

*Praying toward Pentecost:
A Private Prayer Retreat in Eight Movements*

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In northern California we continue to be mostly sheltering-in-place through the month of May, striving to flatten the curve of the coronavirus spread. In response to requests we've received, the New College Berkeley community offers here a private prayer retreat in eight movements. If you begin the retreat on Sunday, May 17, praying each movement over two days will bring it to closure the day after Pentecost. If you begin the retreat on Sunday, May 24, a pace of praying with one movement each day will complete the retreat on Pentecost Sunday, May 31.

The period of 50 days following Easter and ending with Pentecost is a season of looking for grace in everyday life. On the calendars of the more liturgical Christian denominations, Ordinary Time then begins. In ordinary and extraordinary times, Jesus' companions looked for God with them, straining toward hope even as they lamented, feared, wondered, and hoped. The Gospel accounts of their weeks following the Resurrection show us people bringing their full selves, with all their feelings, to their search for God. We do the same in our strange time.

This guide draws on the creativity and wisdom of artists, theologians, and especially the Gospels which help us dwell in the post-Resurrection stories, the Ascension, and Pentecost.

As you look for the Light of the Risen Christ in these days of Eastertide, feel free to pray with this guide (in whatever way is helpful to you) and to pass it freely on to others you think might appreciate it. Like the Lenten retreats we published before Easter, this contains Scripture, poetry and prose, images, and songs. Here's a link to a video blessing to you from New College Berkeley: https://youtu.be/ql_jObvkQEM.

Susan S. Phillips

I. *Visiting the Empty Tomb*



Eugène Burnand, *John and Peter Run to the Grave on the Morning of the Resurrection* (1898)

Jesus' companions observed the Sabbath after he died. His body lay in the tomb through what we call Holy Saturday, when we're told Jesus descended into hell to proclaim good tidings to the dead (1 Peter 4:6). His companions grieved and prayed their Sabbath prayers in their homes, sheltered-in-place. They were bereft, disillusioned, and vulnerable to persecution; the world was dangerous.

In that ominous season while honoring their beloved, deceased teacher, Jesus' companions began to hear stories from people in their community who claimed to have seen evidence that Jesus had risen from the dead. The first to hear that story from Mary Magdalene and respond to it were Peter and the other "beloved disciple."

Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen clothes lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; he saw the linen

cloths lying, and the napkin which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. –John 20:1-9

Easter 2020 by Malcolm Guite

And where is Jesus, this strange Easter day?
Not lost in our locked churches, anymore
Than he was sealed in that dark sepulchre.
The locks are loosed; the stone is rolled away,
And he is up and risen, long before,
Alive, at large, and making his strong way
Into the world he gave his life to save,
No need to seek him in his empty grave.

He might have been a wafer in the hands
Of priests this day, or music from the lips
Of red-robed choristers, instead he slips
Away from church, shakes off our linen bands
To don his apron with a nurse: he grips
And lifts a stretcher, soothes with gentle hands
The frail flesh of the dying, gives them hope,
Breathes with the breathless, lends them strength to cope.

On Thursday we applauded, for he came
And served us in a thousand names and faces
Mopping our sickroom floors and catching traces
Of that *corona* which was death to him:

Good Friday happened in a thousand places
Where Jesus held the helpless, died with them
That they might share his Easter in their need,
Now they are risen with him, risen indeed.

Hymn:

Amazing Grace by John Newton (1772)

1. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.
3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.
5. Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.
6. The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Will be forever mine.
7. When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

(Here's a link to the 16 April 2020 performance of "Amazing Grace" sung by Andrea Bocelli (Easter 2020; Duomo, Milan, Italy):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpXwOSHTwsY>)

Reflection:

Imagine yourself in the Scripture story: You'd been grieving, sequestered with just a few people close to you. You didn't know what you'd encounter when you left the house. Would it be dangerous? Would life ever be the same again?

A trusted companion, out of breath with news, told you the situation is worse than you'd imagined: The body of your beloved teacher may have been abducted. But, when you and your friend ran to the tomb and looked inside, you "saw and believed." Now you *see*, even though you don't see Jesus in the flesh.

You've come through many dangers, toils, and snares in the past months. What have you seen, by God's amazing grace, in this long, strange season of the global health and economic crisis?

II. *Mary Meets the Risen Christ*



Giotto, *Noli me tangere (Don't touch me)*, Chapel of the Scrovegni, Padua, 1303-1305

Mary Magdalene is the first person the Gospels cite as seeing the risen Christ. Like the angels had done when she peered into the tomb at them, Jesus asks about her weeping. In the Book of Acts (1:24, 15:8) we're told that God is a *cardiognostician*, a knower of hearts. God seeks to know our hearts and have a heart to heart relationship with us. No matter how extreme the circumstances, the Holy One pays attention to what is deepest

in our hearts. “Why are you weeping?” we’re asked. Like Mary, we’re encouraged to bring our whole selves to our relationship with God.

