

in medias res | “in the middle of things”
an at-home day retreat guide for Holy Saturday



Gestation by Lisa Kagan © Kisa Kagan. <https://familyheirloomarts.com/the-space-between-poetry-and-art-by-lisa-kagan/>

In medias res is a latin term that means 'in the middle of things.

It is meant to convey the middle of the story, the point at which one doesn't know which way the story will go. Today is Holy Saturday, where we find ourselves in the middle of the death of Jesus and His Resurrection. We don't know yet where the story will lead, and it certainly looks bleak. We are also in the beginning of springtime, a season where the seeds that have been underground and in the dark all winter are beginning to take root and form into something new, something visible.

We hope this guided retreat will help you enter into the liminality of Holy Saturday, that you might emerge into Easter with renewed hope, courage, and comfort.



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plan

- **9:30am** - Morning Prayer on Zoom with this link: <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/188930420>
(and/or dial in +1 778 907 2071 Meeting ID: 188 930 42)
- **10am** - Retreat opening (stay on or join Zoom call)
 - Intro to the day and blessing
 - Centering questions:
 - *How do I come to this day?*
 - *What's the state of my mind, heart, body?*
 - *Anything I need to say or ask so I can be present to God, myself, and others today?*
- **10:30-2:00pm** - Self-guided retreat day
- **Noon** - Optional Midday Prayer
- **2:00pm** - Communal reflection, back on Zoom (same link)
 - Reflection Questions:
 - *What was your experience like today?*
 - *Did anything surprise you?*
 - *How did you experience God in the midst of today?*
 - *What can we hold with you as you wait for tomorrow's Easter (and/or the final Easter)?*
 - Closing prayer and sending blessing

practices

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poetry & prayers

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practices

Invitation: Take a deep breath, and entrust your day to God.

Look through these six meditations, and pick one (or a couple) to try.

None of them are magic.

(As Mary Oliver says: *This isn't a contest, but a doorway into thanks, and a silence in which another voice may speak.*)

Let the exercise start a conversation with God (even if a silent one), and let it go where it goes. Resist taking your spiritual temperature or evaluating your performance, emotions or insights.

However the day takes shape, let God look at you, let God walk with you,

let God love you.



Lectio Divina Meditation | Joseph of Arimathea

When we gather together on zoom for morning prayer, we will do a lectio divina (a sacred reading) of the story of Joseph of Arimathea in Matthew 27:57-66. As a way of deepening into this story, spend more time today contemplating, re-reading, and imagining yourself in this story.

Consider the following questions as prompts for your imagination:

- What line or phrase sticks out to you? Why do you think this strikes you today?
- What thoughts/memories/emotions are evoked in this story?
- What happened in your body as you meditated on this story?
- In what ways can you see yourself like Joseph of Arimathea? How does his life and faith resonate with your own?
- What did Joseph do in this story? What do you think motivated him?
- In what ways can you learn from Joseph? In what ways can his actions inspire you to take some action in your own life?
- What does grief have to do with this story? Is there something we can learn about how to care for our own grief and sorrow in this story?
- Is there a sense of invitation from this story? Something that you feel invited to do, try out, or practice in your own life? Why do you think this invitation is coming to you now?



Guided Meditation | Connecting with the body

To become consciously aware of God's gentle presence and action in your body, begin to attend to your body experience in the present moment.

RELAX: Try this simple grounding exercise* to relax your body. Sit comfortably in an upright position with eyes closed and usher yourself into silence.

