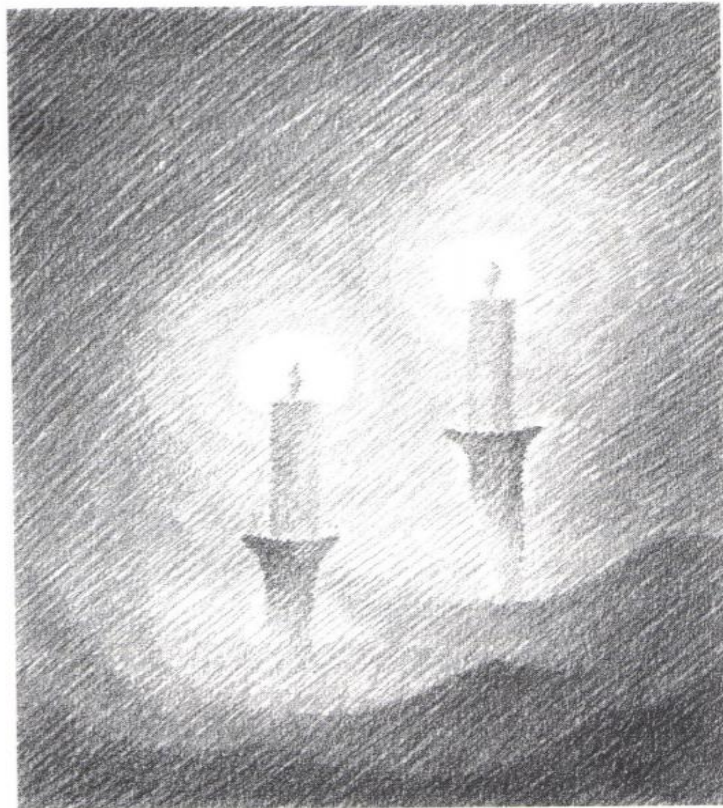


Recovery and the Holy

**A Handbook for Designing and Celebrating Healing Eucharists
and Prayer Services for People with Addictions**



**A Timely Ministry for Clergy and Lay People (in recovery or not)
in Service of the Recovering Community**

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Introduction

Why Offer a Recovery Eucharist or Prayer Service?

We're all aware that rates of addiction and death from addiction are climbing around the United States. Many if not most of us in New Hampshire can recount personal experiences of death from opiate and other addictions in our families, churches, and communities.

Addiction is a disease that affects the whole person, body, mind, and spirit. In my eight years of serving as chaplain in a drug and alcohol residential facility, I discovered that before women and men die from overdose or alcohol or cocaine-related diseases, their spirits have been grievously wounded.

And so here is my answer to the question above: We as clergy and faithful lay people are uniquely positioned for the work of healing spirits. When we do so we follow directly in the footsteps of Jesus and his loving ministry of healing and exorcism.

Most of us, clergy or lay, do not have the tools to help with the body or mind part of the disease. But for millennia the church has studied the ways of the Spirit and how the movements of the Spirit can be nurtured in individuals and communities. I believe that offering sacred rituals like a Recovery Eucharist or Prayer Service is one way that we as followers of Christ can serve those who suffer.

This handbook is designed to help clergy and lay people, especially those who are not themselves familiar with matters of addiction and recovery, to take up this ministry. In this handbook, I offer suggestions for starting a Eucharist or Prayer Services, followed by an introduction to issues of addiction and recovery. I then present a Lectionary consisting of Psalms and Gospel readings that I have found particularly fruitful in my work as an Episcopal priest working primarily with persons with addictions.

It is my desire to share this much needed ministry with as many people as may feel called to it, whether they are in recovery or not. For that reason I try to bridge any felt spiritual divide between people suffering from addictions and those who are not. It is important not to think of this ministry as "we" helping "them." We are all "we" and we are all "them." For this reason each Gospel in the lectionary is followed by a personal reflection on attachments and other aspects of the spiritual life for the presider to ponder prior to the service as well as meditation prompts framed in the language of recovery which can be used as part of the homily.

My experience with Recovery Eucharist

When I was asked to do a weekly Eucharist as part of my work at the Plymouth House, a completely nonreligious rehab for drug and alcohol addiction in Plymouth, New Hampshire, I objected. "No one will come," I said. But my boss insisted.

What happened was way beyond what I could have imagined. In that place full of desperate or despairing people, where few residents were churched and some had never even been in a place or

time of worship, people came. Always more than half the residents came, sometimes almost all. A small proportion of the attendees came because they were active in a church community at home. Others came out of curiosity, or because a staff member had suggested they come, or because they were flailing, trying to figure out who they were and what they were for. Some came because it was a 12 Step facility and they had no idea how or where to find a Higher Power, and they thought that maybe a "Eucharist," whatever it was, might help.

Being there just about every week for eight years taught my heart what my head had learned in seminary: the power of ritual, of sacred story, and most especially of sacrament. Something happened in that dim living room with people sitting in a circle, even though many had no Christian religious education and only the faintest (or a negative) idea of who Jesus was:

For a little less than an hour a week they consciously sat in and absorbed the healing presence of a Someone or Something who cared deeply for them, despite the guilt and shame that covered each of them like a second skin.

When they listened to the Gospels and we talked about them, they heard about God's love. It is a great privilege for a preacher to tell these stories to people who don't know them at all. Once a former Plymouth House resident came back to visit. When I bumped into him he asked, "Do you still tell that story about the sheep that ran away and the shepherd went after it?" I said yes, I did. He went on, "I love that story. I tell it to everyone I meet."

And more: When I laid my hands on a head for healing and everyone in the room prayed for that person, we all felt God's healing presence.

When I handed them a piece of homemade bread and said, using a formula suggested by Nadia Bolz-Webber, "Beloved child of God, the body of Christ," they tasted God's gift of love.

When the person holding the chalice of grape juice was a volunteer from the room, they knew that they themselves, no matter what, were welcome to participate in God's feast.

When a homeless woman was offering the chalice for Communion. I suddenly realized that she was echoing me and saying to each person, "Beloved child of God, the Blood of Christ." My heart turned over.

How to Begin

Here is brief list of things to consider in planning to implement a Recovery Eucharist or Prayer Service:

Choose a time and day for the service. Talk to people you know who attend meetings at your church and elsewhere and ask what time and day would attract the most people. Perhaps it can follow or precede an AA or other recovery meeting at your church.

Decide whether the services will be weekly or monthly. It is important to be consistent. The decision may be based on what the people who will lead the services can carve out of their busy schedule. Perhaps a service could be offered weekly, but with clergy presiding at Eucharist alternating with a lay person presiding at a Prayer Service.

Determine where the service will take place. You might choose to offer the service in a church. In a large church or a church with a long aisle, the sanctuary might feel daunting to attendees, especially

if they're not used to the church (or any church!). This is a great opportunity to think creatively about an alternative space within the church or parish hall.

At Emmanuel Church in Boston, the need for participants to walk in and down a very long aisle proved too anxiety provoking at our first service, so the next week we moved it to the other end of the aisle quite close to the outside door. We were able to create an attractive and intimate space there and people felt comfortable entering directly into the worship space. Another possibility is gathering in one of the rooms that are used for AA and other recovery meetings.

But you don't have to stay inside the church! Perhaps you could offer to do a weekly or monthly service at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center, a local shelter, a sober house, or a site where people come for free meals. What about a "pop up" service at a bus station or in a park?

Choose a Eucharist or Prayer Service format. Yes I can find sites for liturgical resources at the back of this handbook which have several options for services. In my experience every service should incorporate Anointing and Laying on of Hands for healing.