Mary Magdalene, a woman in a patriarchal society, is mentioned by name twelve times in the canonical gospels, more than most of the apostles. She serves an apostolic function in witnessing to her community about Jesus’ resurrection. Like the other disciples, she is a person who needed healing and who continues to display a robust humanity. She weeps, she wishes to hold on to Jesus, and she shares the good news with joy.

We, too, seek God in our everyday lives. Perhaps we do so beside a grave or in deep grief. This year we do so in a pandemic when so much is uncertain and frightening. Jesus wants us to come to him with open hearts, which he will search and heal.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her. –John 20:11-18

The Answer by R. S. Thomas

Not darkness but twilight
In which even the best
of minds must make its way
now. And slowly the questions
occur, vague but formidable
for all that. We pass our hands
over their surface like blind
men feeling for the mechanism
that will swing them aside. They
yield, but only to reform
as new problems; and one
does not even do that
but towers immovable
before us

Is there no way
of other thought of answering
its challenge? There is an anticipation
of it to the point of
dying. There have been times
when, after long on my knees
in a cold chancel, a stone has rolled
from my mind, and I have looked
in and seen the old questions lie
folded and in a place
by themselves, like the piled
graveclothes of love's risen body.

Hymn:

I Have Seen the Lord by John Finch (2016)

Early in the morning as I journeyed to the tomb, there was no where else to go
With eyes full of tears, when He spoke my name, we were standing face to face

I have seen the Lord, I have seen the Lord
He's no longer dead, He is risen!
I have seen the Lord, I have seen the Lord
He's no longer dead, He is risen up again!

For many days I've followed, these eyes have seen Him die, and these eyes have seen
him rise
He cast away my sin by the saving grace of God. It is Christ who saved my life

I have seen the Lord, I have seen the Lord
He's no longer dead, He is risen!
I have seen the Lord, I have seen the Lord
He's no longer dead, He is risen up again!

I have seen
My eyes have seen
The glory of our God

I have seen the Lord, I have seen the Lord
He's no longer dead, He is risen!
I have seen the Lord, I have seen the Lord
He's no longer dead, He is risen up again!

(Here's a link to a performance of this song:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G3IFp3Ckiw>)

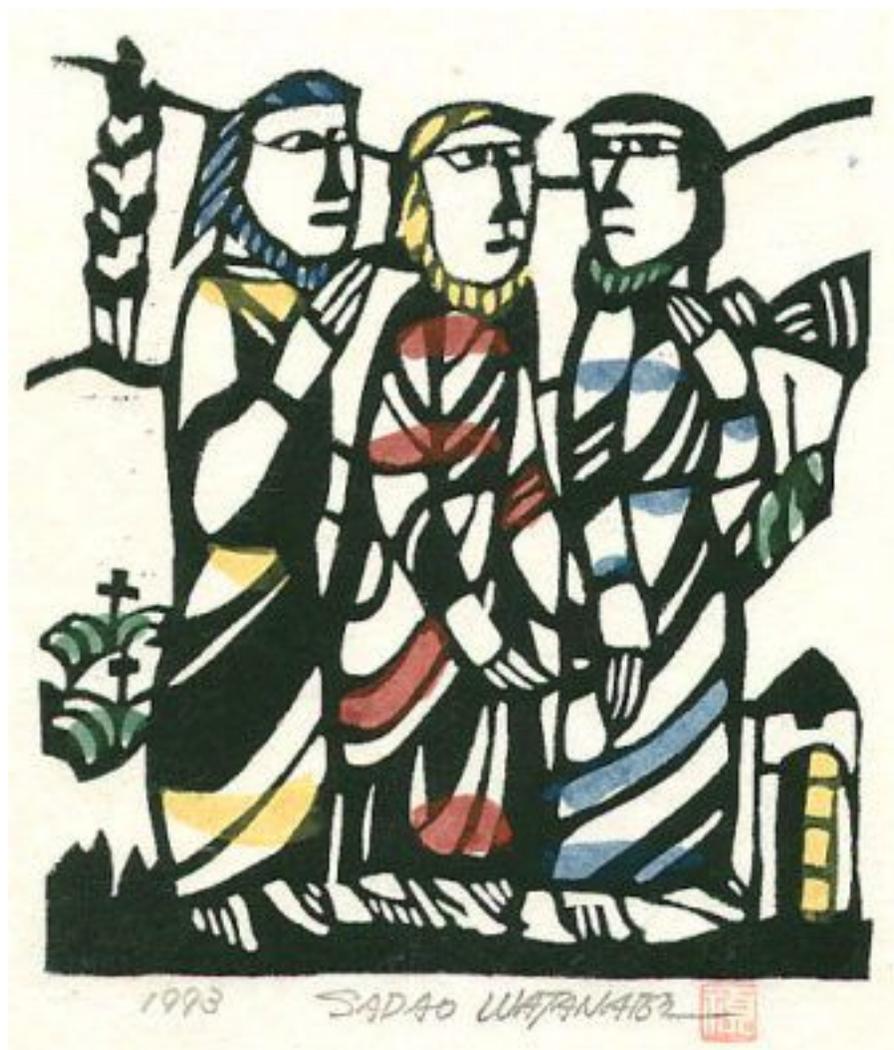
Reflection:

