

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

**LEARNING TOGETHER:
A LENTEN EXPLORATION OF ANTI-RACIST
VALUES IN MATTHEW, MARK, & LUKE**



RELIGION & RACE
The United Methodist Church

GCORR invites you to use this Lenten devotional, ***“Learning Together: A Lenten Exploration of Anti-Racist Values in Matthew, Mark, & Luke,”*** for personal or congregational use. This devotional was inspired by a desire to showcase, through the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Jesus’ faithful demonstration and engagement of anti-racist values – values of shared power, shared responsibility and authority, and openness and curiosity. These values are antithetical to the values by which our society is shaped and ruled– values such as power hoarding, individualism, and holding to one right way for doing everything. Along with the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE) and New International Version (NIV), the First Nations Version (FNV), an Indigenous translation of the New Testament, was also used for this Lenten devotional writing.

The purpose of the devotional is three-fold:

1. To gain a basic biblical understanding that anti-racist values are central to Jesus’ ministry and the gospel message
2. To integrate anti-racist values and actions into our respective faith journeys
3. To transform how we engage our faith journeys that reflect the values of this world rather than the values of Jesus

The devotional is structured to follow the six weeks of Lent. *The format for each day is as follows:*

- Opening prayer
- Scripture
- Short meditation
- Closing prayer

Each week, there is a devotional for each day. The final day of each week, day 7, is structured as a 45-minute small group study.

The format for the study is as follows:

- Main idea or theme for the week
- Opening prayer
- Opening exercise or activity
- Scripture
- Story to highlight the week’s theme
- Questions for discussion
- Call to Action
- Closing prayer

Themes of anti-racism explored through the lens of Scripture in this Lenten devotional are taken from a work created by sociologists Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun in 2001 titled *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*. Jones and Okun list characteristics, or values, of white supremacy culture¹ that show up in our societal organizations. Jones and Okun name the fact that values of white supremacy culture are “damaging to white people and people of color because they are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by a group.”² The following values of anti-racism below are explored each week through the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as a way for us to re-examine Jesus’ life, values, and ministry through lenses of love, equity, justice, and grace:

- Week 1, Cultures of learning and appreciation
- Week 2, Practicing openness and curiosity
- Week 3, Valuing people and process
- Week 4, Shared responsibility and authority
- Week 5, Shared power
- Week 6, Holding discomfort

As you engage in this devotional during these next six weeks, our prayer is that the Spirit of God will help you set your mind on Christ and His ways, die to the values of this world, strip the common, familiar ways you have read popular gospel texts, and clothe yourself with the grace, love, and strength of God.

¹ *White supremacy is defined as “the system in which, either explicitly or implicitly, white people are societally favored to maintain inequities of wealth, power, and privilege. This includes, but is not limited to, political, economic, employment, legal, educational, and health care systems.”* ([What Is White Supremacy? — R-Squared \(r2hub.org\)](https://r2hub.org/white-supremacy-culture/)). *Culture is defined as “norms, practices, rituals, and values, which are taught to and learned by people of a shared group or shared contexts”* ([What Is Culture? — R-Squared \(r2hub.org\)](https://r2hub.org/white-supremacy-culture/)). *Therefore, white supremacy culture is defined as the system in which, either explicitly or implicitly, the norms, practices, rituals, and values of white people are societally favored to maintain inequities of wealth, power, and privilege. These norms, practices, rituals, and values are viewed as the standard and normative for everyone.*

² [White_Supremacy_Culture.pdf \(texas.gov\)](https://www.texas.gov/sites/default/files/2018/07/White_Supremacy_Culture.pdf)

Part 1:
Daily devotions for six days

Writer:
Pastor Dawn Houser

Theme:

Cultures of Learning and Appreciation

DAY 1

Opening Prayer

Great Spirit, open our hearts and our minds to hear your message in the story of the two blind men. That we would not only hear the message but would find gratitude in our own healing experiences with Creator Sets Free (Jesus). In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Amen.

Scripture

Matthew 9:27-31 (FNV)

As Creator Sets Free (Jesus) left from there, two blind men followed after him. They were calling out to him, "Be kind to us, descendant of Much Loved One (David)." The blind men, with the help of others, followed him into a house. Creator Sets Free (Jesus) asked them, "Do you believe I can make your eyes see?" "Yes, Wisdomkeeper," was their answer. He reached out, touched their eyes, and said to them, "Your trust in me will make it so." [They staggered back and rubbed their eyes.] He had healed them! They could see! Creator Sets Free (Jesus) gave them a stern warning and said, "Tell no one about this." But in their excitement, they did not listen, and they told the news far and wide about what Creator Sets Free (Jesus) had done for them.

Meditation

We see in this brief story that these two blind men were seeking the attention of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). They knew and believed that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) had the ability to heal them. Sometimes I wonder, do we have a deep enough faith that will lead to healing? These men clearly had enough faith to be healed. However, their response to this healing experience was so overwhelming that they did not listen to Creator Sets Free (Jesus), when he told them not to share with others how they were healed. They were so excited and appreciative that they shared all the details far and wide.

In 2005, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). I thought it was a death sentence. By seeking out Creator Sets Free (Jesus) and believing that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) can and will heal through the hands of doctors, nurses, and researchers, I have lived a quality life. Like these two blind men, I will tell anyone who will listen that I have not had an exacerbation of MS since I answered the call to ministry in 2012.

When we continue to seek out Creator Sets Free (Jesus) we can be assured that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) will heal. But I caution that healing means different things to different people. Healing does not necessarily mean that your affliction will be taken from you. I still live with the effects of MS. My faith in Creator Sets Free (Jesus) determines my life journey.

Closing Prayer

God of Divine Strength and Comfort, help us to not hide our pain from You—especially when we are sick and tired of being sick and tired. Arrest our grief and distress with Your deep, healing love. Come near to us as we come near to You. Amen.

DAY 2

Opening Prayer

Great Spirit, open our hearts and our minds to hear your message in the story of the two blind men. That we would not only hear the message but would find gratitude in our own healing experiences with Creator Sets Free (Jesus). In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Amen.

Scripture**Matthew 14:22-33 (FNV)**

Right away Creator Sets Free (Jesus) had his followers get into the canoe and go ahead of him to the other side of the great lake, while he sent the people back to their homes.

