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# TO THOSE WHO DREAM

*Advent  
Devotional*

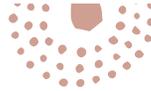
Art, reflections, &  
prompts for a  
season of dreaming

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*Prepare* / Mark 1:1-8

My dad built me a changing table.  
For nine months, my mom watched her ankles swell and her belly grow.  
For nine months, my dad would come home from work,  
kiss her on her forehead—  
Pressing bangs to skin—and tell her she was beautiful.  
Then for nine months, he'd slip into the garage  
To build sawdust sand castles and a dresser out of dreams.  
I imagine she smiled, perched in that rocking chair.  
He was in his woodshop, preparing the way.

Eighteen years later I left for college.  
As I packed my bags, my mom baked blueberry muffins for the road—  
the smell of home.  
She wrapped them in foil and placed them in a cardboard box,  
Willing similar layers of protection to be wrapped around me, her little girl.  
She was preparing the way.

My aunts and uncles bought sweatshirts in my new school colors.  
My dad taught me how to change a tire.  
My mom gave me the earrings I'd been sneaking from her jewelry box  
for the last four years.  
I hid sticky-note love letters on the kitchen door for them to find  
when they returned home.  
We were quiet in the car.  
My brother cried.  
We were all preparing the way.

And through these moments, I have come to see,  
That preparation and love can be the same thing.  
For there is something about love that makes us want to prepare.  
There is something about love that compels us to  
Throw open the doors,  
Yell it from the rooftop,  
Set the table,  
Decorate the nursery,  
Leave love notes on the back door,  
Build the changing table,  
Trim the tree,  
Bake muffins for the road,  
And when it's time,  
If you must,  
Let go.

Preparation and love can be the same thing.

*Poem by Sarah Are*

*read* Mark 1:1-8

*commentary* / Dr. Marcia Riggs

There is a messenger app on our phones. We can communicate immediately and directly with folks on our contact list using this app if they are online at the time. We have become accustomed to receiving news about upcoming events through email and text messages. For some of us, it may be difficult to imagine being John the Baptist standing in the wilderness. He is face to face with others. He is vulnerable, “clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist” (v. 6a). He proclaims that there is one more powerful coming (v. 7a). Yet, we do know messengers like John the Baptist. They are the peaceful protesters in the streets; they proclaim that “Black Lives Matter”—a message that contradicts their treatment at the hands of society’s “protectors of the peace.”

There are at least two reasons why John’s and the protesters’ messages challenge the status quo. First, John’s message is not self-aggrandizing; it is not about his brand. His message preempts those who think they know who is—and how to be—powerful. Second, the message of peaceful protesters marks them as dreamers; why put ourselves in harm’s way when social justice seems elusive? Dreamers acknowledge that the world is violent, but they have a vision of a society of just peace. They proclaim: “No justice, no peace.”

As we light today’s candle, remember that Jesus came into the world so that we are now messengers by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (v. 8). To prepare the way for just peace is a choice that we must make daily. Messengers know that what we see is not all there can, will, or should be. Messengers face the troubles of the world receptively, perceptively, and attentively as they proclaim, “We shall overcome.”

*read* Mark 1:1-8

*from the artist* / Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Recently, my husband and I volunteered to serve on the safety team for a Black Lives Matter march and vigil in our local city. While we've frequently participated in peaceful protests, this role was new to us. We joined hundreds of white allies and community organizers, showing up hours before the march began to prepare supplies and receive training. Our role was straightforward: we were to use our bodies to create critical mass along the edges of the crowd in order to protect the leaders of the march from harm. We were to stay alert and look for agitators—white supremacists or others instigating violence—and either place our bodies as a barrier or, when possible, try to nonviolently de-escalate the situation. Our trainers directed us: "Today's march is not about you. You won't be able to participate in the chants and you might not be able to hear the speakers. Instead, you are here to use your privilege to protect our Black leaders so they can make their voices heard, so they can express their grief and cry out for change without fearing that harm will be done to them in return." And so, all day we walked alongside the shouts crying out in the wilderness of downtown city streets. As a call for repentance for the sins of racism, police brutality, and systemic injustice were proclaimed, we did our best to keep the peace and prepare the way.

As I've returned to this scripture, I've been struck by the fact that the story of the good news according to Mark begins with protest—with crowds swelling and shouting, with a movement of people hungry for change and willing to risk their lives for it. And so, I'm committing to preparing the way—for God's message of liberation and love to truly be heard and made known.

*prayer*

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



The Beginning of the Good News | Lisle Gwynn Garrity



Prepare a World | Lauren Wright Pittman

*read* Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

*from the artist* / Lauren Wright Pittman

The words of this psalm both soothe my soul and ignite longing in my bones. I felt this same feeling as I watched the funeral of the Honorable Congressman, John Robert Lewis. I couldn't help but weep listening to stories of his astounding life—about his passion and undying belief in humanity despite being repeatedly ridiculed, beaten, and jailed. It's the same dissonance I feel when I hold this psalm in sharp contrast to the reality of this broken world.

During the funeral, professor and civil rights activist, Rev. James Lawson shared the poem, "I Dream A World" by Langston Hughes<sup>6</sup> to close his remarks about Lewis: "I dream a world where man / No other man will scorn, / Where love will bless the earth / And peace its paths adorn / I dream a world where all / Will know sweet freedom's way, / Where greed no longer saps the soul / Nor avarice blights our day. / A world I dream where black or white, / Whatever race you be, / Will share the bounties of the earth / And every [one] is free, / Where wretchedness will hang its head / And joy, like a pearl, / Attends the needs of all [humankind]— / Of such I dream, my world!"

