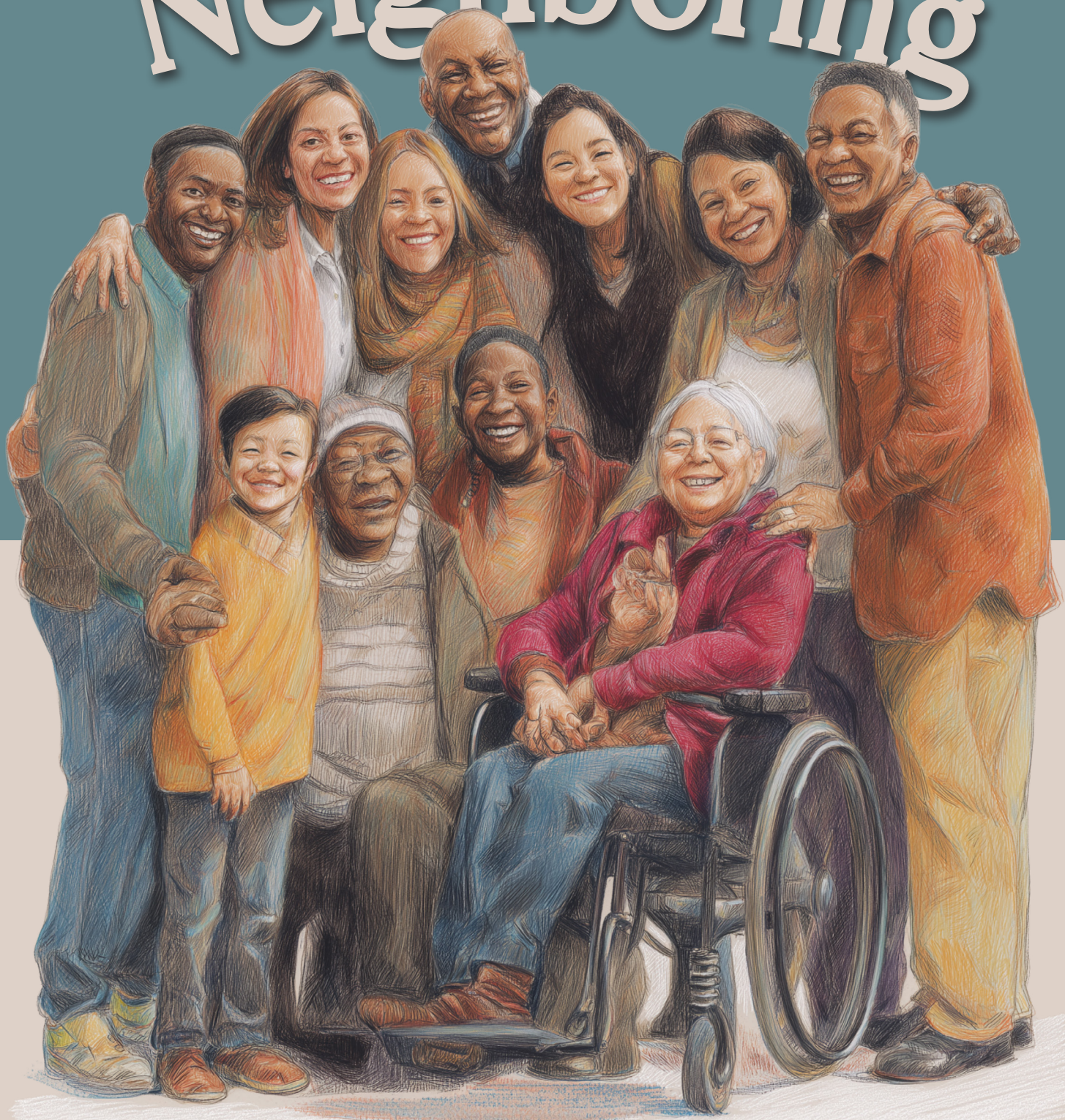


JUST *Love* MINISTRY PRESENTS

# Neighboring



A Family Journey Through Lent

# Neighboring:

## A Family Journey Through Lent

“Neighboring” is the art and practice of *caring deeply* and *acting accordingly*. Neighboring is a verb about living in community. Neighboring starts with noticing and knowing who is near, and ends with simply showing kindness and love. Jesus calls us to follow—carrying our cross into relationships with others, showing kindness and love to build one another up, celebrating our diversity and stories through deep listening and care for one another. This Lent, let’s practice “Neighboring” together, following Jesus’ example for us. Each week in Lent we invite you share together with your family, with a friend, or in your own reflections how Jesus calls us to “Neighboring” and care for one another each in our own way.

