

The Amen Effect

A Lenten Journey to Mend our Broken Hearts and World



Soul Sabbatical 2025

Participant Guide

First Congregational Church of Natick, UCC

Sources:

Sharon Brous – *the amen effect*, 2024, Penguin Random House

Kate Bowler - <https://katebowler.com/> website

Steve Garnaas-Holmes - <https://www.unfoldinglight.net>, website

Mary Oliver – *Devotions, The selected Poems of Mary Oliver*, 2017

Jan Richardson – *Circle of Grace*, 2015

Jan Richardson – *The Cure for Sorrow*, 2016

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer - <https://www.wordwoman.com/>, website

<http://www.afirstsip.com>, website

Videos:

Sharon Brous at Chautauqua – two separate videos for lecture and Q&A

Lecture - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxyXddTEQZM&t=16s>

Q&A - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9c3efztQkFo&t=1s>

Bryan Stevenson – The Power of Proximity - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMKIpycFaOg>

Miguel A. De La Torre – US Immigration Crisis –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAzxEgSehk0>

Aziz Abu Sarah & Maoz Inon Face to Face – How can Israelis and Palestinians achieve peace?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0juLRi90kRg>

The African philosophy of Ubuntu –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UojwMiRpNM>

The Amen Effect ~ A Lenten Journey to mend our broken hearts and world

Welcome to the 2025 Lenten Soul Sabbatical!

During Lent this year we will explore the premise that sacred connection is the antidote to loneliness and alienation, and that turning to one another in compassion and curiosity is essential to our healing, both individually and collectively. We will dig into the human longing for connection – in relationships, in community, with God – that innate yearning to be known, to be seen, and to find our way, not alone, but together.

During Lent this year we meet 5 times with our small group and do daily devotional work on our own for 45 days to strengthen our individual understanding of these issues and to enrich the group discussions.

You will need a few resources for this Soul Sabbatical:

- The book *the amen effect* by Sharon Brous (copyright 2024, Penguin Random House)
- The Amen Effect - Participant Guide
- A journal to write your reflections
- A candle, if you wish

Each week will have the same rhythm ~ We will use a variety of prayer practices to dig deeper into the idea that life is better when we travel together. That the connections we have with one another are essential to live and thrive as whole persons.

Thursday ~ Centering Prayer

Friday ~ Lectio Devina (Holy Reading)

Saturday ~ Body Prayer

Sunday ~ Pray with a Partner

Monday ~ Praying with the Psalms

Tuesday ~ Examen (Listening to your life)

Wednesday ~ Soul Sabbatical Gathering

Week 1~ Show Up

Reading Assignment: *the amen effect* ~ Introduction and Chapter 1 ~ p. xi through p. 28



The Amen Effect is a profound and tender book that teaches us how to be brave with grief and to find one another in the darkest times. There are stories of loss and shared joy found in community. It is essentially a view into the spiritual life of a modern Jewish Rabbi and her congregation in California. I urge you to be kind with yourself. If you are like me, you will shed some tears and you will certainly laugh. Part of what we will explore this Lenten season is how to feel all the feelings and hold those emotions that are hard and uncomfortable as well as the joyful ones. Can we be vulnerable with each other? I think this takes practice – and it takes practice to meet someone when they are in pain or brokenhearted, when they are facing a loss or are overwhelmed. The Jewish tradition has many customs that allow for a person to be supported during time of grief and loss. We can learn a lot from these practices, not only in times of grief, but perhaps when we are feeling unmoored or uncertain about the future like many of us are experiencing now.

I was fortunate to hear Sharon Brous speak this summer at Chautauqua – She is an engaging speaker and a gifted writer. We will read two chapters each week for Rabbi Brous’ book. You may choose to read the assignment in one sitting or break it up over the course of the week. If you finish the reading and want to do some more digging, you will find myriad videos of Rabbi Brous on youtube. She has done many interviews with a number of familiar theologians and social justice activists that you might enjoy.

In this first chapter of her book, Rabbi Brous reminds us of the important role of community in our lives. We need to show up for one another, both to provide support but also to show our vulnerabilities and seek support when we are in need of it. She tells it better than I can.... Enjoy the start of *the amen effect*!

Week 1 Practices:

Each chapter has a practice associated with it – you will find these practices at the end of the book.

Show Up – Go. To. The. Funeral! This week we are reminded, don’t just ask what you can do – pick up the phone, drop off groceries, send cookies.... Your presence matters.

Ash Wednesday

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

The premise of *The Amen Effect* is that sacred connection is the antidote to loneliness and alienation, and that turning to one another with compassion and curiosity is essential to our healing, both individually and collectively.

Take a moment to consider how compassion and curiosity have a role in your life.

Rend Your Heart

by Jan Richardson

A Blessing for Ash Wednesday

To receive this blessing,
all you have to do
is let your heart break.
Let it crack open.
Let it fall apart
so that you can see
its secret chambers,
the hidden spaces
where you have hesitated
to go.

Your entire life
is here, inscribed whole
upon your heart's walls:
every path taken
or left behind,
every face you turned toward
or turned away,
every word spoken in love
or in rage,
every line of your life

you would prefer to leave
in shadow,
every story that shimmers
with treasures known
and those you have yet
to find.

It could take you days
to wander these rooms.
Forty, at least.

And so let this be
a season for wandering,
for trusting the breaking,
for tracing the rupture
that will return you

to the One who waits,
who watches,
who works within
the rending
to make your heart
whole

You are invited to join us for a simple soup and bread supper this evening followed by a Service of Healing in the Sanctuary, including communion and imposition of ashes.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Centering Prayer

Read this poem by Jan Richardson and then conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center yourself in a centering prayer.

If you are new to centering prayer, set a short time goal the first week and try to increase it each week. You might set a goal to sit for 5 minutes the first week and 20 minutes by the last week of our Soul Sabbatical.

Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence. You may hold a word or phrase from the poem or a sacred word that you hold dear.

A Blessing for the Brokenhearted

by Jan Richardson

Let us agree
for now
that we will not say
the breaking
makes us stronger
or that it is better
to have this pain
than to have done
without this love.

Let us promise
we will not
tell ourselves
time will heal
the wound,
when every day
our waking
opens it anew.

Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel
at the mystery

of how a heart
so broken
can go on beating,
as if it were made
for precisely this –
as if it knows
the only cure for love
is more of it,
as if it sees
the heart's sole remedy
for breaking
is to love still,

as if it trusts
that its own
persistent pulse
is the rhythm
of a blessing
we cannot
begin to fathom
but will save us
nonetheless.

When you are ready, close your eyes.

1. Invite the Spirit to lead you to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you for this time of centering prayer. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Listen, Let Go, Be Still, Trust. Having chosen a word, do not change it during your prayer, because to do so would be engaging thoughts.
2. Sit comfortably and close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around you and within you.
3. Silently introduce the sacred word.
4. When thoughts or sensations or feelings or memories or self-reflections arise, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
5. During centering prayer, avoid analyzing your experience, harboring expectations or aiming at a particular goal such as having no thoughts or feeling peaceful or consoled, or having a spiritual experience.
6. At the end of your centering prayer, remain in silence for a few minutes with your eyes closed. You may choose to slowly recite the Lord's Prayer.

~ adapted from *'The Method of Centering Prayer'* by Thomas Keating

- ◇ What does it mean to be brokenhearted?
- ◇ It doesn't necessarily mean that you are incapacitated.
- ◇ What do you need most from your community when you are feeling broken?
- ◇ What can you bring to someone you meet whose heart is broken?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I can grieve in the wilderness

Exhale: I will not look away from suffering

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Lectio Devina (Holy Reading)

Today we will experience an event from the gospel of Luke through a meditative, intuitive approach based on *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola that invites us to activate our imagination to enter the story as it is unfolding.

1. Read the story slowly, either silently or aloud. **Read Luke 4:1-13**

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone." '

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." '

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you",

and

"On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

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

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

2. When you are ready, close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly, until you are relaxed and calm.
3. Picture the scene. Begin with the details in the text. Let your imagination fill in the blanks.
4. Let the scene come alive. Who is there? What's happening? What are the sounds? Smells? Actions?
5. Place yourself in the scene. Where are you? Why? What are you doing? Feeling?
6. Focus on Jesus. Watch him carefully. What is he doing? Saying? Does he have a word for you?
7. Rest in the company of Jesus. Breathe slowly, deeply. Let this be your prayer.

~ From *Way to Live*, Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, editors.

- ◇ What does it feel like to be tempted when you are at your lowest physically?
- ◇ Have you ever been tempted by power?
- ◇ What are the temptations in your life right now?
- ◇ How can temptations lead to brokenness?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I can grieve in the wilderness

Exhale: I will not look away from suffering

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Body Prayer

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this body prayer. (As you do the gestures, say the one-line prayer and then remain in that posture for a brief time.)

Offering the Creator your praise and gratitude, stretch your arms high and wide above your head:

I thank you, Holy One, for the gift of another day of life.

Aware of your connection to the human community, hold out your arms from your sides. Pivot to the left and to the right with your arms stretching out to the world:

I reach out in compassion to my siblings everywhere.

Offering your life to the Holy One, stretch your arms out straight in front of you, slightly apart, palms up:

I give to you all that I am and all that I have.

Opening to accept what the Holy One offers you this day, pull your hands close together and cup them as a container:

I open my entire being to receive the gift that you have waiting for me in this new day.

Remembering the earth and all creation, draw your hands to your chest and bow:

I greet the earth with awe, reverence, and gratitude, promising to care well for her today.

Aware of the indwelling presence of the Holy One, cross your arms and hug yourself, close your eyes and raise your face to heaven:

May I be united with you throughout this day, aware of your love, strengthening and shining through me.

~ adapted from 'Six Gestures for Morning Prayer' by Joyce Rupp

- ◇ Where are you holding your grief or brokenness in your body right now?
- ◇ Can you identify and release it?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I can grieve in the wilderness

Exhale: I will not look away from suffering

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

The Low Road

By Marge Piercy

What can they do to you?
 Whatever they want.
 They can set you up,
 they can bust you,
 they can break your fingers,
 they can burn your brain with
 electricity,
 blur you with drugs till you can't
 walk,
 can't remember,
 they can take your child,
 wall up your lover.
 They can do anything
 you can't stop them from doing.
 How can you stop them?
 Alone, you can fight,
 you can refuse,
 you can take what revenge you can
 but they roll over you.