Lewis aligned his dreams with the dreams of God, and he worked his whole life, creating a path for God's forward motion. I believe this discord in my bones is actually a charge and calling—one that John Lewis named "the deepest calling of your hearts." We were created to prepare the way for *Shalom*—complete wholeness and peace—to take shape on this earth, to ensure all of humanity can enjoy the fullness of Creation. May we honor the life and work of Lewis by getting into good trouble, preparing the way for God's glory to dwell among us.

### *prayer*

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, Langston. "I Dream A World." 1902-1967. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Random House, 1994.

*read* Isaiah 40:1-11

*from the artist* / Hannah Garrity

*"The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever."*

In this image a single iris stalk rises up with three flowers. Representing the inconstancy of the people, the flower is just beginning to fade and the grasses begin to bend. The breath of the Lord swirls through the frame.

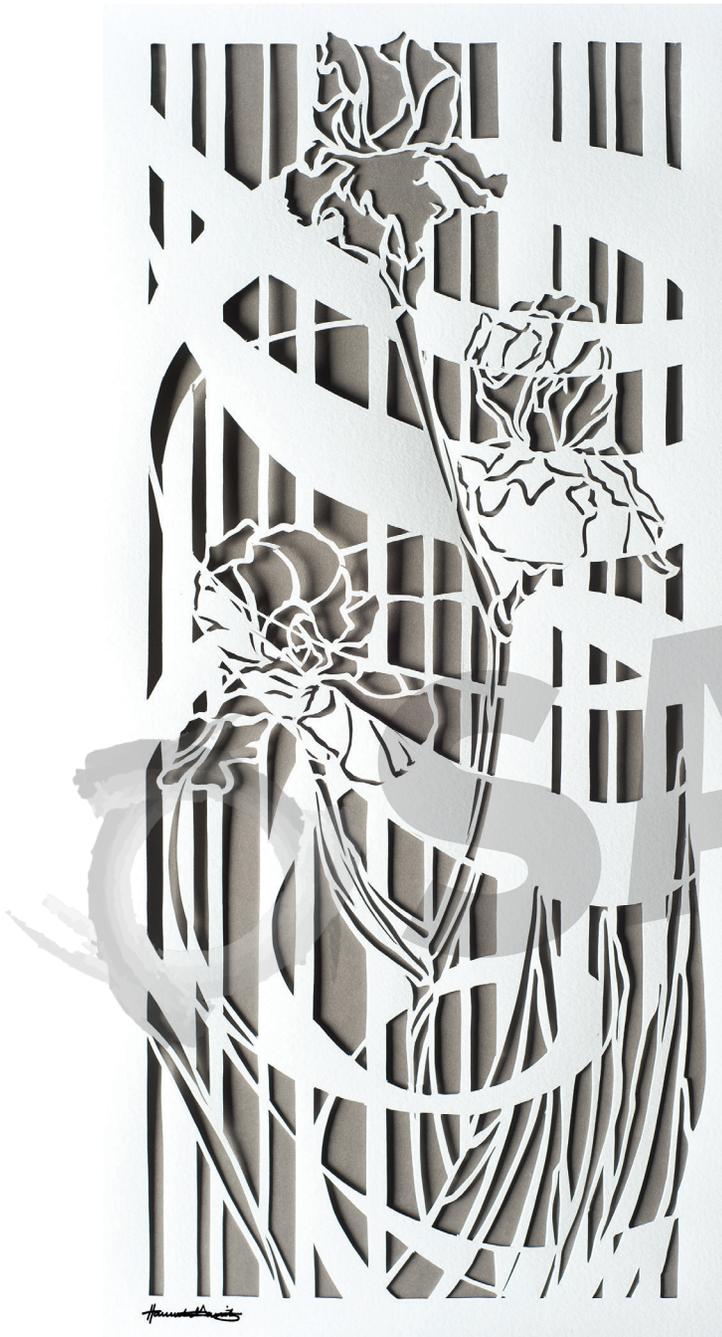
*"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.  
Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain."*

In the background, straight vertical lines represent the paths made straight, the leveling of the ground, the smoothing of the rough places.

Yet, in our inconstancy, God is there for us. There is hope, as Isaiah cries out, for God continues to speak peace into being within us. God continues to whisper Their meaning and purpose into us, teaching us to rely on Them and to bend our trajectory toward righteousness. In this moment, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our physical ways of reaching out and encircling each other in love are stripped away. We must speak. We must speak the peace that we normally act out; we must speak it into being. Can we find the words? Can we reach out to those with whom we can connect? Can we, together, make space for God to speak peace through us?

*prayer*

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



The Flower Fades | Hannah Garrity

*journaling our*  
**DREAMS**

If you can remember any of your dreams from this past week, recall any details that come back to you—colors, people, images, fears, interactions, feelings. As you piece together your dreams, are there any patterns or deeper meanings? How might your dreams be showing you something about your life right now?

If you can't remember your dreams, in the space below, write a dream of peace: Who is in need of peace and what does it look like for them to receive it?

**TAKE SABBATH,**  
*for dreams take time*

There's a reason dreams come to us in our sleep—rest recharges us, connects us with our intuition, expands our imagination, and opens us to receive God's messages. It takes action to bring our dreams to life; it takes rest and time to sustain them. To nourish and sustain yourself as a dreamer, commit to a Sabbath activity today, perhaps one of those listed below:

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Cook or bake something using a favorite or new recipe.
- Do yoga or exercise in a way that feels good for your body.
- Write and mail a letter to someone you haven't talked to in a while.
- Organize or redesign an area in your home.
- Draw or create something.
- Dance or play music.
- Write a poem or a song.
- Watch a movie.
- Take a nap.
- Read a book.