### **Micah 6:8**

God has told you, O mortal, what is good,  
and what is required of you  
but to do justice and to love kindness  
and to walk humbly with your God?

### **Matthew 22:37-38**

Jesus said “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and first commandment.  
<sup>39</sup>And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

## Using This Resource

Each week we invite you to read the scripture and talk about it with your family. The page numbers for the Spark Story Bible for kids are listed for your convenience. If you do not have access to the Spark Story Bible, you can use a simpler modern English translation of the Bible available online (CEB, NLV). As a family, you can also retell the story in your own words with your children. There are reflection questions and weekly challenges for you to talk about throughout the week together and take action with your family, encouraging one another. We encourage you to pray together and allow in your prayers time to listen to God. Speak to God, sharing your hearts, your joys, your fears, and your concerns and end your prayer with 2-3 minutes of silence—sitting and focusing simply on how much God loves you.

# Ash Wednesday

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 325: I Want Jesus to Walk with Me
- ELW 574: Here I Am, Lord
- ELW 708: Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love
- ACS 1075: O God, We Call

## Prayer:

Together, share in the Teaspoon Prayer (TSP) As you pray together, have each person share T: Something you are thankful for, S: Something you are sorry for, P: Someone you are praying for who needs God's healing presence. Conclude by saying the Lord's prayer together.

## Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21 (Spark Story Bible pp. 278–281):

*<sup>1</sup>Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>19</sup>“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup>but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

## Reflection:

Today begins the season of Lent, a time to reflect on our relationship with God, and with one another, acknowledging we are all human, struggle, and are dependent on God's grace. During this season of Lent, we are called to think about what we do, and why we do what we do. Is it to draw attention to ourselves? To be seen in a certain way? To be popular or important? Jesus asks us to let go of trying to be what the world wants us to be, and to embrace who God created us to be. God wants us to live knowing each one of us is created in the image of God—specially made by God to be loved by God so we can in turn love others. That is where our treasure lies!





# Lent: Week 1

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 592: Just As I Am
- ELW 752: Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying
- ACS 922: When We Are Tested
- ACS 1009: Come, Bring Your Burdens to God

## Prayer:

Good God, Creator of light and darkness. You who move the sun and the stars, Move us into the place of light, A light so large that it will absorb all the darkness. ~Amen

by Fr. Richard Rohr

## Matthew 4:1-11 (Spark Story Bible pp. 248–251):

*<sup>1</sup>Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. <sup>2</sup>He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. <sup>3</sup>The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup>But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

## Reflection:

Jesus is tempted in the desert when he is tired, hungry, and vulnerable. The tempter taunts Jesus with language to tear him down to try to get him to do what the tempter wanted. Jesus was committed to following God’s plan rather than giving in to what would have been easy. He responded confidently sharing the power of God’s words. It is not easy to stand up to those who want to break us down, and it often feels easier to go along with the crowd. Yet in this story, Jesus’ example shows us the power of words, and standing up for what is right. God will give us the courage, guidance and strength in the time that we need it.





# Lent: Week 2

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 323: God Loved the World
- ELW 656: Blest Be the Tie that Binds
- ACS 1062: Build a Longer Table
- ACS 1037: Christ, Our Peace

## Prayer:

Share the “Hand Prayer” together. Each finger on our hands represents one part of the prayer. Thumb: Praise God—Share praises and thanksgiving to God. Pointer Finger: Pray for those who teach us, guide us, and care for us. Middle Finger: Pray for our elected leaders and our communities. Ring Finger: Pray for those who are hurting, sick, struggling, and in need. Pinky finger: Pray for your own needs. At the end open your hands to listen to God in a time of silence. Sit and focus on being God’s precious child.