At the Eucharist

A Eucharist Service should use grape juice to be accessible to people addicted to alcohol and other substances. You may have to consult your Bishop for permission. I have been blessed with support from my bishops.

I strongly suggest using Nadia Bolz-Webber's formula for the distribution of the bread and the juice, "xx, Beloved child of God, the Body/Blood of Christ." The people coming forward for Communion often have an extremely difficult time acknowledging themselves as "beloved children of God."

Incorporate simple chants and/or familiar hymns into the service, including during the Anointing and Laying on of Hands. Ask your congregation what hymns they know and like.

Consider the "liturgy after the liturgy." If it is part of your tradition, you might schedule time before or after the service for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You may also offer a coffee time after the services, inviting the community to extend beyond the worship experience.

Advertise, advertise, advertise! Post posters near any rooms in your church where AA or NA or other meetings are held and at all the entryways to the church. Advertise in local papers and online. Consider starting a Facebook page especially for the service and invite participants to "Like" it and share it online with their friends.

Keep at it and don't be discouraged with low turnouts. It can often take quite a while before people start coming on a regular basis. Trust that where two or three are gathered, Jesus is in the midst of them, and take heart.

Addiction and Recovery

My Story

“Hello, I’m Susan and I’m an alcoholic.”

I say that several times a week at AA meetings. I don’t add that I’m ordained an Episcopal priest, I don’t tell them that I worked in parish ministry in Massachusetts and New Hampshire and that I’ve been a chaplain at a residential drug and alcohol rehab center. I don’t say that I have a husband of 40 plus years, two children, and three grandchildren.

I say what most matters at that moment – that I’m me, Susan, the person you see sitting here in this church basement, and that for a long, long time, just like everyone else in that room, I’ve been possessed by a demon.

That’s maybe a little too dramatic. I should say here what I say there, simply, “I’m an alcoholic.”

I’d always been a minimal social drinker but I remember the evening I decided that only alcohol could ease the emotional pain I was in. From then on I used alcohol as a salve. It didn’t always work, but it worked often enough to keep me coming back to the well. I drank like that for more than 30 years. And slowly I came to realize that I couldn’t stop.

I’m what’s called a “high bottom alcoholic,” a phrase which always sounds vaguely salacious to me. It means that I was never arrested for DUI, I didn’t lose my family, I was never fired from a job for drinking.

Yet . . . One night I drove into town after drinking a bottle of wine. Making my way back down my little street, a road that local people use for walking dogs and little kids use for bicycling, that I could kill someone. I didn’t think I could go on living after that. That selfish thought was a bolt of grace.

The next morning I confessed the extent of my drinking to my spiritual director. He suggested I call a friend and parishioner who was on staff at the recovery rehab in town. I did, we met, and almost immediately I started doing the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous with him.

I never thought then that my priestly call would shift from parish ministry to working with other people with addictions, but two years later I was asked to do a weekly recovery Eucharist and offer spiritual counsel to the residents at that same rehabilitation center. I was there as their first chaplain for eight years.

As I noted above, we who are “churched,” whether lay or ordained, usually can’t offer professional help, therapeutically or physically, to the many people in our midst who are suffering from the physical, mental, and spiritual possession which is addiction. But we have centuries of spiritual traditions we can offer, including the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation, the sacred stories of Scripture, and many ways of praying and meditating. And we have something else to offer – our own individual “conscious contact with the God of our Understanding,” to quote the AA’s 11th Step.

While I'm hoping that this handbook will encourage you and give you confidence to begin a recovery service at your church for anyone affected by addiction, I'm also hoping that, even if you yourself are not "addicted" to a substance or behavior in the narrow sense, that working with this material might become part of your own spiritual journey by helping you recognize attachments in yourself which may get in the way of your own freedom and your own relationship with God.

What is addiction?

The best definition I've found for addiction as in "the addiction crisis" is "Compulsive behavior that removes human freedom and substitutes an almost ritualized repetition of a certain behavior, such as drinking alcohol, taking drugs, gambling, sex, or eating." (Woodbridge, Kindle loc. 726)

It is important to stress that addiction is a disease, not a set of "bad (moral) choices." Addictive behavior is compulsive because of the way addictive substances act on the brain. The idea of compulsion has several aspects. First, it is what the philosopher Hegel calls "a bad infinite." You can never get enough alcohol, never get a high enough high, that you can say, "OK, that was great, now I don't have to do it any more." The title of a new book on addiction says it well: "Never Enough." There's never a peak experience and then you can call it a day.

Another aspect of compulsion is that once you start drinking, shooting up, gambling, . . . you can't stop. **It is no longer a matter of "bad choices" because you can no longer make a choice.** In this area, you've lost your freedom. Earlier I mentioned "possession" – that is exactly what it feels like. The exorcism gospels really resonate with people who are addicted.

In the later years of drinking alcoholically, I wanted to stop. I'd wake up at 3 am, feeling guilty, with my throat parched, and swear to myself I wouldn't drink that evening. I would pour any leftover wine (although it was rare to have any leftover wine!), down the sink. I'd do my day's work with the intention of not drinking that evening. I'd stop at the grocery store on the way home to get something I needed for dinner, and I'd go into Bob's Surefine still intending not to buy alcohol.

Here's how, on a daily basis, I experienced compulsion: in the store I'd find myself walking down the wine aisle even though I'd resolved to avoid it. Then my right arm would extend itself and grab a bottle of wine and put it in the cart. "I" had nothing to do with that action; it felt as if something else was moving my arm and hands. Possession, indeed! The old Temperance Movement's references to "demon rum" make a lot of sense to me.

Here's another example of what addictive obsession is like from Leslie Jamison's book, *The Recovering*:

"At six in the morning, I got in the shower and thought about relief [i.e., drinking]. At six forty-five, I put on my apron in the bakery bathroom and thought about relief. At seven-fifteen, I flattened cookie dough – ran it through the sheeter and back again, back again, back again – and thought about relief. At eight, I punched out squirrels and thought about relief. At nine, I frosted the same squirrels – with a brown swirl on their tails, and white whiskers – and thought about relief. At noon I ate a sandwich and thought about relief. At six in the evening, while I mopped the floor, I could almost taste it. The day was a tight skin that only booze could help me wriggle my way out of." (Jamison, p. 185-186).

Earlier in the book she described the very different drinking behavior of her boyfriend, who was not an alcoholic. "At a party, Dave could go to the kitchen intending to grab another beer and I'd find him an hour later still chatting in the living room. He'd never made it to the fridge. He'd run into so many people on the way! If I headed to the kitchen for a drink, I'd end a hundred conversations if necessary. But Dave could leave a glass of wine half full in front of him for hours, and he was

someone who'd probably see it that way: half full. Half full, half empty, whatever. I couldn't understand why you'd ever drink half of anything." (Jamison, p. 139).

Addiction can and often does completely override basic morality. A young acquaintance of mine, now a yoga teacher, got her money for drugs by coming on to men in cars and then robbing them at gunpoint. Many people, women and men, prostitute themselves. Particularly tragic and hard to hear are accounts of how addiction can erode even parental instincts. A woman told me how she'd shoot heroin in front of her three or four year old daughter. One day her daughter said to her, "Mommy, I can't wait until I get to do grown up things like that."

