

in some Asian and other cultures as well. It is less comprehensible in the European culture that has colonized the text and its iconography.

In Matthew 6:6-7, omitted, Jesus tells his disciples not to pray like Gentiles who essentially babble repeatedly, and in that context introduces the Lord's Prayer. It is worth remembering that Jesus initially understood his ministry to be only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (see Matthew 10:4, 15:6). After his encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman, his ministry extended to the Gentiles.

A final note, when reciting Psalm 51 in the liturgy of the day, consider recentering Bathsheba's abduction, rape, and forced impregnation along with the murder of her husband.

LENT I

*Genesis 2:7-9,15-25; Psalm 104:1-4, 10-15,27-30;
Colossians 3:1-11; Mark 16:9-15*

Genesis 2:7 The Sovereign God crafted the human from the dust of the humus and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living soul.⁸ And the Sovereign God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there placed the human whom God had formed.⁹ Out of the ground the Sovereign God made grow every tree pleasant to the sight and good for food, and the tree of life in the middle of the garden, along with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁵ The Sovereign God took the human and settled it in the garden of Eden to till and tend it.¹⁶ Then the Sovereign God commanded the human, "From every tree of the garden you may eat freely,¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it you shall surely die."

¹⁸ Then the SOVEREIGN God said, "It is not good that the human should be alone; I will make it someone to rely on as its partner."¹⁹ Then the Sovereign God crafted from the humus every creature of the field and every bird of the skies and brought them to the human to see what it would call them; and whatever the human called every living soul, that was its name.²⁰ The human gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the human there was not found one to rely on as its partner.

²¹ The Sovereign God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human, and it slept; then took one of its sides and closed up its place with flesh in place of it.²² And the Sovereign God built the side that had been taken from the human into a woman and brought her to the human.²³ Then the human said,

"This time, this one is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called a woman,
for out of a man this one was taken."

²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his mother and his father and clings to his woman, and they become one flesh.²⁵ And they were, the two of them, naked, the man and his woman [or the woman and her man], and were not ashamed.

Psalm 104:1-4, 10-15,27-30

- ¹ Bless the Fount of Life, O my soul.
Mother of All, my God, you are very great.
You do honor and majesty,
- ² Wrapped in light as a garment,
you stretch out the heavens like a tent-curtain.
- ³ She who lays on the waters the beams of her upper chambers,
she who makes the clouds her chariot,
she is the one who rides on the wings of the wind.
- ⁴ She is the one who makes the winds her celestial messengers,
fire and flame her ministers.
- ¹⁰ She is the one who makes springs gush forth in the torrents;
they flow between the hills.
- ¹¹ They give drink to every wild animal;
the wild donkeys slake their thirst.
- ¹² By the torrents the birds of the heavens dwell;
among the branches they give voice.
- ¹³ She is the one who waters the mountains from her high chambers;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.
- ¹⁴ She is the one who makes grass to grow for the cattle,
and vegetation for human labor,
to bring forth food from the earth,
- ¹⁵ and wine to make the human heart rejoice,
with oil to make the face shine,
and bread to sustain the human heart.
- ²⁷ All of these hope in you
to provide their food in due season.
- ²⁸ You give it to them, they glean it;
you open your hand, they are well satisfied.
- ²⁹ You hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you collect their breath, they die
and to their dust they return.
- ³⁰ You send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the earth.

Colossians 3:1 If indeed you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.² Reflect upon things that are above, not on things that

are on earth. ³ For you all have died, and your life hidden with Christ in God.⁴ When Christ is revealed, the one who is your life, then you all will also be revealed with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever part of you that is of the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greediness, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these [things] the wrath of God is coming on the spawn of disobedience.⁷ In these things you all also once followed, when you were living in that way. ⁸ But now you all must put away all anger, wrath, wickedness, slander, and bad language from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its deeds. ¹⁰ And you all have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being made new in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹ There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free, rather Christ is all and in all.

Mark 16:9 Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene from whom he had cast out seven demons.¹⁰ She went out and she told the ones mourning and weeping who had been with him. ¹¹ But when they heard that he lives and was seen by her, they did not believe. ¹² After this Jesus was made known in another form to two of [the disciples] as they were walking into the countryside.¹³ And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. ¹⁴ Now later on, while they were sitting at table, Jesus appeared to the eleven themselves and he rebuked their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they did not believe those [the women] who saw Jesus after he had risen. ¹⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to all creation.

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

The divine Name in this passage is composed of two elements: the word *adonai*, which means "lord," and the Tetragrammaton, the four letters YHWH that represent God's unpronounceable Name. The latter is traditionally pointed with the vowels for *adonai*, its substitute pronunciation. To avoid the repetitive *adonai adonai*, the doubled divine Name is pointed with the vowels for *elohim*, God, customarily yielding "Lord God."

God's creation of the human in Genesis 2:7 uses a verb for crafting pottery. "The human," *ha'adam* is a specific distinct creation; later *adam* will refer to humanity as a whole and serve as the name of the first male human. The earth from which this first earthling was crafted is *ha'adamah*. To preserve the word play I have used human/humus (earthling/earth works as well): humus, pronounced "HUE-muss," is dark, richly fertile, life-giving soil, the matrix of human creation.

To quote Robert Alter, "The Hebrew *'ezer kenegdo* (King James Version "help meet") is notoriously difficult to translate. . . . "Help" is too weak because it suggests a merely auxiliary function, whereas *'ezer* elsewhere connotes active intervention

on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts, as often in the Psalms" (*The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, p. 14). The partner or companion God provides is someone who will have your back, your "ride or die" (roll or ride—originally biker vernacular), the person whom you will accompany, even in the face of certain or inevitable death.

I use the pronoun "it," lacking in Hebrew, for the first human that has within it what will be called woman, *ishshah*, and man, *ish*. The earth-creature will be divided in half to generate the woman and man. The word *tzela* in Genesis 2:22 means "side" and not "rib," used for the sides of the ark and tabernacle in Exodus, sides of the temple in 1 Kings and Ezekiel, and hillsides in 2 Samuel. It is never translated as rib outside of the creation of woman story. In the *LXX*, *pleuron* also means "side," generally in reference to the human body. There are no distinct words for "wife" and "husband" in Hebrew. The language for woman and man has not changed in the text.

Psalms 104 switches between second and third person as is common in the genre. Verses 14-15 use the word that means both bread and food in general in both senses.

"Sexual immorality," *porneia* in Colossians 3:5, is a broad brush that generally refers to sex outside of (an appropriate) marriage, including adultery, prostitution, and use of prostitutes. The term is also used more broadly: the author of Hebrews calls Esau *pornos*, "sexually immoral" in 12:6. However, no biblical or postbiblical texts attribute inappropriate sexual behavior to him beyond marrying Hittite women against his mother's wishes (Genesis 26:34-35; 27:46). "Evil desire" is not (simply) lust, sexual or otherwise; it is wrong or inappropriate desire for that which is not acceptable. It is not a condemnation of sexual desire. In verse 8 the root for "slander" is "blaspheme"; at one level blasphemy is slander against God. "Bad language" is broad, including obscenity and talk considered in "poor taste" according to BDAG, where it is bound up with class in Aristotle, the way a slave speaks but not a free "gentleman." (See the entry on *aischrologia* in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [known as BDAG].)

Preaching Prompts

Lent often begins with a return to our most ancestral story, to remind us that we are all earthlings, creatures of earth, of the soil we till, the soil to which we shall return. There is both dignity and humility in our creation at the hands of God, breathed into living by the Spirit of God.

Lenten reflection on our own failings and finitude is cast back to these ancestral figures now shrouded in postbiblical notions of "fall" and "original sin." The aftermath of those theologies and doctrines is regularly patriarchal, often misogynistic, demonizing—and in some cases, quite literally damning—God's treasured, hand-made creation. The story of the first woman and the fruit from the tree of knowledge

has been translated and interpreted and taught in ways that subordinate and demean women in ways not warranted by the text. (See the classic treatment by Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*.)

The primordial human is a pluripotent entity that will be divided into equal halves to form two human persons, yielding different theological implications than turning a man's rib into a woman. Inserting "wife" and "husband" in Genesis 2:23-24 also has theological and interpretive ramifications: Why would marriage be necessary in paradise with only two people? The text does not mention marriage; the assumption suggests specific understandings of sex and shame not (yet) present in the text. There is a chasm between Genesis and Colossians.

Reading these texts together invites us to hold onto the glories of creation and her Creator voiced in the psalm while acknowledging those created in her image do real harm to each other on this good earth that is no longer paradise. We read in the company of the One who is of earth as much as heaven, for whom earth is womb and tomb and heaven's majesty is at hand, incarnate on this very earth.

LENT II

Genesis 3:1-7; Psalm 92:1-5, 12-15; Ephesians 2:4-10; Matthew 7:15-20

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent had more naked intelligence than any other animal of the field that the Sovereign God had made, And it said to the woman, "Indeed, did God say, 'You two shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" ² The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of any tree in the garden we may eat, ³ though of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden God said, 'You two shall not eat and shall not touch it lest you two die.'" ⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, "You two will certainly not die, ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you two will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her man, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Psalm 92:1-5, 12-15

- ¹ It is good to give thanks to the Ageless God,
to sing praises to your name Most High;
- ² to declare your faithful love in the morning,
and your trustworthiness by night,
- ³ upon the ten strings and the harp,
upon the murmurings of the lyre.

- ⁴ For you have made me glad.
Well spring of Life, by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.
- ⁵ How great are your works, Womb of Creation!
Your designs are so very profound.
- ¹² A righteous woman or man flourishes like a palm tree,
and grows like a cedar in Lebanon.
- ¹³ They are planted in the house of She Who Is Holy;
in the courts of our God, they flourish.
- ¹⁴ Still producing fruit in their elder years;
fat wide sap and ever green.
- ¹⁵ They declare that the Mighty God is upright;
she is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in her.

Ephesians 2:4 Now God, who is rich in mercy, loving us with a great love ⁵ when we were dead through our trespasses, brought us to life together with Christ—by grace have you all been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up together with Christ and seated us all together in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. ⁷ This, that God might show in the ages to come, the abundant riches of God's grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace have you all been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God. ⁹ It is not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what God has crafted, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our path.

Matthew 7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who will come to you all in sheep's clothing but inside are rapacious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruits you will know them. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or from this des, figs?" ¹⁷ Thus, every good tree bears beautiful fruit, but the rotten tree bears wicked fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear wicked fruit, nor can a corrupt tree bear beautiful fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear beautiful fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits.

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

There is a pun between Genesis 2:25 and 3:1: "And the man and his woman were both *atom*, naked, and were not ashamed. . . . Now the serpent had more *arum*, naked intelligence . . ." The serpent also changes the "you shall not eat" to an inclusive plural from masculine singular in 2:16.

I use "murmuring" in Psalm 92:3 to render *higgion*-, the wider semantic range includes melodic speech, song, the sound of instruments, and murmuring (Psalms 9:16 [v. 17 in Hebrew]; 19:14; 92:3; Lamentations 3:62). "Elder years" in verse 15 is *sevah*, "gray hair."

This passage of Ephesians includes a long sentence that extends from verses 4 to 9. I have broken it into more manageable pieces. The plural adjective “heavenly” in verse 6 has no noun to describe; I supply “realms” in keeping with God’s majesty.

In Matthew 7:17-18 the writer (or speaker) uses a variety of adjectives: good and a separate superlative that also means good/beautiful, along with corrupt/rotten and wicked/evil. Many translations reduce the vivid imagery to “good” and “bad” fruit and trees.

Preaching Prompts

Lent offers an opportunity to reflect on the nature and limitations of humanity, including the consequences of our actions and inactions and our responsibility in and for this world. In the garden God offers life, provision, knowledge (conditionally), and boundaries. In the serpent God creates a creature who will stir human curiosity to potentially dangerous limits. It is useful to consider the serpent apart from the crutch of postbiblical misidentification with Satan. In the text, the God-crafted serpent is agent provocateur and fall guy, an external place for humans to place blame. Perhaps rather than “tempter,” the serpent is “tester.” What will humanity do in response to boundaries? Test them, bend them, break them. The serpent also tests something else—how humans hear, remember, tell, question, and interpret God’s words: “Did God say . . . ?” And “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die . . .” except they didn’t, not “in the day you eat from it.” And “neither shall you touch it . . .” was not in God’s recorded speech. These two chapters somewhat surprisingly model the study of scripture, its genres, transmission, and interpretive possibilities, well in keeping with the Lenten disciplines. The woman and the serpent have been long demonized for their exegetical work, but perhaps we should take their example more seriously.

The unfettered praise of the psalm celebrates all of creation on the other side of the garden. Our curiosity has neither doomed nor damned us. We inhabit the good world of a good God, a God whose abundant love manifests as saving grace in and through Christ Jesus according to the Epistle. Unlike in the garden where humanity helped itself to proscribed knowledge, we are helpless to save ourselves. Those who say otherwise may well be among the false prophets of the gospel.

The Gospel offers words to govern our lives—and arguably theology and biblical interpretation. Know a tree—a person, a love, a theology, a biblical interpreter, and their interpretation—by its fruits. Rather than focus on the outward appearance—serpent, woman, out and queer, trans, Black, Brown, bilingual, disabled—examine the fruit of their lives and their interpretation of the scriptures. Is it good? Beautiful? Nutritious? Corrupt? Rotten?