## John 3:1-17 (Spark Story Bible pp. 416-419):

*<sup>16</sup>“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

## Reflection:

God so loved the world so that everyone may have eternal life. In the words of the Spark Story Bible, “Jesus said, ‘Really all you need to know is this, God loves you! In fact, God loves everyone. And it is important that you know this, and tell everyone you meet!’” God does not have favorites! God is always bringing people together in love. God never divides or creates division among us—people do that! The Bible writes about one human family, that is elevated through the image of God that each person bears. Jesus holds a deep love for every person. When we divide people through our language that elevates some people over others or speaks of some people as being less than others it grieves God. This abusive language causes wounds to not only those being persecuted but to our society as a whole. God calls us to love unconditionally without distinction, and to build one another up in love, caring for our neighbors, especially those who are in need or those who are experiencing persecution. We can be a loving presence for those who feel like they are alone.



# Lent: Week 2

## Reflection Questions:

What are some of the ways our world spreads division rather than unity?

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We have the power of speech to harm and the power of speech to build up. As a child of God, can you think of a time when you underestimated the power of your words and caused harm even unintentionally? What lesson did you learn? How did this experience impact you?

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Can you think of a time when you used the power of your words to do good or help another? How did this experience impact you? Share your stories with others.

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## Go & Do Challenge!

Love transforms. We don't have to do big things to make an impact. Mother Teresa said, "Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." Find small things to do for others this week—especially those who you may not typically interact with. Share your stories with one another in your family each night.

# Lent: Week 3

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 513: Listen, God is Calling
- ELW 611: I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say
- ELW 642: Where True Charity and Love Abide
- ELW 815: I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

## Prayer:

Lord, I surrender to Your refining fire. I lay down my own agendas, my hidden motives, and even my reluctance. Search me, God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts. Where there is fear, plant courage. Where there is bitterness, sow grace. Where there is weariness, breathe new life. ~Amen

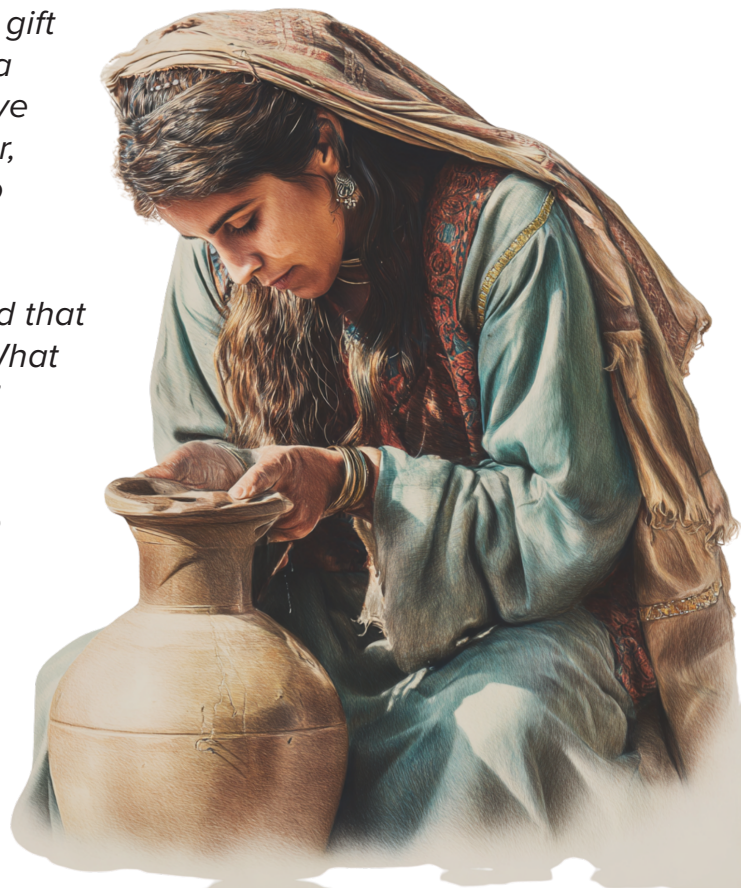
by Dr. Rodrick Belin, African Methodist Episcopal Church

## John 4:5-42 (Spark Story Bible pp. 420-425):

<sup>5</sup>[Jesus] came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup>Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. <sup>7</sup>A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." <sup>8</sup>(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) <sup>9</sup>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.) <sup>10</sup>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." <sup>11</sup>The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"

<sup>27</sup>Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"

<sup>28</sup>Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, <sup>29</sup>"Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" <sup>30</sup>They left the city and were on their way to him.