- Begin by becoming aware of your body. Notice how your body is feeling, simply being present to sensations you are experiencing, welcoming in both the body's delight and discomfort.
- Connect to your breath, deepening it gently. As you inhale, imagine God breathing life into you. As you exhale, allow yourself to experience a moment of release and surrender into this time and place, becoming fully present. Take a couple cycles of breath to simply notice this life-sustaining rhythm which continues moment by moment even when you are unaware of it.
- In your imagination, gently allow your breath to carry your awareness from your head (which is your thinking, analyzing, judging center) down to your heart center (where you experience life from a place of greater integration, feeling, and intuition). Consider placing your hand on your heart to experience a physical connection with your heart center and draw your awareness to this place.
- Breathe into your heart center and begin to notice what you are feeling right now in this moment without judging or trying to change it. Take a few moments to simply be present to whatever it is you are feeling and making some room within yourself to experience this without pushing away.
- Call to mind the spark of God which the ancient monks and mystics tell us dwells in your heart. Bring the compassion of God to however you are feeling right now, not trying to change anything, but just gently holding yourself in this space.
- As you experience yourself filling with compassion for your own experience, imagine breathing that compassion out into the world and connecting to other hearts beating across the world in a rhythm of love.
- Gently allow your breath to bring your awareness into your body and prepare to start the lectio process.

READ (*Lectio*): Simply sit with your body for several minutes and notice if any of your bodily sensations particularly draws you. Take a moment to name what you are experiencing right now—again, without judgment or interpretation.

REFLECT (*Meditatio*): Allow your mind to reflect on this body experience. What draws your attention here? What are your beliefs or thoughts about this aspect? What have you learned (and heard) about your inner self in the process? How may they relate to your current life situation and journey?

RESPOND (*Oratio*): Open your mind and heart to your body and welcome what and how you feel. What touches you? Open yourself to the presence of the Spirit in this body experience; what do you feel as you sense this sacred Presence in your body? Allow a prayer to form that expresses whatever you want to say or ask. Write it down or talk it out with God. How do you sense God responding to your prayer? Continue for as long as this dialogue feels fruitful.

REST (*Contemplatio*): Remain in silence for a few minutes, allowing your body to rest with God.

RESOLVE: After a period of unhurried silence, you may wish to journal about this lectio on the body. What is your sense of invitation or prompting from God? How might you bring what you experienced during the lectio into your daily life and ministry?

*Exercise from [Wil Hernandez @ CenterQuest](#), and grounding portion excerpted and adapted from "Heart-Centered Practice" by Christine Valters Paintner (Abbey of the Arts - <http://abbeyofthearts.com>)



Walking Meditation | Discovering *In Medias Res* all around

Holy Saturday is a space and time that is in between.

It is the “dead zone” where nothing appears to be happening and yet so much activity is happening in the hidden and unseen places. It is a liminal space. Liminal literally means “threshold.”

It is a door-way where the entrance becomes the exit. It is a moment between ebbing and flowing, the twilight between sleeping and waking, the “bowl of hush held lifted to the bird’s first trilling.”

Ultimately, it is where death births forth to new life.

*(Text adapted from Dan Miller at The Sacred Braid
and the poem “Easter Eve: A Fantasy” by Vassar Miller)*

- Begin by praying to be available to God's presence as you take a walk around the block, along the ocean, or through the woods
- Slow down your pace. Stay alert to what's around you rather than mulling over things in your head.
- Practice the spiritual discipline of noticing. Pay attention to shapes, colors and textures. Notice the relationship of things to one another.
- Look for edges, border places, spaces-in-between, fault lines, thresholds, middle points.
- What attracts your attention? Spend some time exploring this.
- If you're outside, you may want to take something with you - stone or twig or branch - as a reminder of what you experience.

- Reflect/Journal:
 - ◆ *What were you aware of as you walked?*

 - ◆ *What did you understand in a new or deeper way--both within and around you?*

 - ◆ *Where and how did you hear God in the world? Does this walk stir any action or response in you?*

 - ◆ *Make a note to yourself or in a journal about the one phrase, image, idea, or action that you want to remember from this walk.*



Lenten Examen Meditation | Reviewing the season of Lent

The Examen prayer is a practice of prayerfully reviewing your day in the presence of God. Think of this as time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has five steps which can be practiced and adapted to your own circumstances. Today, rather than reviewing the past day, we recommend that you review this past season of lent, noticing and becoming aware of God's presence to you in the midst of this penitential season.