Mary peered into the tomb where the burial clothes were left behind. She saw angels who cared about her questions and her grief.

The poet R. S. Thomas reflects on the questions that goad us, and keep returning and reforming. He imagines it's possible, in prayer, to come to a place where "the old questions lie / folded and in a place / by themselves, like the piled / graveclothes of love's risen body."

What questions trouble you and seem unhelpful? Can you imagine the risen One who is Love standing beside you, saying your name, and allowing those questions to come to rest? Feel free to write those questions and place them before Jesus (possibly represented by a lighted candle or some other symbol of God's loving presence).

III. *On the Road*



The Road to Emmaus, Sadao Watanabe (1993)

On Bright Monday (the day after Easter), the New College Berkeley Holy Week prayer guide featured the story of the Road to Emmaus, and we return to it here as we ponder the post-Resurrection stories. Two followers of Jesus, not among the named twelve disciples and possibly a husband and wife, encountered a stranger on the road who took an interest in them. As with Mary at the tomb, the risen Christ asked about grieving people's minds and hearts.

Though they didn't recognize him on the road, later when they had recognized Jesus and he'd disappeared, they realized that their hearts had burned within them as they spoke with him. Their hearts recognized the presence of the Holy One, though their minds didn't grasp who he was.

That's often our experience: only retrospectively do we realize that we've been in the presence of God's grace. It may be an encounter with Scripture or art, an experience with another person, or a glimpse of nature which moves our heart to openness, confession, grief, fear, joy, love, or hope, and kindles our hearts within us.

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast.

One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going further. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." —Luke 24:13-34

Resurrection by Stephen Rybecki

What became of the many others like us
That first Easter morning
Who stared out the back windows of their houses
With blank cups of coffee in their hands
And saw nothing but overcast skies and leafless trees
And weeping weather that mourned for Spring
And did not hear a knock at the door
Or receive a telephone call
From a recently deceased loved one
Or pass Him along the road to an ancient city
Or see the sun rise up from a hole in the earth
Like Hosanna

Hymn:

Just a Closer Walk with Thee (author unknown; possibly an African American spiritual from the times of slavery, and possibly a song created by African American train station porters early in the 20th c.)

I am weak but Thou art strong
Jesus keep me from all wrong
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to Thee
Just a closer walk with Thee
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea
Daily walking close to Thee
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be
When my feeble life is o'er
Time for me will be no more
Guide me gently, safely o'er
To Thy kingdom's shore, to Thy shore
Just a closer walk with Thee
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea
Daily walking close to Thee
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be

(Here's an audio version of the hymn, sung by The Mills Brothers:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQuwV9mWezU>)

Reflection:

An Examen of the Heart

“[T]he Lord searches every heart” — 1 Chron. 28:9

Silence: I prepare myself for prayer, for entering into awareness of my relationship with God. I gently find the still point within my being and appreciate the silence. I notice my heart. I invite God to be present with me in a time of prayer and searching my heart.

Remembering: I look back over the past twenty-four hours of my life, beginning with the present moment. I let each hour of the past day gently pass by my awareness. I notice what I took for granted during the past twenty-four hours of my life. I attend to the movements of my heart. (You may want to write this.)

