



PROMISED LAND &  
LAND OF PROMISE

BELONGING, EXILE, AND COMMUNITY

# PROMISED LAND & LAND OF PROMISE

## BELONGING, EXILE, AND COMMUNITY

Translated from the Latin word *quadragesima*, meaning “fortieth” in English, Lent is a 40-day journey of faith, discipline and renunciation of all that separates us from God in order to return to God and all that God promises. Lent culminates in Holy Week where Jesus offers all that he is and all that he has, even to the point of death on a cross, to reconcile all of humankind with God and God’s promises. The triune God responds by sowing life eternal from death, healing and reconciliation from hatred and violence and beloved community from power and control. All of these promises and mysteries, start with a journey of emptying oneself to receive God and God’s promises. Such a journey is not easy to do in today’s world with so many temptations, distractions, brokenness and fatigue. This journey can be difficult, unwanted and full of grief even as it is also full of hope and promise.

There are hymn suggestions each week and the following hymns are appropriate for the entire season.

- **ELW 319:** O Lord, throughout these forty days
- **ELW 325/TFF 66:** I want Jesus to walk with me
- **ELW 326:** Bless now, O God, the journey
- **ACS 1062:** Build a longer table
- **ACS 1063:** God of the fertile fields



# WEEK 1: THE PROMISED LAND

*The first week of Lent we often hear and meditate on the temptations of Jesus (Luke 4:1-13). This gospel reading reveals what happens when leaders succumb to these temptations.*

**Matthew 2:13-23**  
**Genesis 12**

## REFLECT

After the visit of the Magi, Jesus and his parents had to struggle to make an unwanted journey, amidst threats of persecution and death. Many children faced violence and death as Herod went looking for the boy Jesus so that he could kill him. By the time of the Magis' visit, Jesus was two years old. Joseph, as instructed by God, had to disrupt their lives in Bethlehem and take Mary and Jesus in the middle of the night and flee to Egypt, a place where Herod could not get them.

According to historians the family returned two years later to Israel, after Herod had died, but the trauma of the tragedy was still deeply felt by the people of Bethlehem; additionally, Herod's son was in power. All of this made Joseph afraid for their lives, and so God guided him to move his family to Nazareth, Mary's hometown. Scriptures are filled with stories of God leading people to new lands for a variety of reasons, such as in Genesis, when God leads Abram from his kindred and his country to a new land, the promised land. As the psalmist says, *"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."* In God's economy, the gift of the earth provides for all of God's people and in many ways, all of God's creation is the promised land.

Scriptures are filled with the stories of people relocating and with the prophetic mandate to care for the immigrant and stranger, "remember you were a slave/stranger in Egypt." In the interfaith service at the Washington National Cathedral on January 21, 2025, the Episcopal Bishop Mariann Budde delivered the sermon, and ended with a direct plea to the President: "I ask you to have mercy, ... help those who are fleeing

war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here." People have been coming to America to flee war zones and persecution ever since the beginning of our country. The Pilgrims were fleeing persecution; they came to the New World without any documentation and found a place of peace. Since then millions of immigrants have come to America legally or illegally seeking protection and hope. Once here, most of these people try to become legal and fulfill the law; however, our immigration system has made things difficult and complicated for many.

Some war zones and situations of persecution are easy to define and are known by our government, but some are not. For many immigrants it is very difficult to prove that they came to our country seeking safety, peace and protection. People around the world long have seen America as the "Promised Land." In my years of missionary work in South America, I heard many people speak of America as the Promised Land because, they said, this law-and-order country has made it possible for everyone to live in peace.

This country is admired around the world, so people in troubled lands have come to America to escape threats, terrorization and death. We see that in Jesus's early life people moved for safety, and we know that the church for decades has provided refuge, compassion and hope.

## PRAY

*Welcoming God, wherever we are, whatever we have done or experienced, you welcome us with arms of love and provide all that we need. You call us to do the same. Inspire us to renounce narratives of scarcity and separation so we too can welcome one another with arms of love. In your compassion, you give us "hope and a future". Help us to do the same for future generations and teach us to be a church that continues to be a place of compassion and welcome. **Amen.***

## SING

- **ELW 684:** Creating God, your fingers trace
- **ELW 831:** The God of Abraham praise
- **ELW 771:** God, who stretched the spangled heavens
- **ACS 923:** As your Spirit in the desert
- **ACS 978:** God Welcomes All
- **ACS 979:** Making their Way
- **ACS 1049:** Before the waters nourished earth



# WEEK 2: A RIGHTEOUS COMMUNITY

Leviticus 19:1-18  
Luke 13:31-35

## REFLECT

The Old Testament laws provided a framework for the just and righteous society God wanted the Israelites to offer as an example to the rest of the world. Alongside the themes of the Ten Commandments, we find the expectation that provision is always to be made for the poor and for the disabled, that the foreigners who made their home among the Israelites were to be treated like citizens, and that the poor are never to be denied the justice they are due.