LENT III

Genesis 3:8-21; Psalm 96; Romans 8:31-39; Mark 13:14-22

Genesis 3:8 The woman and man heard the sound of the Sovereign God walking about in the garden in the breezy part of the day, and the woman and her man hid themselves from the presence of the Sovereign God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ Then the Sovereign God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ And the man said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself.” ¹¹ Then God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat from the tree which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹² And the man said, “The woman whom you gave to stand with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the Sovereign God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴ The Sovereign God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all herd animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat, all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
her offspring will strike your head,
and you will strike the heel of her offspring.”

¹⁶ To the woman God said,

“I will greatly increase your painful toil and your pregnancies;
in pain shall you birth children,
and your desire shall be for your man, yet he shall rule with you.”

¹⁷ And to the man God said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your woman,
and have eaten of the tree which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat from it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in painful toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

¹⁸ Thorn and thistle shall it grow for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
shall you eat bread
until you return to the ground;

for out of it you were taken,
you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

²⁰ The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living.²¹ And the Sovereign God made garments of skins for the woman and her man, and clothed them.

Psalms 96

- ¹ Sing to the Exalted a new song;
sing to the Creator, all the earth.
- ² Sing to the Most High, bless her name;
proclaim from day to day her salvation.
- ³ Declare among the nations her glory,
among all the peoples, her marvelous works.
- ⁴ For great is the Ageless God, and greatly to be praised;
revered is she above all gods.
- ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols,
yet the Womb of Life made the heavens.
- ⁶ Splendor and majesty are before her;
strength and beauty are in her sanctuary.
- ⁷ Give to the Majestic One, you families of the peoples,
give to the Mighty One glory and strength.
- ⁸ Give to the Fire OF SINAI the glory due her name;
bring an offering and come into her courts.
- ⁹ Bow down and worship the Sovereign One in majestic holiness;
tremble in her presence, all the earth.
- ¹⁰ Say among the nations, "The Ever-Living God reigns!
Indeed, the world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
God will judge the peoples with equity."
- ¹¹ Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea roar, along with what fills it.
- ¹² Let the field exult, and all that is in it.
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
- ¹³ before the Wisdom of the Ages; for she is coming,
for she is coming to judge the earth.
She will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with her truth.

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

³² God is the one who did not spare the very Child of God, but rather for all of us, handed the Messiah over. Will not God—with Christ—also give us everything else?³³ Who then will bring any charge against the elect of God? God is the one who justifies.³⁴ Who will condemn? It is

Christ Jesus, the one who died, moreover the one who was raised and who is at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us.³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?³⁶ As it is written,

*"For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered?"*

³⁷ No, in all these things we are completely victorious through the one who loved us.³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor powers-that-be, nor things that are, nor things that will be, nor powers,³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Redeemer.

Mark 13:14 "Now when you all see the *desolating sacrilege* set up where it ought not to be—let the reader understand—then those in Judea must flee to the mountains.¹⁵ The woman or man on the housetop should not go down or enter the house to take anything out.¹⁶ And the one in the field should not turn back to grab a garment.¹⁷ Woe to those who have a child in womb and to those who are nursing infants in those days!¹⁸ Pray that it be not winter.¹⁹ For in those days there will be affliction, of such a kind as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, no, and never will be.²⁰ And if the Living One had not cut short those days, no flesh would be saved; rather for the sake of the elect, whom God chose, God has cut short those days.²¹ And if anyone says to you all at that time, 'Look! Here is the Messiah!' or 'Look! There is the Christ!'—do not believe it.²² False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect."

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

The verb that articulates God's ambulation in Genesis 3:8, *halakh*, is in a self-reflective conjugation, *hitpa'el*, and can be humorously understood as God taking Godself for a walk just as the human pair hid themselves. "The breezy part of the day" lacks a specific temporal indicator in the MT. In the LXX, NRSV, and CEB it is in the evening; in the Targum, the "decline" of the day and in the Peshitta, in the "turning" of the day. In verse 12, "stand with me" is "with me," lacking a verb; NETS, NRSV, and KJV supply "to be with me" while the Targum and CEB render the woman the man's property: "provided for me" and "gave me" respectively. My choice of "stand" is a pun of the sort that populate the text where "with me" here is *'imadi* and "stand" shares the same consonants, taking into account the JPS translation, "the woman you put at my side." The offspring of the woman in verse 15 is collective, her "seed"; "he" of RSV and NRSV contribute to readings that thrust Christian messianism upon the text. Rather see the use of "they," "seed," "offspring," etc. in JPS, NETS, CEB, and KJV. Significantly, verse 16 describes the man as ruling *with* rather than over the woman,

using the preposition *b*, meaning “with,” “in,” or “through.” I choose the least hierarchical option. The same word encompasses “pain” and “toil/hard work” and describes childbirth and the agricultural labor of Noah and these first humans (Genesis 3:16-17; 5:29; see Everett Fox’s “pain-staking labor” in Genesis 3:17). Verse 17 marks the first place the man is called Adam. In verse 19, by the sweat of your “nose” becomes “brow.”

Romans 8:36 quotes Psalm 44:22. The familiar martial language “more than conquerors” found in NRSV and KJV is not required by the text of verse 37; the primary meaning is victorious to the point of a rout. Given the harm of militarized Christianity, I follow the Peshitta and CEB in preserving “victorious” for *hupemikomen*. Rulers and their domains, *archai*, the latter the “principalities” of the Peshitta and KJV, are encompassed in the “powers-that-be” of verse 38. Romans 8:35 and Mark 13:19 share the specific language of “affliction,” *thlipsis*.

The original “desolating sacrilege” refers to the idol of Zeus in the temple which provoked the Maccabean wars beginning in 167 BCE (see Daniel 11:31, 12:11). According to Lawrence M. Wills in the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford), the Markan reference may pertain to an image of Caligula intended for the temple forestalled by his assassination in 40 CE. It is not clear if the Divine in verse 20 is Jesus, the risen Christ, or God herself; the “Living One” encompasses both options. Similarly, in the same verse, “no flesh,”—a more literal translation—encompasses humankind and animalkind (and perhaps by extension, all creation).

Preaching Prompts

God’s response to the first human pair helping themselves to proscribed knowledge is harsh; there are curses involved. Yet counter to common misapprehension, God does not curse womankind; God does not curse humans at all. God curses the ground and God curses the serpent. The story leaves the reader with a view of women constrained by hormones, love, sexual desire, and childbirth, and the man doomed to subsistence labor. Yet the story is not prophetic; it is an etiology, an origin story to explain why the essentials of human survival—reproduction and food production—are so hard and provides a vision of an Edenic world in which people did not have to struggle. Humanity lives with and within those parameters, occasionally transcending them.

Humanity offers transcendent praise in Psalm 96 to the God who enables them to flourish in the hostile world that gave rise to the stories of Genesis. The world, though difficult, is not actively hostile and joins with humanity in praise in verses 11-12. The Epistle speaks a word of comfort: we are the beloved of God and nothing can separate us from her love—not even the harsh language of Genesis or hegemonic patriarchal structures built in its name.

Yet there is trouble in the world and more on the way. The danger to humanity is not the biological imperatives of women, real or imagined. In the larger chapter Jesus

prepares his disciples for the danger they will face for refusing to bow to the empire or its idols. The danger is such that believers would be better off dropping everything and fleeing. Jesus expresses concern for the women who are pregnant and nursing. It is more than concern over their slower pace; it is also a reminder that women and children are often most vulnerable to systems that wield power.

These readings present women as the mothers of creation, possessors of forbidden knowledge, bound by reproductive cycles, part of a creation that gives praise, inseparable from the love of God, and disciples of Jesus endangered by their faith yet among the elect who will ultimately be saved. This micro-canon tells the story of salvation that will be retold in its longer form at the conclusion of Lent in the Easter Vigil.

LENT IV

Song of Songs 4:7-16; Psalm 136:1-16; 1 John 4:7-12; John 3:11-17

Song 4

To a woman . . .

- ⁷ All of you is beautiful, my beloved companion;
there is no flaw in you.
- ⁸ With me! From Lebanon, my bride, come with me;
come with me from Lebanon.
Depart from the peak of Amana,
from the peak of Senir and Hermon,
from the dens of lions,
from the mountains of leopards.
- ⁹ My heart is yours, my sister, my bride,
my heart is yours with just one of your eyes,
with one jewel of your necklace.
- ¹⁰ How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride!
How much better is your love than wine,
and the fragrance of your oils more than every spice!
- ¹¹ Honied sweetness drips from your lips, my bride;
honey and milk are under your tongue;
the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon.
- ¹² A garden locked is my sister, my bride,
a garden locked, a fountain sealed.
- ¹³ Your limbs are an orchard of pomegranates
with all choicest fruits: henna with nard,

- ¹⁴ nard and saffron, sweet cane and cinnamon,
with every kind of frankincense tree,
myrrh and aloes, with all the best spices:
¹⁵ A garden spring, a well of living water,
streaming from Lebanon.

To a woman's beloved . . .

- ¹⁶ Awake, Zaphon, northern wind,
and come, Teman, southern wind!
Blow upon my garden
that its spice-scent might flow.
Let my beloved come to their garden,
and partake of its choicest fruits.

Psalm 136:1-16

- ¹ Give thanks to the Fount of Life, who is good,
for her faithful love is everlasting.
² Give thanks to the God of gods,
for her faithful love is everlasting.
³ Give thanks to the Majesty of Majesties,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
⁴ who alone does great wonders,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
⁵ who through insight made the heavens,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
⁶ **to** the one who spread out the land upon the waters,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
⁷ to the one who made the great lights,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
⁸ the sun to govern the day,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
¹⁰ who struck Egypt through their firstborn daughters and sons,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
¹² with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
¹³ who cut the Red Sea in two,
for her faithful love is everlasting;

- ¹⁴ and made Israel pass over through the midst of it,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
¹⁵ but churned Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
¹⁶ who walked her people through the wilderness,
for her faithful love is everlasting.

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ In this way God's love was revealed among us: God sent God's only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent God's own Son to be the means of forgiveness for our sins.¹¹ Beloved, if God loves us thus, we ought also love one another.¹² God no one has ever seen. Yet if we love one another, God lives in us, and God's love is made complete in us.

John 3:11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen; yet you all do not receive our testimony.¹² If I have told you all about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you all believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"¹³ Now then, no one has ascended into the heavens except the one who descended from the heavens, the Son of Woman.¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Woman be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.¹⁷ 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."

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

In the Song the gender of the addressee is indicated by the binary Hebrew grammar. Rather than identify speaking voice (deductively) and reinforce the heteronormativity of the text, I identify the hearer leaving room for anyone to address her, in this case, as "beloved." Similarly in verse 16, I use the pronoun "their" for the woman's beloved. In Song 4:7, the endearment *rāynt* is translated variably: "my love" (NRSV, KJV), "my darling" (JPS), "my dearest" (CEB), "my closest [one]" (Peshitta and LXX); its root meaning is "companion," with the sense of nearest/dearest and here, "beloved." "Bride from Lebanon" is missing the possessive "my" in verse 8 as is "bride" in verses 9 and following. "Depart" in verse 8 is one of a set of homophonic verbs that can mean "look" as in KJV, form II, but fits better in its form I, meaning "travel." Verse 9 lacks a proper verb. The noun "heart" is conjugated like a verb, "you hearted me"; there is no basis for the problematic "ravish" of KJV and NRSV. The plural "branches" in verse 13 are here "limbs," human and arboreal. The orchard of verse 13,

parties, derives from Zoroastrian scripture in the Avestan language, *pairidaeza*, and the source of our word “paradise.”

In 1 John 4:10, Jesus is the “means of forgiveness” for our sins. The method of that facilitation has been traditionally narrowed to “sacrifice,” “expiation,” “propitiation,” etc. in an atonement theory framework. “Means of forgiveness” offers a full range of salvific possibility not limited to the death of Jesus but intentionally including his life, his love, his teaching, his very incarnational existence. In spite of the absolute certainty in the author’s rhetoric that no one has seen God “at any time” in verse 12, the scriptures insist that God spoke to Moses “face to face,” literally “mouth to mouth”—Jacob makes a similar claim—and records Moses seeing God’s “back parts” and Isaiah testifies he has indeed seen the Holy One as does Ezekiel (see Genesis 32:30; Exodus 33:11, 23; Isaiah 6:1, Ezekiel 1:1). In verse 12 God’s love is “made complete” in us, “made whole” in the sense of “finished.” The older translation “perfection” does not readily convey that sense of wholeness.

Jesus as the Son of Woman is more than biologically true; it is grammatically true in that *anthropou* is fundamentally human, not specifically male.

Preaching Prompts

The weightiness of Lent is lightened a bit on Laetare Sunday, named from the historic introit meaning “rejoice.” These weeks of penitent contemplation can leave one with a nearly unredeemable portrait of humanity. These lessons offer reason for rejoicing in contemplating God’s good world of which we are a part and God’s love manifest in creation and ultimately through Jesus.