David Carr, a former journalist at the New York Times, describes in his memoir, *The Night of the Gun*, how one chilly night, desperate for more cocaine, he went to a crack house leaving his twin baby girls in the car. "In that pool of darkness, I decided that my teeny tiny twin girls would be safe. It was cold, but not *really* cold. Surely God would look after them while I did not. . . . The guilty father was replaced by a junkie, no different from the others sitting there. Time passed, one thing begot another . . . And eventually I was thrown clear. Leaving, I remember that. Out the metal door and then out the front door with its three bolts onto the porch and the hollow sound of my boots on the wood floor. . . . A pause. How long had it been, really? It had not been ten minutes tops. Ten minutes times ten, probably, if not more. Hours, not minutes. . . . I cracked the front car door, reached around, unlocked the back, and leaned in. I could see their breath." (Carr, 163-165)

This night Carr "reached bottom," to use AA language. He shocked himself enough to finally reach out for help.

Why do people use?

Answers range from extreme pleasure. to numbing or masking psychic or bodily pain, to despair and hopelessness.

Pleasure is a motivation, especially in early using. Users of heroin describe the first highs as like "orgasms of the stomach." A friend of mine spent his entire retirement savings in a month on crystal meth, and when he came back to a meeting he told us that he'd do it again because of the intensity of the pleasure.

Pain, physical, psychological, and social, is the second major motivator for substance use. Gabriel Mate, in an excellent book based on his work as a physician in the most addiction-ridden neighborhoods of Vancouver, Canada, compares addicts to the creatures in the kingdom of hell in Tibetan Buddhism. In *In the Realm of The Hungry Ghosts* he writes, "The denizens of the hell realm are trapped in states of unbearable rage and anxiety. . . . The inhabitants of the hungry ghost realm are depicted as creatures with scrawny necks, small mouths, emaciated limbs, and large bloated empty bellies. This is the domain of addiction . . . The aching emptiness is perpetual because the substances, or objects, or pursuits we hope will soothe it are not what we really need . . . We haunt our lives without being fully present to escape the hell realm of overwhelming fear, rage, and despair." (Mate, Kindle loc. 207)

Thomas DeQuincey wrote in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*: "What was it that did in reality make me an opium eater? Misery, blank desolation, abiding darkness."

Nick, a man addicted to heroin and crystal meth quoted by Mate: "The reason I do drugs is so I don't feel the feelings I feel when I don't do drugs. When I don't feel the drugs in me, I get [expletive deleted] depressed."

The Neurological Basis of Addiction

Addictive drugs including alcohol alter the way the brain works. They affect the midbrain, the most protected part of the brain, which has evolved to ensure survival. This mesolimbic system includes the *amygdala*, source of “flight or fight” reactions, the *nucleus accumbens*, the brain’s reward center, and the *hippocampus* which enables memory.

Addictive drugs act by imitating chemicals naturally produced in our body which activate sites in the midbrain area. The drugs stimulate the midbrain’s dopamine system which is associated with the release of endorphins. At first the pleasurable states produced by the drugs are wildly more powerful than any produced by normal stimuli like food or sex.

After time, though, the intensity of the pleasure experience diminishes because the receptors the drug’s chemicals attach to become less and less sensitive. Yet the memory part of the midbrain remembers the pleasure, even though the drug inevitably produces less and less pleasure. The ongoing quest for the mind blowing initial experience is “chasing the high.” The user chases the high by using more and more frequently and/or looks for more potent versions of the drug, using, say, vodka instead of beer, or deliberately taking fentanyl rather than heroin.

These “choices” seem irrational because they are irrational. The mesolimbic system is so powerful that it can and does override the cerebral cortex, the part of the brain where rational thought occurs.

Judith Grisel in her excellent survey of the neuroscience of addictive substances, *Never Enough*, shares a story which perfectly illustrates how effective this override is. She was conducting a study at a rehab center to determine whether acupuncture might ease the pain of withdrawal for people with opiate addictions. The study was going well, when one day the group got word that a young addict in the area had just died of an overdose. She writes:

“It took only a few hours after the news broke for the center to empty out entirely – not to mourn, but to score. The patients recognized in their friend’s death a sign of high-quality dope.” She goes on, “You’ve probably seen similar phenomena in your community; regional bursts in overdoses tend to occur not because most addicts don’t know what’s to be found but because they do.” (Grisel, 66-67)

The Continuum from Attachment to Addiction

Many contemporary writers on addiction have observed that addicts don’t have a monopoly on the quest for ease and comfort. We all have addictive tendencies which fall on a continuum from being loosely attached to things or behaviors to being subjugated to them. “While the street addict has become completely consumed by the compulsivity of the addictive process and therefore lost the ability to hide his or her addiction, many of us live with *ambient* addictions to alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, prescription drugs, gambling, Internet porn or gaming, excessive exercise, shopping, cleanliness, rage, anger, or obsessive thinking. These are the addictive behaviors subtly interwoven into our lifestyle that we accept as normal and tolerate in others.” (Muldoon)

Leslie Jamison agrees: “To argue that addiction holds a dark mirror up to more universal hungers isn’t a denial of its physical mechanisms – neurotransmitters and their adaptations – or a denial of chemical dependence as a discrete phenomenon with its own physiological reality. It’s simply an acknowledgment that the operative urges of addiction aren’t unrelated to desires that show up in everyone: the urge to court bliss, to dull pain, to find relief.” (Jamison, 153.)

Religious and spiritual traditions speak of our “attachment” to things or behavior as something we need to become aware of if we are to grow in our spiritual lives. We all have attachments, they are “normal,” and they are often not problematic. But in *Addiction and Grace*, the psychologist Gerald May goes deeply into the relationship between “normal” people and the things or behaviors to which they are attached, and sees a dynamic similar to more official addictions: “The momentum of attachment [of which addiction is an extreme variation] usually carries us on, with a power all its own. Often it is not until this momentum brings us to some point of existential despair, some rock bottom, some *impasse*, that we become capable of beginning to reclaim our true desire [for God].” (May,)

May’s work can be very helpful in providing a spiritual and psychological bridge between people who are attached but not addicted (i.e., probably most of us) and people who are in diagnosable behavioral and neurological ways addicted.

In *Addiction and Grace*, May provides a helpful list of common attachments in our culture.

If you are considering introducing a Recovery Eucharist or other recovery service, it might be well to stop at this point and take some time to look over this list (adapted from May, 37-38) of attachments and ask yourself these questions:

What substance, behavior, person or anything else may function as an “addiction” in your life? What comes close? Where do you go for numbing or solace? What substance or behavior is hard to give up even if don’t want it or you know you should be doing something else with your time? To what extent can you recognize in your attachments the criteria May gives for an attachment morphing into addiction: increasing tolerance, withdrawal, self-deception, loss of will power, lying to yourself and/or to others about how much or how frequently you use it?