# Lent: Week 4

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 574: Here I Am, Lord
- ELW 677: This Little Light of Mine
- ELW 814: Take, Oh, Take Me As I Am
- ACS 1000: God’s Work, Our Hands

## Prayer:

“Praying in Color” Spend a few minutes in silence drawing, writing words, or expressing in color what is on your heart, raising to God those in need, giving thanks, sharing your lament. God knows your heart—even when words are not adequate.

## 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (Spark Story Bible pp. 126-129):

*1The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ 3Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do, and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.” 7But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him, for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”*

## Reflection:

God sent Samuel to choose the new king over Israel, and God would tell Samuel who to choose. Once again, God does not look at the same attributes that we do as humans. God is faithful and sees things in us that we don’t even see in ourselves. God also is able to turn the smallest thing into the greatest miracle! As humans, we often continue to look to those who are wealthy, strong, in high positions or powerful to make a change in the world. We aspire to be stronger, wealthier, more powerful, more popular, more important. God does not see as we see, instead looking into our hearts to guide us to what is really important responding to one another with love, mercy, mutuality and grace.





# Lent: Week 4

## Reflection Questions:

What do you think it means when it says “God looks on our hearts?” What attributes does God value? When we encounter other people, Jesus commands us not to judge, yet often as humans we jump to conclusions about others based on their appearance, where they live, how much money they have, what language they speak, the color of their skin, or their gender expression. “Looking on someone’s heart” means believing the best about others, standing up for them, coming to their assistance, being present with them as God’s precious children. Neighboring...is a verb.



## Go & Do Challenge!

Introduce yourself to someone new today—someone who is different from you that you have not spent time with. Take time to get to know them and learn their story. Ask questions and be curious about getting to know them beyond their outward appearance. Listen with your heart.

How did you find you were alike? What did you learn about yourself and the other person through your conversation.

# Lent: Week 5

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 574: Here I Am, Lord
- ELW 715: Christ, Be Our Light
- ELW 752: Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying
- ELW 815: I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

## Prayer:

Living God, help us to give up, take up, and draw near to You.

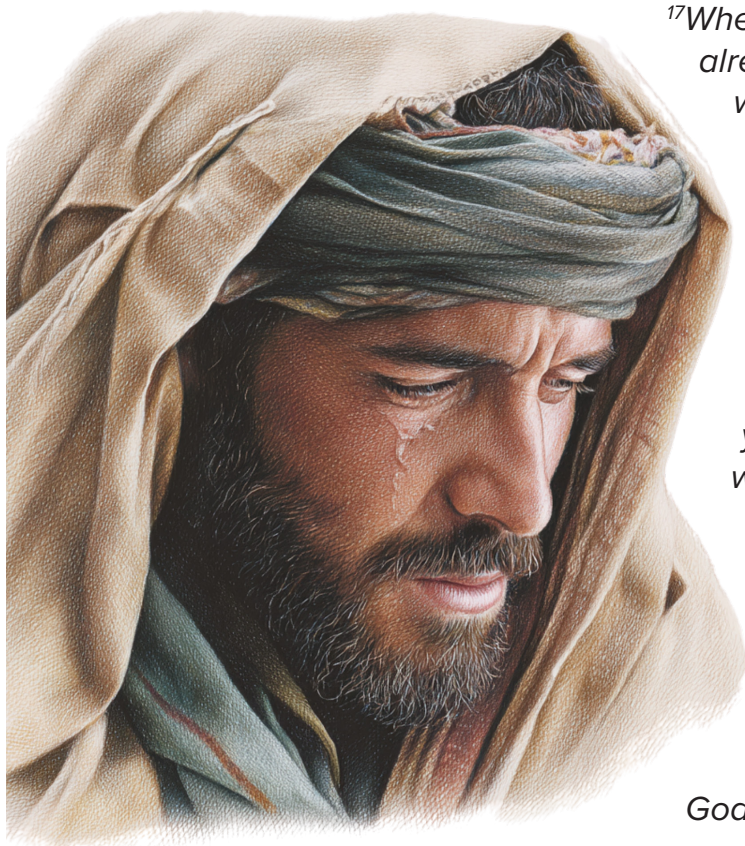
We thank You for the Cross and for the Resurrection. Meet us in both the close and cloistered and the wild and wandering spaces of our lives. Direct us back towards You.