1. **Still yourself** in silence for a few minutes. Become aware of your breathing, and let it settle into a comfortable rhythm. Recall that you are in God's presence. As you breathe become aware of your body and begin with your head and shoulders, work your way down, letting every part of you relax as you breathe.

*O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. (Psalm 131:1-2)*

2. **Ask God for light and wisdom**, praying that you may receive the light of Christ, so that you can look at your day with the eyes of Christ. Pray for wisdom to understand what you are seeing afresh. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

"Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him." (Luke 24:31)

3. **Give thanks** for the season that you have just lived, which is a gift from God. Express your gratitude for the gifts from this past lenten season.

*"All that I have is yours." (John 17:10)
"What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)*

4. **Review the season of lent** – Let your mind review the past 40 days, beginning with Ash Wednesday, your lenten commitments made at the beginning, all the way through to palm Sunday and Good Friday. Recall all the moods and feelings and experiences in this past season. You might want to remember them by writing them down or you may wish to talk to Jesus in words, whichever seems better and more natural to you at this time.

Consider the consolations of the season:

- What events and feelings were you drawn to, what gave you life throughout this season?
- What was wind in your sails?

Consider the desolations of the season:

- What events and feelings made you feel driven or deflated?
- What has zapped you of life in this season?
- What circumstance or struggle left you feeling sad, helpless or angry?

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:3-24)*

5. **Look forward to tomorrow**, ask God to be with you in every detail of the coming day and season, including what you anticipate and what you do not. If there is a particular grace you desire for the season ahead, name that before God now.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?" (Luke 11:9-12)



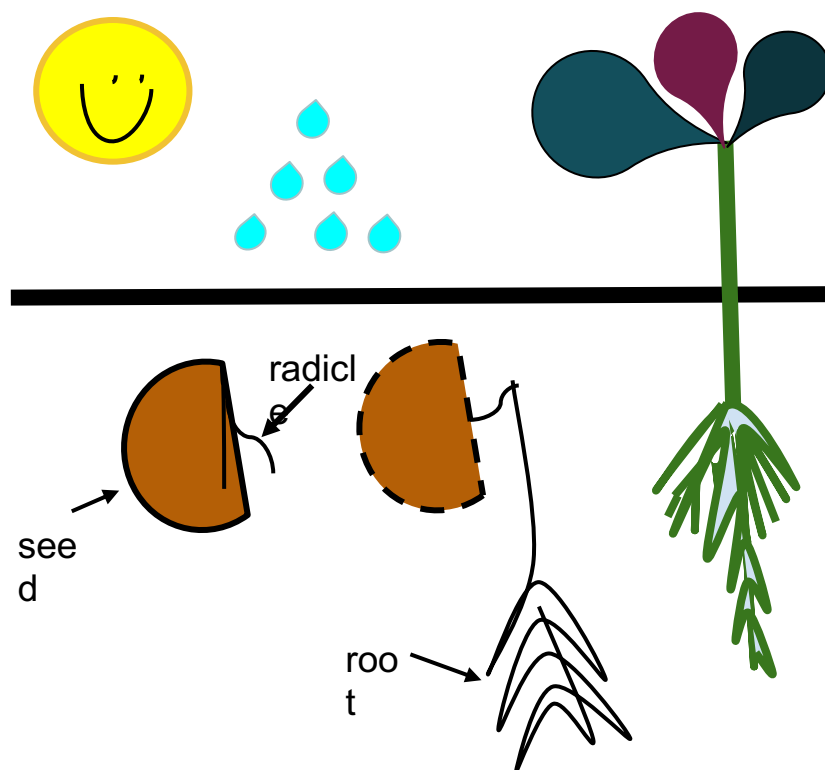
Seed Meditation | Discovering the Radicle