<i>Adrenaline</i>	<i>Alcohol</i>	<i>Anger</i>	<i>Approval</i>	
<i>Attractiveness</i>	<i>Being the center of attention</i>	<i>Being buff</i>	<i>Being loved</i>	
<i>Being right</i>	<i>Being special</i>	<i>Being taken care of</i>	<i>Candy</i>	
<i>Chocolate</i>	<i>Cleanliness</i>	<i>Coffee</i>	<i>Competition</i>	
<i>Doing good</i>	<i>Drugs</i>	<i>Exercise</i>	<i>Fame</i>	<i>Food</i>
<i>Gambling</i>	<i>Hoarding</i>	<i>Hobbies</i>	<i>Internet</i>	
<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Memories</i>	<i>Money</i>	<i>Music</i>	
<i>News feed</i>	<i>Pets</i>	<i>Popularity</i>	<i>Pornography</i>	
<i>Potato chips</i>	<i>Punctuality</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Relationships</i>	
<i>Religion</i>	<i>Self-image</i>	<i>Self-improvement</i>	<i>Sex</i>	
<i>Shopping</i>	<i>Shoplifting</i>	<i>Social media</i>	<i>Spirituality</i>	
<i>Sports</i>	<i>Stress</i>	<i>Talking</i>	<i>Television</i>	<i>Weight</i>

“Recovery” and the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

When I was first trying to stop drinking, I didn’t understand the difference between “sobriety” (or, depending on the addiction, “being clean”, “being abstinent”) and “recovery.” Being sober, clean, or abstinent, simply means someone is not using the substance or behavior of choice. But that alone is not being “in recovery.” “In recovery” means that the addicted person has committed to some sort of program that requires action on his or her part. Being in recovery in any of the “A’s” (Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Heroin Users Anonymous, Cocaine Users Anonymous, . . .) means regular attendance at meetings, working with a sponsor, doing service by helping other addicts and alcoholics, and especially, “working” the 12 Steps developed by Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob and their alcoholic friends in the very earliest years of AA.

The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (and with somewhat different wording, all the other “A’s) are:

- Step 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.
- Step 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- Step 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as *we understood Him*.
- Step 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- Step 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- Step 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- Step 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
- Step 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
- Step 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- Step 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
- Step 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
- Step 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Three things it is important to know about the Steps are:

1. They are considered a spiritual program which addresses a disease, a “spiritual malady,” even deeper than the disease of addiction. This malady is human alienation from God. I went to my first AA meeting because, reluctant as I was I knew I needed to stop drinking. To my surprise the chairperson said he considered the 12 Steps “a way to God” more than a way to stop using substances. As I’ve continued in the program, I’ve come to realize how close the steps are to the spiritual path lived out by the desert Mothers and Fathers.
2. Close to the heart of this program is rigorous self-examination to discern and address through prayer and practice, our “defects of character” which block us from ourselves or others (see Steps 4, 5, and 10).
3. Even though they grew out of the theory and practice of Christian revival efforts like the Oxford Group and the Emmanuel Movement (both with close ties to the Episcopal Church), the Steps themselves and AA itself are “spiritual and not religious.” The clarifying phrase “God *as we understood him*” in the Steps is the result of result of the insistence of some members of the earliest AA groups that the “power greater than ourselves” of the Steps should not be

identified with exclusively with the Judeo-Christian God.

The best sources for learning about the 12 Steps (for any addiction) are the AA Big Book and the *AA 12 Steps and 12 Traditions*. Many offshoots of AA have their own slightly adapted versions of the Steps which can be found online. Anyone is invited to visit open meetings of the A's.

Alternatives to Twelve Step Recovery

MAT – Medically Assisted Treatment. MATs involve the use of medications like methodone and suboxone (alternative opioids) or Vivitrol. Despite strong voices to the contrary and some mutual hostility and stigma, I have come to believe that Step work and MAT aren't mutually exclusive; the use of medication, especially early in sobriety, can open the psychological and physical space for recovery work while working a 12 Step program provides a continuous, even lifelong, supportive community as well as a way to psychological and spiritual transformation.

Celebrate Recovery – A Christian version of AA, pairing Scripture with the 12 Steps.

Rational Recovery – Various programs based on the work of behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner. These programs avoid the 12 Steps' reliance on a Higher Power by developing consciousness of and monitoring of "the addictive voice."

Harm Reduction – For those who can't or won't or aren't ready to become abstinent, "harm reduction means making the lives of [people] more bearable, more worth living" (Mate). Harm Reduction includes needle exchanges, and safe spaces for using.

Reflections on Spiritual Aspects of the Disease of Addiction

We who suffer from addictions are beloved children of God **and** at the same time often possess difficult personality traits: we are often dishonest, including about the duration and extent of our using; immature (i.e. chronological age does not necessarily match our actual maturity level); self-centered, and manipulative. And, still, even with all that, we are beloved children of God.

In active addiction, the substance or behavior of choice functions like a god. As they move deeper into addiction, users sacrifice everything else – spouses, children, parents, principles, careers, their own integrity. Addiction can be understood as a kind of idolatry.

People who suffer from addiction are aware even while using and certainly once they are "clean," of the damage they've done to the selves and others. They are filled with guilt and shame and feel helpless and hopeless. These feelings about themselves may well be reinforced by the people they love most and by the stigma about the disease still prevalent in society in general.

If they had a belief in God before active addiction they may believe that God has judged them unworthy of love because of their actions in addiction. For that reason, prayer may feel risky or presumptuous. Traditional 12 Step programs depend on the addicted person trusting themselves to the care of God as they understand God, but because of their lives in active addiction this commitment may feel dangerous even when they come back to a belief in God. Different understandings of the nature of God can have either life-saving or life-threatening consequences for people struggling with addiction.

Because of the shame and guilt they carry, people who are addicted sometimes keep using in order to suppress these feelings. Letting them know you care for them *as they are* makes it easier for them to tell you the painful secrets they are carrying. Offering the Sacrament of Reconciliation is often a great gift for them.

Lectionary for Recovery Eucharists & Prayer Services

This informal lectionary consists of Gospel stories that I have preached on in Recovery Eucharists at the Plymouth House and Emmanuel Church in Boston. They have been unfailingly illuminating to me as a Christian and a recovering person. Each pericope below is followed by a personal reflection especially written for the use of preachers who are not in recovery. I hope that you may find them useful to ponder before the service. Following the reflection are two or three meditation prompts which may be used as part of a homily, either as simply silent meditation or as silent meditation followed by sharing.

If you are offering the service in a secular setting like a rehab or sober house where all participants may not identify as Christians, I suggest that you use a variety of words for the Divine—the word “God” can have difficult resonances for some people. “Higher Power” is, of course, very familiar in recovery settings. Another possibility, especially since these are all Gospel passages, is “God as Jesus understood God.” Other useful words are “Creator” and “Holy One.”

Searching for the Lost Sheep

Luke 15: 1-7

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the religious teachers and lawyers were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So Jesus told them this parable: “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulder and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that is lost.’

“Just so, I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

Personal reflection:

I imagine Jesus’ listeners laughing in response to his question, “Which one of you...?,” because no responsible shepherd would leave ninety-nine well-behaved sheep in the wilderness at the mercy of wolves and thieves so he/she could go after one badly behaved sheep who is no credit to the flock and no advantage to the herd’s gene pool. Yet this shepherd, who is “God as Jesus understands God” leaves human practicality and common sense behind and seeks the beloved one who has wandered far away into dangerous territory. Take time before the service to reflect on these meditation prompts, remembering what it was like at a time when you yourself were lost.

Meditation prompts:

Imagine yourself as the lost sheep. Why did you run away? How does it feel to be found? Are you be relieved?, angry?, afraid you will be punished?

What would it be or what is it like to surrender “to the care of God as we understand God”? Take some time to feel yourself held in God’s care.

The Healing of Bartimaeus

Mark 10: 46-52

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you."

So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus said to him, "My teacher, let me see again."

Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has made you well." And immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Personal Reflection:

So often when we try to rid ourselves of unhealthy attachments or repetitive thoughts, voices inside us and maybe even the actual voices of other people (e.g., "don't worry about the time you spend on the Internet—everybody does it") try to prevent us from seeking help. I've found it helpful to identify the voices and where they're coming from, maybe even writing them down, then to pray about them and talk to someone I trust about what's going on. I invite you to sit quietly before the service and reflect on these voices in yourself. I have found the other two meditation prompts fruitful as well.