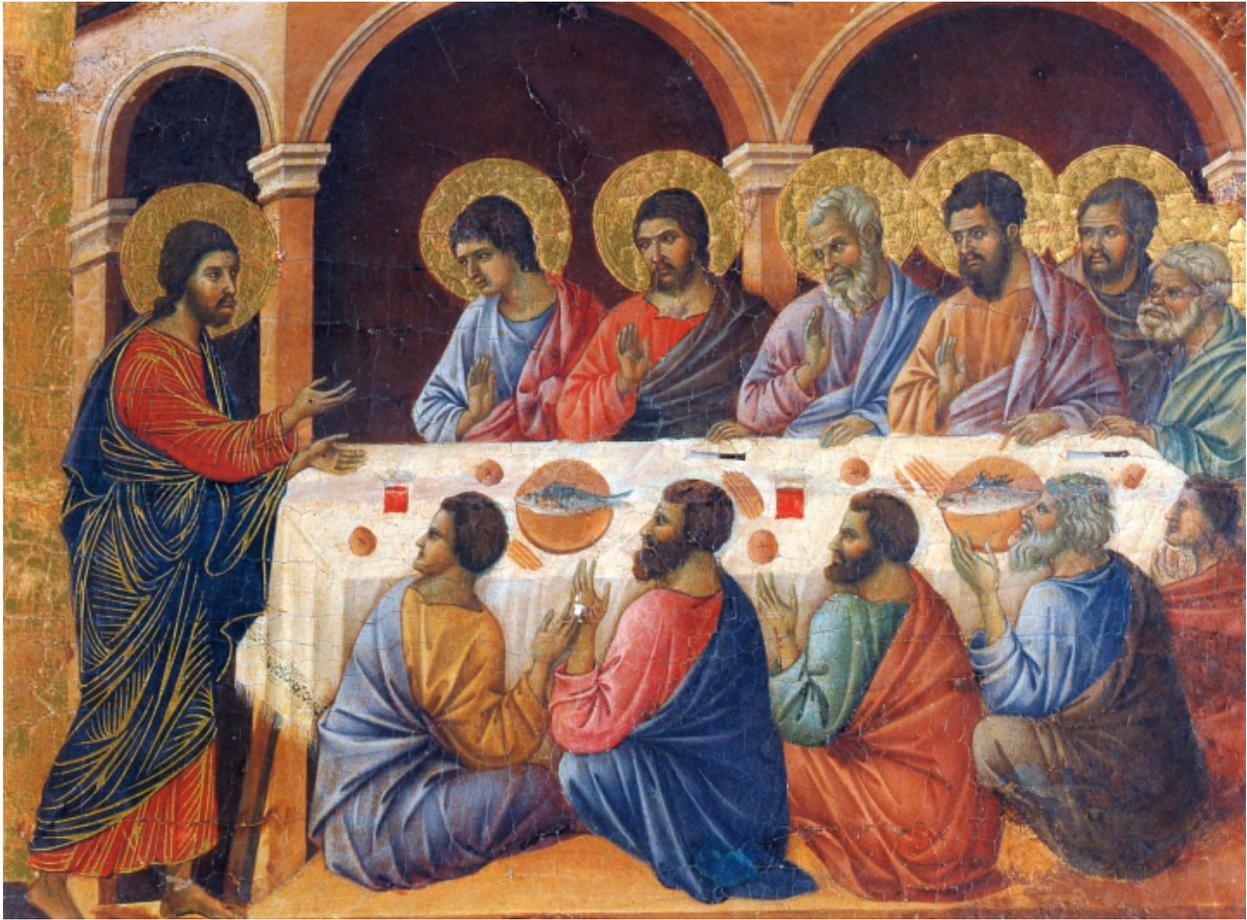
What am I doing now? What was I doing just before coming here? Where did I have my last meal? What was I doing before that? Who was I with? What did I sense in my heart?...

Noticing God's Presence: A second time, I look back at the past twenty-four hours of my life. This time I reflect on the ways in which God has been present. I notice the feelings, heart movements, and thoughts that emerge as I remember. (You may want to write this.)

Where do I see God at work in my life? In joys, fears, suffering, work, relationships? In an act of service? In reading? In an event, person, sound, nature, music, action? Where in the past twenty-four hours did I feel I was cooperating most fully with God's action in my life? Where did I resist God, was I not listening carefully enough to God? Where was my heart moved? When was my heart slow? Do any of my actions or thoughts require God's pardon, or the pardon of others? In what ways is God calling me to a new awareness, a change of heart, to different actions?

Gratitude: Having noticed ways God was present in my life during the last twenty-four hours, I experience my gratitude. I express this gratitude as my heart is moved to do so (by writing, moving, acting...). (You may want to write this prayer of thanksgiving.)

IV. *Breathe in the Spirit*



Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Apparition of Christ in the Circle of His Apostles*, Museum of the Cathedral of Siena,

(1308-1311)

The couple on the Emmaus Road hurried back to Jerusalem after realizing they had been with the risen Christ, and there's no mention of the miles covered or the fall of night. They were eager to share their good news! Back in the city, they joined their companions and sheltered-in-place. Then Jesus appeared to them, through locked doors, and, like the other companions, even that couple with recent, miraculous contact with Jesus, "in their joy...were disbelieving and still wondering." So, too, we wonder, hope, and sometimes are disbelieving.