The garden image that dominates biblical imagination is often Eden, the site of brokenness. Yet scripture also offers the garden paradise of lovers in which the ruptures of the first garden appear healed: The desire of the lovers is mutual and the ground is abundantly fruitful with no evidence of human labor; Phyllis Tribble compares these two gardens in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. The poet’s emphatic speech in the Song defies grammar as poets are wont to do. (For a more poetic translation of the Song, see Marcia Falk, *The Song of Songs: Love Lyrics from the Bible b*)

Indeed, God as poet of creation creates her own grammar. The psalm celebrates the poetry of creation as evidence of God’s faithful love. The theological idiom of the Iron Age further characterizes God’s actions that harm others as evidence of God’s love for Israel, the fate of Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the psalm (verses 10,15). Yet the inclusion of wider creation—the heavens and sun, moon and stars, and land and sea—in verses 5-9 point to an even wider love not limited by nation, tribe, clan, or kin.

The love the Epistle writer celebrates is similarly articulated in insider, communal terms, “beloved” addresses fellow believers, yet that great love of God is not limited to followers of the Way. The Epistle supplies the image of a God who gives birth

to her beloved: “Everyone who loves is born of God” (1 John 4:7). The Epistle also leaves the image of God’s love as not yet, not quite, completed, and extraordinarily, dependent upon us in verse 12: Our love is part of God’s love; God’s love is not complete without our love for one another.

The evangelist articulates God’s love in singular incarnational woman-born terms. We rejoice on this rejoicing Sunday because God’s love is made manifest in and through creation, in and through humanity, and in and through Jesus. We return to our Lenten devotions and disciplines secure in this love and convicted of our call to complete God’s love in loving all who, all that, she loves.

LENT V

Isalah 51:1-8; Psalm 148; Romans 11:13-24; Luke 13:18-21

Isalah 51:1 Listen to me, all you that pursue righteousness,
all you that seek the Author of Life.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.

² Look to Abraham your father,
and to Sarah who writhed-in-labor for you all;
he was just one when I called him,
but I blessed him and made him many.

³ For the God Who Saves has comforted Zion;
she has comforted all her waste places.
And she shall make her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of the Creator of All;
joy and gladness will be found in her,
thanksgiving and the sound of song.
[Sorrow and mourning will flee away.]

⁴ Listen to me, my people,
and my nation, to me give heed;
for a teaching shall from me go forth,
and my justice for a light to the peoples.
I will do so suddenly.

⁵ My deliverance is near,
my salvation has gone forth
and my arms will govern the peoples;
for me the coastlands wait,
and upon my arm they await.

- ⁶ Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and look to the earth below.
For the heavens like smoke will vanish,
the earth like a garment will wear out,
and those who live on it will die like gnats;
yet my salvation will be forever,
and my deliverance will never be broken.
- ⁷ Listen to me, you who know righteousness,
you people who have my teaching in your hearts;
fear not the reproach of others,
and when they revile you, do not be dismayed.
- ⁸ For like a garment a moth will devour them,
and like wool a worm will consume them;
yet my deliverance will be forever,
and my salvation to all generations.

Psalm 148

- ¹ Praise the Almighty!
Praise the Exalted from the heavens;
praise her on the heights!
- ² Praise her, all her angels;
praise her, all her starry warriors!
- ³ Praise her, sun and moon;
praise her, all you stars of light!
- ⁴ Praise her, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!
- ⁵ Let them praise the Name of the Mighty God,
for she commanded and they were created.
- ⁶ She established them forever and ever;
she set boundaries that cannot be crossed.
- ⁷ Praise the Creator of All from the earth,
sea monsters and all watery deeps,
- ⁸ Fire and hail, snow and frost,
swirling wind fulfilling her word!
- ⁹ Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
- ¹⁰ Animals wild and tame,
creeping things and winged birds!
- ¹¹ Queens and kings of the earth and all peoples,
royal seed and all rulers of the earth!

- ¹² Young women and men alike,
aged and young together!
- ¹³ Let them praise the Name of the Eternal,
for her name alone is exalted;
her glory is above the earth and the heavens.
- ¹⁴ She has raised up a horn for her people,
praise for all her faithful,
for the daughters and sons of Israel who are close to her.
Praise the Almighty!

Romans 11:13 Now to you Gentiles am I speaking. Since I am, on the one hand, an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry ¹⁴ in order to make my own in the flesh jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what is their acceptance but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the first fruits are holy, then the whole batch is holy, and if the root is holy, thus are the branches also.

¹⁷ Now, if some of the branches were broken off and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted among them to share the oil-rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not boast against the branches. If you should boast: It is not you that bears up the root, rather the root bears you up. ¹⁹ You may say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Well then, through unbelief were they broken off while you stand only through faithfulness. So be not proud, rather be in awe. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, God may not spare you. ²² Behold the graciousness and the sternness of God: toward those who have fallen, sternness, while toward you, graciousness, provided you continue in that graciousness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And yet, if they do not remain in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you out of what is by nature a wild olive tree have been cut and, contrary to nature, grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree?

Luke 13:18 Jesus asked, "What is the realm of God like? And to what should I compare it?"

¹⁹ It is like a mustard seed that someone took and tossed in the garden and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."

²⁰ Speaking again Jesus said, "To what should I compare the realm of God? ²¹ It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

Sarah's labor in Isaiah 51:2 is described with a verb that means "writhe" and "twist" in birthing and, in some cases, dancing, as in Psalm 150:4. In verse 3 God has already begun to comfort Zion (see JPS); the future tense translation of NRSV and KJV neglects the immediate nature of God's response. The tense changes in the third

verse, emphasizing the ongoing work of God (JPS keeps the passage in the past tense). The last line of verse 3 comes from the Great Isaiah Scroll of the Dead Sea collection, IQIsa¹; the reader may choose to omit it. While some unnecessarily move the last verb constituting the final line of verse 4 to verse 5 (NRSV, CEB, Alter), it is entirely comprehensible in its place.

As a psalm of praise, Psalm 148 has opening and closing hallelujahs typically not said in Lent, and verbs from *xlxHallel* root throughout the first five verses. The “hallelujahs” are translated as “Praise [the divine Name]” so the psalm might be more easily used in Lent.

In Romans 11:20, *apotomia* serves as the opposite or inverse of *chrēstoteś*, goodness, kindness, beneficence; it is only used there in the Scriptures. Related, *apotos* occurs in the Wisdom of Solomon (Ecclesiasticus 5:20; 6:5; 11:10; 12:9; 18:15), translated as “stern” more often than “severe.” Here the pair are rendered “graciousness” and “sternness.”

The “tossed” seed, literally “thrown,” is described as scattered rather than planted. The same word, “heaven/s,” includes the realm of the “birds of the [air]” and the realm of God.

Preaching Prompts

The metaphor of the Lenten wilderness draws its imagery from the many wilderness sojourns of Israel and individual figures across the canon as well as use of that imagery to describe the state of Israel under and after occupation. Salvation and restoration imagery often draw upon garden imagery: well-watered trees and plants flourishing as markers of restoration. Here at the end of Lent these readings move through garden scenes—remembering that the Hebrew garden is often an orchard—to texts with flourishing trees representing God’s people as God’s planting. The flora anticipate the flowers of Easter as the joyful praise of the psalm has unpronounced (but translated) hallelujahs.

The poet writing in Isaiah’s name envisions God’s restoration of Israel, and for those who struggled to see the vision, she reminds them of who God is—the one who waters the wilderness—and what God has done—built a new people through Sarah and Abraham. God promises a salvation that will endure when even the earth crumbles away. That salvation is national, corporate, not individual, generally meaning deliverance from the physical threats of individuals and nations. The psalm’s riot of praise is a further reminder of who God is and what she has done.

In Romans, the garden imagery represents Paul’s Israelite kin and Christian kin; some, like him, were both. At one level Romans 11 is a caution against anti-Judaism in the early church: we are all branches on the same tree and we who are Christians are grafted into the ancient Israelite tree with deep roots. At another level the text is

firmly in the supercessionist tradition, rejecting Judaism and those who do not put their faith in Christ. While it can be a narrow line to walk, one can proclaim Jesus in the broad tradition of Paul without perpetuating anti-Judaism.

In the Gospel reading, tree imagery provides one vision of God’s realm. The mustard seed grows with very little cultivation while the baker is hands-on, tending, kneading her creation. In these paired parables, as with the shepherd of lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7) and woman with coins (Luke 15:8-10), Jesus uses a mix of gendered language back to back, answering the same question. The response is not a description of heaven that one could draw or blueprint, but rather a description of God as a Creator who sparks creation and allows it to flourish on its own *and* as a Creator who carefully tends her creation.

FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION, MARCH 25

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Canticle 15, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55);

2 Corinthians 6:16b-18; Luke 1:26-38

Zephaniah 3:14 Sing aloud, daughter of Zion; shout, all ye Israel!

Rejoice, daughter, and exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem!

¹⁵ The Judge of all Flesh has taken away the judgments against you, and has turned away your enemies, daughter.

The sovereign of Israel, Creator of the Heavens and Earth, is in your midst, daughter; no longer shall you fear evil.

¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

Fear not, Zion; do not let your hands grow weak, daughter.

¹⁷ The Ageless One, your God, is in your midst, daughter,

a warrior who will deliver salvation;

who will rejoice over you with gladness, daughter,

God will renew you in love, daughter;

God will exult over you, daughter, with loud singing.

¹⁸ Those who are grieved on account of the festivals,

I will remove from you, daughter,

so, daughter, that you will not bear their reproach.

¹⁹ I will deal with all your oppressors, daughter, at that time.

And I will save the lame and gather the outcast,

and I will change their shame into praise

and renown in all the earth.

²⁰ At that time I will bring you all home, at the time when I gather all of you;

for I will make you all renowned and praised

among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes before all of your eyes,
says the God Who Is Salvation.

Canticle 15, the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55

- ⁴⁶ "My soul magnifies the Holy One,
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, *
⁴⁸ for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of God's own servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed; *
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is God's name.
⁵⁰ God's loving-kindness is for those who fear God *
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ God has shown the strength of God's own arm; *
God has scattered the arrogant in the intent of their hearts.
⁵² God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, *
and lifted up the lowly;
⁵³ God has filled the hungry with good things, *
and sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ God has helped God's own child, Israel, *
a memorial to God's mercy,
⁵⁵ just as God said to our mothers and fathers,
to Abraham and Hagar and Sarah, to their descendants forever."

2 Corinthians 6:16 For we are the temple of the living God; as God said:

- "I will dwell in them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people"*
¹⁷ Therefore, *"Come out from them,
and be separate from them"* says the Holy One,
and *"Touch nothing unclean"*,
then *"I will take you all in"*
¹⁸ and *"I will be your parent,
and you shall be my daughters and sons"*?
says the Almighty Everlasting God.

Luke 1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town of Galilee, Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the name of the virgin was Mary.²⁸ And the angel came to Mary and said, "Rejoice, favored one! The Most High God is with you." ²⁹ Now, she was troubled by the angel's words and pondered what sort of greeting this was.³⁰ Then the angel said to her, "Fear not Mary, for you have found

favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Sovereign God will give him the throne of his ancestor David.³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his sovereignty there will be no end." ³⁴ Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have not known a man intimately?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit, She will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the one born will be holy. He will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, Elizabeth your kinswoman has even conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for she who was called barren.³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the woman-slave of God; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel left her.

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

Bat Zion (or Jerusalem) can mean both Daughter Zion, the city, or a daughter of Zion, a woman from the city. In Isaiah 40:9 reading "daughter of " reveals a female prophet crying out to Jerusalem (compare NRSV and JPS translations). Because the addressee is feminine, all of the verbs to her are also feminine; I reproduce "daughter" in places where English masks the frequency of feminine address. Verse 18 is notoriously difficult to translate, see the discussion in my commentary on Zephaniah in the *Wisdom* series.

In Luke 1:55, the inclusive plural *pateras* can mean ancestors, parents or fathers. Since God's promises were not just to Abraham and God also made promises to Hagar (Genesis 16:10-13; 21:17-18) and for Sarah (through Abraham in Genesis 17:15-16), I have expanded "Abraham and his descendants" to reflect that. Abraham also had children with Keturah; their offspring would also be beneficiaries of the promises made to Abraham. However, God does not make a promise directly to her in the scriptures.

In Mary's linguistic and cultural world, in Hebrew and Aramaic, the spirit is feminine; the Syriac text uses a feminine verb for the spirit in Luke 1:35. Also in her world, there was no distinction between servant and slave. Mary is not saying she will wait on God hand and foot in verse 38; she is giving God ownership of her body, ownership slaveholders claimed without consent.

Preaching Prompts

In its original context daughter Zion was most likely the city. Here I suggest hearing it through the experience of the pregnant Virgin reflecting on her scriptures in light of her experience.

The appointed Epistle is a collection of verse fragments strung together, many out of context. The phrases are inexact quotes, whether looking at Hebrew or Greek antecedents, shaped for deployment here. Leviticus 26:11-12 has the same sense as

in 2 Corinthians 6:16. Verse 17 of the Epistle links a fragment found in both Ezekiel 20:34 and 20:41 to a line from Isaiah 52:11 calling for a second Exodus from Egypt. Verse 18 takes God's promise to David for Solomon to be his father in 2 Samuel 7:14 and makes it second person plural, "your all" instead of "his," and adds "daughters" to the altered text in Greek.