But two people fighting back to back
 can cut through a mob,
 a snake-dancing file can break a
 cordon,
 an army can meet an army.
 Two people can keep each other
 sane,

can give support, conviction,
 love, massage, hope, sex.
 Three people are a delegation,
 a committee, a wedge.
 With four you can play bridge
 and start an organization.
 With six you can rent a whole house,
 eat pie for dinner with no seconds,
 and hold a fund raising party.
 A dozen make a demonstration.
 A hundred fill a hall.
 A thousand have solidarity and your
 own newsletter;
 ten thousand, power and your own
 paper;
 a hundred thousand, your own
 media;
 ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,
 it starts when you care to act,
 it starts when you do it again and
 they said no,
 it starts when you say We
 and know who you mean,
 and each day you mean one more.

Prayer Practice ~ Pray with a Partner

(Select the meeting day to fit your schedules, e.g. if you meet on Day 3, just switch Day 3's reflection and practice with Day 4.)

Spend a few minutes just getting acquainted or catching up, and then discuss some of your experiences with this material. Perhaps you might want to begin by sharing some of your questions or reactions in general to the reading and practices so far. Share something that is weighing heavily on your heart, listen to your partner's concerns, and then pray together.

- ◇ How is it different when someone is 'broken' because of systems?
- ◇ Broken because of the color of their skin or the place of their birth?
- ◇ What emotions does this poem evoke in you?
- ◇ Is there hope in the poem?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I can grieve in the wilderness

Exhale: I will not look away from suffering

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Praying with the Psalms

The Psalms have long been a response to our deep yearnings: cries of the soul... songs of surrender... paeans of praise. Many evoke a loving movement toward engendering peace, harmony, and healing in our wounded world. Read the Psalm as an invitation to the Voice of Silence that speaks within your own soul.

~ adapted from Nan Merrill, *Psalms for Praying*

Psalm 41

Who among us hears the cry of the poor?
How many open their hearts
and heed the Call?
The plight of the world is a wound
to the very Heart of Love,
a scar on our own souls.
Blessed are those who lovingly respond!
The Friend, who knows all hearts,
will remember their kindness.
They will know joy, peace, and deep
fulfillment working in harmony
with all who serve toward healing
the needs of this troubled world.

As for me, I prayed, "O Soul Mender,
be gracious unto me.
For I have been deaf to those in need;
my fears paralyzed me.
I am bound like a prisoner held
in my own house,
alone and abandoned.
Each fear I push away or deny
rises up with power;
feeling anxious, lies and deceit
take the place of truth.
I can hide no longer; my confusion,
the way I blame others,
have turned even my friends away."

"O Divine Healer, help me face the fears

that threaten to overwhelm me;
without your guidance, they will
bring about what I most fear!
I am on my knees asking forgiveness;
give me strength to turn all
that separates me from You
into love and kindness.
You, who are Unconditional Love, You
do not judge our weaknesses;
raise me up, that I may be renewed
in body, mind, and soul.”

By this I know that You have
graciously forgiven me;
fear did not triumph over me,
though my heart was broken open
so the light could enter in.
You upheld me, filled me with integrity,
and opened my heart to the poor.

Blessed be the Beloved, loving Presence
to all hearts open to Love,
from everlasting to everlasting!
Amen.

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.
Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.
Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.
Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I can grieve in the wilderness

Exhale: I will not look away from suffering

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you?
Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Examen (Listening to Your Life)

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this Examen prayer.

1. Imagine yourself in a favorite place with someone you trust or do whatever helps you to experience God's unconditional love. Take a few deep breaths. Breathe in unconditional love and when you breathe out, fill the space around you with it.
2. Consider the role that compassion plays in healing brokenness.
3. Place your hand on your heart and ask God to bring to mind an insight or awareness from our group session or your reading or reflection for which you are grateful. Ask yourself what about that insight makes it stand out. What gift does it offer to you? What might it ask of you? Breathe in gratitude for this insight.
4. Ask God to bring to mind something from our group session or your readings or reflections that has been challenging. Can you name or describe what elicits resistance or confusion or threat? Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.
5. Take a moment and listen for the Spirit. Is there a word or phrase or image that comes to mind? Sit quietly with that word or image for a few minutes. Close with a prayer in your own words.

~ adapted from *Sleeping with Bread* by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn

- ◇ What role does compassion play in healing broken heartedness??
- ◇ How do you "Show Up" for your community?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I can grieve in the wilderness

Exhale: I will not look away from suffering

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Soul Sabbatical Gathering

Bring your reflections from the past week with an open heart and mind to consider where you need compassion in your life and how you might bring compassion into your interactions with people this week.

Beloved

By Jan Richardson

Beloved.

Is there any other word
needs saying,
any other blessing
could compare
with this name,
this knowing?

Beloved.

Comes like a mercy
to the ear that has never
heard it.
Comes like a river
to the body that has never
seen such grace.

Beloved.

Comes holy
to the heart
aching to be new,

Comes healing
to the soul
wanting to begin
again.

Beloved.

Keep saying it,
and though it may
sound strange at first,
watch how it becomes
part of you,
how it becomes you,
as if you never
could have known yourself
anything else,
as if you could ever
have been other
than this:

Beloved.

Week 2~ See No Stranger

Reading Assignment: *the amen effect* ~ Chapter 2 & 3 ~ p. 29 through p. 61



This week we will focus on how we see other people. How we relate to one another and how we let people get close, or don't. Building community requires that we actually look at and see others, including their pain. And that we are willing to be vulnerable, when it is safe to do so, to share our troubles and be open to the healing that is possible through relationship with one another.

Foundational to Judeo Christian theology is the idea that every person, created in God's own image, has endless potential. This isn't just an empty creation myth. It is this aspirational concept that allows us to have empathy and compassion for people we have never met. How can we accept oppression and exploitation if *imago dei* is a fundamental truth? What would it mean if we could build a world where every person is treated as the image of the Divine?

Brian Stevenson says that one of the conditions that reduces oppression and racism is proximity. He means it is much easier to find detente and understanding when you know someone. We can't afford to stay in our segregated neighborhoods with people who look like us and think like us wishing for a better world. We need to get to know people in other communities. This is perhaps one of the biggest challenges in our divided society today. So how are you going to break out and make that happen?

Week 2 Practices:

Meet Your Neighbors ~ Get to know the people who you live and work near.

Honor the Divine Image ~ Pay attention and see the image of God in all the people you meet (maybe most particularly the ones who you really don't like)

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Centering Prayer

Read this poem by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer and then conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center yourself in a centering prayer.

If you are new to centering prayer, set a short time goal the first week and try to increase it each week. You might set a goal to sit for 5 minutes the first week and 20 minutes by the last week of our Soul Sabbatical.

Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence. You may hold a word or phrase from the poem or a sacred word that you hold dear.

What Comes Next

by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

Love relentlessly.

—Diana Butler Bass

Love relentlessly, she said,
and I want to slip these two words
into every cell in my body, not the sound
of the words, but the truth of them,
the vital, essential need for them,
until relentless love becomes
a cytoplasmic imperative,
the basic building block for every action.
Because anger makes a body clench.
Because fear invokes cowering, shrinking,
shock.
I know the impulse to run, to turn fist, to
hurt back.
I know, too, the warmth of cell-deep love—
how it spreads through the body like ocean
wave,
how it doesn't erase anger and fear,

rather seeds itself somehow inside it,
so even as I contract love bids me to open
wide as a leaf that unfurls in spring
until fear is not all I feel.
Love relentlessly.
Even saying the words aloud invites
both softness and ferocity into the chest,
makes the heart throb with simultaneous
urgency and willingness. A radical pulsing
of love, pounding love, thumping love,
a rebellion of generous love,
tenacious love, a love so foundational
every step of what's next begins
and continues as an uprising,
upswelling, ongoing, infusion
of love, tide of love, honest love.

When you are ready, close your eyes.

1. Invite the Spirit to lead you to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you for this time of centering prayer. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Listen, Let Go, Be Still, Trust. Having chosen a word, do not change it during your prayer, because to do so would be engaging thoughts.
2. Sit comfortably and close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around you and within you.
3. Silently introduce the sacred word.
4. When thoughts or sensations or feelings or memories or self-reflections arise, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
5. During centering prayer, avoid analyzing your experience, harboring expectations or aiming at a particular goal such as having no thoughts or feeling peaceful or consoled, or having a spiritual experience.
6. At the end of your centering prayer, remain in silence for a few minutes with your eyes closed. You may choose to slowly recite the Lord's Prayer.

~ adapted from *'The Method of Centering Prayer'* by Thomas Keating

- ◇ Have you ever felt relentless love?
- ◇ Have you ever been loved with *a radical pulsing of love, pounding love, thumping love, a rebellion of generous love, tenacious love?*
- ◇ How can we practice this kind of love in our community?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am worthy of embrace

Exhale: God, lead me to belonging

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Lectio Devina (Holy Reading)

Today we will experience an event from the gospel of Luke through a meditative, intuitive approach based on *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola that invites us to activate our imagination to enter the story as it is unfolding.

1. Read the story slowly, either silently or aloud. **Luke 19:1-10**

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

2. When you are ready, close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly, until you are relaxed and calm.
3. Picture the scene. Begin with the details in the text. Let your imagination fill in the blanks.
4. Let the scene come alive. Who is there? What's happening? What are the sounds? smells? actions?
5. Place yourself in the scene. Where are you? Why? What are you doing? feeling?
6. Focus on Jesus. Watch him carefully. What is he doing? Saying? Does he have a word for you?
7. Rest in the company of Jesus. Breathe slowly, deeply. Let this be your prayer.

~ From *Way to Live*, Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, editors.