Help us to walk faithfully before You in all seasons—both those of joy and sorrow. Amen.

*A prayer from the Anglican Church of New Zealand*

## John 11:1-45 (Spark Story Bible pp. 440-443):

*<sup>1</sup>Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” <sup>4</sup>But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”*



*<sup>17</sup>When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup>Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, <sup>19</sup>and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. <sup>20</sup>When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. <sup>21</sup>Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup>But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” <sup>23</sup>Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” <sup>24</sup>Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” <sup>25</sup>Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, <sup>26</sup>and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” <sup>27</sup>She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”*





# Holy Week: Palm Sunday

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 453: Baptized and Set Free
- ELW 708: Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love
- ELW 752: Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying
- ACS 1012: To You All Hearts Are Open

## Prayer:

Take 3 pieces of string, yarn, or strips of cloth and tie them together at the top. Choose a person, a friend, or a family member to pray for. You might want to choose a people group, city or our nation. Start braiding and, as you braid, pray for the person in your mind, as if you are holding the person in your hands as you work with the braid. Entrust them to God, knowing God is present with them and knows what they need.

## Philippians 2:5-11:

<sup>5</sup>*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,*  
<sup>6</sup>*who, though he existed in the form of God,*  
*did not regard equality with God*  
*as something to be grasped,*  
<sup>7</sup>*but emptied himself,*  
*taking the form of a slave,*  
*assuming human likeness.*  
*And being found in appearance as a human,*  
<sup>8</sup>*he humbled himself*  
*and became obedient to the point of death—*  
*even death on a cross.*

## Reflection:

Jesus is fully God **and** fully human. A gift of his being fully human is that he gives an example for us in how we should try to live. Jesus shows us humility that comes from the power of the Holy Spirit. One where our heart is set on God first and then on our neighbors. Jesus models letting go of our desire to “make a name for ourselves” to really see others, sacrificing in love for the common good. We, as humans, will always fall short of Jesus’ example, yet we can aspire practice a daily awareness of letting go, and seeing with the eyes of Christ.





# Holy Week: Maundy Thursday

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 592: Just As I Am
- ELW 779: Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound
- ACS 1009: Come, Bring Your Burdens to God
- ACS 1037: Christ, Our Peace

## Prayer:

Behold, Lord, An empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it.

I am weak in faith; Strengthen me.

I am cold in love; Warm me and make me fervent

That my love may go out to my neighbor.

O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in thee.

In thee I have sealed the treasures of all I have. Amen.

*Martin Luther*

## Matthew 26:14-30:

*<sup>26</sup>While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” <sup>27</sup>Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, <sup>28</sup>for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup>I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”<sup>30</sup>When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

## Reflection:

This is the Last Supper. Accounts of this are also found in Mark and Luke but Matthew is the only account that uses the words “for the forgiveness of sins.” As Lutherans, we believe in the real presence of Christ in the bread and the wine. Jesus Christ fully present, offering forgiveness for our sins. It is through our forgiveness in God’s grace that we are called to forgive others.





# Holy Week: Good Friday

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 323: God Loved the World
- ELW 353: Were You There
- ELW 751: O Lord, Hear My Prayer
- ACS 1075: O God, We Call

## Prayer:

Be silent. Be still. Alone. Empty. Before our God. Say nothing. Ask nothing. Be silent. Be still. Let our God look upon you. That is all. God knows. God understands. God loves you with an enormous love, and only wants to look upon you with that love. Quiet. Still. Be. Let your God—  
Love you. ~ Amen