Angelic lore is largely pseudepigraphal beginning in 2 Esdras. While Gabriel and Michael appear in the Hebrew Bible (Daniel 8:16; 9:21; 10:13, 21; 12:1), they are not identified as angels. However, Raphael is called an angel in Tobit 5:4.

There is some irony in the pains the Gospel takes to connect Jesus to David and the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the choice of translators to anglicize the names of the holy family and disciples, undermining their Jewish identity. A further irony is that Jesus's Davidic heritage rests on Joseph's genealogy and the supposition that Mary is from the same tribe, as was common but not required. Mary's only relative in the text, Elizabeth, is the wife of a priest. Priests married within the priestly line nearly exclusively, making her likely a *bat cohen*, priest's daughter as well. What this means for Mary's heritage and that of Jesus is unclear.

PALM SUNDAY—LITURGY OF THE PALMS

Matthew 21:1-11; Psalm 118:19-29

Matthew 21:1 Now they had come near Jerusalem and reached Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village before you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; release them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Son of Woman needs them.' And they will send them immediately." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion,
*'Look, your sovereign is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'*"

⁶ The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them;⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.⁹ The crowds that were going before him and the one following were shouting, saying:

*"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Holy One!
Hosanna in the highest!"*

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was shook, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Psalm 118:19-29

- ¹⁹ Open for me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter them
and give thanks to the Living God.
- ²⁰ This is the gate to the Holy Presence;
the righteous shall enter through it.
- ²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and you have become my salvation.
- ²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
- ²³ This is Our God's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
- ²⁴ This is the day that the Font of Creation has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
- ²⁵ Ah! Holy One, help, save us!
Ah! Holy One, haste, deliver us!
- ²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Most High God.
We bless you from the house of the Holy One.
- ²⁷ The Faithful One is God,
and she has given us light.
Bind the festal offering with ropes of branches,
up to the horns of the altar.
- ²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will exalt you.
- ²⁹ Give thanks to the Holy One, for she is good,
for her faithful love endures forever.

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

The text has Jesus use the title "Lord" of himself in Matthew 21:3. In keeping with the aims of this volume, expansive and explicitly feminine language for God and humanity, I employ a translation of the messianic title Jesus often uses for himself here. (See commentary on Advent 1, Year A.) In verse 5 the Gospel quotes Zechariah 9:9, seeming not to understand the poetic parallelism that describes the same animal in two ways; he appears to sit on both in verse 7. The Gospel adds an introduction to "the daughter of Zion," adding the definite article not common in this

expression in Greek, begging the question to whom it is addressed. In verse 9, the crowd chants Psalm 118:26, a procession psalm for entering the temple also recited during Passover.

The assonant and alliterative poetry of Psalm 118:25 (the "Hosanna") verse, is difficult to reproduce: *Ana Ya hoshia na; Ana Ya chatzlicha na*. The "hosanna" pronunciation comes from the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew. Verse 27 is unclear in a number of places: "bind the feast with clouds." Since portions of sacrificial animals were eaten, "festal offering" is likely; and "ropes" and "branches" are each one letter away from "clouds." "God's faithful love endures forever" is one of the oldest liturgical refrains in the Hebrew Bible, see the opening and closing of this psalm and Psalm 118.

Preaching Prompts

While this is not traditionally a preaching occasion, one may choose to frame the liturgy with a brief preface or blurb in the leaflet, or alternatively address it in the subsequent sermon (if the liturgy precedes another service).

The ubiquity of monarchy in the scriptures and the worlds from which they emerge reflect more about the humans who received and recorded, and translate and interpret them, than it does about God who inspired and speaks through them. Monarchs were the most powerful persons in those worlds and they and their power, reigns, and regalia provided a vocabulary for talking about God. Jesus subverts that to some degree by reinterpreting that title in such a way as to perplex even those who knew him best.

These lessons provide an opportunity to talk about our language and imagery for God in and out of the Bible (and this lectionary) and its impact on persons in terms of class, gender, the performance of gender, and sexual orientation.

PALM SUNDAY—LITURGY OF THE WORD

/safal/ 49:5-16; Psalm 22:1-11; Galatians 3:23-4:7;
Mark 14:32-15:47 (or Mark 14:32-52)

Those who prefer to continue the Gospel through the Passion will find the successive verses in the Good Friday readings.

Isaiah 49:5 And now says the Author of Life,
who formed me in the womb to be God's slave
to return Jacob back to God,
and that Israel might be gathered to God;
I am honored in the sight of the Holy One of Old,
and my God is my strength.

⁶ God says,

"It is too light a thing that you should be my slave
to raise up the tribes of Jacob [the line of Rebekah],
and to restore the survivors of Israel [born of Rachel and Leah, and Bilhah and Zilpah],
I will give you as a light to the nations,
for it will be that my salvation reaches to the end of the earth."

⁷ Thus says the Faithful One,

the Redeemer of Israel, God's holy one,
to one despised, abhorred by the nations,
the slave of rulers,
"Queens and kings shall see and arise,
princes and princesses, and they too shall prostrate themselves,
on account of the Fire of Sinai, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

⁸ Thus says the Mighty God :

In a favorable time have I answered you,
on a day of salvation have I helped you;
I have kept you and given you
as a covenant to the people,
to establish the land,
to apportion the desolate portions;

⁹ saying to the prisoners, "Go free!"

to those who are in darkness, "Let yourselves be seen."
Along the paths they shall pasture,
and on all the bare heights shall be their pasture.

¹⁰ They shall not hunger nor shall they thirst,

neither shall heat nor sun strike them down,
for the one who mother-loves them shall lead them,
and by springs of water shall guide them.

¹¹ And I will turn all my mountains into a pathway,
and my highways shall be raised up.

¹² Look! These shall come from far away,

and see! These from the north and from the sea to the west,
and these from the southland of Syene.

¹³ Sing for joy, you heavens, and exult O earth;

let mountains break forth in singing!
For the Tender Loving One has comforted God's people,
and will mother-love God's suffering ones.

¹⁴ But Zion said, "The EVERLASTING God has forsaken me,
my Sovereign has forgotten me."

- ¹⁵ Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or mother-love for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I, no, I will not forget you.
- ¹⁶ See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are continually before me.

Psalms 22:1-11

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from my deliverance, from the words of my groaning?
- ² My God, I cry by day, and you do not answer;
and by night, and there is found no rest for me.
- ³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- ⁴ In you our mothers and fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you rescued them.
- ⁵ To you they cried, and were freed;
in you they trusted, and they were not put to shame.
- ⁶ But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by humankind, and despised by people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock me;
they flap their lips at me, they shake their heads:
- ⁸ "Commit yourself to the Saving One; let God rescue
and deliver the one in whom God delights!"
- ⁹ Yet it was you who drew me from the womb;
keeping me safe on my mother's breast.
- ¹⁰ On you was I cast from birth,
and since my mother's womb you have been my God.
- ¹¹ Be not far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is none to help.

Galatians 3:23 Now before faith came, we were garrisoned and guarded under the law until the faith that was coming should be revealed.²⁴ Therefore the law was our instructor until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to an instructor,²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all daughters and sons of God through faith. ²⁷ So, as many of you as were baptized into Christ are clothed in Christ.

²⁸ There is no Jew or Greek, there is no slave or free, there is no male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's [and Sarah's] offspring, heirs according to the promise.

^{4:1} say that as long as heirs are minors, they are no better than slaves, though they are the masters of all; ² but they remain under guardians and trustees until the time set by the father.

³ So also for us; while we were minors, we were enslaved by the constitutive elements of the world.⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent God's own Son, born of a woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption like children.⁶ And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of God's own Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

[Mark 14:32] Jesus and his disciples went to a place called Gethsemane and he said to his disciples, "You all sit here while I pray." ³³ He took with him Peter and James and John and began to be deeply moved and distressed. ³⁴ And said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; you all stay here, and stay awake." ³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if possible, the hour might pass from him.³⁶ He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you do." ³⁷ Jesus came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not stay awake one hour?" ³⁸ Stay awake and pray that you all may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same thing.⁴⁰ And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹ Jesus came a third time and said to them, "Are you all sleeping, still, and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come. Look! The Son of Woman is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us go. See, my betrayer is at hand."

⁴³ And instantly, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests, the religious scholars, and the elders.⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I kiss is he; seize him and lead him away safely." ⁴⁵ Then when Judas came, he went up to Jesus immediately and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁴⁶ Then they laid hands on him and took him. ⁴⁷ But one of the bystanders drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to them, "Is it as for a bandit you all have come out with swords and clubs to seize me?" ⁴⁹ Daily I was with you all in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." ⁵⁰ All of them deserted him and fled.⁵¹ A certain young man was following Jesus, with just a fine cloth on his naked flesh. They caught hold of him, ⁵² but he forsook the fine cloth and ran off naked.]

⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest; and they assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the religious scholars.⁵⁴ Now Peter followed him from afar into the courtyard of the high priest and was sitting with the attendants, warming himself at the fire.⁵⁵ Now the chief priests and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death but found none.

⁵⁶ For many gave false testimony against him, yet their testimony did not agree.⁵⁷ Some rose and gave false testimony against him, saying,⁵⁸ "Vfell, we heard him say, 'I will destroy this

hand-made temple, and in three days I will build another, that is not hand-made.”⁵⁹ But even on this point their testimony did not agree.⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and said to Jesus, “No response? What are they testifying against you?”⁶¹ But he was silent and answered nothing. Again, the high priest spoke to him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”⁶² Jesus said, “I am; and

*‘you. will see the Son of Woman
seated at the right hand of the Power,’
and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”*

⁶³ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? ⁶⁴ You all have heard his blasphemy! How does it appear to you?” All of them condemned him, “Guilty! This is death!”⁶⁵ Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophesy!” Then the attendants took him and beat him.

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the high priest’s enslaved girls came by.⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You were also with the Nazarene, Jesus.”⁶⁸ But Peter denied it, saying, “I do not know or even understand what you are saying.” Then he went out into the front courtyard. Then the cock crowed.⁶⁹ And the enslaved girl, on seeing him, began to say to the bystanders again that this man was one of them.⁷⁰ But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders said to Peter again, “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.”⁷¹ But he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this person you are talking about.”⁷² And suddenly the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered the thing Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he threw himself down and sobbed.

^{15:1} As soon as it was morning, the chief priests took a counsel with the elders and religious scholars and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.² Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Judeans?” He answered him saying, “You say so.”³ Then the chief priests accused him of many things.⁴ But Pilate asked him again, “Have you no reply? See how many charges they bring against you.”⁵ But Jesus made no further reply, thus Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now at the festival Pilate used to release one prisoner to them, whoever they asked.⁷ Now there was a man called Barabbas in prison with the rebels who in the rebellion had committed murder.⁸ So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom.⁹ Then he responded to them saying, “Do you all want me to release the King of the Judeans to you?”¹⁰ For he recognized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over.¹¹ Then the chief priests stirred up the crowd that instead Barabbas might be released for them.¹² Pilate again responded to them, “What then do you wish me to do with the one you call the King of the Judeans?”¹³ They shouted more [than before], “Crucify him!”¹⁴ Pilate asked them, “Why, for doing what evil?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!”¹⁵ So Pilate, wanting to satiate the crowd, released Barabbas to them; then he handed Jesus over for flogging and to be crucified.

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the property, which is the military headquarters, and they called together the entire cohort.¹⁷ And they clothed him in purple, and they put on him thorns woven into a crown.¹⁸ And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Judeans!”¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt in homage to him.²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple and put his clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

²¹ They compelled a passerby, a certain Simon of Cyrene who was coming from the countryside, to carry his cross; he was the father of Alexander and Rufus.²² Then they brought Jesus to the Golgotha place (which means Skull Place).²³ And they offered him myrrh wine, but he did not take it.²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his clothes casting lots among themselves for what each would take.

²⁵ It was the third hour [past dawn] when they crucified him.²⁶ The writing above of the accusation against him read, “The King of the Judeans.”²⁷ And with him they crucified two revolutionaries, one on his right and one on his left.

²⁹ The passersby reviled him, shaking their heads and saying, “Ha! You would destroy the temple and build it in three days—³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!”³¹ In the same way the chief priests, with the religious scholars, mocked him among themselves and said, “He saved others; himself he is unable to save.”³² The Messiah, the King of Israel! Come down from the cross now that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also demeaned him.

³³ Now when it was the sixth hour [of the day, or noon], darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour [of the day, about three in the afternoon].³⁴ At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani*” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling Elijah.”³⁶ And someone ran and filled a sponge with vinegary wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Whit, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.”³⁷ Then Jesus gave a great cry and breathed out a final time.³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.³⁹ Now when the centurion, stationed facing him, saw that in this way Jesus breathed out at the end, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

⁴⁰ There were also women watching from a distance; among them were Mary the Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome.⁴¹ These women followed him and ministered to him when he was in Galilee, and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

⁴² When evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation—the day before the sabbath—⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who himself was also waiting for the reign of God, went boldly to Pilate and requested for the body of Jesus.⁴⁴ Then Pilate wondered that Jesus was now dead, and summoning the centurion asked him whether he had been dead for some time.⁴⁵ When he learned it from the centurion, he gave the corpse to Joseph.⁴⁶ Then Joseph bought a fine cloth, and taking him down, wrapped him in the fine cloth, and put him in a tomb that had been hewn out of rock. He then

rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.⁴⁷ Mary the Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was put.