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am worthy of embrace

Exhale: God, lead me to belonging

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Body Prayer

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this body prayer. (As you do the gestures, say the one-line prayer and then remain in that posture for a brief time.)

Offering the Creator your praise and gratitude, stretch your arms high and wide above your head:

I thank you, Holy One, for the gift of another day of life.

Aware of your connection to the human community, hold out your arms from your sides. Pivot to the left and to the right with your arms stretching out to the world:

I reach out in compassion to my siblings everywhere.

Offering your life to the Holy One, stretch your arms out straight in front of you, slightly apart, palms up:

I give to you all that I am and all that I have.

Opening to accept what the Holy One offers you this day, pull your hands close together and cup them as a container:

I open my entire being to receive the gift that you have waiting for me in this new day.

Remembering the earth and all creation, draw your hands to your chest and bow:

I greet the earth with awe, reverence, and gratitude, promising to care well for her today.

Aware of the indwelling presence of the Holy One, cross your arms and hug yourself, close your eyes and raise your face to heaven:

May I be united with you throughout this day, aware of your love, strengthening and shining through me.

~ adapted from 'Six Gestures for Morning Prayer' by Joyce Rupp

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am worthy of embrace

Exhale: God, lead me to belonging

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Manifesto

~ Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

And if we can't save the world,
and who says we can't, then
let us try anyway. Perhaps
we have no superhuman powers—
can't see through buildings,
can't fly, can't bend the bars of cages—
but we have human powers—
can listen, can stand up to,
can stand up for, can cradle.

And if we can't imagine
a world of peace, and who
says we can't, then let us
try anyway. Perhaps we start
tonight—on a Wednesday.
Thursday works, too. Or Friday.
Doesn't much matter the day.

All that matters is the choice
to meet this moment exactly
as it is, with no dream of being

anyone else but our flawed
and fabulous very self—
and then, wholly present,
bringing this self to the world,
touching again and again what is true.
What if we do?

And if we can't save ourselves,
and who says we can't, let's try anyway.
There was a time I thought
I could never be healed.
That was only because it hadn't happened yet,
so I decided it wasn't possible.
Healing happened anyway.
What have we decided isn't possible?
What if we stopped believing that limit?
What if, right now, we used our human powers
of compassion, clarity, gratitude, praise?
What if we did it together—
opened all those closed doors inside us?
What if we let the opening do what opening does?

Prayer Practice ~ Pray with a Partner

(Select the meeting day to fit your schedules, e.g. if you meet on Day 3, just switch Day 3's reflection and practice with Day 4.)

Spend a few minutes catching up, and then discuss some of your experiences with this material. Perhaps you might want to begin by sharing some of your questions or reactions in general to the reading and practices so far. Share something that is weighing heavily on your heart, listen to your partner's concerns, and then pray together.

- ◇ Do you have a personal Manifesto for this divisive time in which we are living?
- ◇ What powers can you bring to bear into the world to make a difference now?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.
Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.
Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am worthy of embrace

Exhale: God, lead me to belonging

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you?
Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Blessing for Finding Grace for Others (and Ourselves)

By Kate Bowler

Blessed are we, the graced.
 We who don't deserve it.
 Whose failures haunt us.
 The things we said.
 The things we left unsaid.
 The decisions, addictions
 and broken relationships
 that have ripple effects we still feel.
 Somehow, we receive this mysterious gift.
 Grace doesn't erase pain we've caused.
 But grace, still.
 For us, the redeemable.
 And if we are...that means they are too.
 Yes—even them:
 The rude neighbor.
 The estranged father.
 The unforgiving ex.
 The boss who screwed you over.

The doctor who messed up.
 The selfish pastor.
 The family member who did the
 unthinkable.
 Despite our mistakes we are graced.
 Blessed are we who wrestle with
 unforgiveness.
 You who make amends.
 You who reach for forgiveness.
 You who say you're sorry even
 if it's not enough.
 You who find the bridge to forgive.
 Even when you cannot forget.
 Or can't go back.
 Or they aren't nearly sorry enough.
 Blessed are we who live here
 In this mystery, this scandal, of grace.

Prayer Practice ~ Examen (Listening to Your Life)

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this Examen prayer.

1. Imagine yourself in a favorite place with someone you trust or do whatever helps you to experience God's unconditional love. Take a few deep breaths. Breathe in unconditional love and when you breathe out, fill the space around you with it.
2. Consider the role that acceptance, reconciliation and love play in creating a sense of belonging and community.
3. Place your hand on your heart and ask God to bring to mind an insight or awareness from our group session or your reading or reflection for which you are grateful. Ask yourself what about that insight makes it stand out. What gift does it offer to you? What might it ask of you? Breathe in gratitude for this insight.
4. Ask God to bring to mind something from our group session or your readings or reflections that has been challenging. Can you name or describe what elicits resistance or confusion or threat? Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.
5. Take a moment and listen for the Spirit. Is there a word or phrase or image that comes to mind? Sit quietly with that word or image for a few minutes. Close with a prayer in your own words.

~ adapted from *Sleeping with Bread* by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn

- ◇ What role does acceptance, reconciliation and love play in creating a sense of belonging and community?
- ◇ How do you “See no Stranger” in your community?
- ◇ How do you practice seeing the image of God in those people you meet every day?
- ◇ How about those people who you disagree with in the political arena?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am worthy of embrace

Exhale: God, lead me to belonging

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Soul Sabbatical Gathering

Bring your reflections from the past week with an open heart and mind to consider where you need justice in your life and how you might bring justice into your interactions with people this week.

Anger

~ Steve Garnaas-Holmes

In this world of cruelty and injustice
it's tempting to respond with anger.
But when you are angry, follow its thread.

You're angry that things are not as you want them
and you feel powerless to change them.
But deeper than that is sorrow for those who are wounded.

Your anger comes from desire for power.
Your sorrow comes from compassion for others.
Let your anger lead you to your sorrow.

When you respond to injustice, even terrible evil, with anger
you are tethered to your own ego.
When you respond in sorrow you are rooted in God's love.

And there, there in God's broken heart,
weeping and powerless, in God's crucified One,
is hope, and courage, and infinite power.

Week 3~ Come Alive

Reading Assignment: *the amen effect* ~ Chapters 4 & 5 ~ p. 63 through p. 104



This week, we will think about our “*calling*”. This is a combination of your abilities, interests, opportunities, and what you see as the needs around you. Although your calling may be related to the work that you do, it usually goes beyond a career choice and is bigger than a nine to five job. This is the answer to the lifelong question, “Why am I here?”

There are some who believe that we are each brought into this world for a higher purpose. It is our life’s work to discover that purpose. And so, we must ask, “In what way am I uniquely able, whether by circumstance or through the cultivation of gifts and abilities, to meet this moment? What is my soul calling me to do? What is the mission only I can fulfill?” And this calling will change over time as new opportunities or needs come to your attention.

But life isn’t just about work and so we need to pay attention to where we find joy and make sure to sprinkle opportunities for delight throughout our life. Even in times of great trouble we are better if we can find reasons to smile.

Week 3 Practices:

Start by Serving ~ Ask each day, “How can I be of service to another today?”

Take a Joy Break ~ We must take time to experience joy, even in the midst of hard times and grief.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Centering Prayer

Read this poem by Steve Garnaas-Holmes and then conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center yourself in a centering prayer.

If you are new to centering prayer, set a short time goal the first week and try to increase it each week. You might set a goal to sit for 5 minutes the first week and 20 minutes by the last week of our Soul Sabbatical.

Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence. You may hold a word or phrase from the poem or a sacred word that you hold dear.

Agonizing love

By Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Losing someone we love, dying
before our eyes,
before their time,
we are caught in-between,
wishing the past, dreading the future.

So we come into the present.
We stop. And we grieve.
If it feels we can't go on
it's because we haven't yet
freed our sorrow.
So we grieve.

We let what is inside out.
We bear witness.
We say the unsaid.
We unburden.

And there, shattered,
weak, bereft and pierced,
the Beloved meets us.

And then we make our sorrow into life.
In tears, in song,
in hands taken, in art audacious,
in dance unbound as if flinging our hearts,
this lack, this breach in us
gives birth, becomes a new creation.

We pause in our Gethsemane
so we can go on
to the agonizing love
we are called to.
Our tears become our strength,
flowing out into the world.

When you are ready, close your eyes.

1. Invite the Spirit to lead you to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you for this time of centering prayer. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Listen, Let Go, Be Still, Trust. Having chosen a word, do not change it during your prayer, because to do so would be engaging thoughts.
2. Sit comfortably and close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around you and within you.
3. Silently introduce the sacred word.

4. When thoughts or sensations or feelings or memories or self-reflections arise, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
5. During centering prayer, avoid analyzing your experience, harboring expectations or aiming at a particular goal such as having no thoughts or feeling peaceful or consoled, or having a spiritual experience.
6. At the end of your centering prayer, remain in silence for a few minutes with your eyes closed. You may choose to slowly recite the Lord's Prayer.

~ adapted from *'The Method of Centering Prayer'* by Thomas Keating

- ◇ What helps you move past feelings of sorrow and dreading the future?
- ◇ Have you had a time when "your tears became your strength"?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: God, awaken my soul to beauty

Exhale: I resist the tyranny of despair

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Lectio Devina (Holy Reading)

Today we will experience an event from the gospel of John through a meditative, intuitive approach based on *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola that invites us to activate our imagination to enter the story as it is unfolding.

1. Read the story slowly, either silently or aloud **John 4:1-14**

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John' — although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'

2. When you are ready, close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly, until you are relaxed and calm.
3. Picture the scene. Begin with the details in the text. Let your imagination fill in the blanks.
4. Let the scene come alive. Who is there? What's happening? What are the sounds? smells? actions?
5. Place yourself in the scene. Where are you? Why? What are you doing? feeling?
6. Focus on Jesus. Watch him carefully. What is he doing? Saying? Does he have a word for you?
7. Rest in the company of Jesus. Breathe slowly, deeply. Let this be your prayer.

~ From *Way to Live*, Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, editors.