After that he went up into the mountainside to be alone while he sent his voice to the Great Spirit. He stayed there and prayed as the sun set and the stars came out. His followers were still in the canoe, far from land. The wind blew strong against them, and the waves pounded the canoe and began to toss it about.

Late into the night, just before the morning light, Creator Sets Free (Jesus) came near them, walking on the water! When his followers saw him, they cried out in terror, "It is a ghost-spirit!" But he heard their cries and called out to them, "Do not fear, take heart. It is I." "Wisdomkeeper, is it you?" Stands on the Rock (Peter) shouted back to him. "If so, tell me now to come to you on the water." "Come!" he said to him *without any hesitation. With reckless abandon*, Stands on the Rock (Peter) climbed over the side of the canoe and began to walk on the water toward him.

[The wind howled, and the waves splashed against him as he made his way toward Creator Sets Free (Jesus)]

But when he felt how strong the wind was, fear took hold of him. He began to sink and cried out, "Wisdomkeeper, save me!" Creator Sets Free (Jesus) quickly reached out and took hold of him. "Man of small faith," he said, "what made you hold back and doubt me?"

The wind stopped blowing and the waves grew still as they climbed into the canoe. All twelve of his message bearers gave honor to him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of the Great Spirit."

DAY 2 *Continued****Meditation***

There are several layers to this story: Jesus needing to take time out to pray, the disciples having faith that Jesus would not let them perish in a storm, and of course Peter having enough faith to get out of the boat and attempt to walk on the water toward Creator Sets Free (Jesus). These are all very valuable lessons!

Growing up in Michigan, I have a deep appreciation for how quickly a storm can blow up and catch boaters by surprise. The storms of life can quickly blow up and catch us by surprise. Sometimes the death of a loved one, an illness, financial issues, etc. can catch us off guard. For some, we may respond like Peter, get out of the boat and begin to face the event with some faith. But we become weary and feel as though we are sinking. Like Peter, we only need to cry out to Creator Sets Free (Jesus) to save us.

As Creator Sets Free (Jesus) calms the wind and waves, the response of the disciples is astonishment! They declare "Truly, you are the Son of the Great Spirit." They have declared that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) is the master of the universe. As we look back on how Creator Sets Free (Jesus) has saved us from all the precarious and difficult situations we have been in, our response should be like that of the disciples, astonishment and the declaration that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) is the Son of the Great Spirit!

Closing Prayer

Creator, you have given us wonderful examples of how to grow our faith in you. As I look at the response of these disciples to your ability to calm the winds and waves, "Truly, you are the Son of the Great Spirit," may I too be astonished by your ability to calm the storms of my life with my response and declaration to the world, that "Creator Sets Free (Jesus) is the Son of the Great Spirit!" There are several layers to this story: Jesus needing to take time out to pray, the disciples having faith that Jesus would not let them perish in a storm, and of course Peter having enough faith to get out of the boat and attempt to walk on the water toward Creator Sets Free (Jesus). These are all very valuable lessons!

DAY 3**Opening Prayer**

Oh, Great Spirit, I come today asking that you open my eyes to the miracles that happen all around me so that I can experience wonder and amazement. That my response to you would be to honor you and give thanks for your mighty acts. In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Amen.

Scripture***Matthew 15: 29-31(FNV)***

Creator Sets Free (Jesus) journeyed from there past Lake of Circle of Nations (Sea of Galilee) to a mountainside, where he sat down to rest. Once again great crowds of people came, bringing to him the lame, the blind, the ones who could not walk or speak, and many more. They laid them down at the feet of Creator Sets Free (Jesus), and he healed them all. When they saw the healings, the crowds were filled with wonder and amazement and gave honor and thanks to the Great Spirit of the tribes of Wrestles with Creator (Israel).

Meditation

During the first months of the Covid Pandemic, I spent a great deal of time at our local hospital volunteering chaplaincy services to patients and front-line workers. Like the people in this story, the sick were brought in for healing from all types of illnesses and diseases, not just Covid. This was an exhausting and tiring time for all who entered the hospital.

In the little chapel, I had placed a wooden box where I collected prayer requests from the hospital staff, patients and their families. I found myself praying for family relationships, sick people, burned down homes, broken cars, financial well-being, and the mental health of those who were working under difficult circumstances. Often, I would never know how those prayers were answered.

When I would get in my car to drive home, after witnessing some amazing events and miracles, I would pray and offer prayers of thanksgiving. Like the crowds of people who brought their sick and dying to Creator Sets Free (Jesus), I too was filled with wonder and amazement. How could I not have given honor to the Great Spirit? It has been a few years since Covid. Leaving me to wonder, am I missing the little miracles that happen every day? Am I paying close enough attention to everyday miracles so that I can respond with wonder, amazement, and thanksgiving.

Closing Prayer

Miracle working Creator, we see the faith of the multitudes of people who came to you on the mountainside that day, and we see the faith of many who come in prayer asking for healing today. You still provide healing and give hope in ways we cannot even imagine. When we experience your healing power, love, and acceptance, we are filled with amazement and wonder. We give you honor and glorify you with all that we have. In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Amen.

DAY 4**Opening Prayer**

Great Spirit, I come today with open hearts and minds to read once again the ancient story of Creator Sets Free (Jesus) triumphal entry into Village of Peace (Jerusalem). Help me to experience the hope that Jesus offered on that very first Palm Sunday. Speak to me through your Word Great Spirit. In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Amen.

Scripture**Matthew 21: 1-11 (FNV)**

Creator Sets Free (Jesus) and the ones who walked the road with him were coming to the end of their journey. As they neared Village of Peace (Jerusalem), he began to make preparations for what would be his final week with his followers. It was now time to complete the work the Great Spirit had sent him to do.

They came to House of Unripe Figs (Bethphage) at the foot of Olive Mountain, near Village of Peace (Jerusalem). There he sent two of his followers ahead of him.

"Go into the village ahead of us," he instructed them. "As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied there with her colt. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks you what you are doing, say to them, 'Our Wisdomkeeper has need of them,' and the owner will release them to you."

This took place to show the full meaning of the ancient prophecy, "speak these words to the daughter of Strong Mountain (Zion): 'Behold, our Chief is coming to you, in a humble way, riding upon a donkey – a colt still with its mother.'"

His followers did as they were told. When they arrived at the village, they found everything just as he had said. They brought the donkey colt to Creator Sets Free (Jesus) and laid their outer garments on the colt, and he sat down on them.