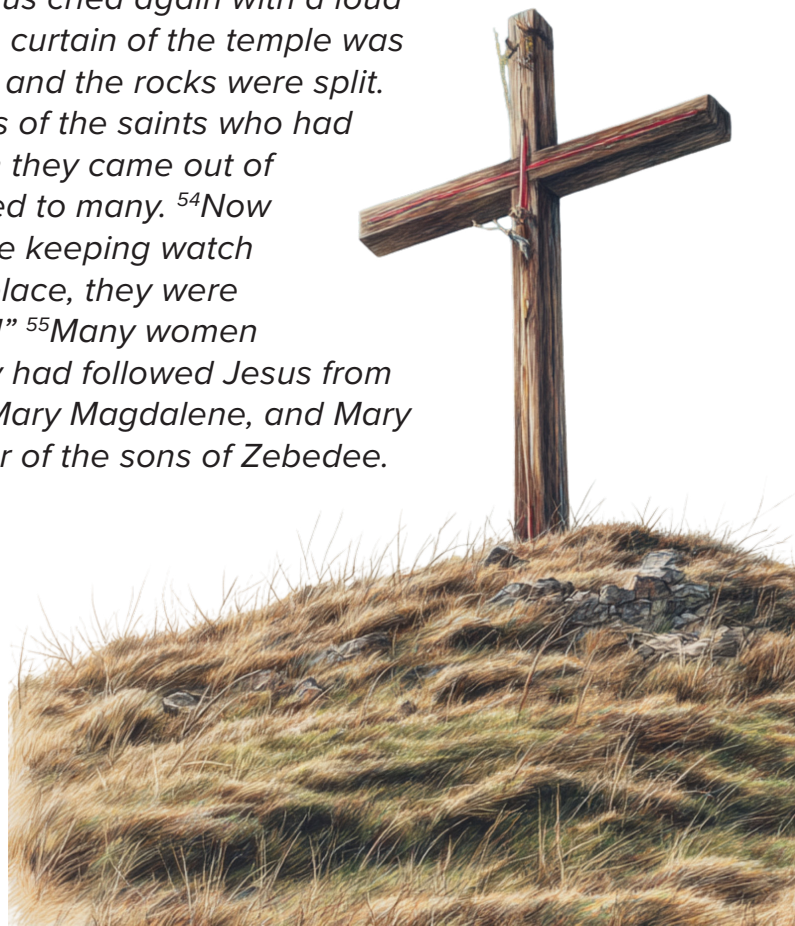
by Edwina Gately

## Matthew 26:31-27:55:

*<sup>45</sup>From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>46</sup>And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" <sup>47</sup>When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." <sup>48</sup>At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. <sup>49</sup>But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." <sup>50</sup>Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. <sup>51</sup>At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup>The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. <sup>53</sup>After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. <sup>54</sup>Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" <sup>55</sup>Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him. <sup>56</sup>Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.*

## Reflection:

Often, we want to look away. We want to skip over the part of Jesus on the cross, and look to the celebration to follow. It is our nature. Yet, Jesus shows us a powerful example of his presence in our suffering. When we ask ourselves, "Why does God allow suffering?" there is no adequate answer, yet we can look



# Holy Week: Good Friday

to Jesus on the cross and know that God is with us in our suffering. Jesus was not spared, nor are we. Hope of Resurrection is embedded in the midst of our world's suffering and pain. Jesus compels us to not look away and ignore the suffering of our neighbors, of immigrants, of children in places of war. Our actions of resistance to Evil and our call to be Repairers, Restorers, and Reconcilers of the breach are in response to Jesus Christ's sacrifice in love for each of us and for the world.

## Reflection Questions:

There is power in being present with others in their grief and suffering, just as the women were present at Jesus' death. We often worry about what to say or do. The women's example shows that we just need to show up. No words are necessary. Share with one another stories of when people have been present with you in your pain or hurt. What is it that you remember the most?

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How does Jesus' love call you to care for your neighbors? To care for our hurting world? How would you answer the question, "What is mine to do?"

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## Go & Do Challenge!

Spend time during these holy days in prayer. You do not need to have the right words—or even words at all. Sit holding the hurts of the world in your heart, raising them to God trusting God knows your heart even when we have no words.