Meditation prompts:

Many voices were telling Bartimaeus to be quiet (one translation even has them say, "Shut up!"). What voices, outside yourself or inside, are discouraging your recovery? It's helpful to be aware of these voices. It is the disease talking and if you recognize it, you can tell it to shut up!

Bartimaeus throws off his cloak when he goes to Jesus. Perhaps the cloak weighed him down in some way. What do you need to let go of for the sake of recovery?

Jesus asks him: "What do you want me to do for you?" If he were standing in front of you right now, how would you answer him?

Woman with the Flow of Blood

Luke 8: 43-48

As they went, the crowds pressed in on Jesus. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhage for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped.

Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power has gone out of me."

When the woman saw 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."

Personal reflection:

This woman has incredible courage. I imagine her frightened and ashamed in every moment of this encounter until Jesus speaks to her, but still she does what she has set herself to do. I remember the first time I went to an AA meeting and said "I'm Susan and I'm an alcoholic." I was terrified, but I did it, and it was a great release. I invite you to remember a time or times when you said or did something even though you were frightened and maybe ashamed. What was it like for you before? How did you feel after you said or did it?

Meditation prompts:

What secrets are you holding on to?

Right now, tell your secrets to God and let God hold them with you.

Is there someone else you need to reveal this to?

Peter Walks on the Water

Matthew 14: 22-33

Jesus made his followers get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he sent away the crowds. And after he had sent away the crowds, he went up to the mountain by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

And early in the morning, Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come." So

Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Personal reflection:

This is pretty bold of Peter! What if it wasn't Jesus walking towards the boat on the water? When I take a risk I like to be sure the odds are with me. The big steps in my life – going to seminary, seeking help for my drinking, admitting my addiction to my bishop and later to a church I was serving – were terrifying, but each time, there was Jesus holding out his hand to me when I was sure I was about to sink. What about you? Have you followed a call from God or from deep in yourself and then felt the strong wind of doubt pushing you off track?

Meditation prompts:

If you've had a relapse, what pulled you down? If not, what has tempted you most strongly to relapse? Whatever it was – thoughts, people, external environment, it is worth writing down or at least staying aware of it.

Imagine sinking like Peter, seeing Jesus' hand reaching for you, and reaching out to grab it. Stay with this image and notice how it feels.

Listen to Jesus' words: "Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid." Repeat them as a mantra for a few minutes. This can be a helpful prayer in times of doubt and fear.

Pool at Bethzatha

John 5: 2-5

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes.

In these lay many invalids – blind, lame, and paralyzed, waiting for the stirring of the water, for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had.

One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way to it, someone else steps down ahead of me." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat, and walk." At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Personal reflection:

I'm always struck in this story by the fact that the sick man never really answers Jesus' simple question. Instead he gives an excuse and blames his continued illness on the fact that no one will help

him. This feels embarrassingly familiar to me – I am aware of behaviors and attitudes in myself that are unfree and even destructive, but I have all sorts of excuses why I keep clinging to them. In those cases, I have to ask myself, “Do I really want to be well?” In what ways does this story resonate with your own experience? What parts in you are you reluctant to have healed?

Meditation prompts:

In the past or now, what excuses have kept you from committing yourself to recovery?

Look into your heart – to what extent do you really want to recover from your addiction?

What might you do, what behavior can you adopt, to strengthen your commitment to recovery?

Poor Widow in the Temple

Mark 12: 41-44

Jesus was in the temple, sitting across from the offering box and observing how the crowd was tossing in money for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions. One poor widow came up and put in two small coins – a measly two cents.

Jesus called his disciples over and said, “The truth is that this poor widow gave more than all the others put together. All the others gave what they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford – she gave her all.”

The Message

Personal reflection:

Whenever he made a visitation to a parish as Bishop of New Hampshire, the Rt. Rev. Gene Robinson used to ask priests and congregations this question: “What are you willing to give for the sake of the Gospel?” Of course the Gospel answer is “Everything!,” and yet how many of us can truly respond that way? This is an area in which addicts and alcoholics have a spiritual advantage – they know from harsh experience that recovery from addiction is an all or nothing matter. They have to “give their all.” This Gospel invites all of us to ask ourselves, what more might God be calling you to give for the sake of the Gospel, for Christ, for the reign of God?

Meditation prompts:

Do you pursue recovery with the same passion and desperation with which you used to pursue your addictive substance or behavior? If not, how could you intensify your pursuit of recovery?

What is the most important concern in your life right now? Pray to keep or put God and recovery first.

The Kingdom of God

Luke 13: 18-19

Jesus said, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made their nests in it.”

And then he said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

Personal reflection:

Here is Jesus at his storytelling best! He’s deliberately startling and even confusing his hearers to push them to see in a fresh way. They’d know that mustard was a weed that no sensible farmer would allow near his garden because it was so hard to eradicate. And yeast? It was considered to some extent unclean in Jesus’ culture and the amount Jesus mentions, the “three measures,” is equal to 50 pounds of flour – way too much dough to handle! These two metaphors suggest the question of how challenges, and difficulties, and even suffering in your life have brought you closer to God.

Meditation prompts:

The mustard seed and yeast were undesirable things to Jesus' listeners. Consider what you have learned through your struggle with addiction.

Both the yeast and the mustard seed resulted in wild abundance. What gifts have you received or do you long to receive in recovery? Pray in thanksgiving for what you have received.

The Rich Young Man

Mark 10: 17-22

As Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and your mother.'" The young man said to Jesus, "Teacher, I have kept all these things since my youth." Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing: go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When he heard this, the young man was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Personal reflection:

This Gospel offers a great opportunity to check in on our personal attachments. Where do you go for comfort or avoidance or numbing (for me it's books)? Is there something you know you spend too much money on, money you don't really want to be tallied up by you or anyone else (again, books)? If any of these questions strikes a chord, you might consider what you would do, even who you would be, without that thing. Would it make sense to cut back? What would cutting back or even abstaining involve? What might you gain?

Meditation prompts:

The rich young man sacrificed following Jesus for the sake of his wealth and the power it gave him. What have you sacrificed to your addictive substance or behavior?

Imagine Jesus/ God/ your Higher Power feeling sad when you turned away to the god of your addiction.

I like to think that the young man eventually returned to Jesus. Imagine Jesus/God/ Higher Power welcoming you back.

The Raising of Lazarus

John 11: 33-44

When Jesus saw Mary weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone.

And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him and let him go."

Personal reflection:

We all have places in our lives in which we are unfree. It is important to name them, pray for help, and reach out to others who can help unbind us. Where are those places in you? Who are the people who can help you or are helping you? How do you pray for God's help?

Meditation prompts:

During your using, who has wept for you? Pray for them.

Lazarus is still wrapped in cloth when he is raised. What keeps you stuck in destructive ways of behaving even in recovery? Pray for help in changing that behavior.

Jesus tells Lazarus' friends to "unbind him." Who are the people helping you to see the truth about your disease and pointing the way to getting better? Give thanks for them.

The Farmer and the Seed

Mark 4: 1-9

Jesus began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd was gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.

He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen, a farmer went out to sow seed. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among weeds, and the weeds grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundred-fold." And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

Personal reflections:

Sometimes we can get so busy that we are oblivious to the tiny seeds God is trying to sow in our hearts. Hurling along, getting things done from morning until night, as I tend to do, blocks me. That is my rocky soil and I am aware that I can only soften it by taking more time for silence. What about you? How do busyness, distractions, other attachments block these little God seeds from growing? What practice could you commit to in order to help enrich the soil of your soul?