Jesus made his physical presence evident, by eating fish off the bone, and inviting his friends to breathe his breath, the breath of life.

³³ *That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.* ³⁴ *They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has*

appeared to Simon!" ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." — Luke 24:33-49

¹⁹ When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." — John 20:19-23

Prayer (I) by George Herbert

Prayer the church's banquet, angel's age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth
Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tow'r,
Reversed thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-days world transposing in an hour,
A kind of tune, which all things hear and fear;
Softness, and peace, and joy, and love, and bliss,
Exalted manna, gladness of the best,
Heaven in ordinary, man well drest,
The milky way, the bird of Paradise,
Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the soul's blood,
The land of spices; something understood.

Hymn:

Breathe on Me, Breath of God by Edwin Hatch, 19th c.)

...He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Ghost." — John 20:22 KJV

⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones,

"Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live:

⁶And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you,
and cover you with skin, and put breath in you,

and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord." — Ezekiel 37:5-6 KJV

Breathe on me, breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.
Breathe on me, breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.
Breathe on me, breath of God,
Blend all my soul with Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity.

(Here's a trio singing this hymn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nynrgVfJgyA>)

Reflection:

Reflect on these Scriptures. Jesus took the time to show his followers that his resurrected existence was real. He found them on the Emmaus Road and in Jerusalem behind locked doors. So, too, he seeks us.

Spend 5 minutes just breathing in that breath of life. The ancient Christian tradition of Breath Prayer (hesychiastic prayer or heart prayer) invites you, as Jesus did, to breathe in his love.

Breath Prayer

1. Close your eyes and recall Jesus' words when he breathed on the disciples: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Be still, calm, peaceful, open to the presence of God.
2. With your eyes closed, imagine that God is calling you by name. Imagine that God is actually asking, "(Your name) what do you want? Like the blind man on the road to Jericho, Jesus kindly looks you in the eyes and asks, "What do you want from me?"
3. Give God a simple and direct answer that comes honestly from your heart. Write down the answer. If you have more than one answer, write them down. Your answer may be one word such as "peace" or "love" or "help!" It may be several words or a phrase such as "feel your presence" or "lead me into life." Whatever your answers, they are the foundation of your breath prayer.
4. Select the name that you are most comfortable using to speak with God. Combine it with your written answer to the question God asked you. This is your prayer.
5. Breathe in the first phrase/word (generally your invocation of God's name) and breathe out the second phrase/word (request or need).

V. *Believe*



Caravaggio, *The Unbelief of Saint Thomas*, Bildergalerie de Potsdam (1600-1601)

God is with us. That is what we trust. The disciples came to see Jesus' divinity even in his humanity. We, too, yearn to see divinity present in our lives. Each of the post-Resurrection stories highlights struggles our hearts undergo as we long for God. Peter wanted to be active and helpful. He and his comrade ran to the tomb in their eagerness. Mary wept. Through her tears she could barely make out the identity of the man who called her by name. The couple on the road to Emmaus were bewildered and fearful. They "had hoped," yet now were confused.

Thomas is known for his doubt. He asks for tangible evidence of the unreasonable miracle. Jesus, in his great mercy, seeks Thomas and grants him that evidence. The poet Malcolm Guite writes of Thomas as one who teaches us to "[f]eel after Him and find Him in the flesh." We do so in different ways—in prayer, service, friendship, and love of all kinds.

²⁴ *But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.* ²⁵ *So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I*

see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ *A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."* ²⁷ *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."* ²⁸ *Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"* ²⁹ *Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*—John 20:24-29

St. Thomas the Apostle by Malcolm Guite

"We do not know... how can we know the way?"

Courageous master of the awkward question,

You spoke the words the others dared not say

And cut through their evasion and abstraction.

Oh doubting Thomas, father of my faith,

You put your finger on the nub of things

We cannot love some disembodied wraith,

But flesh and blood must be our king of kings.

Your teaching is to touch, embrace, anoint,

Feel after Him and find Him in the flesh.

Because He loved your awkward counter-point

The Word has heard and granted you your wish.

Oh place my hands with yours, help me divine

The wounded God whose wounds are healing mine.

Hymn:

Teach Me Thy Way by Benjamin M. Ramsay (1919)

Teach me Thy way, O Lord, teach me Thy way!
Thy guiding grace afford, teach me Thy way!
Help me to walk aright, more by faith, less by sight;
Lead me with heav'nly light, teach me Thy way!

When I am sad at heart, teach me Thy way!
When earthly joys depart, teach me Thy way!
In hours of loneliness, in times of dire distress,
In failure or success, teach me Thy way!