From the large crowd many began to cut branches from nearby trees and spread their outer garments on the road in front of him. The crowd circled around him, front and back and began to shout: "Hosanna! To the descendant of Much Loved One (David)! Blessed is the one who comes representing the Great Spirit! Hosanna to the highest one!"

This humble Chief did not fit the image of a conquering ruler. Instead of a warhorse, he rode on a donkey colt. No mighty warriors rode next to him. No dignitaries came out to meet him. It was mostly the common people who welcomed him that day.

When he rode through the gate entering the Village of Peace (Jerusalem), the whole village was in an uproar! "Who is this?" they asked.

He is Creator Sets Free (Jesus), the prophet from Seed Planter Village (Nazareth) in Circle of Nations (Galilee)," the crowd answered.

DAY 4 *Continued****Meditation***

This is the story of Palm Sunday! It's a fun story that we retell every year. The image of Creator Sets Free (Jesus) humbling himself by riding into town on a donkey, is in stark contrast to what the people of his time and culture would have expected and what we would expect even today. One would think with the power that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) had, that he would have rode into town on the back of a beautiful stallion with a strong army beside him. But this is not what God's plan was.

Instead, his humble entrance fulfilled prophecy and unnerved the political powers of the time. Common people knew who Creator Sets Free (Jesus) was. They had witnessed firsthand the power that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) possessed. Creator Sets Free (Jesus) had healed the sick, cast out demons, answered those who had confronted him and tried to trick him into saying or doing the wrong thing, he had eaten meals with those who were thought to be the worst of humankind, and he spread the news that the Kingdom of God is for every human being. Creator Sets Free (Jesus) possessed power that had never been seen before and he brought hope into a dark and hurting world.

As we celebrate Palm Sunday, we honor Creator Sets Free (Jesus) as the one who brought hope and healing all those years ago. Creator Sets Free (Jesus) offers hope and healing even today. How will you celebrate Palm Sunday this year?

Closing Prayer

Gitchi Manidoo (Great Spirit), the Palm Sunday story is the beginning of the end. I know what comes at the end of this week. But for these few moments I am soaking in the joy of the Palm Sunday story and all the hope that is offered to all people, including myself. I pray that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) continues to come to me and others with the gifts of hope, joy, love, peace, and eternal life. In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Amen.

DAY 5**Opening Prayer**

Oh, Great Spirit, as I come to the story of the Last Supper, I begin to see how your plan for humanity is unfolding. That you do truly love the world so much that you sent your son Creator Sets Free (Jesus) into the world to offer freedom from our brokenness. As I meditate on this story, speak to me in new ways, that I may internalize and apply the lessons from this story I need to learn. In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus) I pray. Amen.

Scripture**Matthew 26: 26-30 (FNV)**

Then, during the meal, Creator Sets Free (Jesus) took some of the frybread, lifted it up, and gave thanks. He broke it into pieces, gave some to each of his followers, and said, "This is my body. Take it and eat it." Then he took a cup of wine, lifted it up, and gave thanks, he gave it to his followers and said, "Drink from this cup, all of you, for this is my lifeblood of the new peace treaty, poured out to release many people from their broken ways. "I tell you now, I will not drink from the fruit of this vine again until I drink it with you in a fresh and new way when we walk together on my father's good road." Then, after they sang a ceremonial song together, they walked to Olive Mountain.

Meditation

The Last Supper is an instructional moment for Creator Sets Free (Jesus). We see in this story that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) is using common everyday elements to share his message of eternal life through him.

Creator Sets Free (Jesus) uses the bread as a symbol of his body. He instructs his followers to eat the bread, which is a reminder that we are all part of the body of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). The cup of wine is a symbol of his blood life. Without blood we do not have life. But here we see Creator Sets free instilling in his followers that the spilling of his blood will be a new peace treaty with humanity. No longer will there need to be blood spilled by animals (Offerings) for the repentance of sins. Creator Sets Free (Jesus) is the final offering. This creates a new peace treaty (convenient) with humanity.

There is yet another promise in this passage of scripture. Creator Sets Free (Jesus) states that he will not drink the fruit of this vine again until we are all joined together in a new way, while we walk together on the Great Spirit's good road.

Each time we gather around Creator Sets Free (Jesus) table, we meet Jesus and our ancestors, we become one body in Christ, we know our broken ways are forgiven, and we are reminded that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) will come again to take us to be with him for eternity.

Closing Prayer

Gitchi Manidoo (Great Spirit), you alone have the ability and desire to be connected to the universe in a way that speaks to all who have spirit. The water, the wind, the fire, the earth, the four-legged, the winged, the fish, the plants, and us two-legged. We are so very grateful you have given us scripture that tells the story of humanity and the life, death and resurrection of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Remind me each time I come to Creator Sets Free (Jesus) table that you are there along with my ancestors, and that the peace treaty Jesus offered is available to me and all your universe. Remind me that I am a part of your body and must continue the work of Jesus in the world today, growing and building your kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus) I pray. Amen.

DAY 6**Opening Prayer**

Great Spirit, the women who visited the gravesite of Creator Sets Free (Jesus) loved him so much that they were in deep grief when he was crucified and died. They came wanting to serve and care for his body. May I approach this story with an open mind and heart.

Speak to me in a way that only you can know that I will hear. Use this story to draw me closer to you. In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Amen.

Scripture***Matthew 28: 8-10 (FNV)***

The women ran from the burial cave to bring the good news to his followers. Their hearts were trembling with fear and great joy. Suddenly, Creator Sets Free (Jesus) was standing in front of them. "It is a good morning!" he smiled and said to them. They came close, held tightly to his feet, and gave great honor to him. "Do not fear!" he told them. "Go and tell my brothers to go to Circle of Nations (Galilee), and there they will see me."

Meditation

As these women journeyed toward Creator Sets Free (Jesus) gravesite, they must have been filled with fear, sadness and grief. I can only imagine how they must have felt as they walked away from their encounter with an angel, who told them Creator Sets Free (Jesus) has come back to life. It was an unbelievable message to hear!

As they ran through the garden, they encountered Creator Sets Free (Jesus). They were so overwhelmed with emotions that all they could do was cling to Creator Sets Free (Jesus). I often find myself wondering, how could these women not just cling to Creator Sets Free (Jesus)? This is their beloved rabi! They thought he was dead and now here he is, very much alive.