Meditation Prompts:

How does your mind and heart receive the good news of recovery? Probably more than on a hard-packed path or sidewalk, since you are here today. But what about the rocky soil? What distracts you from your recovery?

And what about the weeds? What inside you or outside you is trying to pull you back from your commitment to recovery?

What can you do to enrich the soil of your heart? What practical thing could you commit to? A real prayer practice, with prayer morning, night, and during the day? Time for meditation? Helping someone else?

The Churchgoer and the Tax Collector

Luke 18: 9-14

Jesus told this story to some who were pleased with themselves over their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people. "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a faithful churchgoer, the other a tax man. The churchgoer posed and prayed like this: 'O God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and give away a tenth of all my income.' Meanwhile, the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, 'God, give mercy. Forgive me a sinner.'"

Jesus commented, "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to wind up flat on your face, but if you're content to simply be yourself before God, you will become more than yourself."

Adapted from The Message

Personal reflection:

I'm using the word "churchgoer" instead of "Pharisee" so that the contrast in social and religious value is more clear. The irony here of course is that we as clergy or engaged lay – churchgoers – are the ones telling this story. The alcoholics and addicts in the service are sharply aware of the pain they have caused others and of their own "defects of character," as the phrase is used in AA. What habitual attitudes or behaviors draw you away from God? What is your most serious and strongest attachment?

Meditation Prompts:

Jesus is deliberately trying to confuse his hearers with this story. Of course a righteous church person is better than someone who exploits and cheats others. But Jesus turns our "of courses" upside down, something he loves to do! So what can this story say to us? It definitely asks some hard questions, such as –

In what ways do you think you're better than others? Maybe you think you don't drink or use as much as "that guy" or "that woman." In what ways do you put yourselves above other people?

Are you willing to admit your faults, your character defects to yourself and a few trusted others? In silence, right now, admit them to God.

Jesus is Tempted by the Devil

Luke 4: 1-13

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus answered him, "It is written,

*'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"*

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

*'He will command his angels
concerning you,
to protect you.'*

and

*'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"*

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Personal reflection:

Temptation is a fact of our life. We're continually being besieged by sort of good things that are competing to take the place of better good things – the half gallon of chocolate ice cream in the freezer vs. care for the health of our hearts, extended time on our cell phones vs. quality face to face time with loved ones. We can all name dozens of things and behaviors that tempt us away from the right thing to do. The best weapon we have in this challenge besides prayer is to bring the voices of the temptations into our consciousness, so we can name them, even write them down, and thereby get power over them. What are the things that call you away from the next right thing?

Meditation prompts:

What are the voices of temptation that call you to use? The obsession itself, maybe. Or maybe temptations like, "I'm not worth it; I might as well give in"; "Maybe I can manage alcohol (or heroin or pills or gambling or eating . . .) if I just try harder"; "It might work for other people, but it won't work for me." The more conscious you are of these voices, the more quickly you can notice them and reach out to God and other people for help. Take a minute or so to consider what voices most tempt you. Take a minute or so to consider what voices are most tempting to you.

What might be a good prayer to help in times of temptation? Try out one of these for a minute or two right now: "Not my will but yours be done," or "May I do Thy will always," or "Give me strength to do your bidding."

The Great Commandment

Mark 12: 28-34

One of the religious lawyers came near and heard Jesus and the religious scholars testing each other with questions, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he said, "Which is the most important of all the commandments?"

Jesus said, "The first in importance is 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." The religious lawyer said, "A wonderful answer, Teacher! So lucid and accurate – that God is one and there is no other; and to 'love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,' – this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one dared ask him any question.

Personal reflection:

As people have said about the 12 Steps, these two commandments are "simple but not easy." In their simplicity they lay out clearly what we are called to do in this life – the sorts of relationships we are to strive for with God and others. You might prepare for the service by looking at each way of loving God that Jesus mentions: How do you love God with your heart – your emotions & how you express your devotion? Your soul – what are your prayer and meditation practices? Do they bring you closer to God? Your mind – do you explore different ways of thinking about God? Do you make time for study of Scripture? Your strength – how faithful and steady are you in maintaining your relationship with God? Beyond these questions, you might turn Jesus' words around and ask yourself whether you love yourself as much as you love your neighbor (for me a very tough question!).

Meditation prompts:

Do you love God/Higher Power? How might your life be different if you loved God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength?

Do you love yourself as much a beloved child of God as anyone else? If not, what is getting in your way? Ask God to help you see yourself the same way he sees you.

Jesus Tells How to become His Follower

Mark 8:31-37

Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

Personal reflection:

This is one of those gospels I found it difficult to make sense of before I began my journey of recovery. What did Jesus mean? But as I got farther away from the fog of drinking and deeper into the Steps, I realized that the spiritual path of the Steps asks for the same level of commitment Jesus is talking about here. If God ("Higher Power") and recovery aren't my first priority, then I will at best be a "dry drunk," just as anxious and egotistical as I was before I stopped drinking, and at worst, I'll relapse.

My bishop used to ask us, whenever we had a clergy meeting or he made a visitation, "What are you willing to give for the sake of the Gospel?" It was essentially the same question I've had to ask myself over and over in recovery and the question implied in Jesus' startling conversation with his disciples.

Meditation prompts:

Besides your addictive substance or behavior what are the particular persons, places, or things you had to give up or will have to give up for the sake of sobriety and recovery?

What has helped you "lose" these things from your life? Prayer? Other people? Overdosing or physical illness from using?

Give thanks for God's grace and mercy towards you in this journey.

Friends Bring a Sick Man to Jesus

Mark 2:1-12

When Jesus returned to his home after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many people gathered at the house that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them.

Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after digging through it, they let down the mat on which the paralyzed man lay.

When Jesus saw his friends' faith, he said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some religious lawyers were sitting there questioning in their hearts, "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! No one can forgive sins but God alone.

At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier to say to this man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up, take up your mat and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . ." he said to the paralyzed man, "I say to you, stand up, take your mat, and go to your home."

And the man stood up, and immediately he took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Personal reflection:

I love that this passage brings up the importance of other people in the process of healing. Who are the people who have helped you in your spiritual growth? Were you always willing to do what they suggested? How have other people played a role in any healing you've experienced, whether physical, psychological, spiritual, or social?

Meditation prompts:

I've always wondered whether the man really wanted to get better. It was his friends who insisted that he go to Jesus. What part did other people play in the very beginning of your recovery? Was there an intervention? What was it like for you? Say a prayer of thanksgiving for those people who helped you along the way.

Who are the people supporting you in your journey of recovery right now? Pray for them.

Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus ; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, because he was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today. "So Zacchaeus hurried down and was happy to welcome Jesus.

All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be a guest of someone who is a sinner. Zacchaeus stood there and said to Jesus, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

Personal reflection:

There's no big miracle in this story but there is enormous healing! Jesus befriends a tax collector, a person despised by his community for dishonesty and treason, and heals him through a simple act of kindness and grace to the point where he is ready to make restitution to those he has harmed. When in your life have you experienced extraordinary kindness? How did it affect your life?

Meditation prompts:

In terms of the Steps, Zacchaeus seems to accomplish them in an afternoon! By the end of the story he has leapt to Steps 8 (making a list of those you have harmed) and Step 9 as he makes concrete plans to make financial and other amends to those he has cheated and exploited over the years. Who are some people you should make amends to? Right now make a start by praying for them.