“The etymology of the term radical is from the Latin *radix*, ‘root’...Radical Discipleship is about nothing more and nothing less than *laying bare* the roots of the personal and socio-political pathologies of our imperial society and its dead-end history, even as we seek to *recover* the roots of our deep biblical tradition: namely, the messianic movement of rebellion and restoration, of repentance and renewal, a ‘Way out of no way’ that has been going on since the dawn of resistance to the dusk of empire.” - [Ched Myers @ BCM](#)

“The ‘radicle’ is the first organ to appear when a seed germinates. It grows downward into the soil, anchoring the seedling....and the radicle becomes a taproot.” - [Britannica.com](#)

Look at the image below* of a seed, a radicle, roots, a tender plant and its environment, and use your “Lenten Examen” to name some of these stages in your own life. What, for example, would be:

- The soil/the darkness/the heaviness that your seed is consumed in?
- The new thing/the “radicle” thing starting to grow in this season?
- The seed coating that needs to be shed/broken out of?
- The root system, stemming from the radicle?
- The water/sun/nutrients/grace needed for growth and maturation?



***Or feel free** to use this prompt to draw, paint, collage, build or write about the “radicle” sprouting in your own life, in your own colors, in your own shapes.



Writing Meditation | Connecting with our longings

“Most of us have never discovered where our desires lead us on their own. Instead we attempt to satisfy ourselves in the short-term. We bury our unformed, barely perceptible longings for intimacy with God by settling for whatever forms are immediately available or convenient.” - Janet Ruffing

From the *Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron: “Speed writing is one of the best ways to evade our ‘Censor.’ Wishes might sound frivolous, but should be taken seriously, at least **as a sign of a deeper desire.**”

→ Fill out this “wish list” playfully, honestly, and stream-of-consciously, and see what comes up!

1. I wish _____
2. I wish _____
3. I wish _____
4. I wish _____
5. I wish _____
6. I wish _____
7. I wish _____
8. I wish _____
9. I wish _____
10. I wish _____
11. I wish _____
12. I wish _____
13. I wish _____
14. I wish _____
15. I wish _____
16. I wish _____
17. I wish _____
18. I wish _____
19. I wish _____
20. I most especially wish _____

- Which one surprises you the most, or is most evocative for you?
- How is it a “barely perceptible longing for intimacy with God?”
- Is there a prayer that forms around that longing for you?

poems & prayers

Invitation: Glance over these poems and prayers and pick one to pray with. Treat it like a lectio divina - reading it several times slowly, meditatively, circling the word or phrase that catches your attention, and using that to usher you into conversation and contemplation with God. If a **cool** insight or feeling comes, rest with that. If nothing does, **cool**, rest with God just the same.

(a quote)

By Annie Dillard, *For the Time Being*

There is no less holiness at this time —
as you are reading this —
than there was on the day the Red Sea parted,
or that day in the 30th year, in the 4th month,
on the 5th day of the month as Ezekiel
was a captive by the river Cheban,
when the heavens opened and he saw visions of god.
There is no whit less enlightenment under the tree
at the end of your street
than there was under Buddha's bo tree....
In any instant the sacred may wipe you
with its finger.
In any instant the bush may flare,
your feet may rise,
or you may see a bunch of souls
in trees.

Collects for the Stations of the Cross

By Pádraig Ó Tuama

14 - Jesus is placed in the tomb

Jesus of the unexpected,
for at least some of your life
this was not how you imagined its end.
Yet even at the end,
you kept steady in your conviction.
Jesus, keep us steady.
Jesus, keep us steady.
Because, Jesus, keep us steady.
Amen.

Not the loss alone

by Gregory Orr

Not the loss alone,
But what comes after.
If it ended completely
At loss, the rest
Wouldn't matter.
But you go on.
And the world also.
And words, words
In a poem or song:
Aren't they a stream
On which your feelings float?
Aren't they also
The banks of that stream
And you yourself the flowing?

Insha'Allah

By Danusha Lameris

I don't know when it slipped into my speech
that soft word meaning, "if God wills it."
Insha'Allah I will see you next summer.
The baby will come in spring, insha'Allah.
Insha'Allah this year we will have enough rain.