When doubts and fears arise, teach me Thy way!
When storms o'erspread the skies, teach me Thy way!
Shine through the cloud and rain, through sorrow, toil, and pain;
Make Thou my pathway plain, teach me Thy way!

Long as my life shall last, teach me Thy way!
Where'er my lot be cast, teach me Thy way!
Until the race is run, until the journey's done,
Until the crown is won, teach me Thy way!

(Join the youth in singing this prayer:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSEHs0CwvLI>)

Reflection:

Reflect on what helps you believe in Jesus. The word "believe" originally was related to trust and love (the German word for love is *liebe*). Jesus seeks us in love and asks for our love. In his struggle to believe, Thomas was accompanied. His community witnessed amazing grace when Jesus invited Thomas to touch him. Jesus' friends fortified each other in courage and faith, helping one another to learn Jesus' way.

In this season of sheltering-in-place, there may be people with whom you can share your stories of grace. You might want to write the names of people you can be open with about the hopes and fears of the faith journey, the moments of knowing that God is with you, and also the moments when everything seems opaque.

VI. *Do You Love Me?*



Tintoretto, *Christ on Lake Tiberias*, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC (1575-1580)

Yet again Jesus seeks the disciples. His friends are grieving his absence and seeking a new normal. On this day they've left the shelter of their homes and returned to work, but work doesn't go well—no fish! The disciples are tired, they've suffered, and the world feels threatening. These circumstances might resonate with the feelings of many people around the world now as we tentatively enter our post-pandemic lives.

Jesus shows up in the middle of their workplace, affectionately calls them “children,” and prepares breakfast for his followers. Peter, who bears the guilt and shame of publicly denying Jesus three times, has the reparative experience of affirming his love three times, albeit with mounting anguish as the question is repeated. He also is commissioned before witnesses to feed Jesus' sheep.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon

Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶ He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." ¹⁹ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me." — John 21:1-19

Called to Say Yes by Edwina Gateley (1996, 2013)

We are called to say yes.
That the kingdom might break through
To renew and to transform
Our dark and groping world.

We stutter and we stammer
To the lone God who calls
And pleads a New Jerusalem
In the bloodied Sinai Straights.

We are called to say yes
That honeysuckle may twine
And twist its smelling leaves
Over the graves of nuclear arms.

We are called to say yes
That children might play
On the soil of Vietnam where the tanks
Belched blood and death.

We are called to say yes
That black may sing with white
And pledge peace and healing
For the hatred of the past.

We are called to say yes
So that nations might gather
And dance one great movement
For the joy of humankind.
We are called to say yes
So that rich and poor embrace
And become equal in their poverty
Through the silent tears that fall.

We are called to say yes
That the whisper of our God
Might be heard through our sirens
And the screams of our bombs.

We are called to say yes
To a God who still holds fast
To the vision of the Kingdom
For a trembling world of pain.

We are called to say yes
To this God who reaches out
And asks us to share
His crazy dream of love.

Hymn:

In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful (the Taizé community, 1986, 1991)

In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,
In the Lord I'll rejoice.
Look to God, do not be afraid,
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near;
Lift up your voices the Lord is near.
In the Lord I'll be ever thankful,
In the Lord I'll rejoice.
Look to God, do not be afraid,
Lift up your voices, the Lord is near;
Lift up your voices the Lord is near.
You are my salvation.
I trust in you.
I shall not be afraid,
You are my strength,
You are my song.

(Here's the song sung at Taizé, the ecumenical Christian monastic community in Burgundy, France: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAx8gjQrsOY>)

Reflection:

Despite guilt and shame, exhaustion and sweat, Peter dove into the sea and swam to Jesus when he realized that's who was on the beach. Jesus sends him back to the boat to fetch fish for the meal (the first potluck?). What do you bring to your encounter with God, in terms of feelings, gifts, and possibly questions? Imagine bringing all of that and having to sit with them while the meal takes place. Then, as the meal comes to a finish, questions are directed to you.

Dialogue with Jesus

Imagine Jesus addressing you by name and asking:

Jesus: "Do you love me?"

Your response: _____

Again, Jesus: "Do you love me?"

Your response: _____

Jesus, again: "Do you love me?"

Your response: _____

If you hear more from Jesus, write that, too.

VII. *Ascension*



Erice Liu, *Ascension* (2003)

The Feast of the Ascension is one of the longest celebrated feasts in the history of the Christian faith. Augustine believed it was of apostolic origins. Jesus' ascension to heaven is mentioned in Mark, Luke, and Acts, and has traditionally been celebrated on the 40th day after Easter, ten days before Pentecost. Here in this retreat it immediately precedes our reflections about Pentecost, but Jesus' companions spent ten days experiencing his absence before the joy of Pentecost.