Imagine God/your Higher Power calling you by name, without judgment. How does it make you feel that, no matter what other people may think of you, you are known and loved by God? Say a prayer of gratitude for God's never-ending love for you.

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15: 1-2, 11-24

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the upright people and the religious scholars were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So the man divided his property between his two sons.

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he wasted all his money in bad living.

When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the food the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'"

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But the father said to his son, 'Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And cook the fattest calf and let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate."

Personal reflection:

This story is so familiar, but so rich! The not quite repentance of the son (really, he only goes home because he's hungry) meets the exuberant love of his father who doesn't even stop to listen to his son's prepared speech. All that matters is that his beloved child has come home. You might take time to remember situations in your life when you have received forgiveness that you may have felt you didn't deserve or when you have been given an experience of God's mercy.

Meditation prompts:

What have you thrown away or lost in your using?

What is the hunger inside you that has brought you to this Eucharist/Prayer Service?

Imagine God or Jesus or your Higher Power embracing you and welcoming you home as a beloved child.

Jesus Rejected in His Hometown

Mark 6:1-6

Jesus left that place and came to his hometown, Galilee, and his disciples followed him. On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor except in their hometown, and among their own relatives, and in their own house."

And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Personal Reflections:

Such an odd Gospel! Yet this picture of Jesus failing to heal because folks didn't believe that he had the power to heal is helpful as a description of the logic of healing. It seems that some degree of receptivity is necessary, even if it is as ambivalent as "I believe, help my unbelief." Reflect on a situation in which you were healed – physically, psychologically, spiritually, or socially – suddenly or over a period of time. How receptive were you beforehand to the possibility of being healed?

This story speaks directly to AA's Step 2: "We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

Meditation prompts:

Jesus couldn't heal in Nazareth because the people didn't and wouldn't have faith that he could. How strong is your faith in the power of Jesus/God/your Higher Power to heal you from addiction?

If you find it hard to believe in that power right now, do you think you are at least willing to believe or even willing to be willing to believe?

In another Gospel story a man with a sick child prays, "I believe, help my unbelief." If you have trouble with belief, this may be a good prayer for you. Try repeating it over and over right now, like a mantra.

The Bent-Over Woman

Luke 13: 10-17

Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight.

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

But the officials, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day."

But Jesus answered them and said, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from bondage on the sabbath day?"
When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Personal reflection:

The first part of this Gospel perfect describes how my sobriety feels to me. After many years stooped over in shame and blinded by my addiction, I am now able to stand up tall and look people in the eye. You might reflect on times in your own life when you have been healed into a new degree of freedom. What was the nature of the freedom? What has it opened up for you? How has it changed your relationships with God, other people, and yourself?

Meditation prompts:

How does the woman's condition remind you of yourself in active addiction? What are some similarities?

What voices inside or outside you are holding you back from accepting God's willingness to restore you to sanity (2nd Step)?

Imagine the woman standing straight after so many years. Imagine the freedom she felt in her body, mind, and spirit! Try to imagine such freedom for yourself.

More than Many Sparrows

Luke 12: 6-7

Jesus said, "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Personal reflection:

I confess that there have been times in my life when the only way I could hold myself together was to recite the line from an earlier translation of this passage: "You are worth more than many sparrows." Whenever I have felt driven to recite this line as a mantra, it has helped keep me going until my dejection lifts. If you have times of feeling worthless or besieged by loss, what do you do? Are there particular prayers that help you? Where do you find God in these experiences?

Meditation prompts:

How do you feel about yourself these days? How strong or weak is your sense that God really does love and value you?

How does this change for you when you are clean/sober/abstinent? How has it changed for you in recovery?

What is God doing in your life right now?

Jesus Makes Demands on His Followers

Luke 9: 57-62

As they were going along the road, someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another person said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Personal Reflection:

I always grew anxious when I had to preach on this Gospel. How to make sense of Jesus' demand that those who want to follow him should ignore and abandon the people closest to them?

It was only when I began struggling with my addictions to alcohol and food that I realized that my chief priority needed to be my recovery and that went hand in hand with surrendering myself to God's actions in me. I had all sorts of excuses why not to prioritize God and my recovery but all of them led me away from wholeness and health.

The Gospel poses a good opportunity to reflect on your priorities. What is most important in your life? Are your ideal priorities different from your working priorities? Is there some shift God is demanding from you right now?

Meditation prompts:

What is the most important thing in your life right now? Is it recovery? If not, where does recovery fall on your personal list of priorities?

What might God be asking you to change in your life right now to ensure that recovery becomes and stays the most important thing? What could you commit to today? Pray for the strength to put it into action.

Jesus Prepares His Friends for His Death

Mark 8: 31-37

Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things, but on human things." He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

Personal reflection:

This Gospel is another of those passages of Scripture that became much clearer to me in recovery than before. For any addicted person who takes their recovery seriously these are **the** questions, "For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?" The word "life" here for them is not a metaphor. People addicted to opiates are most visibly at risk – we are surrounded by their deaths at home, on the sidewalk, in MacDonald's or library restrooms. But probably most of us know people who drank themselves to death or died in accidents due to drinking, and cocaine often leads to sudden heart attacks even after use has ended. "Life" is also a useful metaphor. Is there anything in the way you are living that is limiting your life – maybe physically, but also emotionally and spiritually? Pondering St. Iranaeus' bold statement, "The glory of God is a human person fully alive," consider what might be keeping you from your full aliveness.

Meditation prompts:

Is there anything in your life right now that is more important than your recovery? How is it affecting your recovery?

What changes could you make in your attitudes or actions that would put your recovery first?

Ask God to help you make these changes.

What is one change you could make today?

Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet

John 12: 1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it). Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it that she might have it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Personal reflection:

For me, Mary of Bethany is a model of passionate, wildly imprudent love for God. Her action is over the top in so many ways: financial (a pound of nard cost an average year's salary), social (can you imagine how Mary's exuberance played in a respectable dinner party?, can you imagine the scandal?), and familial (I wonder what the relationships among the siblings were like after the party was over, especially since poor Martha probably had to clean up!).

A person who is addicted to substances or behaviors knows how to "love" extravagantly and is willing to sacrifice everything in life for the sake of the addicting object or action. They can really only be healed if they pursue recovery with the same single-mindedness.

So this might be a good time to ask yourself, whom or what you love most. Is it worth your love? What are you willing to give up for its sake? How extravagant are you in your love? How extravagant is your love for God?

Meditation prompts:

Mary bought and poured out the perfume as an expression of her extravagant love for Jesus. Whom or what do you love most in your life right now?

In the time of your using, what were you willing to ignore or cast aside (e.g., people, money, job, respect) for the sake of getting drugs and/or alcohol?

What would it be like to love sobriety with the same passion that you love/loved drugs or alcohol? Pray for that gift.

Seasonal Gospels

Jesus is Born

Luke 2: 1-7

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. That was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for him in the inn.

Personal reflection:

Christmas is a time of great joy and great sorrow. For people with addictions, it may be a time of regret and guilt, of painful memories and acute consciousness of loss.

How are you faring this Christmastide? Is there a particular sorrow that is on your heart today, or a particular joy? How do your feelings right now connect with the story of Jesus' birth?

Meditation prompts:

The newborn Jesus was laid in a manger, basically a feed trough for animals. Not the place where one would expect God to choose! In your life, what was an unlikely place or event where you encountered God?

What is the greatest gift you have ever been given by God? Give thanks for it.

The Magi and their Search

Matthew 2: 1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judas, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who was born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.