- ◇ What image is conjured for you from the phrase "living water"?
- ◇ What do you thirst for?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: God, awaken my soul to beauty

Exhale: I resist the tyranny of despair

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Body Prayer

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this body prayer. (As you do the gestures, say the one-line prayer and then remain in that posture for a brief time.)

Offering the Creator your praise and gratitude, stretch your arms high and wide above your head:

I thank you, Holy One, for the gift of another day of life.

Aware of your connection to the human community, hold out your arms from your sides. Pivot to the left and to the right with your arms stretching out to the world:

I reach out in compassion to my siblings everywhere.

Offering your life to the Holy One, stretch your arms out straight in front of you, slightly apart, palms up:

I give to you all that I am and all that I have.

Opening to accept what the Holy One offers you this day, pull your hands close together and cup them as a container:

I open my entire being to receive the gift that you have waiting for me in this new day.

Remembering the earth and all creation, draw your hands to your chest and bow:

I greet the earth with awe, reverence, and gratitude, promising to care well for her today.

Aware of the indwelling presence of the Holy One, cross your arms and hug yourself, close your eyes and raise your face to heaven:

May I be united with you throughout this day, aware of your love, strengthening and shining through me.

~ adapted from 'Six Gestures for Morning Prayer' by Joyce Rupp

- ◇ Can you picture your community? What do they need today?
- ◇ What can you do today to help another person?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: God, awaken my soul to beauty

Exhale: I resist the tyranny of despair

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Blessed Are You

by Steve Garnass-Holmes

Blessed are you, children of Aleppo, Ferguson, Standing Rock,
 prisoners, immigrants and bullied queers,
 blessed are you, welfare mothers, discouraged rednecks,
 depressed teens, bipolar and suicidal,
 blessed are you, unarmed young black men,
 women bearing memories of abuse.

Blessed are you who are discouraged or afraid or doubting,
 and you, the forgotten who are no one at all,
 you are blessed because God blesses you.
 Don't let your circumstances tell you otherwise.

Blessed are you, for God gives the Realm to you;
 gives it readily to all whose hands are empty;
 not to the powerful—they've already gained what they sought.
 Those whose hands are full can't receive.

Blessed are you, for you are God's saints,
 made beloved by God's love, not ours,
 made holy by God's grace, not your accomplishments,
 made sacred by your being, not your experience.
 Blessed are you, and woe to us who do not see it
 and bow down in humble amazement.
 Woe to us who do not empty our hands
 and receive the infinite gift.

Prayer Practice ~ Pray with a Partner

(Select the meeting day to fit your schedules, e.g. if you meet on Day 3, just switch Day 3's reflection and practice with Day 4.)

Spend a few minutes catching up, and then discuss some of your experiences with this material. Perhaps you might want to begin by sharing some of your questions or reactions in general to the reading and practices so far. Share something that is weighing heavily on your heart, listen to your partner's concerns, and then pray together.

- ◇ What does it mean to you to be blessed and beloved?
- ◇ Look in the mirror – you are fiercely and wonderfully made in God's image!

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: God, awaken my soul to beauty

Exhale: I resist the tyranny of despair

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Praying with the Psalms

The Psalms have long been a response to our deep yearnings: cries of the soul... songs of surrender... paeans of praise. Many evoke a loving movement toward engendering peace, harmony, and healing in our wounded world. Read the Psalm as an invitation to the Voice of Silence that speaks within your own soul. ~ adapted from Nan Merrill, *Psalms for Praying*

Psalm 84

How glorious is your dwelling place,
 O Blessed Architect
 of the universe!
 My soul longs, yes, aches for
 the abode of the Beloved;
 All that is within me sings for joy
 to the living Heart of Love!
 Even as the sparrow finds a home,
 and the swallow a nesting place,
 where its young are raised within
 your majestic creation,
 You invite us to dwell within

your Heart.
 Blessed are they who put their strength
 in You,
 who choose to share the joy and
 sorrows of the world.
 They do not give way to fear or doubt;
 they are quickened by Divine
 Light and Power;
 they dwell within the peace of
 the Most High.
 They go from strength to strength and
 live with integrity.

- ◇ Do you have a sorrow or joy that you can share in a psalm of your own?
- ◇ Can you imagine resting / dwelling "in God's heart"? What does that feel like for you?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: God, awaken my soul to beauty

Exhale: I resist the tyranny of despair

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Blessing for Stretching Your Heart

By Kate Bowler

God, my life has too many things
Awful. Lovely. Full.
Shockingly incomplete.
Will you help me learn to live with
a greater capacity for this?
Living in the tension between a life
that has worked out...
and one that has gone to hell in
every hand basket.
Let today be a divine exercise of
yes...and.

Yes, I have so much
to be thankful for,
and this hasn't turned out
like I thought it would.
Yes, I feel moments of joy,
and I have lost more than
could live without.
Yes, I want to
make the most of today,
and my body keeps breaking.
Yes, I am hopeful,
and this is daunting.
Yes, I am trying to be brave,
and I feel so afraid.

So bless me,
trying to live in between those
two words:
yes...and.

May I understand this is where
the real work of life is found.
Where it takes courage to live.
Where grief can strip me
to the studs
and love can remake me
once again.
Where my heart
can be both broken
and keep on beating.
Never sorry to have broken at all.
Yes...and.

Make me capable of great joy,
great love,
great risk,
even fear,
as you expand my heart
with this yes...and today.

Prayer Practice ~ Examen (Listening to Your Life)

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this Examen prayer.

1. Imagine yourself in a favorite place with someone you trust or do whatever helps you to experience God's unconditional love. Take a few deep breaths. Breathe in unconditional love and when you breathe out, fill the space around you with it.
2. Consider the role of simultaneously holding both joy and sorrow in creating belonging and community.
3. Place your hand on your heart and ask God to bring to mind an insight or awareness from our group session or your reading or reflection for which you are grateful. Ask yourself what about that insight makes it stand out. What gift does it offer to you? What might it ask of you? Breathe in gratitude for this insight.
4. Ask God to bring to mind something from our group session or your readings or reflections that has been challenging. Can you name or describe what elicits resistance or confusion or threat? Be with

whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.

5. Take a moment and listen for the Spirit. Is there a word or phrase or image that comes to mind? Sit quietly with that word or image for a few minutes. Close with a prayer in your own words.

~ adapted from *Sleeping with Bread* by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn

- ◇ How do you meet someone's overwhelming sorrow when you are in the midst of great joy or vice versa?
- ◇ Can we make room for both at the same time?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: God, awaken my soul to beauty

Exhale: I resist the tyranny of despair

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Soul Sabbatical Gathering

Bring your reflections from the past week with an open heart and mind to consider where you need justice in your life and how you might bring justice into your interactions with people this week.

Cure for Sorrow

by Jan Richardson

Because I do not know
any medicine for grief
but to let ourselves
grieve.
Because I do not know
any cure for sorrow
but to let ourselves
sorrow.
Because I do not know
any remedy
but to let the heart break,
to let it fall open, then
to let it fall open
still more.
Because I do not know
how to mend
the unmendable,
unfixable,
unhealable wound
that keeps finding

itself healed
as we tend it,
as we follow
the line of it,
as we let it lead us
on the path
it knows.
Because I do not know
any solace
but to give ourselves
into the love
that will never cease
to find us,
that will never loose
its hold on us,
that will never abandon us
to the sorrow
for which it holds
the cure.

Week 4 ~ Be Present

Reading Assignment: *the amen effect* ~ Chapters 6 & 7 ~ p. 105 through p. 148



This week we are reminded of the vicarious trauma that presents a real danger to those people who are caregivers. Taking on someone else's pain and trouble can place a surprising toll on us and so we need to pay attention to the burdens that we are carrying -sometimes not only our own but those we care for. Broken Heart Syndrome is real and can be made manifest from a personal loss and also from the task of caregiving to others.

Are you a caregiver? Or are you someone who avoids people who are troubled? Something for us all to practice is being present with someone who is in pain or brokenhearted. Sometimes it is the time for action and sometimes it is the time to just be present. Can you be the one who sits and listens without trying to fix anything? It's worth trying it out- you may find that this isn't one of your gifts, and that's okay. This requires honesty on both sides because sometimes the brokenhearted don't need anything beyond knowing that they are not alone and sometimes they need a casserole.

Week 4 Practices:

Don't Grin & Bear It ~ Tell the truth, don't pretend you are okay when you're not.

Be Present ~ Practice sitting with discomfort – you don't need to fix anything – just be there for the brokenhearted person.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Centering Prayer

Read this poem by Jan Richardson and then conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center yourself in a centering prayer.

If you are new to centering prayer, set a short time goal the first week and try to increase it each week. You might set a goal to sit for 5 minutes the first week and 20 minutes by the last week of our Soul Sabbatical.

Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence. You may hold a word or phrase from the poem or a sacred word that you hold dear.

Blessing That Does Not End

by Jan Richardson

From the moment
it first laid eyes
on you,
this blessing loved you.
This blessing
knew you
from the start.
It cannot explain how.
It just knows
that the first time
it sat down beside you,
it entered into a conversation
that had already been going on
forever.
Believe this conversation
has not stopped.
Believe this love
still lives –
the love that crossed
an impossible distance
to reach you,
to find you,
to take your face
into its hands

and bless you.
Believe this
does not end –
that the gesture,
once enacted,
endures.
Believe this love
goes on –
that it still
takes your face
into its hands,
that it presses
its forehead to yours
as it speaks to you
in undying words,
that it never ceased
to gather your heart
into its heart.
Believe this blessing
abides.
Believe it goes with you
always,
Believe it knows you
still.

When you are ready, close your eyes

1. Invite the Spirit to lead you to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you for this time of centering prayer. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Listen, Let Go, Be Still, Trust. Having chosen a word, do not change it during your prayer, because to do so would be engaging thoughts.
2. Sit comfortably and close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around you and within you.
3. Silently introduce the sacred word.
4. When thoughts or sensations or feelings or memories or self-reflections arise, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
5. During centering prayer, avoid analyzing your experience, harboring expectations or aiming at a particular goal such as having no thoughts or feeling peaceful or consoled, or having a spiritual experience.
6. At the end of your centering prayer, remain in silence for a few minutes with your eyes closed. You may choose to slowly recite the Lord's Prayer.