Some traditions pay little attention to this celebration, yet it is the theologically logical (yet miraculous!) end to the post-Resurrection stories with which we've been praying.

Can we then simply drop the Ascension story? The answer is that we can do so only if we regard the Resurrection appearances as those of a ghost or hallucination. For a phantom can just fade away; but an objective entity must go somewhere—something must happen to it. And if the Risen Body were not objective, then all of us (Christian or not) must invent some explanation for the disappearance of the corpse. And all Christians must explain why God sent or permitted a 'vision' or 'ghost' whose behaviour seems almost exclusively directed to convincing the disciples that it was not a vision or a ghost but a really corporeal being. If it were a vision then it was the most systematically deceptive and lying vision on record. But if it were real, then something happened to it

after it ceased to appear. You cannot take away the Ascension without putting something else in its place. (C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, 1947, pp. 243-244)

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." ⁵⁰ Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. ⁵² And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; ⁵³ and they were continually in the temple blessing God. — Luke 24:44-53

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." — Acts 1:6-11

Ascension by John Donne (1896)

*Salute the last and everlasting day,
Joy at the uprising of this sun, and son,
Ye whose true tears, or tribulation
Have purely washed, or burnt your drossy clay;
Behold the Highest, parting hence away,
Lightens the dark clouds, which he treads upon;
Nor doth he by ascending, show alone,
But first he, and he first enters the way.
O strong Ram, which hast battered heaven for me,
Mild lamb, which with Thy Blood, hast marked the path;
Bright torch, which shin'st, that I the way may see,*

Oh, with thy own blood quench thy own just wrath,
And if thy holy Spirit, my Muse did raise,
Deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise.

Hymn:

Be Not Afraid by Michael John Talbot

You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst.
You shall wander far in safety though you do not know the way.
You shall speak your words in foreign lands and all will understand.
You shall see the face of God and live.

Be not afraid.
I go before you always;
Come follow me,
and I will give you rest.

If you pass through raging waters in the sea, you shall not drown.
If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed.
If you stand before the pow'r of hell and death is at your side,
know that I am with you through it all.

Be not afraid.
I go before you always;
Come follow me,
and I will give you rest.

Blessed are your poor, for the kingdom shall be theirs.
Blest are you that weep and mourn, for one day you shall laugh.
And if wicked men insult and hate you all because of me,
blessed, blessed are you!

Be not afraid.
I go before you always;
Come follow me,
and I will give you rest.

(Here's a sheltering-in-place version of this hymn:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RF0DIpFOoBg>)

Reflection:

Throughout the post-Resurrection stories, we've seen Jesus' companions experience strong feelings: fear, grief, doubt, confusion, and awe. They were in unprecedented history, "unprecedented" being a word that's cropped up in our lives this past Lent and Easter as well.

In every story, Jesus seeks and finds them. He wants to be with them, and they don't have to achieve any kind of emotional perfection to be beloved by him. When they grieve, he comforts. When they doubt, he reassures. When they are confused, he reveals. When they feel guilt and shame, he restores.

Pray with the chorus of John Michael Talbot's song *Be Not Afraid*, which so clearly expresses Jesus' message to us:

*Be not afraid.
I go before you always;
Come follow me,
and I will give you rest.*

Pray the words slowly out loud several times. The first time, just hear them. The second time, notice any word or phrase that seems to strike and invite you. Sit with that. The third time you read these words, notice what feelings and images they evoke in you. Then finally sit in wordless silence before God, metabolizing the gift of grace.

VIII. Pentecost



Lisa Ellis, *Filled* (quilt)

On the Jewish feast day of Shavuot (a harvest festival also known as the Festival of Weeks) or Pentecost, many of Jesus' followers, along with people from the whole Jewish Diaspora, were in Jerusalem to celebrate. About 120 followers of Jesus were present, including the disciples, Jesus' mother, and other women followers. They experienced the wind, fire, and tongues as fulfillment of Jesus' promise that he would send the Holy Spirit to them. When others questioned their babbling, Peter gave an impromptu sermon about the life and resurrection of Jesus, contextualizing him in Jewish prophecy.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. — Acts 2:1-6

Veni, Creator Spiritus by Rabanus Maurus (776–856)

*VENI, Creator Spiritus,
mentes tuorum visita,
imple superna gratia
quae tu creasti pectora.*

COME, Holy Spirit, Creator blest,
and in our souls take up Thy rest;
come with Thy grace and heavenly aid
to fill the hearts which Thou hast made.

*Qui diceris Paraclitus,
altissimi donum Dei,
fons vivus, ignis, caritas,
et spiritalis unctio.*

O comforter, to Thee we cry,
O heavenly gift of God Most High,
O fount of life and fire of love,
and sweet anointing from above.

