

THEY WERE WITH HIM

Cherisna Jean-Marie • Peter Makari • Roxie McNelly • Larry Morris • Samuel Robles • Monique Crain Spells



2023 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL



WELCOME TO THE LENTEN SEASON

“They Were With Him”

Our hope is you can start each day in centering meditation and each week with a reflection on those who were with Jesus. It is worth stating Jesus did not walk alone and neither do we. There are personalities, communities, problems, and narratives that journey alongside Jesus. They are part of our learning experience of Jesus. Approaching with open hearts and minds, let us consider the offerings in this resource as a contribution to our ever-increasing and evolving understanding of the One Who Stood in Faith—Jesus.

Included in this resource are the following:

Ash Wednesday Litany

Daily Meditation

Weekly Reflections

Palm Sunday Litany

Join me in saying thank you to our reflection writers:

*Reverends Cherisna Jean-Marie, Roxie McNelly,
Larry Morris, Samuel Robles, and Dr. Peter Makari.*

Please enjoy your time in the Spirit, being with Jesus!

Justice and peace,

*Rev. Monique Crain Spells
Director of Christian Education
and Faith Formation*



“For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken.”

Luke 5:9

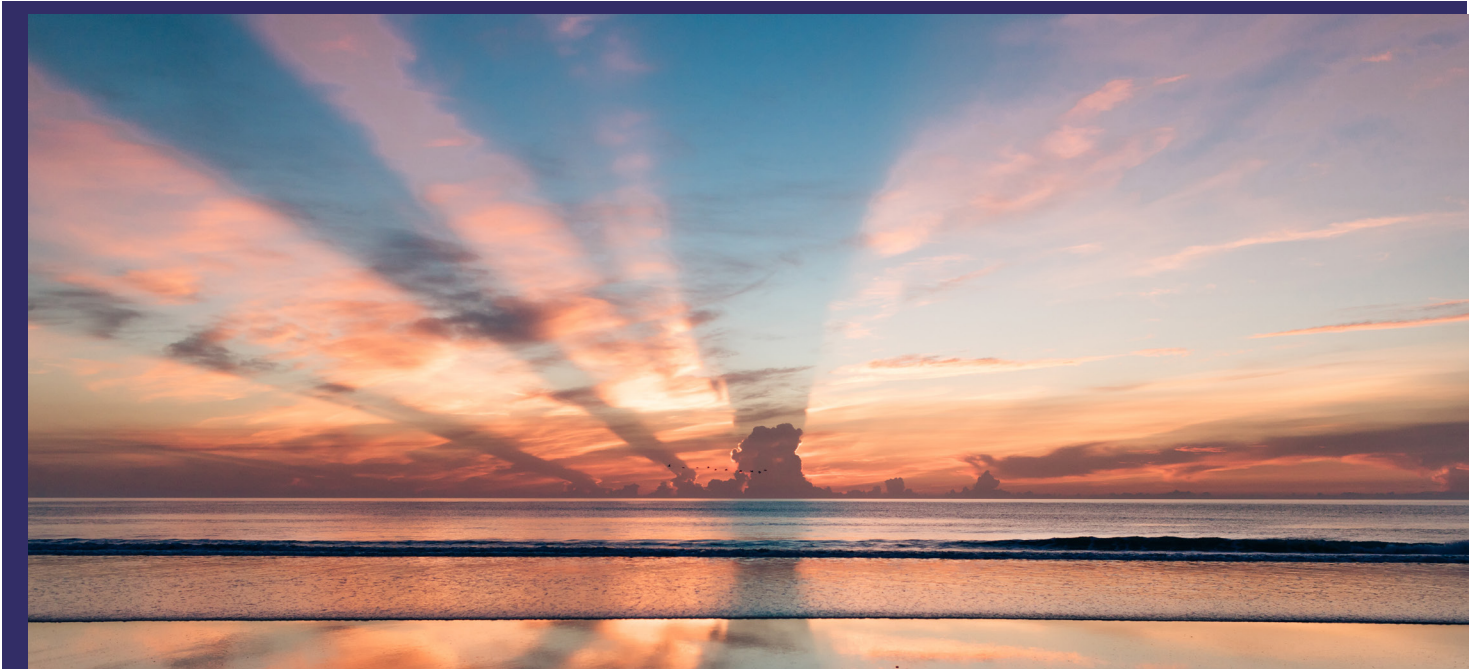


ASH WEDNESDAY LITANY

“WE ARE LED”