~ adapted from *'The Method of Centering Prayer'* by Thomas Keating

- ◇ How does your faith and what you believe sustain you in difficult times?
- ◇ Does your community feed your faith?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I journey to the margins

Exhale: I protect every corner

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you?
Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Lectio Devina (Holy Reading)

Today we will experience an event from the gospel of Luke through a meditative, intuitive approach based on *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola that invites us to activate our imagination to enter the story as it is unfolding.

1. Read the story slowly, either silently or aloud. **Luke 15:1-32**

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.'

So he told them this parable: 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

'Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;

I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.

‘Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, “Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!” Then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” ’

2. When you are ready, close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly, until you are relaxed and calm.
3. Picture the scene. Begin with the details in the text. Let your imagination fill in the blanks.
4. Let the scene come alive. Who is there? What’s happening? What are the sounds? smells? actions?
5. Place yourself in the scene. Where are you? Why? What are you doing? feeling?
6. Focus on Jesus. Watch him carefully. What is he doing? Saying? Does he have a word for you?
7. Rest in the company of Jesus. Breathe slowly, deeply. Let this be your prayer.

~ From *Way to Live*, Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, editors.

- ◇ Have you ever felt like the lost one?
- ◇ How are you like the younger brother?
- ◇ Have you lost something or someone and not noticed?
- ◇ Has the father lost the older son? What might heal their broken relationship?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I journey to the margins

Exhale: I protect every corner

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Body Prayer

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this body prayer. (As you do the gestures, say the one-line prayer and then remain in that posture for a brief time.)

Offering the Creator your praise and gratitude, stretch your arms high and wide above your head:

I thank you, Holy One, for the gift of another day of life.

Aware of your connection to the human community, hold out your arms from your sides. Pivot to the left and to the right with your arms stretching out to the world:

I reach out in compassion to my siblings everywhere.

Offering your life to the Holy One, stretch your arms out straight in front of you, slightly apart, palms up:

I give to you all that I am and all that I have.

Opening to accept what the Holy One offers you this day, pull your hands close together and cup them as a container:

I open my entire being to receive the gift that you have waiting for me in this new day.

Remembering the earth and all creation, draw your hands to your chest and bow:

I greet the earth with awe, reverence, and gratitude, promising to care well for her today.

Aware of the indwelling presence of the Holy One, cross your arms and hug yourself, close your eyes and raise your face to heaven:

May I be united with you throughout this day, aware of your love, strengthening and shining through me.

~ adapted from 'Six Gestures for Morning Prayer' by Joyce Rupp

- ◇ How will you practice 'being present'?
- ◇ How will you notice others 'being present'?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I journey to the margins

Exhale: I protect every corner

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Lost Sheep

~ Steve Garnaas-Holmes

*Which one of you, having a hundred sheep
and losing one of them,
does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness
and go after the one that is lost until they find it?*
—Luke 15.4

None of us, of course.
Which makes God's love all the more radical.
God will find you no matter how lost you are.

But wait. This is not about you.
(How readily we center ourselves
in Jesus' stories, make them about us,
and make them comforting...) But.
Jesus is talking to us privileged insiders,
describing God's joy in finding truly lost sheep—
"those people"—*others*—not us.
You are not the lost sheep. They are.
The kid entangled in gangs, drugs and violence.
The junkie glazed in the street.
The MAGA nut paranoid about bogeymen.
The CEO who couldn't care less about people.
The person who just can't believe. Nope. No way.
God is more delighted in the love
of people who are truly lost
than in those who already have it right.

Find yourself in that.

Prayer Practice ~ Pray with a Partner

(Select the meeting day to fit your schedules, e.g. if you meet on Day 3, just switch Day 3's reflection and practice with Day 4.)

Spend a few minutes catching up, and then discuss some of your experiences with this material. Perhaps you might want to begin by sharing some of your questions or reactions in general to the reading and practices so far. Share something that is weighing heavily on your heart, listen to your partner's concerns, and then pray together.

- ◇ Who will you notice today? Which people are 'lost' and waiting to be 'found' or seen?
- ◇ How do we return when we have been away and make amends for broken relationships?
- ◇ How do we have the difficult 'end-of-life' conversations with those we love?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I journey to the margins

Exhale: I protect every corner

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you?
Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Praying with the Psalms

The Psalms have long been a response to our deep yearnings: cries of the soul... songs of surrender... paeans of praise. Many evoke a loving movement toward engendering peace, harmony, and healing in our wounded world. Read the Psalm as an invitation to the Voice of Silence that speaks within your own soul. ~ adapted from Nan Merrill, *Psalms for Praying*

Psalm 6

O my Beloved, though I have turned from
You,
continue to enfold me with your love;
Be gracious to me, Heart of my heart,
for I am sad and weary.
Surround me with your healing Light,
that my body, mind and soul might heal.
How long must I wait, O Love?
I open the door of my heart to You,
my Beloved,
Enter in and imbue me with your steadfast
Love.
I shall remember You all my days;
I shall sing praises to You throughout the
nights.
I am tired of so many fears;
I cry myself to sleep at night, while

grief and feelings of guilt
bedim my eyes with tears.
All my doubts, my fears, are creating walls
so that I know not love.
Depart from me,
you enemies of wholeness,
for the Beloved is aware of my cry;
Love has heard my prayer,
and hastens to answer my call.
Though my fears are running for cover,
yet they shall be forgiven
by Love;
Illusions that lived in the ego
can now turn to the Light:
I will know peace as I
return Home.

- ◇ What does God's love look like to you?
- ◇ Describe a moment when you felt wrapped in that love.

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I journey to the margins

Exhale: I protect every corner

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Breathing Compassion

By Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Breathe in.
Breathe deeply.
Breathe in love.

It is love, all this that surrounds you,
surrounds you perfectly,
touches you perfectly,
holds you, contains you, fills you perfectly.
You breathe it.
You move through it.
Everything you see, you see through it.

It is given, breathed into you,
the breath of love,
from divine lungs
that breathe everything,
that have been breathing from all eternity,
breathing the one spirit we all breathe.

Breathe it in deeply, this love.
Let it fill you,
enliven you,
change you.

And breathe out.

Prayer Practice ~ Examen (Listening to Your Life)

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this Examen prayer.

1. Imagine yourself in a favorite place with someone you trust or do whatever helps you to experience God's unconditional love. Take a few deep breaths. Breathe in unconditional love and when you breathe out, fill the space around you with it.
2. Consider the role that caring for others plays in creating belonging and community.
3. Place your hand on your heart and ask God to bring to mind an insight or awareness from our group session or your reading or reflection for which you are grateful. Ask yourself what about that insight makes it stand out. What gift does it offer to you? What might it ask of you? Breathe in gratitude for this insight.
4. Ask God to bring to mind something from our group session or your readings or reflections that has been challenging. Can you name or describe what elicits resistance or confusion or threat? Be with

whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.

5. Take a moment and listen for the Spirit. Is there a word or phrase or image that comes to mind? Sit quietly with that word or image for a few minutes. Close with a prayer in your own words.

~ adapted from *Sleeping with Bread* by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn

- ◇ Who do you care for?
- ◇ Who cares for you?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I journey to the margins

Exhale: I protect every corner

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Soul Sabbatical Gathering

Bring your reflections from the past week with an open heart and mind to consider where you need justice in your life and how you might bring justice into your interactions with people this week.

A Blessing for the Life You Didn't Choose

by Kate Bowler

Blessed are you when the shock subsides,
when vaguely, you see a line appear that divides before and after.
You didn't draw it, and can barely even make it out.
But as surely as minutes add up to hours and days,
here you are,
forced into a story you never would have written.

Blessed are you in the tender place of wonder and dread,
Wondering how to be whole when dreams have disappeared and part of you with them,
where mastery, control, determination, bootstrapping, and grit,
are consigned to the realm of before (where most of the world lives),
in the fever dream that promises infinite choices, unlimited progress, best life now.

Blessed are we in the after, loudly shouting: is there anybody here?
We hear the echo, the shuffle of feet, the murmur of others
asking the same question, together in the knowledge
that we are far beyond what we know.

Show us a glimmer of possibility in this new constraint,
that small truths will be given back to us.
We are held.
We are safe.
We are loved.
We are loved.
We are loved.
And best of all: We are not alone.

Week 5 ~ Wonder

Reading Assignment: *the amen effect* ~ Chapter 8 & Epilogue ~ p. 149 through p.178



This week we are encouraged to build our capacity for curiosity. In this time of divisiveness and isolation, it can seem like a particularly difficult challenge to branch out from our own tribe to build relationships with people who we perceive to be just a little too different from us, maybe they don't look like us, talk like us, or vote like us. We will look at how to build capacity to openhearted wonder while we diminish our tendency towards confirmation bias.

While it's important to build strong connections with people with whom we have a strong sense of care and concern, it is also important to be open to understanding people outside of our comfortable circle. It requires that we be willing to set aside isolation, loneliness, polarization, extremism, and broken politics and lay a new foundation in its place. That we be willing to see each other, not despite our broken hearts but because our hearts are broken too. That we be willing to build a beloved community together – a society built on love and justice, worthy of each of us.

Week 5 Practices:

Breathe and Stay at the Table ~ We don't need to argue, maybe we just need to listen.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Centering Prayer

Read this poem by John O'Donohue and then conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center yourself in a centering prayer.

If you are new to centering prayer, set a short time goal the first week and try to increase it each week. You might set a goal to sit for 5 minutes the first week and 20 minutes by the last week of our Soul Sabbatical.

Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence. You may hold a word or phrase from the poem or a sacred word that you hold dear.

For Longing

By John O'Donohue

Blessed be the longing that brought you here
 And quickens your soul with wonder.
 May you have the courage to listen to the voice of desire
 That disturbs you when you have settled for something safe.
 May you have the wisdom to enter generously into your own unease
 To discover the new direction your longing wants you to take.
 May the forms of your belonging—in love, creativity, and friendship—
 Be equal to the grandeur and the call of your soul.
 May the one you long for long for you.
 May your dreams gradually reveal the destination of your desire.
 May a secret Providence guide your thought and nurture your feeling.
 May your mind inhabit your life with the sureness with which
 your body inhabits the world.
 May your heart never be haunted by ghost-structures of old damage.
 May you come to accept your longing as divine urgency.
 May you know the urgency with which God longs for you.