PROCLAMATION

Owing to the length of the Palm Sunday Gospel, the commentary section will be longer than for other readings.

Text Notes

The same word is used in Isaiah 49:5 and verse 7, yet NRSV, JPS, and CEB all translate Israel as God's "servant" but the nation as the "slave of rulers." "Servant" occludes the expectation of complete domination/submission, including ability to maim, kill, breed, rape, impregnate, and sell the person without consequence.

Hebrew plurals like "monarchs/kings" and "princes" in Isaiah 49:7 are inclusive. I have expanded both to reflect the presence of female royals in and at the head of some nations. "Go free" in verse 9 uses the primary verb of the exodus. Syene, or Sinim, in verse 12 is an Egyptian town with a record of some Israelite settlement.

In Isaiah 49:5 and 15, "womb" is the more generic "belly" used broadly for women and men; it is also found in Psalm 22:9-10 (verse 10 also uses the more common specific "womb"). In Isaiah 49:13-15 it is paired with "mother-love" (the verb whose root is that same word) and children, including one at the breast, in verse 15. Translating this as "compassion" (NRSV), "pity" (CEB), or just "love" (JPS) eviscerates the intentionally crafted portrait of God as a mother, accomplished despite use of masculine forms.

The second phrase in Psalm 22:3 can also be translated as "you are holy, enthroned, the Praise of Israel." In verse 9 the Divine Midwife "extracts" the baby; she does not just "catch" him, perhaps suggesting a difficult birth.

In Galatians 3:23ff translation choices can present the law in an antagonistic and ultimately anti-Jewish manner as "prison" and "disciplinary" (see NRSV). However, *ephrourometha* in verse 23 means to set a guard or garrison; that is a protective action. And in verse 24, a *paidagōgos* is a teacher; *torah* itself means "teaching" and "revelation" more than "law."

One of the verbs that describes Jesus's emotions in Mark 14:33 is only used in that place, making it difficult to define; suggestions range from "amazed" to "gloomy" to "distressed" to "troubled." In verse 34, Jesus expresses his sorrow using the language of Psalms 42:11 and 43:5 in Greek: "my soul is cast down." Similarly, the description of soldiers gambling for Jesus's clothes matches the wording of Psalm 22:18 in Greek. Judas is concerned that Jesus's arrest be done "safely" in verse 44; he is a complex character with mixed motives. The "attendants" in verse 54 can provide a number of services; the word is more "assistant" than "guard," as is commonly translated.

The enslaved "girls" in Mark 14:66-69 could be young women. "Girl" is often used to denote their minor legal status. The criminals crucified with Jesus in Mark 15:27 could have been thieves or highway bandits; the root of *leštes* is stolen goods. However, the semantic range includes revolutionaries and insurrectionists. This latter understanding may be what is meant given mention of imprisoned rebels (using a different word, *stasiastes*) in verse 7. The vinegar wine in verse 36 draws on Psalm 69:21. The nature of the women's ministry to Jesus in 15:41 should be understood as wholistic: spiritual and material. Many Greek manuscripts use the more explicit *ptōma*, "corpse," rather than *soma*, "body," for Jesus's remains in Mark 15:44.

Preaching Prompts

As Holy Week begins, one may wish to explore God's sorrow over a world that crucifies as well as over a crucified beloved child, a mother's sorrow as well as a father's. In Isaiah 49, God is the divine mother whose love emanates from her womb, most specifically in verses 13 and 14.

Contemporary discomfort with slave language should not overshadow the degree to which it was normative in the biblical text and its theologies. For the biblical ear, "slave of God" and "slave of Sarah" were equally acceptable and nonremarkable. The linguistic distinction between being a "servant" of God and being held in slavery is entirely artificial to the text and permits slave-holding societies to embrace servitude of God as pertaining to them while holding others in bondage in a Active distinct category.

In Psalm 22 the most obvious divine feminine image is God as midwife and lactation guide in verse 9. There is also the birthing mother who has no voice and makes no cry. In verse 10 God seems to have become a foster parent for a perhaps abandoned child; the child is thrown (away?) on to God. God can be both midwife and foster mother here. We do not know if the birth mother cannot or will not keep her child. She can be preached in conversation with the reminder that women do abandon children in Isaiah 49, yet without demonization. In keeping with Palm Sunday, she can be read as giving her child over to God, whatever his fate.

Galatians 3:23-24 describes the law as a protective, not punitive, garrison and guard. Though addressing a Gentile Church on whom the Torah (or *torah* broadly) was never binding, Paul uses "we" with regard to the law. In a rhetorical flourish, Paul argues that the particularities that characterize individuals and communities no longer exist "in Christ," yet he continues to operate as though those categories continue and are normative. Yet our adoption and kinship does not require us to leave ourselves, our identities behind.

There are very few women and girls in the Passion narratives. Here in Luke there are girls or women held in slavery by the chief priest. There is missing the wife of

Simon of Cyrene, the Cross-Bearer; he is named with reference to his sons, but no mention is made of their mother.

The Passion narratives on Palm Sunday and Good Friday have been used to incite lethal physical violence against Jewish communities by the Church and its ministers. They have also been used to craft violent, anti-Semitic theologies that blame Jews for the death of Jesus, demean and defame Judaism, and deem it failed and its covenants replaced. It is important to acknowledge that history while repudiating it and repenting of it and affirming God's fidelity to all her covenants and all her peoples. It is essential to be in conversation with our Jewish neighbors and to listen more than speak. I strongly recommend reading the scriptures in conversation with Jewish scholars, for example with the *Jewish Study Bible* and *Jewish Annotated New Testament*.

MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

Jeremiah 31:8-13; Psalm 22:19-31; Hebrews 1:1-9; John 12:1-7

Jeremiah 31:8 Look! I am going to bring them from the land of the north,

and I will gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them blind and lame, pregnant and birthing, together,
a great assembly, they shall return here.

⁹ With weeping they shall come,

and with consolations I will lead them back,

I will have them walk by streams of water,

on a straight path, they shall not stumble on it;

for I am a parent to Israel,

and Ephraim is my firstborn.

¹⁰ Hear the word of the Holy One, you nations,

and declare it in the islands far **off**;

say, "The One who scattered Israel will gather him,

and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."

¹¹ For the Faithful One has ransomed Jacob [of Rebekah's line],⁹
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

¹² They shall come and they shall sing on the heights of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Gracious God,
over the grain, and over the new wine, and over the oil,
and over the young of flock and herd;
their souls shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

¹³ Then shall young women rejoice in dance,
and young men and elders together.

I will turn their mourning to joy;

I will comfort them, and give them joy for sorrow.

Psalm 22:19-31

¹⁹ Saving God, be not far away!

My strength, hasten to help me!

²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the clutch of the dog!

²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion!

For on the horns of the wild oxen you have responded to me.

²² I will tell of your name to my sisters and brothers;
in the midst of the congregation, I will praise you:

²³ You who revere the Fount of Life, praise her!

all the offspring of Leah and Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah glorify her.

Stand in awe of her all you of Rebekah's line.

²⁴ For she did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;

she did not hide her face from me,

and when I cried to her, she heard.

²⁵ On your account is my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who revere her.

²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek her shall praise the Mother of All.
May your hearts live forever!

²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Well spring of Life;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before her.

²⁸ For sovereignty belongs to the SHE Who Is Holy,
and she rules over the nations.

²⁹ They consume and they bow down,
all the fat ones of the earth before her,
they bend their knees,
all who go down to the dust,
and cannot save their soul.

³⁰ Later descendants will serve her;
future generations will be told about our God,

³¹ they will go and proclaim her deliverance
to a people yet unborn,
saying that she has done it.

Hebrews 1:1 Many times and in many ways God spoke to our mothers and fathers through the prophets, female and male.² In these last days God has spoken to us by a Son, whom God appointed heir of all there is, and through whom God created the worlds.³ The Son is the brilliance of God's glory and reproduction of God's very being, and the Son undergirds all there is by his word of power. When the Son had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,⁴ having become as much greater than the angels as the name he inherited is more excellent than theirs.

⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say,
"You are my Child; today I have begotten you 1"

Or this,

"I will be their Parent, and they will be my Child!"

⁶ Then again, when God brings the firstborn into the world, God says,

"Let all the angels of God worship him"

⁷ On the one hand of the angels God says,

*"God makes winds into celestial messengers,
 and flames of fire into God's ministers"*

⁸ But of the Son God says,

*"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
 and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your realm."*

⁹ *You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
 therefore God, your God, has anointed you
 with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."*

John 12:1 Now Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was who he raised from the dead.² There they gave a dinner for him and Martha served while Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.⁵ Mary took a pound of a balm made of expensive pure nard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the scent of the perfume.⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, the one who was about to betray him, said, ⁵ "Why was this balm not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ Now he said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the moneybag and whatever was put into it, he stole. ⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. It was for the day of my burial that she kept it."

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

In Jeremiah 31:9, arguably "consolations" became "supplications," the literal reading, when a letter was dropped.

In Psalm 22:23, "the offspring of Jacob" are identified by their mothers/ matriarchs, enslaved and free; similarly "Rebekah's line" stands in for "the offspring of Israel."

In keeping with the aims of this work, foremothers and female prophets are made explicit in Hebrews 1:1. *Megalosynes*, "Majesty," in Hebrews 1:3, as a feminine noun, marks a rare use of feminine language to describe God or her attributes in the New Testament.

The following verses quote the earlier scriptures widely and often out of context: Hebrews 1:5 quotes Psalm 2:7 where the anonymous psalmist says God told them they were God's begotten child, probably initially heard with regard to David. The next quote is from 2 Samuel 7:14 (and its duplicate, 1 Chronicles 17:13), where the promise of God to be a parent to a future monarch is to one of David's descendants. Given the difficulty of asserting biological gender for heavenly beings, I use the neuter "child" and "parent" in verse 5. Verse 6 quotes Deuteronomy 32:43 and Psalm 97:7 from Greek where the original "gods" were replaced by "angels" to correct toward a pure monotheism. Verse 7 quotes Psalm 104:4, playing on the primary meaning of angel, "messenger." Verses 8-9 quote Psalm 45:6-7 where the first verse refers to God but the second refers to the king whose wedding psalm it is (Ahab since Jezebel is the only princess of Tyre to marry into Israel).

Preaching Prompts

A second iteration of the woman who anoints Jesus is traditional on Monday of Holy Week, an earlier version having been read on the last Sunday of Lent. Today the woman is Mary, sister of Martha and the resurrected Lazarus in John. The Jeremiah 31 reading offers the hope of consolation for those who mourn, just as Lazarus's resurrected body at the table with Jesus does.

The context of Jeremiah 31 is God's promise to restore Israel after the Babylonian devastation; our reading affirms the faithfulness of God to her people in each generation, building on, not replacing the earliest reading. In some ways Jeremiah 31 is an answer to the plea for salvation in Psalm 22. It is important to remember that "salvation" in the Hebrew Scriptures is physical salvation from death or other danger, and normally national or corporate. Paraphrased by Jesus (his recitation does not quite match Hebrew or Greek versions in either Matthew 27:46 or Mark 15:34), Psalm 22 became the Psalm of the Cross, a principal text of Holy Week.

Hebrews 1 calls us back to the fidelity of God who spoke through prophecy but now speaks through her Holy Child. (Some have concluded from this that prophecy came to an end; however, prophets appear scattered throughout the New Testament.) The amount of proof-texting in this short section raises the eyebrows of a biblical scholar, yet reminds us how flexible ancient interpreters found the scriptures. That flexibility enabled them to reinterpret them in light of Jesus while still holding their previous understandings. Christians have all too often abandoned contextual readings, seizing upon this type of exegesis and neglecting other biblical models.

The last line of the Gospel points us to the tomb, where we need must linger,

TUESDAY IN HOLY WEEK²

Isaiah 49:1-6; Psalm 123; Philippians 3:17-21; Matthew 21:12-17

Isaiah 49:1 Listen to me, you coastlands,

give heed, you peoples from far away!

The Life-Breath of Creation called me from the womb,
from the innermost parts of my mother God made my name known.

² God made my mouth like a sharp sword,
in the shadow of God's own hand did God hide me;

God made me a polished arrow,
in God's own quiver did God hide me away.

³ And God said to me, "You are my slave,
Israel, the one in whom I will be glorified."

⁴ But I said, "In vain have I labored,
I have spent my strength in futility and vanity;
yet surely my judgment is with the Righteous Judge,
and my recompense with my God."

⁵ And now says the Author of Life,
who formed me in the womb to be God's slave
to return Jacob back to God,
and that Israel might be gathered to God;
I am honored in the sight of the Holy One of Ql d,
and my God is my strength.

⁶ God says,
"It is too light a thing that you should be my slave

to raise up the tribes of Jacob [the line of Rebekah]
and to restore the survivors of Israel [born of Rachel and Leah, and Bilhah and Zilpah].
I will give you as a light to the nations,
for it will be that my salvation reaches to the end of the earth."