Even though we know how the story ends, we can still find ourselves in grief and darkness during the events of Holy Week. By the time we get to the resurrection story, are we willing and able to cling to the feet of Creator Sets Free (Jesus)?

The story of the women in the garden and the stories of the many encounters Creator Sets Free (Jesus) has with different people in the coming weeks is not the end of the story. There is no end to the story! The story of Creator Sets Free (Jesus) continues today. We continue to believe and hope that the Great Spirit will "make good" on the promise of eternal life through Creator Sets Free (Jesus).

Closing Prayer

Gitchi Manidoo, these women were so filled with joy to discover that Creator Sets Free (Jesus) was alive, that all they could do was cling to him. As I journey through my daily life, may I too be filled with joy and cling to you. In the name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Amen.

PART 2**Sunday School Class Lesson for 45 Minutes****Main Idea**

Learning about one another and being aware of our own perspectives can lead to great joy and gratitude.

Opening Prayer

Creator of all the universe, open our hearts and minds as we spend time together learning from you and one another. Make us aware of the lens we view the world and one another through. Fill us with curiosity and wonder as we engage in a learning process. As we filter this information may we gain knowledge to be better equipped to share your love and grace with our neighbors. May we also be more appreciative of You and one another. In the Name of Creator Sets Free (Jesus). Amen.

Opening Exercise/Activity:

Read the prophecy of Crazy Horse.

"The Red Nation shall rise again, and it shall be a blessing for a sick world; a world filled with broken promises, selfishness and separations; a world longing for light again.

I see a time of Seven Generations when all the colors of mankind will gather under the Sacred Tree of Life and the whole Earth will become one circle again.

In that day, there will be those among the Lakota who will carry knowledge and understanding of unity among all living things and the young white ones will come to those of my people and ask for this wisdom.

I salute the light within your eyes where the whole Universe dwells. For when you are at that center within you and I am that place within me, we shall be one."

— Crazy Horse, Oglala Lakota Sioux

Crazy Horse's prophecy may conjure up an image of the "Beloved Community"—all of humanity coming together to live within the sacred hoop with respect and honor for one another and all of creation.

As a group, create a list of all the ways you can better learn from people of different cultures and ethnicities. Discuss how you can implement something from the list into your life to be a better participant in the "Beloved Community."

Scripture**Matthew 7:12 (FNV)**

Here is the meaning of what I have been saying: whatever good you want others to do for you is what you should do for them. This is the whole purpose of the instructions given by Drawn from the Water (Moses) and the words spoken by the prophets.

PART 2 *Continued***Story to highlight week's theme:**

I live in Central Minnesota. The opportunity to witness the Aurora Borealis occurs quite often. In my Native American culture, we recognize the Aurora Borealis as visits from our ancestors. This is a special time in the life of our community.

In modern day life, we are fortunate enough to have apps on our cell phones to alert us when the conditions are favorable for our ancestors to visit. Recently I was alerted that the conditions were favorable. At 9:40 pm, myself, my daughter and twelve-year-old granddaughter headed out of town, away from the light pollution. We only need to drive about two miles north of town.

We always get out of the car, turn the lights off, and take pictures. Sometimes we just marvel at the beauty of our ancestors. On this particular evening, there were a couple of cars that drove by as we were taking our pictures. The next thing I know, there is a city police officer pulling up to see what we were doing. We were not within the city limits, so I was a bit confused. As he got out of his car, he shared with us that, "one of the cars who passed by called 911 and reported that there was a blacked-out car with kids waving their arms trying to get their attention."

My daughter and I both laughed and told the officer we were flattered that they thought we were kids (My daughter is 40 years old and I am old enough to sign up for AARP).

Perspective is everything! It was dark when that car drove by. They could not see who was out there in the dark, all they could see was the shadows of a car, and people with their hands up. Even the relatives could not be seen well with the naked eye. The people who called in the report made many assumptions about who we were and what we were doing.

In my glass half full way, I would like to think that if that car had stopped we would have been able to share about our culture and the beauty of the visit from our ancestors. I don't think badly of them for not stopping, I just think they missed a great opportunity to learn about another culture and people.

Once the police officer realized who we were, he stuck around a little while to take a picture of himself with his cruiser under the beautiful visit from our ancestors. As we shared with him about the cultural significance of this visit, he shared with us that he had taken several of his law enforcement classes at the local Native American college. He then stated he needed to return to town. We thanked him for driving out there to check on us. I was grateful for him, his service, and the opportunity to learn more about him.

As I think about this visit with our ancestors, Matthew 7:12, and Crazy Horse's prophecy, I am reminded that all of life is viewed through our many different lens. Today, we all have our own perspective, In Jesus' time they all had their own perspective, and Crazy Horse has this amazing perspective that we are all human beings. We need to meet there first. We all hold knowledge, and we need to share this knowledge with one another so we can be a "Beloved Community."

Yet, while we are learning about one another, we also need to honor and respect one another for our differences and our commonalities. Praise and thanksgiving to Creator Sets Free for making us all different and yet similar.

PART 2 *Continued***Discussion Questions:**

1. Matthew 7:12 is often referred to as the Golden Rule. What does this mean to you in practical terms? How would you apply this principle in everyday situations?
2. What role does spirituality play in Crazy Horse's prophecy? How does it inform the way we understand prophecies and visions?
3. How do traditional prophecies like Crazy Horse's and Scripture like Matthew 7:12 fit into the modern world? Are there challenges or benefits to preserving and interpreting these prophecies and scripture today?
4. How might living according to the Golden Rule and Crazy Horse's Prophecy affect your relationships with others, both personally and professionally? Can you share any experiences where the Golden Rule or even Crazy Horse's Prophecy guided your actions?
5. How does your perspective affect how you approach prophecies that are outside of Scripture? How does your perspective affect how you engage with people who have different belief systems or cultures?

Call to Action:

Being cognizant that we all have our own perspective, or lens for which we view the world can limit us in our learning and finding appreciation for all of creation, including one another. Become aware that sometimes our perspective is not at all what is happening around us. Ask questions and be prepared for Creator Sets Free to surprise you with beauty and wonder.