When you are ready, close your eyes.

1. Invite the Spirit to lead you to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you for this time of centering prayer. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Listen, Let Go, Be Still, Trust. Having chosen a word, do not change it during your prayer, because to do so would be engaging thoughts.

2. Sit comfortably and close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around you and within you.
3. Silently introduce the sacred word.
4. When thoughts or sensations or feelings or memories or self-reflections arise, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
5. During centering prayer, avoid analyzing your experience, harboring expectations or aiming at a particular goal such as having no thoughts or feeling peaceful or consoled, or having a spiritual experience.
6. At the end of your centering prayer, remain in silence for a few minutes with your eyes closed. You may choose to slowly recite the Lord's Prayer.

~ adapted from *'The Method of Centering Prayer'* by Thomas Keating

- ◇ How will you use your curiosity and sense of wonder to energize your engagement and discovery of what your community needs?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am meant for love

Exhale: God, help me receive it

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Lectio Devina (Holy Reading)

Today we will experience an event from the gospel of John through a meditative, intuitive approach based on *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola that invites us to activate our imagination to enter the story as it is unfolding.

1. Read the story slowly, either silently or aloud. **Read John 12:1-8**

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

2. When you are ready, close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly, until you are relaxed and calm.
3. Picture the scene. Begin with the details in the text. Let your imagination fill in the blanks.
4. Let the scene come alive. Who is there? What's happening? What are the sounds? smells? actions?
5. Place yourself in the scene. Where are you? Why? What are you doing? feeling?
6. Focus on Jesus. Watch him carefully. What is he doing? Saying? Does he have a word for you?
7. Rest in the company of Jesus. Breathe slowly, deeply. Let this be your prayer.

~ From *Way to Live*, Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, editors.

◇ Sometimes we need to attend to the grieving – Are you a caretaker?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am meant for love

Exhale: God, help me receive it

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Body Prayer

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this body prayer. (As you do the gestures, say the one-line prayer and then remain in that posture for a brief time.)

Offering the Creator your praise and gratitude, stretch your arms high and wide above your head:

I thank you, Holy One, for the gift of another day of life.

Aware of your connection to the human community, hold out your arms from your sides. Pivot to the left and to the right with your arms stretching out to the world:

I reach out in compassion to my siblings everywhere.

Offering your life to the Holy One, stretch your arms out straight in front of you, slightly apart, palms up:

I give to you all that I am and all that I have.

Opening to accept what the Holy One offers you this day, pull your hands close together and cup them as a container:

I open my entire being to receive the gift that you have waiting for me in this new day.

Remembering the earth and all creation, draw your hands to your chest and bow:

I greet the earth with awe, reverence, and gratitude, promising to care well for her today.

Aware of the indwelling presence of the Holy One, cross your arms and hug yourself, close your eyes and raise your face to heaven:

May I be united with you throughout this day, aware of your love, strengthening and shining through me.

~ adapted from 'Six Gestures for Morning Prayer' by Joyce Rupp

- ◇ Repeat the body prayer and instead of picturing your close community, imagine those people who you are at odds with and don't agree with. Can you feel compassion for them? Remember the source of your love – God's love flows through you!

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am meant for love

Exhale: God, help me receive it

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

The Sun

By Mary Oliver

Have you ever seen
anything
in your life
more wonderful
than the way the sun,
every evening,
relaxed and easy,
floats toward the horizon
and into the clouds or the hills,
or the ruffled sea,
and is gone—
and how it slides again
out of the blackness,
every morning,
on the other side of the world,
like a red flower
streaming upward on its heavenly oils,
say, on a morning in early summer,

at its perfect imperial distance—
and have you ever felt for anything
such wild love—
do you think there is anywhere, in any language,
a word billowing enough
for the pleasure
that fills you,
as the sun
reaches out,
as it warms you
as you stand there,
empty-handed—
or have you too
turned from this world—
or have you too
gone crazy
for power,
for things?

Prayer Practice ~ Pray with a Partner

(Select the meeting day to fit your schedules, e.g. if you meet on Day 3, just switch Day 3's reflection and practice with Day 4.)

Spend a few minutes catching up, and then discuss some of your experiences with this material. Perhaps you might want to begin by sharing some of your questions or reactions in general to the reading and practices so far. Share something that is weighing heavily on your heart, listen to your partner's concerns, and then pray together.

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am meant for love

Exhale: God, help me receive it

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Praying with the Psalms

The Psalms have long been a response to our deep yearnings: cries of the soul... songs of surrender... paeans of praise. Many evoke a loving movement toward engendering peace, harmony, and healing in our wounded world. Read the Psalm as an invitation to the Voice of Silence that speaks within your own soul. ~ adapted from Nan Merrill, *Psalms for Praying*

Psalm 25

To You, O Love, I lift up my soul!
 O Heart within my heart,
 in You I place my trust.
 Let me not feel unworthy;
 let not fear rule over me.
 Yes! May all who open their hearts
 savor You and bless the earth!
 Compel me to know your ways, O Love;
 instruct me upon your paths.
 Lead me in your truth,
 and teach me,
 for through You will I know
 wholeness;
 I shall reflect your Light
 both day and night.
 I know of your mercy, Blessed One,
 and of your unconditional Love;
 You have been with me
 from the beginning.
 Forgive the many times I have walked
 away from You
 choosing to follow my own will.
 I seek your guidance, once again,
 I yearn to know your Peace.
 Companion me as I open to your Will!
 You are gracious and just,
 O Spirit of Truth,
 happy to guide those who
 miss their way;
 You enjoy teaching all who are open,
 all who choose to live in truth.
 your paths are loving and sure,
 O Holy One, and
 those who give witness to You
 through their lives

are blessed beyond measure.
 Yet, all too often glorious gifts
 of Grace, of Love and Light,
 are veiled by my busyness.
 I bow down before You;
 instruct me, that I might choose
 the way of love and truth.
 I would live in your abundant Love,
 and my children as well.
 Your friendship is offered to all
 whose hearts are open;
 You make known your promises
 to them.
 My eyes are ever on You, Beloved,
 keep my feet from stumbling
 along the way.
 Turn to me, O Holy One, and envelop me
 with your love, for
 I am lonely and oppressed.
 Relieve the blocks in my heart
 that keep me separated from You;
 See all the darkness within me;
 fill it with your healing Light,
 Look at my pain and all my fears;
 they shut out love and life.
 Protect me and free me;
 let me not live as unworthy,
 for I would return Home to You.
 May integrity and wholeness fill me
 as I dwell with You,
 O Loving Presence.
 May we, together with the angels
 and the company of heaven,
 help unfold your Plan
 for planet Earth.

◇ What keeps you from feeling the fullness of God's love and grace?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am meant for love

Exhale: God, help me receive it

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Sink, So As to Rise

~ Leon Wieseltier, from his book, *Kaddish*

There are circumstances that must shatter you;
And if you are not shattered, then you have not understood your circumstances.
In such circumstances, it is a failure for your heart not to break.
And it is pointless to put up a fight, for a fight will blind you to the opportunity
that has been presented by your misfortune.
Do you wish to persevere pridefully in the old life?
Of course you do: the old life was a good life.
But it is no longer available to you. It has been carried away, irreversibly.
So there is only one thing to be done.
Transformation must be met with transformation.
Where there was the old life, let there be the new life.
Do not persevere.
Dignify the shock.
Sink, so as to rise.

Prayer Practice ~ Examen (Listening to Your Life)

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this Examen prayer.

1. Imagine yourself in a favorite place with someone you trust or do whatever helps you to experience God's unconditional love. Take a few deep breaths. Breathe in unconditional love and when you breathe out, fill the space around you with it.
2. Consider the role that curiosity and openness plays in creating belonging and community.
3. Place your hand on your heart and ask God to bring to mind an insight or awareness from our group session or your reading or reflection for which you are grateful. Ask yourself what about that insight makes it stand out. What gift does it offer to you? What might it ask of you? Breathe in gratitude for this insight.
4. Ask God to bring to mind something from our group session or your readings or reflections that has been challenging. Can you name or describe what elicits resistance or confusion or threat? Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.
5. Take a moment and listen for the Spirit. Is there a word or phrase or image that comes to mind? Sit quietly with that word or image for a few minutes. Close with a prayer in your own words.

~ adapted from *Sleeping with Bread* by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn

- ◇ How could you be more open to curiosity?
- ◇ How do you need to protect your own heart in this work?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am meant for love

Exhale: God, help me receive it

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Soul Sabbatical Gathering

Bring your reflections from the past week with an open heart and mind to consider where you need justice in your life and how you might bring justice into your interactions with people this week.

What I Didn't Know

by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

At last I am learning it's okay
to be scared to the marrow
and still show up whole-hearted.
No shame it took so long
to learn this truth,
just giddy relief to finally trust
I can be clenched like a hedgehog
or poised as a snake
and still be open to finding love
at the center of what scares me.
And when I find no sprig of love there,
that is the chance
to offer love to the world
any way I know how—
with a gift, with my time,
with words, with touch,
or with a simple act of kindness.
And if I find I have no love
to muster, then that is the chance
to plant seeds of love in whatever
soil I find. And amend the ground.
And bring light. Bring water.

Week 6 ~ Write a New Story



This week you can think about what you have read and heard throughout this Lenten journey. If you are at all like me, you probably have more questions than answers. You have been challenged to try new spiritual practices and hopefully some of them resonated with you and you may find that you can continue to use them after this Soul Sabbatical ends. We hope that you know that you are on this journey accompanied by a community of people who care about you and will be with you in the darkest days and will be happy to rejoice with you when you have something to celebrate. So don't be afraid to share your brokenness as well as your joys – we are in this together!