Psalm 123

- ¹ To you I lift up my eyes,
the one who is enthroned in the heavens!
- ² See! It is just as the eyes of the enslaved
are toward the hand of their lord,
as the eyes of an enslaved girl
toward the hand of her mistress,
just so our eyes look to the Mighty One our God,
until God shows us favor.
- ³ Have mercy upon us, Merciful One, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than our fill of contempt.
- ⁴ Our soul has had more than its fill
of the scorn of those who are at ease,
of the contempt of the proud.

Philippians 3:17 Become imitators of me together sisters and brothers, and observe those who walk according to our example.¹⁸ For many of them—as I have often told you all, and now I tell you even with tears—walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, Jesus Christ, our Sovereign,²¹ who will transform the body of our humiliation that it may bear the likeness of the body of his glory, through the force that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Matthew 21:12 Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and the tables of the moneychangers he overturned, as well as the station of those who sold doves.¹³ He said to them, "It is written,

*'My house shall be called a house of prayer';
but you all are making it a den of robbers?*

¹⁴ And they came to him in the temple, those who were blind and disabled, and he cured them.¹⁵ Now when the chief priests and the religious scholars saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the girls and boys crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry.¹⁶ They said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read.

2. Careful observers may have noticed that both the principal Easter service and Tuesday in Holy Week use the same Isaiah 49 reading. I translated the reading twice, forgetting that I had previously translated it. The two different versions offer a window into the craft and flexibility of translation and the range of choices in some instances.

*'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise for yourself:'''*

¹⁷ He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

In Isaiah 49:4, the poet-prophet speaking in the first person emphasizes redundantly, "I, I said" what she or the unidentified servant about whom she is prophesying said to God upon being commissioned in God's service. Writing long past the time of Isaiah proper, the gender and identity of the prophet is unknown. (I discuss the possibility of the author being a woman in *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel*)

Psalm 123 makes explicit the psalmists' understanding that God is a slave-master, and we, women and men alike, are God's slaves. This understanding pervades the scriptures. Linguistically, the human slave-master, "lord," in verse 2 is the same word as "Lord," most often used to represent God's unpronounceable name formed of the letters YHWH; this volume eschews that language while wrestling with its lingering theology. Philippians 3:20 uses the Greek equivalent for lord, *kyrion*, for Jesus.

In Philippians 3:19, the belly, *koilia*, the mark of one of the carnal obsessions of the "earthly" believer, can refer to innards broadly or to the womb, thereby perhaps to gluttony or lust.

Where the Greek text has "children" in Matthew 21:14, I have specified "girls and boys"; girls have extremely low visibility in the scriptures but would have been present in the temple. There is no reason to presume that only boys acclaimed him given the plural form allows for the presence of girls.

Preaching Prompts

These texts emphasize the sovereignty of God and of Christ, calling attention to the great gulf between God and humanity in troubling and troublesome language. At the same time, they frame the story of the One who crossed and closed that gulf, looking more human than divine this week. We may be helped by remembering the Church writes from a position of vulnerability, believing in faith that it won't always be that way. Paul in particular is imprisoned. One might wish to think of the crucified Church looking to its own resurrection.

The various servants in later Isaiah are sometimes the nation, sometimes a coming monarch, sometimes a messiah, sometimes indeterminate. This passage speaks in messianic terms and was so understood by Christian readers.

As is often the case, the Epistle distinguishes physical, bodily, and earthly from what is spiritual and heavenly. It is worth remembering that there was a widespread

belief that Christ's return was imminent and we would soon have little use for this world. It is our task to interpret this text in light of our continuing reality and the season. Holy Week, in which the physicality of salvation is made manifest.

Matthew 21:13 fuses Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 into a single citation. Dr. Amy-Jill Levine helpfully reminds that a "den of robbers" is not a place where there is criminal activity, just as a lion's den is not where lions do their hunting and killing. It is the refuge, or abode, meaning that the moneychangers who were essential to proper functioning of the temple were not robbing people. She suggests that Jesus's rebuke like Jeremiah's before him was that the unrepentant had made the temple a social club rather than a place of prayer; she also notes that the table turning would have been a rather small demonstration given the scale of the complex (*Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week*, Chapter 2, "The Temple: Risking Righteous Anger").

Individual women are hard to locate in the Gospel reading but would have been among the worshippers, praying and making their own offering; some likely would have been among those Jesus healed. Jesus evokes but does not mention women when citing Psalm 8:2/3 in Greek (verse numbers vary by language): women birthed and nurse the infants who offer praise to God.

WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 John 2:7-14; Matthew 23:37-39

Ezekiel 17:22 Thus says the Sovereign God:

I myself will take a sprig of cedar
from its very top;
and I will place it;
from the topmost of its most tender branch
I will pluck it and I myself will plant it
on a high and lofty mountain.

²³ On the mountain height of Israel

I will plant it,
that it may lift up its boughs and bear fruit,
and become a noble cedar.
Under it every kind of bird shall live;
every kind of winged creature shall nest
in the shade of its branches.

²⁴ All the trees of the field shall know

that I am the Creator of All.

I bring low the high tree,
 I make high the low tree;
 I dry up the green tree
 and I make the dry tree sprout buds.
 I the Ageless God have spoken;
 I will make it so.

Psalm 36:5-10

- ⁵ Holy One, throughout the very heavens is your faithful love,
 your faithfulness beyond the clouds.
⁶ Your righteousness is like the eternal mountains,
 your judgments are like the mighty deep;
 you save humankind and animalkind alike. Faithful One.
⁷ How precious is your faithful love, O God!
 All the woman-born take shelter in the shadow of your wings.
⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house,
 and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;
 in your light we see light.
¹⁰ Extend your faithful love to those who know you,
 and your justice to the upright of heart!

1 John 2:7 Beloved, no new commandment do I write you all, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; that commandment is the word that you have heard.
⁸ Yet, I am writing you all a new commandment that is true in Christ and in you, because the shadow is passing away and the true light already shines. ⁹ Whoever says, "I am in the light," while hating a sister or brother, is in shadow still. ¹⁰ Whoever loves a sister or brother lives in the light, and in such a person there is no occasion for stumbling. ¹¹ But whoever hates another sister or brother is in shadow, walks in shadow, and does not know where to go, because shadow dims the eyes.

- ¹² I am writing to you, little children,
 because your sins are forgiven on account of Christ's name.
¹³ I am writing to you, mothers and fathers,
 because you know the one who is from the beginning.
 I am writing to you, young women and men,
 because you have conquered the evil one.
¹⁴ I write to you, children,
 because you know the Creator.
 I write to you, mothers and fathers,
 because you know the one who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young people,
 because you are strong
 and the word of God abides in you,
 and you have overcome the evil one.

Matthew 23:37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!³⁸ See, your house is left to you, desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you all, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Holy One.'"

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

In the psalm the noun *el*, God, is used as an adjective describing the mountains in verse 5.

Preaching Prompts

Today's lessons revolve around Jesus's journey to Jerusalem, where even on the way to his death, he expressed his longing to mother Jerusalem through its violent inclinations. In these lessons birds function as both images for a sheltering God and images for a huddled humanity and are themselves creatures of the natural world for whom God also cares.

Ezekiel 17:22-24 is a highly allegorical text that can be read as a description of a messianic figure who has noble (lofty) origins but is tender rather than hardened. The community founded around and beneath sheltering branches of this "tree" is diverse and flourishing. As in other prophetic texts, God brings low what is high and exalts what is low.

The psalm echoes the theme of God's faithfulness to bird and tree, extending it to all animals and all humanity. Here God is winged, sheltering all life within her wings.

The Epistle exhorts us to replicate the love God has for creation in our love for each other. It also offers a hint that the heaviness and shadow of Holy Week will give way to light.

Jesus's embrace of Jerusalem, its history and hopes, ugly realities, looming threats, sacred space, and all of its people, citizens, immigrants, pilgrims, and occupiers was all inclusive.- There is room for all in his embrace.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Exodus 15:11-21; Psalm 136:1-16; Hebrews 11:23-28; Matthew 26:17-56

Exodus 15:11 "Who is like you, Mighty One, among the gods?"

- Who is like you, resplendent in holiness,
revered praiseworthy, working wonders ?
- ¹² You stretched out your right hand,
the earth swallowed them.
- ¹³ You led, in your faithful love, the people whom you redeemed;
you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.
- ¹⁴ The peoples heard, they quaked;
pangs like labor seized the inhabitants of Philistia.
- ¹⁵ Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed;
the rulers of Moab, trembling seized them;
all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away.
- ¹⁶ Terror and dread fell upon them
by the might of your arm;
they became still as a stone
until your people. Redeeming God, passed by,
until the people whom you acquired passed by.
- ¹⁷ You brought them and planted them on the mountain of your own possession,
the place, Sheltering God, you made for your dwelling,
the sanctuary, Most High God, that your hands have established.
- ¹⁸ The Everlasting God will reign forever and ever."
- ¹⁹ The horse of Pharaoh and his chariots and charioteers went into the sea, and the
Mighty God turned the waters of the sea back upon them; but the daughters and sons of
Israel walked through the sea on dry ground.
- ²⁰ Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a hand-drum in her hand, and all the
women went out after her with hand-drums and with dancing.²¹ And Miriam sang to them,
women and men:
- "Sing to the Indomitable God who has triumphed triumphantly;
horse and rider God has thrown into the sea."

Psalm 136:1-16

- ¹ Give thanks to the Fount of Life, who is good,
for her faithful love is everlasting.
- ² Give thanks to the God of gods,
for her faithful love is everlasting.

- ³ Give thanks to the Majesty of Majesties,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ⁴ who alone does great wonders,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ⁵ who through insight made the heavens,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ⁶ to the one who spread out the land upon the waters,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ⁷ to the one who made the great lights,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ⁸ the sun to govern the day,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ¹⁰ who struck Egypt through their firstborn daughters and sons,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ¹² with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ¹³ who cut the Red Sea in two,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ¹⁴ and made Israel pass over through the midst of it,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ¹⁵ but churned Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
for her faithful love is everlasting;
- ¹⁶ who walked her people through the wilderness,
for her faithful love is everlasting.

Hebrews 11:23 By faith Moses was hidden after his birth by his mother and father for three months, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. ²⁴ By faith Moses, after he had grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter,²⁵ rather choosing ill-treatment with the people of God than enjoyment of the transitory pleasures of sin.²⁶ He considered abuse for the sake of the Messiah to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward.²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the anger of the king; for he persisted as though he saw the unseen.²⁸ By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, in order that the destroyer of the first-born would not touch the firstborn daughters and sons of Israel.

Matthew 26:17 On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city

to a certain person, and say, 'The Teacher says. My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" ¹⁹ So the disciples did just as Jesus instructed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰ When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve, ²¹ and while they ate, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." ²² And they became deeply grieved and each one began to say to him, "Not me, is it Rabbi?" ²³ He responded and said, "The one who dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me." ²⁴ Indeed, the Son of Woman goes away as it is written of him, but woe to the person by whom the Son of Woman is betrayed! It would have been better for that person not to have been born." ²⁵ Judas, who betrayed him, responded and said, "It wasn't me was it, Rabbi?" He replied, "You said it."

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and blessing it, he broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body."²⁷ Then he took a cup, and giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.²⁹ I tell you all, I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you all in the realm of my Abba."

³⁰ And when they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become scandalized to the point of desertion because of me this night; for it is written,

*'For I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*

³² But after I am raised, I will go ahead of you all to Galilee." ³³ Peter said to him, "Though all become scandalized and desert because of you, I will never desert you." ³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." ³⁵ Peter said to him, "Should it be necessary I die with you, I will not deny you." Then likewise said all the disciples.

³⁶ Then Jesus came with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "You all sit here while I go pray there."³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be grieved and distressed.³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; you all stay here, and stay awake with me." ³⁹ And going on a little, he fell on the ground and prayed saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not what I want but what you do." ⁴⁰ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, you all were not strong enough to stay awake with me one hour?"⁴¹ Stay awake and pray that you all may not come into the test; indeed, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² Again, for the second time, Jesus went away and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is not possible for this to pass lest I drink it, let your will be done." ⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.⁴⁴ So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying those words again. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep now and take your rest. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Woman is betrayed into the hands of sinners.⁴⁶ Get up, let us go. Look, my betrayer is at hand."

⁴⁷ While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came and with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests' and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I kiss is he; take him." ⁴⁹ At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Shalom, Rabbi!" and kissed him.⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, this is why you have come." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took him. ⁵¹ Suddenly, someone with Jesus reached out with his hand, drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Return your sword to its place; for all who choose the sword will perish by the sword." ⁵³ Do you think I am not able to ask my Abba, who will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ How then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must be thus? " ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Is it as for a bandit you all have come out with swords and clubs to seize me? Daily in the temple I sat teaching, and you did not arrest me."⁵⁶ But all this has happened, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

In Exodus 15:13, God's holy "abode" can also be understood as a pasture. The instrument Miriam and the other women play in verse 20 is a hand-drum, traditionally played by women across the ancient Afro-Asiatic world. "Tambourine" is anachronistic; they did not yet exist. In verse 21, Miriam exhorts the entire community or just the men—either can be indicated by the plural verb; however, the women are already following her according to the previous verse.

In Matthew 26:18, the grammar used for the person who hosts Jesus is masculine; it may be generic for "person" as translated above. In verse 22 and elsewhere "Rabbi" replaces "Lord" for direct address. In verse 29 I use "shalom" as the greeting, reflecting the culture of Jesus rather than the literary world of the Greek text.