Rev. Monique Crain Spells

- LEADER:** We gather this Ash Wednesday to acknowledge our brokenness and possibility. We are stewards of God’s hope in the world. Let us examine how we are led.
- PEOPLE:** Like Jesus, we have a partner in the Holy Spirit. There are days we walk alongside the Jordan and days we wander in the wilderness. Let us examine how we are led.
- LEADER:** To be alive is to be tested. In our hunger for peace, love, rest, affirmation, and resources, we are vulnerable. Let us examine how we are led.
- PEOPLE:** This world will cause us to question who we are and what we value. Let us examine how we are led.
- LEADER:** Materialism, power, and privilege will attempt to draw us away from the Holy Spirit. Let us examine how we are led.
- PEOPLE:** The comfort of God’s peace is unmatched by the imperial riches offered by society. Let us examine how we are led.
- LEADER:** Jesus said, “It is written, one does not live by bread alone.” On this Ash Wednesday, God summon our holy convictions and refine our appetites to be led, like Jesus was, by You.
- ALL:** Bring forth ashes to symbolize our need for reflection and our call to be a community led by the Spirit toward wisdom, justice, and love. Amen.



MORNING MEDITATION

*I heighten my senses to remember I am with
You throughout the day.*

*I am strengthened in remembering my shared
humanity with Jesus.*

EVENING MEDITATION

I pause to remember how I experienced You today.

Jesus calls me toward tangible care for myself and others.

LEVI: THE DINNER PARTY

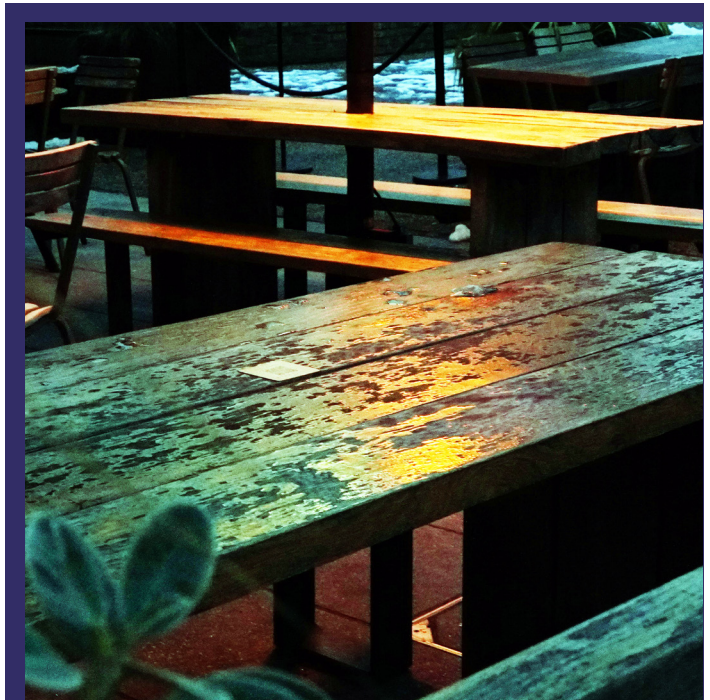
REV. ROXIE JO MCNELLY

Scripture: Mark 2:13-17

Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners."



Those serving the meal were kind to me. I got my food and found an open spot at a table. I was surprised to see that when I sat down the others at the table rather quickly got up and moved to another table. Another gentleman wound up sitting with me only after searching the room desperately for any other open seat. As I finished my meal and got up to leave the table, it filled in behind me as I walked away.