Mishnah Middot 2:2

This description of a simple pilgrimage ritual, found in *The Amen Effect*, seems to capture life's very essence:

Hundreds of thousands of people would ascend to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the focal point of Jewish religious and political life in the ancient world. The crowd would enter the courtyard in a mass of humanity, turning to the right and circling right, around the enormous complex and exit close to where they entered.

But someone suffering... the grieving, the lonely, the sick – someone to whom something awful had happened – that person would walk through the same entrance and circle in the opposite direction. And every person who passed the brokenhearted would stop and ask, "What happened to you?" The bereaved would answer, "I lost my mother." Or perhaps, "My husband left." Or, "I found a lump." "I just feel so lonely and lost."

And those who walked from right to left would look into the eyes of the ill, the bereft, and the bereaved and say, "May God comfort you and may you be wrapped in the embrace of this community."

Can you imagine this? Can you imagine being the bereft person and sharing your pain so openly? Can you imagine offering comfort to someone who is so openly hurting? Can we say to one another, "I see you."?

May it be so!

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Centering Prayer

Read this poem by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer and then conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center yourself in a centering prayer.

If you are new to centering prayer, set a short time goal the first week and try to increase it each week. You might set a goal to sit for 5 minutes the first week and 20 minutes by the last week of our Soul Sabbatical.

Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence. You may hold a word or phrase from the poem or a sacred word that you hold dear.

How Did I Ever Believe it Would Be Otherwise?

~ Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

*When it's dry here,
the clay in the soil shrinks,
its particles pulling
more tightly together
until deep cracks form in the earth,
a force so powerful
it can damage foundations.
This makes me wonder
about how we, too,
storied to have come from clay,
can crack in times of drought.
I have felt it, drought of love,
drought of touch, drought of death,
drought of compassion and justice.*

*And I have known, too, the miracle
of how when the drought is over,
the clay of my soul expands again,
absorbing what it most needs.
Is it strange how much comfort
I take in knowing it's natural,
that cracking is what we do,
it's part of the cycle.
Of course, the cracking.
And of course, the healing.
I am awed by its force
and how little it takes,
even a small bit of rain,
for deep healing to begin.*

When you are ready, close your eyes.

1. Invite the Spirit to lead you to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you for this time of centering prayer. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Listen, Let Go, Be Still, Trust. Having chosen a word, do not change it during your prayer, because to do so would be engaging thoughts.
2. Sit comfortably and close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around you and within you.
3. Silently introduce the sacred word.
4. When thoughts or sensations or feelings or memories or self-reflections arise, return ever so gently to the sacred word.

5. During centering prayer, avoid analyzing your experience, harboring expectations or aiming at a particular goal such as having no thoughts or feeling peaceful or consoled, or having a spiritual experience.
6. At the end of your centering prayer, remain in silence for a few minutes with your eyes closed. You may choose to slowly recite the Lord's Prayer.

~ adapted from *'The Method of Centering Prayer'* by Thomas Keating

- ◇ What parts of you are cracked open and need healing?
- ◇ From where will the healing rains come?
- ◇ It's okay to say it, to show it – It's okay to not be okay.....

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am not okay

Exhale: God, with you I am safe

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Lectio Devina (Holy Reading)

Today we will experience an event from the gospel of Luke through a meditative, intuitive approach based on *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola that invites us to activate our imagination to enter the story as it is unfolding.

1. Read the story slowly, either silently or aloud. **Luke 19:28 – 40**

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" just say this: "The Lord needs it." ' So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.' Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

'Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!'

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'

1. When you are ready, close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly, until you are relaxed and calm.
2. Picture the scene. Begin with the details in the text. Let your imagination fill in the blanks.
3. Let the scene come alive. Who is there? What's happening? What are the sounds? smells? actions?
4. Place yourself in the scene. Where are you? Why? What are you doing? feeling?
5. Focus on Jesus. Watch him carefully. What is he doing? Saying? Does he have a word for you?
6. Rest in the company of Jesus. Breathe slowly, deeply. Let this be your prayer.

~ From *Way to Live*, Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, editors.

- ◇ It is said that Pilate entered Jerusalem through a different gate on the other side of the city on the same day that Jesus came in on a donkey. Which parade are you attending? Where is your focus?
- ◇ Where do you find hope in this story?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am not okay

Exhale: God, with you I am safe

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Body Prayer

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this body prayer. (As you do the gestures, say the one-line prayer and then remain in that posture for a brief time.)

Offering the Creator your praise and gratitude, stretch your arms high and wide above your head:

I thank you, Holy One, for the gift of another day of life.

Aware of your connection to the human community, hold out your arms from your sides. Pivot to the left and to the right with your arms stretching out to the world:

I reach out in compassion to my siblings everywhere.

Offering your life to the Holy One, stretch your arms out straight in front of you, slightly apart, palms up:

I give to you all that I am and all that I have.

Opening to accept what the Holy One offers you this day, pull your hands close together and cup them as a container:

I open my entire being to receive the gift that you have waiting for me in this new day.

Remembering the earth and all creation, draw your hands to your chest and bow:

I greet the earth with awe, reverence, and gratitude, promising to care well for her today.

Aware of the indwelling presence of the Holy One, cross your arms and hug yourself, close your eyes and raise your face to heaven:

May I be united with you throughout this day, aware of your love, strengthening and shining through me.

~ adapted from 'Six Gestures for Morning Prayer' by Joyce Rupp

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am not okay

Exhale: God, with you I am safe

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

The Real Work
by Wendell Berry

It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work,

and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Prayer Practice ~ Pray with a Partner

(Select the meeting day to fit your schedules, e.g. if you meet on Day 3, just switch Day 3's reflection and practice with Day 4.)

Spend a few minutes catching up, and then discuss some of your experiences with this material. Perhaps you might want to begin by sharing some of your questions or reactions in general to the reading and practices so far. Share something that is weighing heavily on your heart, listen to your partner's concerns, and then pray together.

- ◇ What is your 'real work' this spring?
- ◇ Where do you need to build your resiliency so you can engage in the important stuff?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am not okay

Exhale: God, with you I am safe

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Praying with the Psalms

The Psalms have long been a response to our deep yearnings: cries of the soul... songs of surrender... paeans of praise. Many evoke a loving movement toward engendering peace, harmony, and healing in our wounded world. Read the Psalm as an invitation to the Voice of Silence that speaks within your own soul. ~ adapted from Nan Merrill, *Psalms for Praying*

Psalm 34

I will bless the Beloved at all times;
 a song of praise will I sing.
 My soul speaks to the Beloved continually;
 let all who suffer hear and be glad.
 O, open your hearts, friends,
 that your pain and loneliness
 be turned to Love;
 And then, we shall rejoice in the Beloved
 together!

When I searched for Love, the Beloved
 answered within my heart,
 and all my fears flew away.
 Look to the Beloved, and your
 emptiness will be filled,
 your face will radiate Love.
 For when you weep, the Beloved hears
 and comes to companion you;
 your burdens are eased by Love.
 The Beloved sends angels when you
 call upon these messengers
 for guidance and light,
 for their gracious inspiration,
 One with Love, you are never alone!

Happy are all who dwell in the
 Beloved's heart!
 Abandon yourself into Love's hands,
 O you holy ones,
 For those who give themselves to
 the Beloved,
 lack no good thing.
 Everyone separated from Love is empty
 and hungry within;
 But those who open their hearts to

 the Beloved
 are filled to overflowing!
 O come and see, come and hear,
 how we honor the Beloved.
 Many there are who desire Life,
 who yearn for fulfillment,
 who covet the wisdom of Truth.
 Keep your heart open and free,
 take time to dwell in the Silence,
 Become a peaceful presence in the world.
 For the Beloved sees the deeds
 of our hearts, and
 hears our innermost thoughts.
 The face of the beloved turns from
 the evil ways of men and women;
 For Love is kind and merciful and
 remembers not our sins.
 Rather, the Beloved is patient,
 ever-waiting for us to cry out
 for forgiveness.
 To embrace Love's way.
 How often the Beloved weeps with
 compassion
 over those who are crushed in spirit.
 Though we are beset with many fears
 that cause illness and troubles,
 The Beloved is ever ready
 to comfort us in our sorrows,
 to strengthen us on our soul's
 journey to wholeness.
 The Beloved renews the life of all
 who surrender to Love.

- ◇ We say, “You are never alone” ~ Are you more likely to feel the presence of God when you are by yourself or in community?
- ◇ What is the most important aspect of “community” for you?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am not okay

Exhale: God, with you I am safe

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Blessing for Palm Sunday

by Kate Bowler

Jesus, from that mountain
high among the olive trees,
it would have been an easy journey
down to the city,
to Jerusalem, which lay below.
So why choose to make your way
on a donkey,
on an everyday beast of burden,
your feet almost dragging on the ground?
And who are these people running,
bending low,
to spread their precious cloaks
on the road before you,
waving palm branches and shouting,
"Save us! Hosanna to the Son of David!"?
What is the raw and urgent hope that
rises in their songs?

"Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord!"
And, Jesus, why are you smiling?
Because it is true what they are saying,
though they can't yet know the whole of it.
It is happening. It is unfolding
in slow motion,
the fulfillment of that promise from of old:
their savior would come,
humble, and riding on a donkey.
Blessed are we, on this side of history
shouting, "Come, Lord, save us too!"
We know how it ends, and still we forget
to rush toward our humble,
forgettable king
and yell, "Hosanna, hosanna,
our hope is in you!"

Prayer Practice ~ Examen (Listening to Your Life)

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this Examen prayer.

1. Imagine yourself in a favorite place with someone you trust or do whatever helps you to experience God's unconditional love. Take a few deep breaths. Breathe in unconditional love and when you breathe out, fill the space around you with it.
2. Consider the role that vulnerability and resilience plays in creating belonging and community.
3. Place your hand on your heart and ask God to bring to mind an insight or awareness from our group session or your reading or reflection for which you are grateful. Ask yourself what about that insight makes it stand out. What gift does it offer to you? What might it ask of you? Breathe in gratitude for this insight.
4. Ask God to bring to mind something from our group session or your readings or reflections that has been challenging. Can you name or describe what elicits resistance or confusion or threat? Be with whatever you feel without trying to change or fix it in any way. You may wish to take deep breaths and let God's love fill you just as you are.
5. Take a moment and listen for the Spirit. Is there a word or phrase or image that comes to mind? Sit quietly with that word or image for a few minutes. Close with a prayer in your own words.