Preaching Prompts

Passover and Holy Week and Easter are linked seasonally, thematically, and theologically. In some languages the word for Easter is "Pascha," making the connection more explicit. The two seasons are also connected by violence. In the Exodus and Passover stories, Israel, God's beloved, is saved, and God sends their oppressors to their deaths. Painfully, those deaths are celebrated in psalms and songs. In Holy Week, Jesus, God's beloved, is executed by his—still God's beloved—people's oppressors. His death will also be commemorated in songs of praise. Each offers an opportunity to reflect on who we say God is in conversation with the scriptures.

The necessity for Jesus to observe Passover is just one of many reminders that Jesus was a religiously observant Jew who never broke with Judaism. The singular

host in Matthew 26:18 seemingly obscures women from the household who would have done or helped with the actual work: cleaning, shopping, meal preparation, cooking, serving, and hosting. Since the more inclusive "disciples" is used rather than presumptively exclusively male "apostles," it is reasonable to expect the presence of women, particularly since these disciples prepared and served the meal (verse 19). Should female and male disciples have been present, it would be likely that children would be present given that the Passover is a family and community meal. (It should be noted that the form of the Passover meal at the time of Jesus, and even in the literary construction of the evangelists, was not a seder, a form which developed later.) The mention of "the twelve" in verse 20 does not foreclose the possibility of a larger group at more than one table.

GOOD FRIDAY

Judges 11:29-40; Psalm 22; Hebrews 12:1-4; Luke 22:14-23:56

Owing to the length of the Passion Gospel, the commentary section will be longer than for other readings.

Judges 11:29 The Spirit of the Holy One, she was upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh. He passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites.³⁰ And Jephthah vowed a vow to the Holy One of Old, and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand,³¹ then it shall be that the one who comes out—whoever comes out—of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return having finished with the Ammonites, shall be the Holy One's, I will offer them up as a burnt offering."³² Then Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them and the Holy One gave them into his hand.³³ He smote a mighty smiting on them from Aroer until you come to Minnith, twenty towns, and as far as Abel-keramim. So, the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

³⁴ Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah, and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with drums and with dancing. Only she, an only child; he had no son or daughter apart from her, ³⁵ When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said, "Ah! My daughter, you have knocked me down; you have become my trouble! I—I opened my mouth to the Holy One, and I cannot take back my vow." ³⁶ She said to him, "My father, you have opened your mouth to the Holy One, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, after that the Holy One has taken vengeance through you against your enemies, against the Ammonites." ³⁷ And she said to her father, "Let be done for me this thing: Release me for two months, and I will go and go down among the hills, and weep for my virginity, I and my women-friends." ³⁸ Then he said, "Go," and sent her away for two months. So, she left, she and her women-friends, and wept over her virginity among

the hills. ³³ And it was at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did to her what he vowed in his vow. She had never known a man and she became an observance in Israel.⁴⁰ Year by year the daughters of Israel would go out to tell the story of the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite for four days.

Psalm 22

- ¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me ?
Why are you so far from my deliverance, from the words of my groaning?
- ² My God, I cry by day, and you do not answer;
and by night, and there is found no rest for me.
- ³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- ⁴ In you our mothers and fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you rescued them.
- ⁵ To you they cried, and were freed;
in you they trusted, and they were not put to shame.
- ⁶ But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by humankind, and despised by people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock me;
they flap their lips at me, they shake their heads:
- ⁸ "Commit yourself to the Saving One; let God rescue
and deliver the one in whom God delights!"
- ⁹ Yet it was you who drew me from the womb;
keeping me safe on my mother's breast.
- ¹⁰ On you was I cast from birth,
and since my mother's womb you have been my God.
- ¹¹ Be not far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is none to help.
- ¹² Many bulls surround me,
mighty bulls of Bashan encompass me;
- ¹³ they open wide their mouths at me,
like a lion, ravaging and roaring.
- ¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are disjointed.
My heart is like wax;
it is melted within my being.
- ¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
in the dust of death you lay me down.

- ¹⁶ For dogs ire all around me;
a conclave of evildoers encircles me.
Like a lion they ravage my hands and feet.
- ¹⁷ I can count all my bones.
They gloat and stare at me.
- ¹⁸ They divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
- ¹⁵ Saving God, be not far away!
My strength, hasten to help me!
- ²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the clutch of the dog!
- ²¹ Save me from the mouth of the lion!
For on the horns of the wild oxen you have responded to me.
- ²² I will tell of your name to my sisters and brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
- ²³ You who revere the Fount of Life, praise her!
all the offspring of Leah and Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah glorify her.
Stand in awe of her all you of Rebekah's line.
- ²⁴ For she did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
she did not hide her face from me,
and when I cried to her, she heard.
- ²⁵ On your account is my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who revere her.
- ²⁶ The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek her shall praise the Mother of All.
May your hearts live forever!
- ²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Well Spring of Life;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before her.
- ²⁸ For sovereignty belongs to the She Who Is Holy,
and she rules over the nations.
- ²⁹ They consume and they bow down, all the fat ones of the earth before her,
they bend their knees, all who go down to the dust,
and cannot save their soul.
- ³⁰ Later descendants will serve her;
future generations will be cold about our God,
- ³¹ they will go and proclaim her deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that she has done it.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also put aside every weight and entangling sin, and with endurance let us run the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus the originator and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, its shame disregarding, and at the right hand of the throne of God has taken his seat.

³ Consider the one who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you all may not grow weary or your souls grow faint. ⁴ Not to this point have you all in your struggles against sin resisted to the point of shedding blood.

Luke 22:14 Now when the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you all before I suffer." ¹⁶ For I tell you all, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the realm of God. ¹⁷ Then Jesus took a cup, giving thanks. He said, "Receive this and divide it among yourselves;" ¹⁸ for I tell you all that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the reign of God comes." ¹⁹ Then Jesus took a loaf of bread, giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you all. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." ²¹ Look, the hand of the one who betrays me is with me, on the table. ²² For indeed the Son of Woman is going as it has been determined, but woe to the one by whom he is betrayed!" ²³ Then they began to ask among themselves, which one of them was about to do this.

²⁴ There was also an argument among them as to which one of them should be considered the greatest. ²⁵ But Jesus said to them, "The royals of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who have power over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you all, rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? Yet I am among you all as one who serves.

²⁸ "You are the ones who have remained with me in my trials," ²⁹ so then I covenant with you all, just as my Abba has covenanted with me, a royal inheritance, ³⁰ so that you all may eat and drink at my table in my realm, and you all will sit on thrones governing the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹ "Simon, Simon, listen! The Adversary has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you in order that your faith not fail, and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." ³³ Then he said to Jesus, "Rabbi, I am ready to go with you co prison and to death!" ³⁴ But Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, this day the cock will not have crowed three times, before you deny knowing me."

³⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Not a thing." ³⁶ He said to them, "But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who does not have one must sell his cloak and buy a sword. ³⁷ For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was counted among the lawless'; and indeed that which pertains to me is coming to its completion." ³⁸ So they said, "Rabbi, see, here are two swords." He replied to them, "It is it is sufficient."

³⁹ Then Jesus came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ When he was at the place, he said to them, "Pray that you not enter into testing." ⁴¹ Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw on bended knee and prayed, ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; yet not my will but yours be done." ⁴³ [Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ In agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground.] ⁴⁵ When he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping from grief ⁴⁶ And he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you not enter into testing."

⁴⁷ While he was speaking, suddenly there was a crowd, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him. ⁴⁸ But Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you betray the Son of Man?" ⁴⁹ When those around him saw what was happening, they asked, "Rabbi, should we strike with the sword?" ⁵⁰ Then one of them struck a person enslaved by the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus responded, saying, "Enough of this!" And he grasped his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the ones who had come for him, the chief priests, the officers assigned to the temple, and the elders, "Have you all come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit?" ⁵³ When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"

⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the house of the high priest. But Peter was following from afar. ⁵⁵ They kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together; Peter sat among them. ⁵⁶ Then a slave-girl, seeing him near the fire, looked intently at him and said, "This one also was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." ⁵⁸ After a time someone else, on seeing him, said, "You are one of them too." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" ⁵⁹ Then about an hour later another one insisted, "On the truth, this one was with him too, for he is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" Immediately, while he was speaking, the cock crowed. ⁶¹ The Savior turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Messiah, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." ⁶² And Peter went out and wept bitterly.

⁶³ Now the men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him; ⁶⁴ they also blindfolded him and asked him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" ⁶⁵ They yelled much other abuse at him.

⁶⁶ Then when day came, the elders of the people, both chief priests and religious scholars, gathered together and brought him to their council. ⁶⁷ They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us." Jesus replied to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, ⁶⁸ and if I ask a question, you will not answer.

⁶⁹ But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God."

⁷⁰ They all asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am." ⁷¹ Then they said, "What further testimony do we need; we have heard it ourselves from his own lips!"

^{23:1} Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. ² They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man leading our nation astray, forbidding paying taxes to the emperor, and saying that he is a messiah, a king." ³ Then Pilate questioned him saying, "Are you the king of the Judeans?" He answered, "I say so." ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests

and the crowds, "I find no cause for legal action against this person." ⁵ But they insisted saying, "Because he stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee to this very place."

⁶ Upon hearing this, Pilate asked if the person was a Galilean. ⁷ Now when he learned that he was under Herod's authority, he sent him to Herod, who himself was in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was extremely glad, for he had wanted to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and hoped to see him perform some sign. ⁹ Herod questioned him to his satisfaction, but Jesus answered him nothing. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the religious scholars stood by, vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Herod and his soldiers also treated him with contempt and mocked him, and he put a majestic robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That very moment Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; previously they had been each other's enemy.

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, "You brought me this person for leading the people astray. Look now, I have examined him in your presence and have not found this person guilty of your charges against him. ¹⁵ Nor has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look here, there is nothing deserving death in his case. ¹⁶ Therefore whip and release him."

¹⁸ Then they shouted together, saying, "Away with him! Release for us Barabbas!" ¹⁹ (Who for a rebellion that had taken place in the city, and for murder, had been put in prison.) ²⁰ Again Pilate addressed them, wanting to release Jesus, ²¹ but they kept shouting, saying, "Crucify, crucify him!" ²² A third time he said to them, "Why, what evil has he done? I have found nothing deserving death in him; I will, therefore, have him whipped and release him." ²³ But they insisted with loud shouts that he should be crucified, and their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate passed sentence to grant their demand. ²⁵ So he released the one in prison for rebellion and murder who they asked for, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

²⁶ As they led Jesus away, they seized Simon of Cyrene who was coming from the country, and they laid on him the cross to carry behind Jesus. ²⁷ A great number of people followed him, and a group of women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. ²⁸ But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, weep only for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ Look, the days are surely coming when they will say, 'Blessed are barren women, and wombs that have never given birth, and breasts that have never nourished.' ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.' ³¹ For if when the wood is green they do this, when it is dry what will happen?"

³² Now two criminals were also led away to be put to death with him. ³³ And when they came to the place called Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ [And then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."] *They divided his clothing by casting lots.* ³⁵ And the people stood there, watching; but the leaders ridiculed him, saying, "Others he saved; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, God's chosen one!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming and offering him vinegar wine, ³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Judeans, save yourself!" ³⁸ There was also an inscription above him, "This is the King of the Judeans."

³⁹ One of the criminals who was hanging there derided him, saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same death sentence?" ⁴¹ And we indeed justly, for what we have done merits what we are receiving, but this one has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your realm." ⁴³ Jesus replied to him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

⁴⁴ And it was now about the sixth hour [of the day, or noon], and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour [of the day, about three in the afternoon].⁴⁵ The sun's light ceased, and the curtain of the temple was torn in the middle.⁴⁶ Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Saying this then, he breathed out a final time.⁴⁷ Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he praised God saying, "This man was indeed innocent." ⁴⁸ And all the crowds that had gathered for this spectacle saw what had happened, beating their breasts, they turned back. ⁴⁹ All those who knew him stood far off; the women who had followed him from Galilee were watching these things.

⁵⁰ Now, take note, there was a man named Joseph, a member of the council, a good man and a righteous one. ⁵¹ He had not agreed with the council and their action. He was from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he was waiting for the reign of God.⁵² This man went to Pilate and requested the body of Jesus.⁵³ Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb hewn from rock where no one had yet lain. ⁵⁴ It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was dawning. ⁵⁵ The women followed, the ones who had come with him from Galilee, and they saw the tomb and how his body was placed.⁵⁶ Then the women returned, and prepared spices and balms.

On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

In Judges 11:31, the word *shalom* is used to indicate completion; the verb is used similarly in Modern Hebrew, for example, to complete a purchase or pay the check. In verse 37 and following, virginity symbolizes a stage of life; the grief is about not reaching the full measure of womanhood in her culture, marrying and mothering. In verse 40, the women gather to memorialize the woman sacrificed by her father; the verb is "recount," not as usually translated, "lament."

The psalmist locates her heart in her "belly" in verse 14. The verb for the violence done to the psalmist's hands and feet is missing. The LXX and traditional Jewish exegesis (Rashi) supply it.