So many plans I've laid have unraveled
easily as braids beneath my mother's quick fingers.

Every language must have a word for this. A word
our grandmothers uttered under their breath
as they pinned the whites, soaked in lemon,
hung them to dry in the sun, or peeled potatoes,
dropping the discarded skins into a bowl.

*Our sons will return next month, insha'Allah.
Insha'Allah this war will end, soon. Insha'Allah
the rice will be enough to last through winter.*

How lightly we learn to hold hope,
as if it were an animal that could turn around
and bite your hand. And still we carry it
the way a mother would, carefully,
from one day to the next.

Remembering God after Three Years of Depression

By [Derrick Austin](#)

Where was your familiar body, rough hands
smelling of rosemary? Insomnia watched me,
wild-haired, unwashed, like an officer.
Perhaps, the light through the keyhole
was you, floorboards straining in another room.
In the hall, a sleepwalker, like divine love,
sang the blues, bleeding dream into the world.
I feared a knock at the door. I needed a hand.
Would you have found me on the deflated air
mattress, among filthy shirts, half-eaten food?
I don't know what to call doubt when you are here
and I am not. What is it to be exiled in you?
Maybe if I'd been drinking red instead of white.
I had no space in me for less than life.

What the Living Do

By Marie Howe

Johnny, the kitchen sink has been clogged for days,
some utensil probably fell down there.
And the Drano won't work but smells dangerous, and
the crusty dishes have piled up
waiting for the plumber I still haven't called. This is
the everyday we spoke of.
It's winter again: the sky's a deep, headstrong blue,
and the sunlight pours through
the open living-room windows because the heat's on
too high in here and I can't turn it off.
For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of
groceries in the street, the bag breaking,
I've been thinking: This is what the living do. And
yesterday, hurrying along those
wobbly bricks in the Cambridge sidewalk, spilling my
coffee down my wrist and sleeve,
I thought it again, and again later, when buying a
hairbrush: This is it.
Parking. Slamming the car door shut in the cold.
What you called that yearning.
What you finally gave up. We want the spring to come
and the winter to pass. We want
whoever to call or not call, a letter, a kiss — we want
more and more and then more of it.
But there are moments, walking, when I catch a
glimpse of myself in the window glass,
say, the window of the corner video store, and I'm
gripped by a cherishing so deep
for my own blowing hair, chapped face, and
unbuttoned coat that I'm speechless:
I am living. I remember you.

The Comfort of Darkness

By Galway Kinnell - 1927-2014

Darkness swept the earth in my dream,
Cold crowded the streets with its wings,
Cold talons pursued each river and stream
Into the mountains, found out their springs
And drilled the dark world with ice.
An enormous wreck of a bird
Closed on my heart in the darkness
And sank into sleep as it shivered.
Not even the heat of your blood, nor the pure
Light falling endlessly from you, like rain,
Could stay in my memory there
Or comfort me then.
Only the comfort of darkness,
The ice-cold, unfreezable brine,
Could melt the cries into silence,
Your bright hands into mine.

Witness

By Denise Levertov, *Selected Poems*

Sometimes the mountain
is hidden from me in veils
of cloud, sometimes
I am hidden from the mountain
in veils of inattention, apathy, fatigue,
when I forget or refuse to go
down to the shore or a few yards
up the road, on a clear day,
to reconfirm
that witnessing presence.

These Days

by Lynn Ungar

Anyone who tells you not to be afraid should have
their head examined.
Cities are burning, hillsides are burning, and the
dumpster fire of our common life is out of control. I
wish I could tell you when it was going to get better.
I wish I could promise that better
was anywhere down this road.
I miss dancing, bodies in something between
conversation and flight.
I miss singing, the way we trusted
the air that moved between us. I miss the casual
assumption that everything would be all right in the
morning. These days I am trying to be buoyed by the
smallest things—
a ripe tomato, a smattering of rain. These days I am
trying to remember that songs of lamentation
are still songs.