Both Mark and Luke tell us of Jesus' calling Levi, known as Matthew in the Greek, to follow him. Being a man of great means, as a tax collector, Matthew throws a banquet to honor Jesus and perhaps to introduce some of his friends to Jesus. Being a tax collector, he would not have had many friends among the Jews, though he himself was Jewish. Matthew's banquet guests would have been those willing to come to his home. Those comfortable being among people considered to be sinners were not concerned, as they were likely a part of the very same sector in local society. The Passion Translation says joining Jesus at the table were "many tax collectors and notable sinners." (LK 5:29-30 TPT) I wonder what one must have done to be a "notable sinner."

This was a group that ate together because no one else, including their own families, wanted to eat with them. While in seminary, my classmates and I were instructed to eat at a local soup kitchen during the semester. There we would discuss our experiences at the end of the semester. I did not want to walk into the downtown soup kitchen with my white privilege. I wanted a more unique experience. I had worked for six years with special needs youth so I decided to go as a special needs adult. I used some of my students' behaviors of rocking and verbally echoing what I heard while not making eye contact but looking off into empty space.

The other people in the room did not understand my behavior and so they did not want to be near me. That is a common thread throughout humanity. When we do not understand other's behaviors, we avoid them. But we also often speak words condemning them or belittling them as a way of assuring ourselves that we are in the right. In Jesus' Jewish community, associating with certain people like notable sinners and tax collectors was more than just socially awkward. The high-ranking Jewish authorities did not understand why Jesus would defile himself by breaking bread with such people.

Jesus was not afraid of people or their different behaviors. He came to reach and care for those the rest of the world would not even associate with. He came to be the doctor of those who were sick spiritually. It does not matter who we are or what we have done; Jesus is there for us. He is ready to sit with us.
 To dine with us.
 To diagnose what is keeping us from opening our hearts fully to him.
 SO come to the table.



Faith step:

Think about who are the people you avoid. Have you ever said things to yourself or others about them that would show a disdain for them? Ask Jesus how he sees them and ask him to open your heart to see them as he does.

- How does this reflection encourage you to walk with Jesus this week?
- Identify a song, community landmark, or piece of art that speaks to you in a way similar to this reflection.
- This week find time to spend with that song, place, or artwork.

When the COVID pandemic hit, I was amazed at the willingness of health care workers and public servants to risk "defiling" themselves as they put themselves in close proximity to others infected with the virus. In some cases, those caregivers contracted the virus themselves, becoming sick and or dying as a result. What if physicians would not get close enough to sick people to actually take care of them and heal them?



Rev. Roxie McNelly serves as the pastor of First Christian Church, DOC, in Martinsville, IN and just celebrated ten years in ministry. She is a graduate of Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, with a Master of Divinity.

THE PHARISEES: WHO IS GOOD ENOUGH?

DR. PETER MAKARI

Scripture: Luke 4:16-29

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months and there was a severe famine over all the land, yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many with a skin disease in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.

“Have you never read...?” (Mark 2:23-28)

It is a dramatic scene, another instance in which Jesus challenges the Pharisees and their strict interpretation of the law. As Jesus and the disciples pass through a field, the disciples pluck heads of grain, prompting the Pharisees to reprimand them, saying, “Why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?” Jesus pivots the question from the letter of the law to its spirit, asking the Pharisees, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God...”

Over the past 12 years, the Middle East has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of refugees and forcibly displaced people, primarily as a result of the war in Syria. Since 2011, almost 13 million people, or more than half of the Syrian population, have been forced from their homes and communities due to impact of the fighting. Of those, 5.5 million are refugees in neighboring countries. Many of them left their homes with what they had on their backs and what they could carry as they sought safety and security for themselves and their families somewhere else, away from the dangers of war. A decade later, many still live in uncertainty about their future. They are hungry for food, and hungry to begin their lives again with some sense of stability and a future.