Throughout this passion account "Rabbi" replaces "Lord," so as not to further divinize slave language. For third-person references, Messiah, Christ, and Savior will be used. Also, "enslaved person" rather than "slave" distinguishes between a person and their circumstances. The eucharistic instruction in Luke 22:16 can be translated as

"take" or "receive" (this cup). In the Hebrew Scriptures, to judge is to govern, administer, oversee, rule, and render justice. That full sense is intended in Luke 22:30, rather than passing judgment on Israel. The Adversary, the Satan, occurs in verse 31 with the definite article as in Hebrew where the term is a title or description; further contemporary notions of Satan are often postbiblical. Verses 43-44 in chapter 22 and verse 34 in chapter 23 are not present in all manuscripts as indicated by brackets.

In Luke 23:2 and 14, the more common translation "perverting" (rather "leading astray" here) has an unnecessary sexual connotation in English. Jesus's accusers testify that he says he is *a messiah*, there is no direct object. The term was not unique to Jesus. Hebrew *meshiach* is translated by Greek *christos*, David and Cyrus are each God's messiah, God's christ in the Hebrew and Greek versions of 2 Samuel 23:1 and Isaiah 45:1, which parallel Luke 23:35 where Jesus is disbelieved as the Christ/Messiah of God. The term, otherwise translated "anointed," also applies to monarchs and priests.

The robe with which Jesus was mocked in Luke 23:11 was "bright," or "shiny," suggesting rich embroidery or embellishment. Some less reliable manuscripts include averse 17 that is generally removed from critical translations: "He had to release one prisoner for them because of the festival."

Jesus quotes Hosea 10:8 where people ask for the mountains and hills to cover them in Luke 23:30. Verse 34, "Father, forgive them ..." is missing in many manuscripts. "Into your hands I commend my spirit" in verse 46 from Psalm 31:5 can also be translated "Into your hands I place my life." In verse 49, "those who stood" are a mixed gender as indicated by the text (grammatically, an all-male group is also possible); those who were watching were the women according to the feminine plural verb which excludes males. In contrast, the "they" who rested on the sabbath in verse 56 is inclusive.

A final note, the NRSV translation that Joseph of Arimathea, "who, though a member of the council" was "good and righteous" in Luke 23:50 excludes the whole of the Sanhedrin from the possibility of being good and righteous normatively. It is more than an uncharitable reading; it is anti-Judaistic and contributes to the anti-Semitic legacy and practices of the Church.

Preaching Prompts

This lectionary pairs the brutal deaths of Jephthah's daughter and Jesus. Each of their deaths is horrific; at one level, unnecessary slaughter, and each death is believed by someone in their respective story to serve a greater good. The disparate portraits and motives of the two fathers in relation to the death of their sole child offer fruitful space to address the crucifixion beyond the limits of atonement theology. Each of these texts requires us to ask who it is we think God is.

Jephthah, taken from his mother, a sex-worker, by his father Gilead, was rejected by his brothers and his father's wife. The troubled boy is not unrelated to the troubled

man. He is desperate for affirmation. Note that God had already given Jephthah victory over the Ammonites in Judges 11:32 before he makes a vow to “ensure” his win. Jephthah’s god is familiar to many: rigid and unyielding, apparently incapable of forgiving a rash vow, making human sacrifice the only acceptable appeasement Jephthah doesn’t test his theology; he doesn’t bargain with God like Abraham. He doesn’t offer himself as recipient of divine rage; he does not fight for the life of his child. His parenthood, like his theology, leaves much to be desired. As is the case in rigid, fundamentalist, patriarchal systems, women’s lives hold little value and are expendable. In spite of the lethal limits of the system in which she finds herself constrained, Jephthah’s daughter carves out space for herself and other women, illuminating and memorializing the deficiencies of a god like Jephthahs.

The psalmist’s God is lightyears away from the tyrant Jephthah worships, savior rather than destroyer. The psalmist’s God is part nurse, part midwife, trustworthy and praiseworthy. In Matthew and Mark on the cross Jesus turns to this God and this psalm, making it virtually inseparable from Good Friday. In Luke’s Passion, Jesus quotes Psalm 31, which shares the theme of trusting a trustworthy God for salvation.

Hebrews calls us to look to Jesus in the company of the faithful. Luke presents a roster of the faithful where women are more fully present than in other accounts. The spaces where women are missing are also instructive, such as a conversation about who is greater and injunction for the greatest to serve the least with apparently no women in the room. How different would the church have looked if that teaching were applied to systemic structural inequities between genders and cultures as a start?

Women are rendered invisible in the crowds that characterize the narrative, visible as enslaved girls, weeping women who accompany Jesus on his death march, and the women who were family, friends, followers, and disciples—some in more than one category—standing watch until the end. In spite of the gruesome horror, Jesus’s female companions and followers, family and friends, watched and did not turn away according to Luke 23:49; the text cannot make the same claim of the male apostles and disciples. These women were faithful in and beyond the horror that seemed to mark the end of their shared journey.

HOLY SATURDAY

Job 14:1-14; Psalm 31; Philippians 2:1-8; Matthew 27:57-66

Job 14:1 “Woman-born,
humankind is short of days and full of turmoil.

² They sprout like a flower and wither,
flee like a shadow and do not endure.

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³ Are your eyes, then, open to such a one as this ?
Do you bring me into judgment with you?

⁴ Who can make a clean thing out of an unclean thing?
No one.

⁵ If their days are fixed,
the number of their months is in your keeping,
it is because you have set their boundaries that they cannot pass.

⁶ Look away from them, and they sit at ease,
until they complete, like laborers, their days.

⁷ For there is hope for a tree,
if it is cut down, that it will be renewed,
and that its branches will not fail.

⁸ Its root grows old in the earth,
and its trunk dies in the dust.

⁹ At the scent of water it will bud
and put forth branches like a sapling.

¹⁰ Mortals die, and are carried away;
the woman-born perish, and where are they?

¹¹ As waters dissipate from a sea,
and a river dries up and is depleted,

¹² so a person lies down and does not rise again;
until the heavens are no more,
they will not awake or be stirred from their sleep.

¹³ Grant that you would hide me in Sheol,
that you would cover me until your wrath is past,
that you would set for me a boundary, and remember me.

¹⁴ If a person dies, will they live again?
All the days of my service I would wait
until my change come.

Psalm 31

¹ In you, O Lord, I take refuge;
let me not ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness rescue me.

² Incline your ear to me;
quickly deliver me.
Be for me a rock of refuge,
a stronghold to save me.

³ For you are my rock and my stronghold;
for your Name’s sake lead me and guide me.

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⁴ Free me from the net that is hidden for me,
 for you are my refuge.
⁵ Into your hand I commit my spirit:
 you have redeemed me. Ark of Safety, God of truth.
⁶ I hate those who attend to worthless vanity,
 but in the Mother of All I place my trust.
⁷ I will exult and I will rejoice in your faithful love,
 because you have seen my affliction;
 you have studied my souls sorrows.
⁸ Yet you have not handed me over to the hand of the enemy;
 you have set my feet in a broad place.
⁹ Be gracious to me. Mother Of Mercy, for I am in distress;
 my eyes waste away with angry tears,
 my soul and body too.
¹⁰ For my life is spent in sorrow,
 and my years in sighing;
 because of my iniquity my strength fails,
 and my bones waste away.
¹¹ Because of my enemies I am a disgrace to all,
 and to my neighbors, more,
 an object of dread to those who know me;
 those who see me in the street flee from me.
¹² I have been forgotten from the heart like one who is dead:
 I have become like a ruined vessel.
¹³ Because I hear the whispering of many,
 terror surrounds in their scheming together against me,
 as they plot to take my life.
¹⁴ Yet I, in you I trust, Faithful God ;
 I declare, "You are my God."
¹⁵ My times are in your hand;
 deliver me from the hand of my enemies and those who hound me.
¹⁶ Let your face shine upon your slave;
 save me in your faithful love.
¹⁷ Gracious God, let me not be put to shame,
 for I call upon you;
 let the wicked be put to shame;
 let them go silent to Sheol.
¹⁸ Let lying lips be stilled,
 the ones that speak against the righteous,
 arrogant with pride and contempt.

¹⁹ How great is your goodness
 that you have secured for those who fear you,
 and that you do for those who take refuge in you,
 before all the woman-born.
²⁰ In the shelter of your presence you shelter them
 from human plots;
 you hide them safe under your shelter
 from contentious tongues.
²¹ Blessed be the Mother of Creation,
 who is marvelous in her faithful love to me,
 a city under siege.
²² Now I, I had said in my alarm,
 "I am cut off from your sight."
 However, you heard my supplications
 when I cried to you for help.
²³ Love God Whose Name is Holy, all you her godly ones.
 The Faithful God preserves the faithful,
 and repays with interest the one who acts out of pride.
²⁴ Take courage, and she shall strengthen your hearts,
 all you who wait for the Mother of All.

Philippians 2:1 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any communion in the Spirit, any tenderness and compassion, ² make my joy complete. Be wise in the same way, having the same love, united and sharing the same wisdom. ³ Do nothing from self-interest, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you, look not to your own interests, but rather to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same wisdom be in you all that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ *who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be seized,
⁷ but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness;
 then being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death,
 even death on a cross.*

Matthew 27:57 When it was evening, a rich person came from Arimathea, Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and requested the body of Jesus; then Pilate

commanded it to be given to him.⁵⁹ So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in clean linen,⁶⁰ and laid it in his new tomb, which he had hewn in rock. Then he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and departed.⁶¹ Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting before the tomb.

⁶² Now, the next day, which was after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate.⁶³ They said, "Lord, we remember what that deceiver said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.'⁶⁴ Command, therefore, the tomb be secured until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first."⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, "You may have a squad; go, as secure it as you can."⁶⁶ So they went with the guard and secured the tomb, sealing the stone.

PROCLAMATION

Text Notes

Job 14 begins its reflection on mortality using inclusive language, "those born of women," and "humanity in verse 1, then shifts to masculine language, "(male) warrior" in verses 10 and 14 and "man" in verse 12. I apply inclusive language to the other human references in the passage. Job's address shifts from second to third person in verses 6 and 13. Verse 13 could also begin, "Who will grant . . ." In his book-length legal complaint, Job looks (rhetorically at least) for someone to compel God to do justly by him. That is part of the theological scandal of the book.

In verse 4 of the psalm, "free me" is the "let my people go" verb of the exodus. In verse 9 there is only one "eye" and tears are lacking; "body" is "belly/womb." Somewhat contradictorily, "to go silently to Sheol" can also be "to go weeping to Sheol." "Godly ones" in verse 23 are often translated anachronistically as "saints," importing Christian language and theology into the Hebrew Scriptures.

There is considerable disagreement over the meaning of *eritheian* in Philippians 2:3, translated here as "self-interest"; some other possibilities are: strife, contentiousness, selfishness, or selfish ambition. According to its earlier usage in Aristotle, it may mean "a self-seeking pursuit" for political office in that case. (See the corresponding entry in *they! Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG].)

The use of "Lord" for Pilate serves as a reminder the title was not unique to Jesus, nor a particularly religious one, but one of hierarchy, signifying Pilate's authority as the face of the Roman occupation. Translations like NRSV that preserve it for Jesus but change it for other characters are intentionally misleading.

Preaching Prompts

Holy Saturday may be the most liminal space in the Christian liturgical cycle. Passion has become pathos. The death of Jesus stupefies, but the breaking dawn has not dispelled the waking dream. Yet the liturgical remembrance is part of a thousands-year-old cycle, and we know what the next dawn brings. We struggle not to anticipate that dawn. These lessons underscore our finitude, our mortality and that of all living things, and the mortality of Jesus, Son of Woman, Son of God, Child of Earth.

Job's reflection on his own mortality comes in the midst of his address to God in chapters 12-14, responding to Zophar's chapter 11 rebuke, blaming Job for the evil that has befallen him. In this lesson Job's rumination on his inevitable death is accompanied by the reminder that death is part of the cycle of life in nature. Without knowing the hope that Christians hold dear. Job expects a "no" to the question of whether a person who has died will live again. He and the psalmist expect all the dead to go to Sheol (Job 14:13; Psalm 31:17). The psalmist commits her fragile life (verse 5) and finite times (verses 14-15) into God's hands, fully aware of her own mortality. The psalm also includes the remembrance of God's fidelity (verses 7, 19-21, 23) and assurance that God hears the cry of her faithful, verse 22.

As a Holy Saturday text, Philippians 2 presents a Jesus as empty of divinity as his body in the tomb was empty of life. Here Jesus humbles himself to experience the finitude of the human experience, mortality, and one of its most common and most horrific occurrences, a violent death at human hands.

We hold all of these things in our hearts as we wrestle with implications, sitting, watching, and waiting with Miriam, Mary of Magdala, and another woman who also bears the name of Israel's first prophet. They knew not for what they waited. Though we know, we keep vigil with them.

EASTER—THE GREAT VIGIL

At least two of the following lessons are read, of which one is always the lesson from Exodus. After each lesson, the psalm or canticle listed, or some other suitable psalm, canticle, or hymn, is sung.

A Cod-Crafted Creation: Genesis 1:1-2, 26-27; 2:1-4

Genesis 1:1 When beginning he, God, created the heavens and the earth,² the earth was shapeless and formless and bleakness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God, she, fluttered over the face of the waters.

²⁶ And God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule the fish of the sea, and the birds of the heavens, and the animals, and the whole earth, and over every creeping creature that creeps upon the earth."