*Tu, septiformis munere,
digitus paternae dexteræ,
Tu rite promissum Patris,
sermone ditans guttura.*

Thou in Thy sevenfold gifts are known;
Thou, finger of God's hand we own;
Thou, promise of the Father, Thou
Who dost the tongue with power imbue.

*Accende lumen sensibus:
infunde amorem cordibus:
infirma nostri corporis
virtute firmans perpeti.*

Kindle our sense from above,
and make our hearts o'erflow with love;
with patience firm and virtue high
the weakness of our flesh supply.

*Hostem repellas longius,
pacemque dones protinus:
ductore sic te praevio
vitemus omne noxium.*

Far from us drive the foe we dread,
and grant us Thy peace instead;
so shall we not, with Thee for guide,
turn from the path of life aside.

*Per te sciamus da Patrem,
noscamus atque Filium;
Teque utriusque Spiritum
credamus omni tempore.*

Oh, may Thy grace on us bestow
the Father and the Son to know;
and Thee, through endless times confessed,
of both the eternal Spirit blest.

*Deo Patri sit gloria,
et Filio, qui a mortuis
surrexit, ac Paraclito,
in saeculorum saecula.
Amen.*

Now to the Father and the Son,
Who rose from death, be glory given,
with Thou, O Holy Comforter,
henceforth by all in earth and heaven.
Amen.

Hymn:

Spirit of the Living God by Daniel Iverson (1926)

Spirit of the living God,

Fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the living God

Fall afresh on me.

(Join the choir in singing this hymn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06h3J5FYn-I>)

Reflection:

Centering Prayer is a contemplative prayer practice of attending to God, influenced by the 14th c. *The Cloud of Unknowing* and articulated in the 20th c. by Cistercian monks Fr. William Meninger, Fr. Basil Pennington, and Fr. Thomas Keating. (The form below was developed by Susan Phillips.) As you pray, invite the Spirit of God to come to you and shape you.

Centering Prayer and Response

In him we live and move and have our being. — Acts 17:28 (NRSV)

Prepare

I sit comfortably with my eyes closed, relaxed and quiet, seeking to orient in love and faith toward God. I begin by saying the Lord's Prayer and then enter into silence.

Intend to Address God

I choose, with the help of the Holy Spirit, a word that best supports my sincere intention to be in the Lord's presence and open to His divine action (i.e., "Jesus", "Lord," "God," "Savior," "Jesus," "Abba," "Divine," "Shalom," "Spirit," "Love," etc.).

Address and Listen for God

I let that word be gently present as the symbol of my sincere intention to be in the Lord's presence and open to His divine action within me. [Fr. Thomas Keating advises that the word remain unspoken.] The word expresses my consent to God, reorienting me toward God.

Return to Prayer

Whenever I become aware of anything (thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, associations, etc.), I simply and gently return to the orienting word as an anchor for prayer.

Reflect on the Experience and Respond to God

I rest in silent communion with God. Perhaps I write something down in order to remember this time with God.

Leaving the Retreat

On the church calendar, we now enter Ordinary Time. Even in Ordinary Time we live in post-Resurrection days! Continue to pray with these Scriptures, poems, images, and music as we move through the long months of Ordinary Time until we arrive at Advent.

Closing Prayer:

A Prayer for Pentecost from the Reformed Church in America (2006)

Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life:

At the beginning of time you moved over the face of the waters;
you breathe into every living being, the breath of life.
Come, Creator Spirit, and renew the whole creation.

Holy Spirit, voice of the prophets:

You enflame men and women with a passion for your truth,
and through them call your people to the ways of justice and compassion.
Come, Spirit of Righteousness, and burn in our hearts.

Holy Spirit, Spirit of Jesus:

By your power Jesus came to bring good news to the poor
and release to those held captive.
Come, Liberating Spirit, and free us from the powers of sin and death.

Holy Spirit, Advocate, Teacher:

You speak to us of our Lord,
and show us the depth of his love.
Come, Spirit of Truth, abide in us and lead us in the way of Jesus Christ.

Holy Spirit, wind and flame:

You filled disciples with joy and courage,
empowering them to preach your word and to share your good news.
Come, Spirit of Power, make us bold witnesses of your redeeming love.

Holy Spirit, Spirit of Peace:

You break down barriers of language, race, and culture,
and heal the divisions that separate us.
Come, Reconciling Spirit, and unite us all in the love of Christ.

Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life:
At the close of the age
all creation will be renewed to sing your praises.
Come, Creator Spirit, and make us new creations in Jesus Christ.

Here's a link to a brief word of blessing as you come to the end of this retreat:
<https://youtu.be/jrYYsL3c4Wc>.