Uprooted Syrians are not the only ones to experience this uncertainty and hunger. In the last year, we have witnessed the devastation of Ukraine and the displacement of 16 million Ukrainians, about half of whom have remained in their country but away from home, and the other half have fled altogether, and are now refugees, mostly in Europe. There are 6 million Palestinian refugees who were forcibly displaced from their homes and dispossessed of their property decades ago. They live in a state of suspension and waiting, what Shahd Abusalama describes as “permanent temporality.” Among them are Palestinian Christians, proud to trace their heritage back to the first Christian community, still living today in same places where Jesus was born, preached, and was crucified and resurrected.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates that, before the Ukraine crisis, there were upwards of 90 million people worldwide forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflicts, violence, fear of persecution and human rights violations. That was the highest total since World War II, and had more than doubled in the previous decade. The Ukraine war has pushed the total above 100 million.

For these Syrians, Ukrainians, Palestinians, and tens of millions more around the world, there is no sabbath, no chance to set aside a daily routine to rest and to worship. Even so, faith sustains many of them in their days, months, and years of uncertainty.

In the Middle East and Europe, where the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) accompanies a number of partner churches and organizations through Global Ministries, we have witnessed and supported the responses of numerous partner responses to the needs of refugees fleeing various circumstances.

Partners such as the Middle East Council of Churches, the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical [Protestant] Churches, the Forum for Development, Culture, and Dialogue (FDCD), the Reformed Church in Hungary, and Perichoresis of the Evangelical Church in Greece, to name a few, continue to provide bread and sustenance to refugees from throughout the region. Such response includes basic items like food, water, and accommodations, but also health needs, psycho-social support for these victims of trauma, childcare, language learning, and training in marketable skills.

And partners do not stop on the sabbath either. One Sunday morning, while visiting Perichoresis in Katerini, Greece, I was about to enter the church for worship. Just outside the church was a Syrian Muslim family who had heard about how the church helps refugees. We stopped and spoke with them. I translated the Arabic until the program's translator could arrive and our Greek partners began to move into action. By the time church started, a plan was in place, the couple and their little daughter were visibly a bit more at ease. The family were attended to, with a promise of a commitment to help them further—on the sabbath.



It is as if our Disciples partners have opened the house of God for those who are hungry and in need of food. They – and we – know that by making daily bread accessible when it is needed, we live out God's law to love our neighbor.

Jesus taught that those who would inherit salvation are not those who would uphold a strict reading of the law, but those who understand the law as created for God's people. When we feed the hungry and give drink to those who are thirsty; those who welcome the stranger; who clothe the naked; who take care of the sick; and who visit the imprisoned, for when we carry out those acts for the benefit of our neighbor, we serve God.



As we observe the season of Lent and move toward Christ's Passion in Jerusalem, we might re-read Jesus' retort to the Pharisees, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God..." understanding it from the point of view of the marginalized and oppressed, so that we can see the hunger of the world and know that it does not allow a respite. We cannot responsibly adhere to a strict reading of one law, at the expense of the welfare of God's people. Ultimately, "the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath." We live in that hope.

- How does this reflection encourage you to walk with Jesus this week?
- Identify a song, community landmark, or piece of art that speaks to you in a way similar to this reflection.
- This week find time to spend with that song, place, or artwork.



Peter has served in the capacity of Executive for the Middle East and Europe with the Common Global Ministries Board of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) since July 1, 2000. An Egyptian-American, Peter has lived in the Middle East, where he worked with the Coptic

Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) in Cairo, Egypt (1991-1994), and then with the Middle East Council of Churches, based in Limassol, Cyprus (1997-2000). Peter earned an M.A. in Middle East Studies from the American University in Cairo (1993) and a Ph.D. in Politics and Middle East Studies from New York University (2003). He is the author of *Conflict and Cooperation: Christian-Muslim Relations in Contemporary Egypt* (Syracuse University Press, 2007).

MARY: WHERE IS THE LOVE?