When the Pilgrims arrived in New England, the people already living there chose to show kindness to the aliens who had come among them. Sadly, the European

colonists who followed were not as Christian in their treatment of their neighbors, slaughtering the people who were in their way and enslaving the citizens of other nations and bringing them here against their will.

When the Herods of today try to stir up fear and create division with messages of hatred and threats of violence, people of faith must resist them with words and deeds of love. Following the example of Jesus, we must gather and protect the weak and the vulnerable. Following the example of our forebears in faith, we must create a society that treats all people as equally deserving of honor and of opportunity.

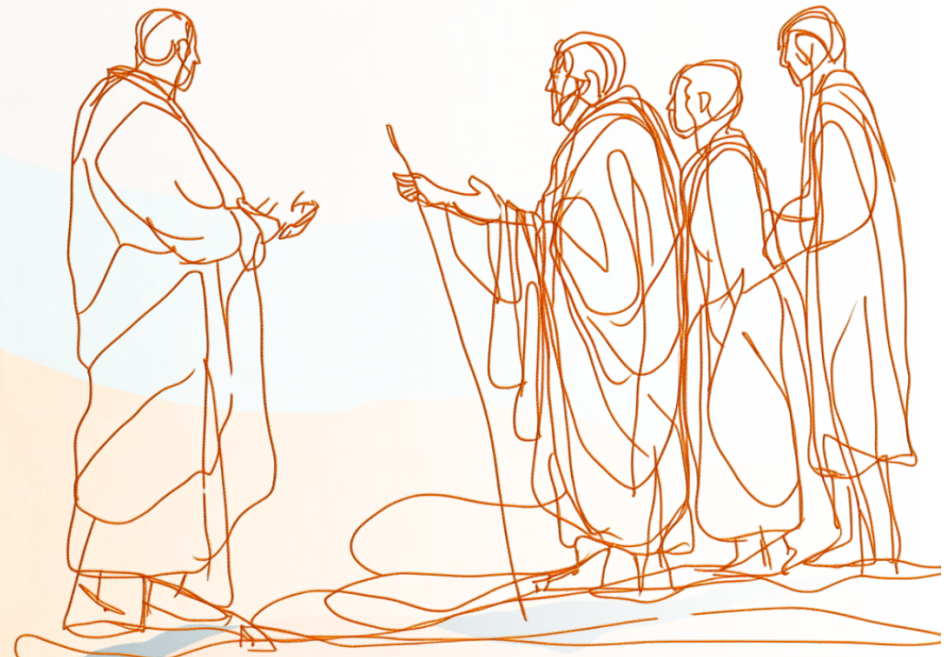
## PRAY

*Mothering God, amidst fear and division, you sustain and protect us and call us to stand fast casting out demons and healing all those in need. You have gathered us under your wings. Give us courage and strength to trust your provision and continue gathering and protecting the weak and the vulnerable under your wings.*

**Amen.**

## SING

- **ELW 678:** God, whose giving knows no ending
- **ELW 707:** Lord of glory, you have bought us
- **ELW 712:** Lord, whose love in humble service
- **ELW 725:** When the poor ones
- **ACS 1085:** Hope of the world
- **ACS 1093:** In a deep, unbounded darkness





# WEEK 3: A RESTORED COMMUNITY

Zechariah 8:1-23  
Luke 13:1-9

## REFLECT

In 587 BCE, Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon. The Babylonians burned the temple to the ground. It was the end of the Davidic monarchy and the end of Israel as a nation. In the decade leading up to this final destruction, the Babylonians forcibly deported thousands of Judeans. This Babylonian captivity ended in 538 BCE when the Persian king, Cyrus, defeated the Babylonians and allowed the exiles to return to Jerusalem.

The prophets blamed the fall of Jerusalem and Israel on the many ways the Israelites had strayed from God and God's vision of justice. Jesus shares a similar parable in the gospel reading. God continues to lovingly encourage and chastise God's people, offering them fertilizer and all they need to grow, but if they stubbornly refuse God's gifts, eventually they and their communities will be cut down.

As the exiles returned to Jerusalem after decades of being cut off from the land, the temple, and one another, they were hungry to rebuild a community centered in God and God's promises. Zechariah reminds them that God dwells with them as they rebuild. God has not abandoned them and desires to bless them and give them every-

thing they need to grow and produce fruit. This fruit includes "speaking truth to one another, rendering judgements that are true and make for peace, not devising evil in your hearts against one another, and not loving false oaths." Additionally, they are to prepare to do all these things not only with one another but with inhabitants from other cities and nations that will stream into Jerusalem because God envisions his people and his community to be a blessing to all the nations.

Today in Israel and in the United States, many policy-makers and people of God have forgotten the prophets warning and lament about God's people straying from God and God's vision of beloved community for all of God's beloved people. Instead, policies are being implemented that favor some of God's people over others, false narratives are spread about people-groups that hinder right-relationships and sabotage peace, and people from other cities and nations are actively prevented from coming to entreat the favor of the Lord from the people of God. Yet, God continues to pour fertilizer and all that we need to do God's will. How will we respond? How will we speak truth to one another? How will we insist on judgements that are true and make for peace for all of God's people? How can we, like the exiles, return to God?

