.

CHARLENE M. RACHUY COX
double tetractys

April 8 - Holy Saturday

Threshold
Time in between
No longer and not yet
Thinning veil in liminal space
We wait

CHARLENE M. RACHUY COX
Cinquain

April 9 - Easter

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Matthew 28:1-10

There are many roads in this life. Some are actual roads that take us from “point A to point B.” Others are metaphorical, roads that we travel in our hearts. Many of the roads we travel, we never think of again, but some roads are so defining that they become drawn across our story with indelible ink.

What are some of your defining roads?

What about the road that you traveled to the first day of school, or the road that you took as you moved from one community to the next, moving with your family, or to college, or for a new job?

Or what about the road that you traveled toward a significant relationship or the road away from a relationship? And what about the road home, how would you describe that road?

In the story of Jesus, much of his life was lived on the road. He was born on the road, away from home, in his ancestral town of Bethlehem. When he was very small, he traveled the immigrant road with his family, fleeing a tyrant who wanted him dead.

When he was 12, he journeyed with his

family to Jerusalem, and there was a frantic search for him on the road home. And the whole of his ministry life was spent on the road, traveling from place to place – teaching, healing the sick, casting out demons, giving sight to the blind, raising the dead.

His was a life on the road.

But at the beginning of the Easter story, it is not Jesus who is on the road: it is the ever-faithful women. They have traveled with him throughout his ministry, tending to his needs, serving him, following him along the various roads he traveled.

They followed down the road to Jerusalem, and they walked the road with him during the last week of his life, a road from which most of his followers eventually fled. Then, on the first day of the week, they walked the road to the grave, the road of grief, the road of sorrow, the road of despair.

As they walked this road, they did not know that the grave would not be what they expected it to be. For the first time in forever, the grave had been forever changed.

For the first time in forever, one who once was dead, lives to die no more. As if that was not good news enough, the messenger from God then told them, Jesus is going ahead of you, and you will see him.

Jesus is going ahead of you.

That same promise is for you. On whatever road you find yourself, Jesus is going ahead of you. As you travel the everyday road of your daily routine, Jesus is going ahead of you.

Whether you travel the road of joy or sorrow, hope or despair, anxiety or contentment, fear or certainty, Jesus is going ahead of you, and that makes all the difference in the world.

May this promise grant you strength for today's road, courage to keep going when the burdens are heavy and your footsteps are slow, and assurance that whatever roads you travel, you never walk alone.

PRAYER

God of Resurrection and Life, you go ahead us wherever the road may take us. In confidence and hope, give us good courage to trust and believe that wherever we go, we never journey alone. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Season of Easter

Vocare Practice: Called to Resurrection

REV. DR. CHARLENE RACHUY COX

Vocare is an ongoing spiritual practice designed to help you discern and embrace your various callings so that you can more intentionally live life on purpose for the common good.

Reflect upon how God is calling to to practice resurrection...

- How do my values inform how I practice resurrection?
- How does practicing resurrection invite, encourage, or challenge me to be open?
- In what ways am I called to practice resurrection?
- How does practicing resurrection inform my attentiveness?
- In what ways does practicing resurrection impact my regrets?
- How does practicing resurrection influence where and how I experience God's presence in everyday life?
- Who am I called to be? What am I called to do? Why am I here?
- What do I need for this season?

PRAYER

Give me courage to practice resurrection every day of my life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

See page 6 of this booklet for brief instructions to make the most of your time with this practice.

Presented By:



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