REV. MONIQUE CRAIN SPELLS

Scripture: Matthew 12:46-49 NRSV

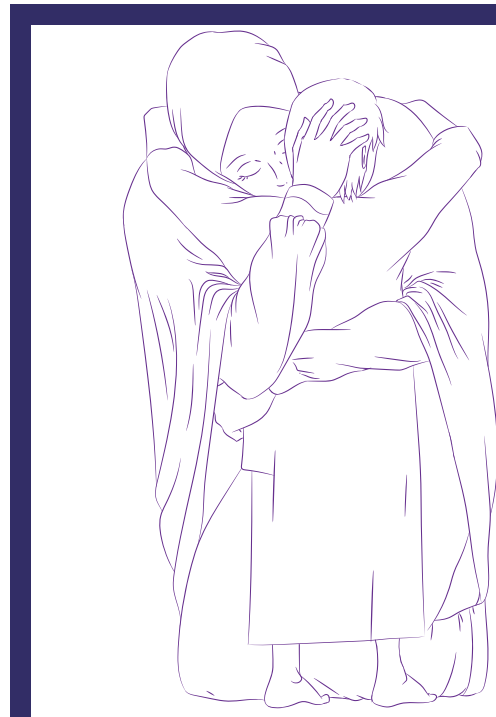
“While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak with you. But to the one who told him this, Jesus replied, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers.””

As a mother, auntie, mentor, and former youth service worker, it does not feel good to read this text as Jesus being resolved to a flippant or self-righteous posture with his mother—the one who taught him daily living. Furthermore, it does not feel good to imagine this happening in public. Many of us can relate to the necessary discomfort of adult conversations with our parents and/or children. We have them. They are essential to wellness; however, we try to keep such tension from the public eye. Here we see Jesus swiftly redefining “mother” and “brothers” while his mother Mary has need of him. I ask, “Where’s the love?”

Where is the compassion for his mother who is surely concerned for his life? Where is the respect for her as the vessel of his being? Where is the discretion that might offer grace to Mary in processing her son’s extraordinary spiritual understandings of family? Where is the love?

Dare I say, it is Mary’s love at work in him offering the very words that disturb me. For Jesus to arrive at adulthood well-studied, curious, caring, and bold, he had to get some of that from his mama. For Jesus to understand the law ought never have more value than the thriving of people, I am guessing he was raised as a human being and not a god. For Jesus to carry the gospel as Mary carried the gospel, with courage and great risk of religious condemnation, he surely was her offspring. I tell you; the love in his communal remarks was first generated in Mary’s trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

As children, we are formed and Jesus was no different. We grow and evolve. Jesus was no different. I am guessing because Mary raised him, she was much less surprised than I am by her son’s remarks. Jesus unashamedly embodied reset. Culturally, spiritually, economically, and in the most intimate familial ways, Jesus was serious about shifting reality in the direction of collective liberty.



He did not exempt himself from the challenges of change. Only one with an esteem born of enduring love could take on the monumental task of setting folk free. Mary was his first teacher and we have reaped all the benefits of her love.

- How does this reflection encourage you to walk with Jesus this week?
- Identify a song, community landmark, or piece of art that speaks to you in a way similar to this reflection.
- This week find time to spend with that song, place, or artwork.



Rev. Monique Crain Spells currently serves as Director of Christian Education and Faith Formation for Disciples Home Missions and the National Convocation of the Christian Church. It has also been her privilege to serve as a seminary administrator, church

planter, clergy coach, and Past President of the Fellowship of Black Disciples Clergywomen. Monique received a Bachelor of Arts in Communications with a focus on Public Relations from Purdue University and a Master of Divinity from Christian Theological Seminary. She is completing her Doctor of Ministry coursework around the power of rituals at Lexington Theological Seminary.

Week Five

LEGION: THE BURDENS WE CARRY

REV. LARRY MORRIS

Scripture: Luke 8:26-39

Then they arrived at the region of the Gerasenes,[a] which is opposite Galilee. As he stepped out on shore, a man from the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had not worn[b] any clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, shouting, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me," for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" He said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding, and the demons[d] begged Jesus[e] to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they became frightened. Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. Then the whole throng of people of the surrounding region of the Gerasenes[f] asked Jesus[g] to leave them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him, but Jesus[h] sent him away, saying, "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

What would it look like to give up all of the burdens we carry? Are we even able to imagine what healing and salvation look like anymore or have we been so burdened for so long, we no longer think healing and salvation are possible? The story of the possessed one in Mark 5:1-19 and Luke 8:26-39 offers us hope that healing and salvation are possible.