## PRAY

*Nourishing God, you give us everything we need to be a people of tender mercy and true justice. Open our hearts to your word and your will so that we are inspired to extend your tender mercy and true justice to all people and nations. Amen.*

## SING

- **ELW 706:** The people walk
- **ELW 711:** O day of peace
- **ELW 716:** Lord of all nations, grant me grace
- **ELW 724:** All who love and serve your city
- **ACS 921:** Return to God
- **ACS 1049:** Before the waters nourished earth



# WEEK 4: A RECONCILED COMMUNITY

Ephesians 2:1-22  
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

## REFLECT

Criticized for welcoming the misfits and rejects of his society, after telling the stories of the lengths to which a man will go to find a lost sheep and a woman to find a lost coin, Jesus shares one of his most well-known parables, which is about the lengths to which a loving father will go to reconcile his sons and restore his family.

It was difficult for the Christian community that formed in Jerusalem after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus to welcome non-Jewish people into their faith. Believing Jesus to be the promised Savior of Israel, many people thought Gentiles needed to convert to Judaism if they wanted to be followers of Christ.

Instead of evangelizing those who, like him, were strict observers of first-century Judaism, the apostle Paul discerned a call to bring the good news of God's love to residents of Turkey and Greece who practiced the pagan religions of the Roman Empire.

The letter to the Christians in Ephesus expands the themes of radical welcome and

reconciliation demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus. Just as the people identified by their culture as unredeemable sinners are welcomed into fellowship with Jesus, so are the Gentiles and pagans of the world. Just as the father will go to great lengths to bring his estranged sons back into relationship, Jesus was willing to suffer and die, so as to break down all of the walls that we erect between ourselves and others.

Even as we grow to see people of all races and cultures as members of one human family, reconciled by the death and resurrection of Jesus, there are forces committed to keeping us divided. Politicians turn minority groups into scapegoats, demonizing them as a threat that must be stopped. Christian nationalism presents a twisted corruption of faith used to promote the supremacy of white men.

In order for true reconciliation to happen, all of us need to have the courage to die to self, making sacrifices for the sake of the common good, and granting all people the honor and respect that they have in the eyes of their heavenly Father.

## PRAY

*Reconciling God, you go to great lengths to welcome us home after we, like lost sheep, stray from you. Soften our hearts and our borders, so that we can radically welcome and extravagantly feast with all the scapegoats and lost sheep of this world. **Amen.***

## SING

- **ELW 684:** Creating God, your fingers trace
- **ELW 707:** Lord of glory, you have bought us
- **ELW 725:** When the poor ones
- **ELW 771:** God, who stretched the spangled heavens
- **ACS 1049:** Before the waters nourished earth
- **ACS 1093:** In a deep, unbounded darkness





# WEEK 5: LAND OF PROMISE

Revelation 21-22  
John 12:1-18

## REFLECT

In this final book of scriptures, John has a vision of a renewed heaven and earth where all the nations and kingdoms of the world are infused with the light of God and God dwells with all of God's people. Death, pain, abominations and falsehoods will be no more. Instead God's waters will cleanse everyone and everything and God's tree of life will continue healing all the nations. This vision of God dwelling with God's people and God's people living in harmony with God and one another is and has always been God's hope and promise. We see this vision in the creation stories (Genesis 1 & 2) and we see this throughout scriptures.

Our gospel story this week reminds us that humankind co-creates this hope and vision by surrendering our own desires to God's desires and vision. Mary tenderly and lovingly sacrifices a pound of costly perfume to anoint her teacher who has opened her eyes and her life to God's vision and expansive community. To reconcile all things

to God and God's vision and community, Jesus prepares tenderly and lovingly to sacrifice his life and surrender all that he is, not just for his friends and for people like him, but for all people and all of creation. Judas is not ready to surrender or sacrifice his will and desires, only seeing the market value of this perfume and how it could benefit him. Mary and Jesus make huge sacrifices, surrendering themselves and their will, and they are united and reconciled with God and God's every-expanding community. Judas insists on his own will and is left desolate and forsaken.

Today, humans still struggle with these paths: my will be done or thy will be done. The healing of the nations is tied to our own healing. The violence of the nations is tied to our own pain, falsehoods, and abominations. Can we taste and see God's vision and promises and like Mary and Jesus, surrender our own will and sacrifice all that we have and all that we are to participate in and co-create the healing that we all desire?

## PRAY

*Indwelling God, our hearts and souls cry out for healing and wholeness. You are the healing and wholeness that we desire and that this world needs. Help us to surrender anything and everything in us that resists your light and healing so that we too tenderly and lovingly submit all that we are to you and your vision of expansive community. **Amen.***

## SING

- **ELW 334:** Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery
- **ELW 678:** God, whose giving knows no ending
- **ELW 711:** O day of peace
- **ELW 716:** Lord of all nations, grant me grace
- **ELW 831:** The God of Abraham praise
- **ACS 1049:** Before the waters nourished earth
- **ACS 1071:** In sacred manner