Closing Prayer:

Catch Me in My Scurrying
 Catch me in my anxious scurrying, Lord,
 and hold me in this Lenten season:
 hold my feet to the fire of your grace
 and make me attentive to my mortality
 that I may begin to die now
 to those things that keep me
 from living with you
 and with my neighbors on this earth;
 to grudges and indifference,
 to certainties that smother possibilities,
 to my fascination with false securities,
 to my addiction to sweatless dreams,
 to my arrogant insistence on how it has to be;
 to my corrosive fear of dying someday
 which eats away the wonder of living this day,
 and the adventure of losing my life
 in order to find it in you.
 Catch me in my aimless scurrying, Lord,
 and hold me in this Lenten season:
 hold my heart to the beat of your grace,
 and create in me a resting place,
 a kneeling place,
 a tip-toe place. Amen.

Loder T. Guerrillas of grace: Prayers for the Battle. Augsburg Books; 2005. Chapter: 'Prayers for Seasons & Holidays pp 123 Catch Me in My Scurrying'

Part 1:
Daily devotions for six days

Writer:
Rev. Enger Muteteke

Theme:

Openness and Curiosity

DAY 1

Opening Prayer

Dear God,
thank You for the gift of curiosity
and the ability to seek deeper
understanding of You and Your ways.
Open my heart and mind today
as I engage with Your Word. May I
approach this time with a spirit of
openness, ready to learn and grow
in faith. Amen.

Scripture

Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV)

Ask and it will be given to you; seek
and you will find; knock and the door
will be opened to you. For everyone
who asks receives; the one who seeks
finds; and to the one who knocks,
the door will be opened.

Meditation

In Matthew 7:7-8, Jesus invites us into a posture of openness and curiosity—qualities essential for a deep relationship with God. The command to “ask, seek, and knock” is not just about receiving answers; it’s about engaging in a dynamic dialogue with our Creator. Each action signifies movement toward God.

Asking reflects our vulnerability and acknowledgment that we need divine guidance. Seeking indicates a desire to explore and understand more fully, to dive into the mysteries of faith. Knocking symbolizes persistence and determination in our spiritual journey.

Imagine approaching God with the curiosity of a child, eager to learn and discover. This openness transforms our prayers from mere requests into heartfelt conversations. It challenges us to question our assumptions, confront our doubts, and embrace the unknown.

Reflect on what it means to seek God without fear of what you might find. What questions do you carry? What doors might God be inviting you to knock on? In cultivating a curious spirit, we allow God to lead us into new insights, deeper connections, and ultimately, a fuller understanding of His love.

Closing Prayer

Lord, I thank You for the invitation to come to You with my questions and curiosities. Help me to approach You with an open heart, ready to listen and learn. May I seek Your truth with persistence and faith, trusting that You will reveal what I need to know. Guide my steps and deepen my understanding of Your ways. Amen.

DAY 2**Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, thank You for the gift of curiosity. Help me to approach You with the wonder of a child, ready to learn and explore. Amen.

Scripture**Matthew 18:2-4 (NIV)**

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Meditation

In this passage, Jesus emphasizes the importance of childlike wonder in our faith. Children approach the world with curiosity, asking questions and seeking to understand their surroundings. This innate inquisitiveness is something we can cultivate in our relationship with God.

When we approach faith with a child's heart, we open ourselves to new perspectives and possibilities. Jesus calls us to let go of preconceived notions and rigid understandings of faith, encouraging us to explore with an open mind and heart. This openness allows us to experience God's grace in profound ways.

As we engage with Scripture, let's adopt that same spirit of wonder. Instead of merely reading the text, let's ask questions: What does this mean for my life? How does this reveal God's character? What can I learn from the people and situations described?

By embracing a childlike curiosity, we allow God to reveal His kingdom to us in fresh and transformative ways. It can lead to deeper insights, unexpected revelations, and a more profound relationship with our Creator.

Closing Prayer

God of wonder, grant me a heart that is open and curious. Help me to approach You with the wonder of a child, ready to learn and grow. May my faith be filled with joy and discovery as I seek to know You more. Amen.

DAY 3***Opening Prayer***

Lord, thank You for the gift of questions. Teach me to ask the right ones and to seek Your wisdom in every situation. Amen.

Scripture***Matthew 21:23 (NIV)***

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked.

Meditation

In this passage, we see the religious leaders confront Jesus with a question that challenges His authority. Their inquiry reveals the significance of questions in our spiritual journey. Questions can be a powerful tool for growth, prompting deeper exploration of our beliefs and assumptions.

While the religious leaders approached Jesus with skepticism, our questions can come from a place of genuine curiosity. When we wrestle with difficult topics or uncertainties in faith, it often leads to growth and deeper understanding. It's important to remember that asking questions does not signify a lack of faith but rather a desire to strengthen it.

Consider the questions you have about your faith. Are there areas where you feel uncertain or curious? Approach these questions with openness, inviting God into the conversation. Allow yourself to explore the answers, whether through prayer, study, or dialogue with others.

God welcomes our inquiries. When we seek answers with a genuine heart, we are often met with wisdom that deepens our understanding and strengthens our faith.

Closing Prayer

God, thank You for the gift of questions. Help me to embrace my inquiries with an open heart, trusting that You will guide me to the answers I need. May my questions lead me closer to You and strengthen my faith. Amen.

DAY 4***Opening Prayer***

Lord, help me to quiet my heart and mind so that I can listen for Your voice. Teach me to be open to Your guidance and wisdom. Amen.

Scripture***Matthew 13:9 (NIV)***

Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Meditation

In this brief yet powerful statement, Jesus underscores the importance of truly listening. Openness to God's voice is essential in our spiritual journey. However, in a world full of distractions, finding the space to hear God can be challenging.

Listening requires intentionality and a heart ready to receive. When we approach God with curiosity, we open ourselves to hearing Him in new and unexpected ways. This can happen through prayer, Scripture, nature, or the insights of others. It requires us to slow down and create space for God to speak.

Consider the times you've felt prompted or nudged by God. Reflect on how those moments impacted your life. Did you approach them with curiosity and openness, or were you quick to dismiss them?

As we cultivate a listening heart, we may discover God's presence in our everyday lives. Let's practice being still, allowing God's voice to penetrate our thoughts and guide our decisions. When we genuinely listen, we may uncover the depth of His love and the direction He has for us.

Closing Prayer

God, help me to cultivate a listening heart. May I be open to Your voice and guidance in my life. Teach me to recognize and respond to Your whispers, leading me closer to You each day. Amen.

DAY 5***Opening Prayer***

Gracious God, thank You for the journey of faith. Help me to embrace each step with openness and curiosity as I seek to know You more. Amen.