Both accounts portray a person who carried heavy burdens and was unclean, according to the standards of their community. This person was living in the tombs, naked, howling and making unintelligible noises, and cutting themselves. At one point in time, the person was shackled and chained but they overpowered the restraints and no one in town could overpower them. This possessed person was burdened. They had no control over themselves and lost their personal identity and communal belonging. The possessed one runs to Jesus and the burdens begin to cry out to Jesus, the Liberator, "I know who you are but please, don't get rid of me. Allow me to stay and continue to torment this person; please don't torment me." When Jesus asked the burden to identify itself, it called itself Legion. It wasn't just one thing causing havoc on this person's life, it was many things.

Mark and Luke agree there was pleading for the burdens to stay but they differ on who wanted the burdens to stay. Mark implies the possessed one pleaded for the burdens to stay (Mark 5:10) while Luke implies the burdens themselves begged to stay (Luke 8:31). Both accounts make it unclear at times if the person is speaking or if the burdens within the person are speaking. Sometimes it is challenging for us to discern the difference. Are we speaking or are the burdens we carry doing the communicating? Jesus takes compassion on the possessed one and heals them.

By the end of the story, the person has experienced healing and salvation. The possessed one is no longer possessed and overburdened. They are sitting at the feet of Jesus as disciple, "clothed and in their right mind", communicating with their community, and not harming themselves. Their sense of self has been restored and they're restored to their community. They desire to go with Jesus, but Jesus commands them to stay in their city and to tell the city what God has done for them. Maybe healing and salvation looks like a restoration of personal identity, communal belonging, and telling others what God has done? Maybe healing and salvation begins by naming the burdens we carry and taking seriously the words of the prophet Isaiah, "to lose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke." This is what Jesus did for the person who was possessed and overburdened. May we have the holy imagination to envision letting go of the burdens we carry and the faithfulness to help each other get free.

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- Identify a song, community landmark, or piece of art that speaks to you in a way similar to this reflection.
- This week find time to spend with that song, place, or artwork.



Rev. Larry J. Morris III (he/they) is the Executive Director of the *Inclusive Collective*, a campus ministry that "exist to fuel young adults through Jesus rooted soul work." Rev. Morris III is also a Ph.D. in the African American Preaching and Sacred Rhetoric Program at Christian Theological Seminary, working at the

intersections of Blackness, Queerness, and Sacred rhetoric. Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Rev. Morris has served in various roles within the Christian Church including serving in local congregations, the regional church, and the general church. Rev. Morris III earned their Master of Divinity and Master of Theological studies at Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, CA. In addition to their roles as pastor and scholar, Rev. Morris III also serves as a spiritual director. www.larryjmorris3.com

JAIRUS: DESPERATE FAITH

REV. SAMUEL ROBLES JR.

Scripture: Luke 8:40-56; Mark 5:21-43

Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus's feet and began pleading with him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying. As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all she had on physicians,[a] no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, and immediately her flow of blood stopped. Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When they all denied it, Peter[b] said, "Master, the crowds are hemming you in and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I noticed that power had gone out from me." When the woman realized that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace." While he was still speaking, someone came from the synagogue leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer." When Jesus heard this, he replied, "Do not be afraid. Only believe, and she will be saved." When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him, except Peter, John, and James and the child's father and mother. Everyone was weeping and grieving for her, but he said, "Do not cry, for she is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But taking her by the hand, he called out, "Child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and she stood up at once, and he directed them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astounded, but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened.

There was a point in my ministry where I had to ask myself, "If I weren't a pastor, would I still be a follower of Jesus?" The reason why this question was so relevant to me was because at that time I was under high stress and overwhelmed with ministry responsibilities. Little did I know, that despite all the training I received about self-care and doing the best I could do to care for myself, I was burnt out. What helped me cope with how I was feeling during that period of my life was actually not a Sabbath or extra days off.

My healing process entailed acknowledging that I was not healthy, seeking help, affirming my belief in Jesus, and in desperation, relying on Jesus to be my source of strength.

