

Preparing

"After nourishment, shelter, and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world" ~ Philip Pullman

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." ~ Maya Angelou

"The courage it takes to share your story might be the very thing someone else needs to open their heart to hope." ~ anonymous

God caused the one who didn't know sin to be sin for our sake so that through him we could become the righteousness of God. ~ 2 Corinthians 5:21

Remembering Who We Are and Who We Are Called to Be

Invitation to Observe Lenten Disciplines – *a responsive reading of Psalm 51:1-5* (see insert)

* Hymn – Come and Find the Quiet Center (insert)
(from *Sing the Faith*, © 2003 Geneva Press)

Come and find the quiet center
In the crowded life we lead,
Find the room for hope to enter,
Find the frame where we are freed:
Clear the chaos and the clutter,
Clear our eyes that we can see
All the things that really matter,
Be at peace, and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us,
Cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us,
Knows our being, touches base,
Making space within our thinking,
Lifting shades to show the sun,
Raising courage when we're shrinking,
Finding scope for faith begun.

In the Spirit let us travel,
Open to each other's pain,
Let our loves and fears unravel,
Celebrate the space we gain:
There's a place for deepest dreaming,
There's a time for heart to care,
In the Spirit's lively scheming
There is always room to spare.

* Call to Confession

* Prayer of Confession (unison)

We are surrounded by voices, God. We hear the cries and taunts and clamor in the world around us – people and ideologies and things trying to draw our attention, to pull our full focus toward themselves and away from you. And they do, Lord God. They do. We hear the negative murmurs and critical muttering inside ourselves – fears and frustrations and insecurities trying to draw our attention, to pull our full hearts toward themselves and away from you. And they do, Lord God. They do. And too often, God, to that cacophony, we add our own voices – drawing other people’s hearts and minds away from your call and claim on them. Sometimes we do it unwittingly. Sometimes we do it intentionally. For all the ways that we turn away from you, O God, and all the ways we cause others to turn away, forgive us. Help us to focus our whole selves on you. Lead us back to your side, and shelter us under the protections and peace of your unconditional love and mercy. Help us to recognize the promise and joy within each of our stories of faith, and show us how those stories are inextricably woven in with your grand Story of faith – streaked with grace, variegated with hope, and inlaid with your everlasting presence. Amen.

* God’s Promise of Grace

* Hymn – Come and Fill Our Hearts (insert – sing through 3 times)

(from *Glory to God*, © 2013 Westminster John Knox Press – lyrics altered)

Come and fill our hearts with your peace.

You alone, O Lord, are holy.

Come and fill our hearts with your peace.

Ho – ly One.

First Testament reading – Isaiah 58:1-12 (from the *Common English Bible*, © 2011)

¹ Shout loudly; don’t hold back; raise your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their crime, to the house of Jacob their sins. ² They seek me day after day, desiring knowledge of my ways like a nation that acted righteously, that didn’t abandon their God. They ask me for righteous judgments wanting to be close to God. ³ “Why do we fast and you don’t see; why afflict ourselves and you don’t notice?” Yet on your fast day you do whatever you want, and oppress all your workers. ⁴ You quarrel and brawl, and then you fast; you hit each other violently with your fists. You shouldn’t fast as you are doing today if you want to make your voice heard on high. ⁵ Is this the kind of fast I choose, a day of self-affliction, of bending one’s head like a reed and of lying down in mourning clothing and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? ⁶ Isn’t this the fast I choose: releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke? ⁷ Isn’t it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family? ⁸ Then your light will break out like the dawn, and you will be healed quickly. Your own righteousness will walk before you, and the Lord’s glory will be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and God will say, “I’m here.” If you remove the yoke from among you, the finger-pointing, the wicked speech; ¹⁰ if you open your heart to the hungry, and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted, your light will shine in the darkness, and your gloom will be like the noon. ¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually and provide for you, even in parched places. He will rescue your bones. You will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water that won’t run dry. ¹² They will rebuild ancient ruins on your account; the foundations of generations past you will restore. You will be called Mender of Broken Walls, Restorer of Livable Streets.

Gospel reading – John 10:11-18 (from the *Common English Bible*, © 2011)

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away. That’s because he isn’t the shepherd; the sheep aren’t really his. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. ¹³ He’s only a hired hand and the sheep don’t matter to him. ¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me, ¹⁵ just as

the Father knows me and I know the Father. I give up my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that don't belong to this sheep pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, with one shepherd. ¹⁷ "This is why the Father loves me: I give up my life so that I can take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I give it up because I want to. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it up again. I received this commandment from my Father."

Imposition of Ashes

Hymn #414 – Be Still and Know That I Am God (sing through 5 times)
(from *Glory to God*, © 2013 Westminster John Knox Press)

Be still and know
That I am God.
Be still and know
That I am God.

Remembering God's Grace

Invitation to Observe Lenten Disciplines – *a responsive reading of Psalm 51:6-12* (see insert)

Stations of Lent

Throughout Lent this year, we're going to be spending time on our own stories of faith – our own testimonies. Tonight, you're going to put together your own storybook/journal to help you hold sacred space for that story and begin to put it into words. At each station tonight, you'll find a question and a prayer designed to help you walk through the story/testimony writing process week by week. Begin by picking up your storybook and pen at the foot of the cross, pausing to remember that our stories come from, are inspired by, and are for the glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. At each station, take a moment to pause, reflecting on the theme for the week with the breath prayer posted at the station. Then, take a prompt question and a prayer and put them in your journal.

Pastoral Prayer

Prayer of Surrender (from Howard Thurman): **Lord, open unto me light for my darkness, courage for my fear, hope for my despair, peace for my turmoil, joy for my sorrow, strength for my weakness, wisdom for my confusion, forgiveness for my sins, love for my hates, thy Self for my self. Lord, Lord, open unto me! Amen.**

Going with Thanksgiving and Peace

Invitation to Observe Lenten Disciplines – *a responsive reading of Psalm 51:13-17* (see insert)

New Testament reading – Colossians 1:3-14 (from the *Common English Bible*, © 2011)

³ We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. ⁴ We've done this since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all God's people. ⁵ You have this faith and love because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You previously heard about this hope through the true message, the good news, ⁶ which has come to you. This message has been bearing fruit and growing among you since the day you heard and truly understood God's grace, in the same way that it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, who is the fellow slave we love and Christ's faithful minister for your sake. ⁸ He informed us of your love in the Spirit. ⁹ Because

of this, since the day we heard about you, we haven't stopped praying for you and asking for you to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, with all wisdom and spiritual understanding. ¹⁰ We're praying this so that you can live lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way: by producing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ by being strengthened through his glorious might so that you endure everything and have patience; ¹² and by giving thanks with joy to the Father. He made it so you could take part in the inheritance, in light granted to God's holy people. ¹³ He rescued us from the control of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. ¹⁴ He set us free through the Son and forgave our sins.

"thirty-seven" by slats, from *queeringlent*, © 2017, self-published

* Hymn #698 – Take, O Take Me as I Am (sing through 3 times)
(from *Glory to God*, © 2013 Westminster John Knox Press)

Take, O take me as I am;
Summon out what I shall be;
Set your seal upon my heart
And live in me.

* Benediction

* Sharing the Peace of Christ

* *indicates please rise in body or spirit as you are able*