Scripture***Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)***

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Meditation

In the Great Commission, Jesus sends His disciples on a journey of discovery and sharing. This call to go and make disciples is rooted in openness to the world around us and curiosity about the lives of others. It challenges us to step beyond our comfort zones and engage with those who may not yet know Him.

The journey of faith is not solely about personal growth but also about sharing the discoveries we've made with others. When we approach our relationships with curiosity, we can learn from different perspectives and experiences. This openness enriches our understanding of God and His kingdom.

As we engage with others, let's be mindful of the questions we ask and the stories we share. Each interaction is an opportunity for growth, both for us and for those we encounter. God often uses our openness to touch the lives of others in profound ways.

Let's embrace the journey ahead, confident that as we seek to learn and share, we are fulfilling the call Jesus has given us. In this process, our faith deepens, and our understanding of God expands.

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank You for the journey of discovery You have set before me. Help me to embrace each opportunity with openness and curiosity. May my life reflect Your love as I share the Good News with others. Amen.

DAY 6***Opening Prayer***

Gracious God, thank You for the gift of Your Word. As we delve into the teachings of Jesus today, open our hearts to receive new insights. Help us to embrace curiosity and a desire to understand more fully. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Scripture***Matthew 13:10-11 (NIV)***

The disciples came to him and asked, 'Why do you speak to the people in parables?' He replied, 'Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.'

Meditation

In this passage, we see the disciples' curiosity come alive as they seek clarity from Jesus. Their question reveals a desire to understand the deeper truths behind His teachings. Jesus responds by affirming that such knowledge is a gift, highlighting the importance of openness in our spiritual journey.

Parables invite us into a world of metaphor and mystery. They are designed not just to convey information but to provoke thought and reflection. Jesus often spoke in parables, encouraging His listeners to engage their minds and hearts, to dig deeper, and to ponder the layers of meaning beneath the surface.

This invites us to ask ourselves: How often do we approach scripture with genuine curiosity? Are we willing to wrestle with difficult concepts, or do we shy away from challenging questions?

Openness requires vulnerability and a willingness to explore the unknown. As we engage with God's Word, may we adopt the disciples' attitude, seeking understanding and insight. Embrace the invitation to discover the secrets of the kingdom; each question can lead to greater revelation.

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank You for the wisdom found in Your parables. Help us to approach Your Word with open hearts and curious minds. May we be unafraid to ask questions and seek understanding, knowing that You reveal truth to those who earnestly seek it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PART 2**Sunday School Class Lesson for 45 Minutes****Main Idea**

Approaching forgiveness with openness and curiosity can lead us to deeper understanding and healing.

Opening Prayer

God of Heaven, we thank you for gathering us today. As we explore the theme of forgiveness, help us to approach this topic with open hearts and curious minds. May we be receptive to Your truth and ready to learn from one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Opening Exercise/Activity:

"Forgiveness Spectrum"

1. Materials Needed: A large piece of paper or whiteboard, markers.
2. Draw a line on the paper or board to represent a spectrum from "Not Forgiving" to "Fully Forgiving."
3. Ask participants to consider where they are on this spectrum regarding someone they struggle to forgive. They can place a sticky note or mark on the line to indicate their position.
4. Invite a few participants to share why they placed themselves where they did, fostering a discussion about the complexities of forgiveness and the different stages people experience.

PART 2 *Continued***Scripture****Matthew 18:21-35 (NIV)**

Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Then Jesus told this parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant!' he said. 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'

In anger, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Story to highlight week's theme:
"The Gift of Forgiveness"

Share a story about a woman named Sarah who struggled to forgive her brother after a painful family conflict. She often felt resentment and anger, which clouded her view of relationships. One day, in a moment of curiosity, she asked herself why she held onto these feelings.

This question led her to reflect on her own imperfections and the grace she had received in her life. With an open heart, Sarah began to pray and seek guidance. After much contemplation, she reached out to her brother, expressing her feelings and offering forgiveness. This conversation not only healed their relationship but also liberated Sarah from the burden of resentment, illustrating how openness to understanding can lead to transformation.

PART 2 *Continued***Discussion Questions:**

1. What are your initial thoughts on Peter's question about forgiveness? Why do you think he asked it?
2. How does Jesus' response challenge conventional ideas about forgiveness?
3. How does the parable illustrate the consequences of withholding forgiveness?
4. In what ways can curiosity about our feelings towards forgiveness lead to healing?
5. What steps can we take to cultivate openness in our relationships, especially when it comes to forgiveness

Call to Action:

Encourage participants to identify one person they need to forgive or an area where they struggle with forgiveness. Challenge them to take a step this week toward forgiveness, whether it's writing a letter, having a conversation, or simply praying for that person. Emphasize the importance of approaching this process with an open heart and a curious mindset, willing to explore their feelings and seek understanding.

Closing Prayer:

Lord, thank You for teaching us about forgiveness through Your Word. Help us to be open to understanding the depths of Your grace and to extend that grace to others. May we find courage and strength to forgive, leading to healing and restoration in our lives. Guide us as we take our next steps, and may our hearts remain curious and open to Your will. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Part 1:
Daily devotions for six days

Writer:
Rev. Noé Gabriel López

Theme:
Valuing People And Process

DAY 1

Opening Prayer

God of Justice and Compassion, we seek your guidance in our journey to balance the needs of people with the processes that shape our lives. Help us to create systems that are not only efficient but also inclusive and fair. May our actions reflect your love and justice, ensuring that no one is overlooked or burdened by rigid structures. Teach us to recognize the inherent worth of every individual and to design processes that uplift and empower all members of our community. Amen.

Scripture

Mark 2:23-28 (NRSVUE)

One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?" Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

DAY 1 *Continued****Meditation***

In this passage, Jesus and His disciples walk through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and the disciples begin to pick heads of grain. The Pharisees challenge this, citing Sabbath

laws that prohibit such actions. Jesus responds by reminding them that “the Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath.” This response highlights a profound truth: processes, including religious laws, are meant to serve people, not to burden them.

Here, Jesus is not dismissing the importance of the Sabbath—a vital process in Jewish religious life—but He is emphasizing that its true purpose is to bring rest, renewal, and well-being to people. The process is valuable, but it must always serve the people it was created for. When processes become more important than the individuals they are meant to benefit, they lose their meaning.