Though not a pastor, Jairus, a synagogue leader found in the Bible, was at a point of desperation. He fell at Jesus' feet and pleaded for him to go to his house because his twelve year old daughter was dying. A religious leader, one who most likely had access to some of the finest physicians around, chose to go before Jesus in a posture that displayed his deep need for his help.

Jesus begins the trek with Jairus towards his house, a trek that gets interrupted by a large crowd. This is the section of the story that most of us are very familiar with, largely because we've preached on the miracle story that takes place here. It is at this moment where a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years touched Jesus' cloak and was healed.



I can't help but wonder what was going through Jairus' mind during this moment? This miracle paused the trek towards Jairus' house, where his dying daughter was. Could Jairus be angry that someone else's miracle took precedence over his own desperation? What could his feelings be at this very moment? As a local synagogue leader, does he feel entitled to exclusive access to the Holy, instead of someone who is deemed unclean? Is he now regretting his decision to have gone to Jesus instead of a physician?



It's in the midst of someone else's miracle moment that Jairus receives word that his daughter has died. Jairus now becomes a grieving parent. When Jesus heard the news, he didn't apologize to Jairus, as though he messed up or that the reason why she died was his fault because of the interruption. Instead, Jesus tells him to not be afraid, to believe, and then affirms that despite the news of her death, she will be healed (Luke 8:50). So the trek towards Jairus' house resumed.

The next part of the story is quite remarkable. Without a doubt the climax is that Jairus' daughter came back to life. But the remnant of the story is *astonishment*. Those who were in the room and saw the miracle happen right before their eyes, including Jairus, were astonished.

Their astonishment could have been two-fold: astonished that the girl lived, and perhaps astonished that Jesus actually pulled it off. Healing amongst the living and the dead exists in this narrative. In the midst of Jairus' grief, desperation, and any other feeling he may have experienced, astonishment is birthed. It's an astonishment that now occupies where doubt lived. The astonishment is that the impossible came to pass.

An unknown lesson exists in this story. It teaches us that desperation kicks off an emotional journey that leads to astonishment. I dare say that every pastor and church leader should take a moment to reflect and answer honestly the question that I had to ask myself, "If I weren't a pastor, would I still be a follower of Jesus?" Perhaps an additional question could be, "Do I still live my life in astonishment of who Jesus is and what Jesus can do?" No one can answer those questions but you.

However, I would state, that if Jairus can be any form of example to us Christian leaders, it is that we are not exempt from having to fall at the feet of Jesus, to be honest with how we are feeling, to be comforted by him in our darkest times, and to live astonished of his miracle working power.

A desperate faith that causes one to take some desperate measures, and yearns to experience and live in astonishment, first begins with a meek gesture: falling at the feet of Jesus.

- How does this reflection encourage you to walk with Jesus this week?
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- This week find time to spend with that song, place, or artwork.



Rev. Samuel Robles Jr. is the author of *I AM ONESIMUS: A trek toward self-affirmation*. He does church consulting, and performs full-time as a musician at Walt Disney World. Sammy is currently pursuing his Doctor of Ministry degree, and resides in Orlando, FL with his wife and 3 daughters.

Visit www.SamuelRoblesJr.online

THE FIG TREE: WHAT HUNGER WILL DO

REV. CHERISNA JEAN-MARIE

Scripture: Mark 11:12-14

“On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard it.”



The hungry students would come to class withdrawn, sometimes distracted, and irritable. It would take me most of the morning to complete a task that would usually take a few minutes. Those were some of the most challenging days being a teacher. And those days happened more often than you could imagine. I would come home and share with my friends and family how frustrating and difficult my day was as a teacher. I was so task-oriented I didn't really see the need or the divine opportunity.

That conversation with my friend, comparing me with my students, awakened my divine spark. It was not until I was hungry that I was able to understand what was happening to the students in my class. Hunger will make you do things out of the norm. Hunger will make you misbehave. Hunger will have you make irrational decisions in the moment. Hunger will make you do things out of your character. Hunger can change your mood which essentially can impact your experience. Hangry is not just a word, many people can become angry because they are hungry.