~ adapted from *Sleeping with Bread* by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn

- ◇ What role does vulnerability and resilience play in creating belonging and community?
- ◇ Are you ready to see something important unfolding in front of you?
- ◇ Will you look on from the sidelines or join the movement?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am not okay

Exhale: God, with you I am safe

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Centering Prayer

Read this poem by Steve Garnaas-Holmes and then conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center yourself in a centering prayer.

If you are new to centering prayer, set a short time goal the first week and try to increase it each week. You might set a goal to sit for 5 minutes the first week and 20 minutes by the last week of our Soul Sabbatical.

Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence. You may hold a word or phrase from the poem or a sacred word that you hold dear.

Blessed are you who weep

by Steve Garnaas-Holmes

God is among the broken-hearted.
 Joining them, you are close to the Beloved,
 whose loving grief for this tear-soaked world is deep,
 yet whose joy is infinite.
 When your heart is cracked open by sorrow,
 in time the delight of God pours in,
 splashing with laughter.

Carefree, untouched, laughing now,
 you belittle God's passion.
 Your awakening will be a mourning.

When you are ready, close your eyes.

1. Invite the Spirit to lead you to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you for this time of centering prayer. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Listen, Let Go, Be Still, Trust. Having chosen a word, do not change it during your prayer, because to do so would be engaging thoughts.
2. Sit comfortably and close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around you and within you.
3. Silently introduce the sacred word.
4. When thoughts or sensations or feelings or memories or self-reflections arise, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
5. During centering prayer, avoid analyzing your experience, harboring expectations or aiming at a particular goal such as having no thoughts or feeling peaceful or consoled, or having a spiritual experience.
6. At the end of your centering prayer, remain in silence for a few minutes with your eyes closed. You may choose to slowly recite the Lord's Prayer.

~ adapted from *'The Method of Centering Prayer'* by Thomas Keating

- ◇ Can you name how your heart has been broken?
- ◇ Can you feel how God's heart hurts for you too?
- ◇ Can you picture that brokenness being healed? Not fixed – healed

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I am not okay

Exhale: God, with you I am safe

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Lectio Devina (Holy Reading)

Today we will experience an event from the gospel of Matthew through a meditative, intuitive approach based on *The Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola that invites us to activate our imagination to enter the story as it is unfolding.

1. Read the story slowly, either silently or aloud. **Read Matthew 26:36–56**

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

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.' At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?' At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

2. When you are ready, close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly, until you are relaxed and calm.
3. Picture the scene. Begin with the details in the text. Let your imagination fill in the blanks.
4. Let the scene come alive. Who is there? What's happening? What are the sounds? smells? actions?
5. Place yourself in the scene. Where are you? Why? What are you doing? feeling?
6. Focus on Jesus. Watch him carefully. What is he doing? Saying? Does he have a word for you?
7. Rest in the company of Jesus. Breathe slowly, deeply. Let this be your prayer.

~ From *Way to Live*, Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, editors.

- ◇ What disappointments sit heavy on you?
- ◇ Have you been betrayed by someone you trusted?
- ◇ Were you able to forgive them?
- ◇ Can you move on without forgiveness?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I don't have to hold every pain at once

Exhale: I can feel and not be consumed

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Centering Prayer

Read this poem by Lynn Ungar and then conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center yourself in a centering prayer.

If you are new to centering prayer, set a short time goal the first week and try to increase it each week. You might set a goal to sit for 5 minutes the first week and 20 minutes by the last week of our Soul Sabbatical.

Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence. You may hold a word or phrase from the poem or a sacred word that you hold dear.

The Path

By Lynn Ungar

Life, the saying goes, is a journey,
and who could argue with that?
We've all experienced the surprising turns,
the nearly-impassible swamp, the meadow
of flowers that turned out not to be quite
so blissful and benign as we first thought,
the crest of the hill where the road
smoothed out and sloped toward home.

Our job, we say, is to remain faithful
to the path before us. Which is an assumption
as common as it is absurd.
Really? Look ahead. What do you see?
If there is a path marked out in front of you
it was almost certainly laid down for someone else.
The path only unfolds behind us,
our steps themselves laying down the road.
You can look back and see the sign posts—
the ones you followed and the ones you missed—
but there are no markers for what lies ahead.

You can tell the story of how
you forded the stream or got lost
on the short cut that wasn't,
how you trekked your way to courage or a heart,
but all of that comes after the fact.

There is no road ahead.
There is only the walking,
the tales we weave of our adventures,
and the songs we sing
to call our companions on.

When you are ready, close your eyes.

1. Invite the Spirit to lead you to choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you for this time of centering prayer. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as God, Jesus, Listen, Let Go, Be Still, Trust. Having chosen a word, do not change it during your prayer, because to do so would be engaging thoughts.
2. Sit comfortably and close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around you and within you.
3. Silently introduce the sacred word.
4. When thoughts or sensations or feelings or memories or self-reflections arise, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
5. During centering prayer, avoid analyzing your experience, harboring expectations or aiming at a particular goal such as having no thoughts or feeling peaceful or consoled, or having a spiritual experience.
6. At the end of your centering prayer, remain in silence for a few minutes with your eyes closed. You may choose to slowly recite the Lord's Prayer.

~ adapted from *'The Method of Centering Prayer'* by Thomas Keating

- ◇ Maundy Thursday is essentially a story about how people can disappoint us – full of betrayal – but there is also hope. Do you look back on the path you can see or ahead to the way that is unknown?
- ◇ Does it make a difference if you have companions on the journey? Even if they might disappoint you sometimes?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I don't have to hold every pain at once

Exhale: I can feel and not be consumed

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

You are invited to join us this evening for a meal followed by a Tenebrae Service in the Sanctuary, including communion.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Praying with the Psalms

The Psalms have long been a response to our deep yearnings: cries of the soul... songs of surrender... paeans of praise. Many evoke a loving movement toward engendering peace, harmony, and healing in our wounded world. Read the Psalm as an invitation to the Voice of Silence that speaks within your own soul.
~ adapted from Nan Merrill, Psalms for Praying

Psalm 88

O Beloved, Heart of my heart,
I call to You for help by day;
I cry out in the night,
Let my prayer come before You,
bend your ear to my cry!
For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life seems like dust,
I have fallen into a pit of despair;
I have no strength and
I feel powerless,
Like one from whom You have turned,
like the soil people walk upon.
You alone can comfort me in this abyss,
in the darkness of fear.
Separation from You is an agony,
hopelessness threatens to
overwhelm me.
Through You alone can I pray for
my enemies,
for those who ignore my plight.
I am in prison, chained by fear;
I am weary of tears.
Every day I call upon You, O Beloved;
I lift up my hands in supplication.
Will You raise me from this
living death?

Will You mend a broken heart?
Let not your steadfast Love pass
me by:
have mercy on me. O Comforter!
Reach your hand into the darkness of
my ego-fears;
by your saving grace forgive
my unholy ways.
O Merciful Beloved, I cry to You;
each day my prayer comes before You.
Let not separation keep me from
your Heart;
be my strength as I face the
darkness inside.
Too long have I let fear control me,
projecting onto others the demons
dwelling within.
Let your Love encircle and envelop me;
in your mercy raise me up.
Let peace become my companion all day
long; by night
free me from the bonds of fear.
Let me be reconciled with family and
friends; and may I know You,
O Loving Companion Presence,
as in days of old.

- ◇ How will you respond to the ostracized (or cancelled) person – can you offer a blessing and mercy, even if their actions have hurt you or your community?
- ◇ How will you find forgiveness and restoration for your 'enemy'?

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I don't have to hold every pain at once

Exhale: I can feel and not be consumed

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

Light a candle if you wish and invite the Spirit to kindle the light of God's presence within you.

Prayer Practice ~ Body Prayer

Conclude your reflections by taking a few moments to center in this body prayer. (As you do the gestures, say the one-line prayer and then remain in that posture for a brief time.)

Offering the Creator your praise and gratitude, stretch your arms high and wide above your head:

I thank you, Holy One, for the gift of another day of life.

Aware of your connection to the human community, hold out your arms from your sides. Pivot to the left and to the right with your arms stretching out to the world:

I reach out in compassion to my siblings everywhere.

Offering your life to the Holy One, stretch your arms out straight in front of you, slightly apart, palms up:

I give to you all that I am and all that I have.

Opening to accept what the Holy One offers you this day, pull your hands close together and cup them as a container:

I open my entire being to receive the gift that you have waiting for me in this new day.

Remembering the earth and all creation, draw your hands to your chest and bow:

I greet the earth with awe, reverence, and gratitude, promising to care well for her today.

Aware of the indwelling presence of the Holy One, cross your arms and hug yourself, close your eyes and raise your face to heaven:

May I be united with you throughout this day, aware of your love, strengthening and shining through me.

~ adapted from 'Six Gestures for Morning Prayer' by Joyce Rupp

- ◇ Repeat the body prayer and instead of picturing your close community, imagine those people who you are at odds with and don't agree with. Can you feel compassion for them? Remember the source of your love – God's love flows through you!

Breath Prayer

In a position of rest, place the palm of your hand to your chest. If it feels safe to do so, close your eyes. Feel where you might be carrying tension in your body. Release what you can.

Silently name and hold the first phrase as you inhale.

Silently name and hold the second phrase as you exhale.

Breathe deeply and slowly to start and adjust to what feels possible and right in your body.

Repeat and remain with the breath prayer for as long as you need.

Inhale: I don't have to hold every pain at once

Exhale: I can feel and not be consumed

Is there a word or a phrase or an image from your reflections today that holds a message for you? Write it down in the space below or in your journal if you wish.

You are invited to join us for a celebration of Christ's resurrection in the Easter Worship service.

He is risen! He is Risen Indeed!



Alleluia!