This passage invites us to reflect on how our own processes—whether in religious practice, community organization, or personal life—serve the people involved. Are they flexible and compassionate enough to adapt when necessary, or have they become rigid and burdensome? Valuing both people and process means finding a balance where systems and structures work in harmony with human needs, promoting justice, compassion, and dignity for all.

Closing Prayer

God of grace and harmony, inspire us to create and uphold processes that honor and uplift those they serve. May our systems reflect your love and justice, promoting well-being and dignity for all. Help us to continually reassess and improve our structures to ensure they meet the needs of every person with fairness and compassion. Amen.

DAY 2**Opening Prayer**

God of compassion and healing, just as you restored the man who was bound by chains and tormented by evil, we ask for your power to break the chains of injustice and oppression in our world. Help us to see the humanity in those who are often cast aside, and give us the courage to reach out in love and support. May we value both the people who need your touch and the process of bringing Your healing into their lives. Guide us in being instruments of your peace. Amen.

Scripture**Mark 5:1-20 (NRSVUE)**

They came to the other side of the sea, to the region of the Gerasenes. And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. He lived among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain, for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces, and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him, and he shouted at the top of his voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" Then Jesus[b] asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the region. Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding, and the unclean spirits[c] begged him, "Send us into the swine; let us enter them." So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, stampeded down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea.

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. They came to Jesus and saw the man possessed by demons sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion, and they became frightened. Those who had seen what had happened to the man possessed by demons and to the swine reported it. Then they began to beg Jesus[d] to leave their neighborhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. But Jesus[e] refused and said to him, "Go home to your own people, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you." And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

DAY 2 *Continued****Meditation***

The healing of the Gerasene demoniac is a powerful story of Jesus prioritizing a person's well-being while also challenging societal processes. The man, possessed and living among the tombs, had been ostracized and feared by his community. The societal process had been to isolate and control him rather than seeking his healing and restoration.

When Jesus heals the man, He not only restores him to health but also reintegrates him into society, challenging the processes that had excluded him. The people, however, react with fear, preferring the status quo to the radical change that Jesus brings. This story illustrates the need for processes that not only maintain order but also promote healing, inclusion, and justice.

Valuing people and process means creating systems that are not only fair and orderly but also compassionate and transformative. It involves challenging and changing processes that exclude or harm, ensuring they truly serve the well-being of all people. By doing so, we build a community where both individuals and the structures that guide our lives are in harmony, working together for the common good.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we remember the man You healed from the torment of many demons. Let us be inspired by Your example to bring hope and healing to those who are struggling in our own communities. May we value the process of understanding and supporting those who are marginalized, and may we always see Your image in each person we encounter. Strengthen us to be agents of change and love in a world that desperately needs Your light. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 3***Opening Prayer***

God of all, you remind us that true worship is not found in rituals but in how we treat others. Today, we ask for your guidance as we seek to honor you by valuing people and the processes that uplift them. Help us to recognize when our traditions have become barriers to love and to be willing to change for the sake of others. May our actions reflect Your love and justice in all that we do. Amen.

Scripture***Mark 7:1-8 (NRSVUE)***

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands,[a] thus observing the tradition of the elders, and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash,[b] and there are also many other traditions that they observe: the washing of cups and pots and bronze kettles and beds.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders but eat with defiled hands?"

He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

"You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

DAY 3 *Continued****Meditation***

In this passage, Jesus confronts the Pharisees and scribes who criticize His disciples for eating without performing the traditional ritual washing. Jesus responds by quoting Isaiah, saying, "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." Here, Jesus is addressing the disconnect between the outward observance of tradition (the process) and the inward reality of the heart (the people).

Traditions and commandments are important; they provide structure and guide our communal life. However, when these processes are followed without a true understanding of their purpose—to foster love, justice, and community—they can become hollow rituals. Jesus calls us to ensure that our processes are aligned with the deeper values they are meant to uphold, and that they truly serve the people involved.

Valuing people and processes means constantly re-evaluating our practices to ensure they are life-giving and meaningful. It involves holding onto traditions that promote justice and love, while being willing to let go of those that no longer serve their intended purpose. In doing so, we create a community where processes and people are in harmony, each enhancing the other.

Closing Prayer

God of the Heart and Tradition, help us to live in a way that honors you not just with our lips, but with our hearts. Guide us to create and uphold processes that are true reflections of your love, and help us to discard those that have lost their purpose. Amen.

DAY 4

Opening Prayer

Loving Jesus, who welcomes all who come to You in faith, help us to see the value in every person we encounter. Teach us to be patient in the process of understanding and addressing the needs of those who are often ignored or marginalized. May our hearts be open to the voices that challenge us and push us to grow in love and justice. Amen.

Scripture

Mark 7:24-30 (NRSVUE)

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, [b] even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." And when she went home, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

Meditation

Jesus encounters a Syrophenician woman who boldly approaches him, seeking healing for her daughter. At first, Jesus responds in a way that reflects the prevailing cultural and religious boundaries of his time. However, the woman's persistence and faith lead Jesus to cross those boundaries, ultimately healing her daughter.

This story illustrates the importance of valuing both people and process in our journey toward justice. The woman's persistence is key; she challenges the norms and refuses to be dismissed, showing that the process of seeking justice often requires resilience and courage. Jesus listens, engages, and eventually acts, demonstrating the importance of valuing people. This passage calls us to recognize the voices that are often silenced or overlooked in society. It encourages us to value the process of listening, learning, and evolving our understanding, particularly when it comes to issues of inclusion and equity. The Syrophenician woman's story reminds us that true justice is not just about meeting immediate needs but about transforming systems and attitudes that perpetuate exclusion and inequality.

In our own lives, we are called to follow Jesus' example by engaging in the sometimes uncomfortable process of questioning our assumptions and being open to the wisdom of those who are different from us. Valuing people means being willing to change our perspectives and actions to create a more just and compassionate world.

Closing Prayer

God of healing, we thank you for the example of the Syrophenician woman who teaches us the power of persistence and faith. Help us to value the voices that challenge us to be better, and to embrace the process of growth and transformation. May we always seek justice with humility and love, knowing that through You, all things are possible. Guide us to be agents of change, breaking down barriers and building a world where everyone is valued and heard. Amen.