We see this first in the book of Mark when Jesus is with the disciples, and *He* was hungry. He was so hungry the Bible says he goes to a fig tree when it is out of season to search for something to eat. And because the tree could not provide nourishment Jesus was so angry, he cursed the tree to never produce again. How unreasonable!?!?! The tree wasn't expected to produce in that moment yet Jesus out of hunger reacted irrationally. Jesus too was hangry. During this season of lent I want to invite you to reflect on Jesus' hunger and reaction through the eyes of those in your community who too are hungry.

A few years ago, I was out with a friend running errands before lunch, but because I missed breakfast, I was hungry. I was so hungry that it began to impact my behavior. I couldn't concentrate on what we were doing, unable to think straight let alone hold a decent conversation. I was withdrawn and fussy. Moody. Sluggish. Irritable. Impatient. Irrational. It was a rough morning. Because I was hangry (hunger + angry = hangry)! When we finally sat down to eat, we began to reflect on our morning, and she shared how she thought I was acting like the students I often complained about in my classroom. You see, I used to be a schoolteacher. And some of the most challenging days teaching children were when they would come to class hungry. Often my students would come to school hungry because they didn't have food for breakfast at home.

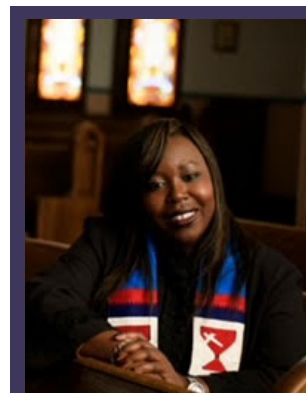


Someone in your midst behavior might express anger because they are hungry. Perhaps it's a physical hunger like Jesus but I want to remind you that there are so many ways someone can be hungry. Sometimes it can also be a spiritual hunger or maybe its emotional, or even hunger for purpose. Someone could also be hungry for direction or wisdom, that their behavior is irrational. They are acting out of the norm or being unreasonable. We have so many people in our country who do not have a chance to be their natural selves because of hunger. When you are hungry something within you will either cause you to act in a way out of your character or withdraw.

The conversation with my friend awakened my divine spark. I didn't see it before but once I connected my experience with my students, I realized how hunger can be a barrier not just for my classroom but also the human experience. I was so task-orientated at the time I failed to see. I didn't see the impact hunger had on these students, I was distracted by their behavior and my inability to complete a task. I want to invite you this Lenten season to see anew. To see beyond the behavior and offer grace. See beyond the behavior to see the person and perhaps even provide nourishment for their hunger.

Next time you are passing by someone in your community may you see the divine opportunity to co-labor with God to make their lives better. May you see the person and not get distracted by the behavior. May you be open to the workings of God in you to show grace to change someone's circumstance. May the love of God be poured within you so you can pour it out to someone who is hungry.

- How does this reflection encourage you to walk with Jesus this week?
- Identify a song, community landmark, or piece of art that speaks to you in a way similar to this reflection.
- This week find time to spend with that song, place, or artwork.



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Rev. Jean-Marie is a visionary who possesses tremendous gifts for ministry. She seeks to personify her calling by boldly professing the Word of God to communities in need of the Good News. Above all Rev. Jean-Marie is a preacher, teacher, anti-racist activist, and organizer who loves God and has dedicated her life to building the Kingdom of God on earth.



PALM SUNDAY LITANY

LEADER: Oh Lord, our Messiah, just as the people lauded your triumphant journey into Jerusalem, we celebrate your presence here today with joy and with praise!

PEOPLE: Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!

LEADER: We wave our branches of palms, seeking not the god of worldly acclaim, position, power, or of quests for material gain.

PEOPLE: We wave these palms as signs of your victory in our lives over anything that would separate us from you.

LEADER: We take off our cloaks of self and sin, and lay them down at your feet. We hail you as our Lord. Help us to follow you—the WAY, the TRUTH, and the LIFE.

PEOPLE: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

LEADER: There are songs of victory in the tents of the righteous.

ALL: Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!

Source: African American Lectionary 2008, 2012



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