When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying! "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.

When they had heard the king they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Personal reflection:

I have found that it is so easy to stop trusting in my star – which I interpret as what God is calling me to do at this time in my life – if the calling leads me into unexpected places. I followed my star out of parish ministry and I was miserable and angry and confused the whole time of decision and the year following. I tried different things that seemed to suit my talents (my Jerusalem?), but nothing worked. Then one day I was asked to chaplain people who were struggling to recover from addiction to drugs and alcohol. My star had come to rest over a rehab facility. Who would have guessed? Where is God calling you right now? To minister where you are and as you are? Or is your star leading you into something new and unknown? What are the voices that may be trying to persuade you from trusting your star?

Meditation prompts:

What distracts you most from your desire to recover? Are you distracted by money?, love?, sex?, the desire for respectability?

What people or places would it be dangerous to your sobriety to be with or return to?

Have you found that the gifts of recovery have come to you in unexpected places or unexpected ways?

Jesus arrives in Jerusalem

Luke 19: 29-40

When Jesus had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"

So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They said, "The Lord needs it."

Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Some of the religious teachers in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Personal reflection:

Such joy in the streets! Shouts and songs, a joyous demonstration of relief that God was moving in Jerusalem and here was the Messiah that would conquer the Roman occupiers and return Israel to itself.

There's always a sadness hanging over this reading and Palm Sunday itself. Because that's of course not what happened. What happened was what seemed to be utter defeat and desolation. Yet when Jesus gives himself freely to death "for the life of the world," he reveals God's incredible love for us, the love that is always available to us if we open ourselves to it. Take some time to reflect on how God's healing love has worked and is working in your life right now.

Meditation prompts:

Have you experienced "the pink cloud" of early recovery? How are you facing the challenges of real life? What resources are you using to cope with disappointments and even tragedies in your life?

When Jesus says, "if these were silent, the stones would shout out," he means that what he's about to do will not be a military or political victory, but a cosmic revelation of God's generous love. How has God's love worked in your life? Can you see God working in your life right now? Give thanks.

Jesus is Crucified

Luke 23: 32-47

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Jesus. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept insulting him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.

Personal reflection:

In Luke's version of the Passion narrative, the theme of forgiveness looms large. Jesus' first words as he is raised on the cross are words of forgiveness for everyone involved in this travesty of justice— Pilate, the temple officials, the soldiers, the people who once followed and now mock him, the apostles and friends conspicuous by their absence. He forgives the criminal who reaches out to him in compassion and hope and welcomes him into Paradise. I wonder where I am in this scene— how am I so proud or cruel or cowardly or fearful that I don't consider the consequences of my actions, whom I may be hurting? And I also wonder whom I need to forgive, especially the people I am consciously withholding forgiveness from. These are important Good Friday questions for us all.

Meditation prompts:

Jesus forgives everyone involved in the Crucifixion, Pilate, the temple officials, the soldiers, those who once followed him and now mock him, his apostles and friends conspicuous by their

absence. Who are people you need to forgive? Bring some of them into your mind and forgive them or, if that is too difficult right now, ask God to forgive them for you.

It may be difficult for you, but take this time to open your heart and believe that God has forgiven you just as Jesus forgave the criminal.

Jesus Rises from the Dead

Luke 24: 1-5

At the crack of dawn on Sunday the women came to the tomb carrying the burial spices they had prepared. They found the entrance stone rolled back from the tomb so they walked in. But once inside, they couldn't find the body of the Master Jesus.

They were puzzled, wondering what to make of this. Then out of nowhere it seemed, two men in dazzling clothes, stood there. The women were awestruck and bowed down in worship.

The men said, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here, he has risen!"

Personal reflection:

A few years ago I spent Holy Week and Easter at a monastery. There were hours of church a day, beautiful services, heavenly music. I've never been so fully present to the Easter story.

But church was not where I heard the story of Jesus' rising from the dead most clearly. The day before Easter, one of the monks took me to an AA meeting a couple of towns over.

There I heard other stories, like the ones one hears at every meeting: woman 18 months sober who had come into AA after her child died. She didn't want to face the pain drunk. Another woman, a grandmother, caring for a three year old granddaughter. She'd been in recovery a long time and she wanted to say how grateful she was that she was sober. Otherwise, she said, she would have murdered the child's father who had abused the little girl. Then she would have been in prison and the child sent into foster care. You could feel her strength radiating across the room.

Those women, and the people we meet in rehab, in sober living, in meetings, were all dead or dying in spirits, minds, and bodies. And now, through a miracle I don't understand, they – and I – are alive.

Mostly I call what has happened to them and to me "recovery," and it's a good word. But today, on Easter, I'm calling the addicted person's journey from death to life "resurrection."

Meditation prompts:

Take a little time to be quiet. In the quiet, notice your breath, your heart beating. Slowly expand your awareness to the sounds around you.

Imagine what it was like for Jesus to come back into life. To breathe, to feel his heart beating, to hear the sounds of this beautiful world. Imagine his gratitude to God.

Give thanks for your recovered/resurrected life.

Jesus Appears to Two Friends

Luke 24: 13-3

Now on that same day two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" they replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, how he was handed over to be condemned to death and crucified But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. . . ."

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.

Personal reflections:

Have you ever just blurted out something deep and true about yourself to a perfect stranger? There's something safe about confiding in someone you assume you'll never see again.

Cleopas and his wife?, his friend?, both of them decimated by Jesus' death, confide their shock and sorrow to a gentle stranger whom they encounter on the road to their home. The stranger hears their lament and then leads them to reinterpret their experience. As you know, later in this pericope, we're told that their hearts were strangely warmed as he talked. And then, in a startling and tender moment they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

Have you had the experience of losing God, where God's presence seemed utterly absent? What was that like for you? What do you think God was doing in you during that time of lost presence? If and when you were again aware of the divine presence, how did it come to you? Suddenly?, gradually?

Meditation prompts:

Have you ever experienced God's presence in an unexpected way? Take some time to remember and savor that moment.

Have you ever experienced losing God? In what way do you think it was connected to your addiction? Or are you finding God for the first time in recovery?

Cleopas and his wife or friend recognized Jesus when he broke the bread at supper. Are there particular times or places where you are most likely to feel more strongly that God is with you?

Psalm Selections

I suggest simply rotating these from session to session.

I have found it that participants in the service appreciate having copies of the day's psalm that they can take away with them so they can pray it on their own.

Psalm 3

Psalm 16: 1, 7, 9-11

Psalm 18: 1-7, 17-20

Psalm 23

Psalm 25: 1-9

Psalm 27: 1-8

Psalm 31: 1-5, 9-10, 12, 14-16, 21

Psalm 32: 1-8, 12

Psalm 42: 1-4a, 14-15

Psalm 51: 1-4, 7-16

Psalm 69: 1-4, 14-18

Psalm 71: 1 – 6, 12

Psalm 116: 1-8

Psalm 139: 1-17, 22-23

Psalm 142

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St. Gregory of Nysa Episcopal Church, *Music for Liturgy: A Book for All God's Friends* (A great resource for chants from a variety of traditions)

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Other Resources

The Episcopal Church in NH website: www.nhepiscopal.org. The site has many resources helpful to pastors. From the site's Home Page go to Resources, then to Addiction and Recovery and press [HERE](#). The Liturgical Resources section has full texts for several Recovery Eucharists, as well as a simple Recovery Healing Service.

Episcopal Recovery Ministries: www.episcopalrecovery.org. The site has helpful leaflets and other publications on Recovery and the Church.

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