# Resurrection Sunday!

## Song Suggestions:

- ELW 439: Soon and Very Soon
- ELW 556: Morning Has Broken
- ELW 674: Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ
- ACS 950: Oh, When The Saints Go Marching In

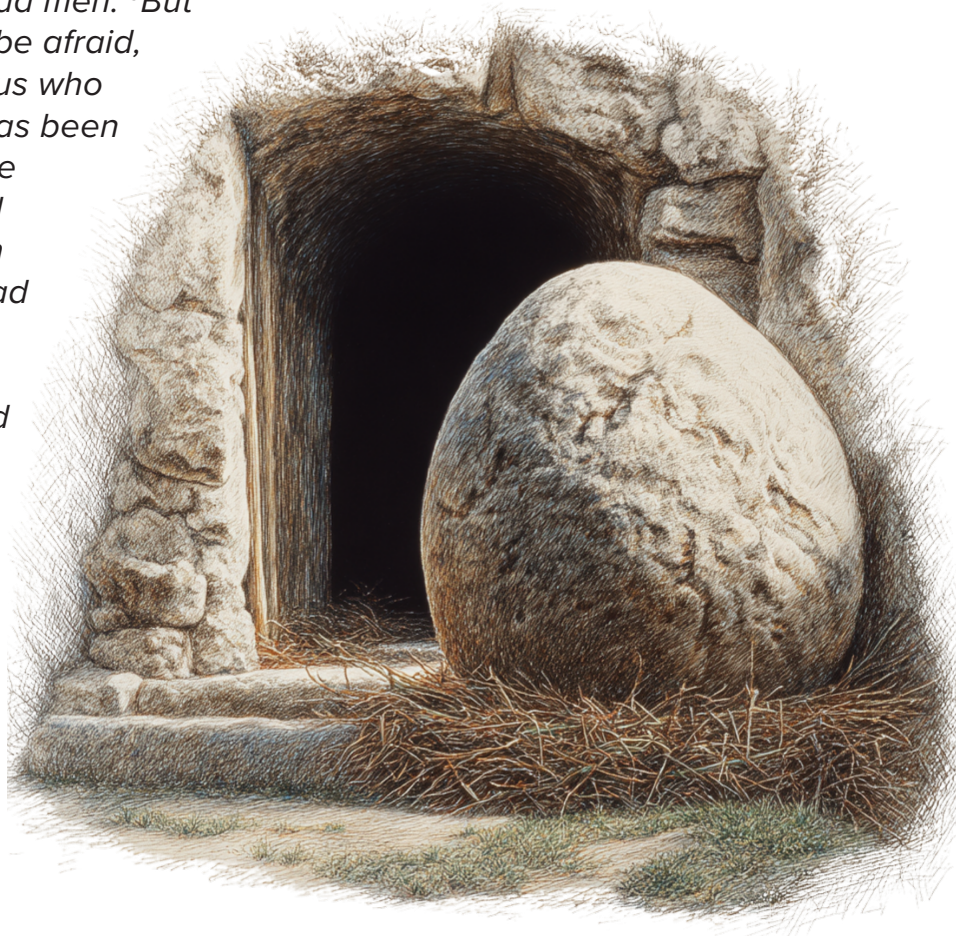
## Prayer:

O all ye big things of the earth, bless ye the Lord . . .all ye small things bless ye the Lord . . .Isn't that beautiful? All shall be Amen and Alleluia. We shall rest and we shall see, we shall see and we shall know, we shall know and we shall love, we shall love and we shall praise. Behold our end which is no end.

*Archbishop Desmond Tutu*

## Matthew 28:1-10 (Spark Story Bible pp. 482-487):

*<sup>1</sup>After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup>For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup>But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup>He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup>Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." <sup>8</sup>So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup>Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*



April 5

# Resurrection Sunday!

## **Reflection:**

Fear turns into joy! Jesus is alive! Jesus is risen! It is hard not to be overwhelmed by the pain, suffering and feeling of helplessness that comes from our world. Yet, we have the hope of the Resurrection, and that hope is embedded in all we do! We can boldly embrace Neighboring--the art and practice of caring deeply for our neighbors and acting accordingly, because we know the final outcome! God wins! Love wins! A certain and lasting Hope!

## **Go & Do Challenge!**

**Boldly go out in the world and share God's Love and Grace!  
Tell your story—your story is Jesus' story!**