DAY 5**Opening Prayer**

Eternal God, grant us the wisdom to balance the needs of individuals with the processes that guide our actions. Help us to create systems that promote justice and love, ensuring that every person is valued and their needs are met. May our work reflect your commitment to equity and compassion, building a community where both people and processes align with your divine purpose. Amen.

Scripture**Mark 10:46-52 (NRSVUE)**

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, 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?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Meditation

The story of Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, highlights the importance of valuing both people and processes. As Jesus is leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus cries out for mercy. The crowd tries to silence him, following the societal process that dictated who was worthy of Jesus' attention. But Jesus stops, calls Bartimaeus to him, and asks, "What do you want me to do for you?"

By asking this question, Jesus acknowledges Bartimaeus' dignity and agency, valuing him as a person. At the same time, Jesus' action challenges the societal process that would have kept Bartimaeus marginalized and voice silenced. The healing of Bartimaeus shows that processes should be designed to uplift and empower people, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Valuing people and process means ensuring that our systems and structures are inclusive, just, and responsive to the needs of all individuals. It involves creating processes that not only maintain order but also empower and uplift those who are often silenced or overlooked. By doing so, we create a community where every person is valued, and where processes serve to enhance the well-being and dignity of all.

Closing Prayer

God of Justice and Mercy, as Jesus empowered Bartimaeus by acknowledging his dignity and needs, guide us to create processes that uplift and include everyone, especially those who are marginalized. May our systems reflect Your love, ensuring that all people are valued and heard in our communities. Amen.

DAY 6**Opening Prayer**

Liberating God, we gather to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, an event that shatters the boundaries of despair and injustice. As we reflect on the empty tomb, open our hearts to the call for justice and renewal in our world. Guide us in understanding how the resurrection empowers us to challenge systems of oppression and to embrace a life of hope and transformation. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Scripture**Mark 16:1-8 (NRSVUE)**

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

DAY 6 *Continued****Meditation***

In Mark 16:1-8, the story of the women discovering the empty tomb is a powerful testament to the theme of valuing people and process. The women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, were often marginalized in their society, yet they are the first to witness and proclaim the most pivotal event in Christian faith: Jesus' resurrection. Their role emphasizes the importance of valuing every person, regardless of their social standing or perceived importance.

The process of discovering the empty tomb—initially filled with fear and confusion—reveals a transformative shift. The stone, a symbol of barriers and confinement, has been rolled away, symbolizing the removal of obstacles to new possibilities and hope. This act challenges us to reflect on our own processes: Are they inclusive and just? Do they uplift and empower every person?

The resurrection invites us to value both people and the processes that shape our lives. It calls us to ensure that our practices and systems reflect God's commitment to justice and renewal. By embracing the message of the resurrection, we are called to challenge and change processes that marginalize or oppress, and to build communities where every individual is honored and valued. As we embody this transformative message, let us be mindful of how we can contribute to a world that truly reflects the values of justice and hope exemplified by Jesus' resurrection.

Closing Prayer

Resurrected Christ, your victory over death brings not only hope but a call to justice. Help us to see beyond the barriers of oppression and to embrace the transformative power of your resurrection. Empower us to challenge systems of injustice and to work for a world where every person is valued and treated with dignity. May our lives reflect your love and commitment to justice, and may we be bold in sharing the Good News of hope and renewal. In your name, we pray. Amen.

PART 2**Sunday School Class Lesson for 45 Minutes****Main Idea**

Valuing people and processes means making space for those who are often overlooked or dismissed. Jesus demonstrates this by prioritizing children, showing that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are open, vulnerable, and often underestimated.

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank You for teaching us how to love and care for everyone. Help us to remember that each person is special and important, just like You showed us with the children. Please help us learn how to do things in a way that makes everyone feel included and valued. Amen.

Opening Exercise/Activity:**“Who Gets In?”**

Divide the class into small groups. Give each group a scenario where they must decide who should be allowed into an exclusive event (e.g., a party, a VIP event, a special club). Provide each group with descriptions of various people (e.g., a wealthy person, a well-known influencer, a young child, an unhoused person, an undocumented person, a non-English speaker, a person is differently-abled).

After a few minutes, ask the groups to share their decisions. Discuss how they made their choices and why some people were included while others were not.

Scripture:**Mark 10:13-16**

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Story to highlight week's theme:

Share a story about a child at a park who notices another child sitting alone because they speak a different language or look different. Instead of ignoring them, the first child goes over, smiles, and invites them to play. The story emphasizes how it feels good to include others and make them feel welcome, just like Jesus did. Relate this to how Jesus always made sure to include everyone, especially those who might be treated unfairly or left out.

PART 2 *Continued***Discussion Questions:**

1. Why do you think the disciples wanted to stop the children from coming to Jesus?
2. How did Jesus show that He valued the children just as much as anyone else?
3. What can we do to make sure everyone feels included and special, just like Jesus did?
4. Can you think of a time when someone made you feel welcome? How did it make you feel?

Call to Action:

"Be an Ally"

Talk with the class about how they can be allies in their daily lives. Explain that being an ally means standing up for what is right and making sure everyone is treated fairly. Give specific examples:

- If they see someone being treated unfairly or left out at work or school, they can stand up for that person by telling others to stop and inviting them to join in.
- If they notice someone is being treated unfairly because of how they look, where they come from, or what they believe, they can speak up and say, "That's not right."
- If they see someone who seems lonely or different, they can be brave and show kindness by sitting with them, playing with them, or simply smiling and saying hello.

Encourage class participants to share a time when they stood up for someone or made someone feel included. Emphasize that Jesus wants us all to be allies and helpers, making the world a better place by loving and caring for others.

Closing Prayer:

Dear Jesus, Thank you for teaching us to stand up for others and to make sure everyone is treated with kindness. Help us to be brave and caring, just like You, and to remember that everyone is important. Please guide us to always do what's right and to help others when they need it. Amen.

Part 1:
Daily devotions for six days

Writer:
Pastor Dawn Houser

Theme:

Shared Responsibility and Authority

DAY 1

Opening Prayer

Great Spirit, You are the creator of all the universe, and we honor You. I come to this meditation today with the expectation that you will provide revelation to me and speak wisdom into my heart. I am thankful for all that you provide me with. Speak to me Great Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Scripture

Mark 9:42-45 (FNV)

But let no one cause one of these little ones who have put their trust in me to stumble away from the path. It would be better to have a great stone tied to one's neck and to be thrown into the great waters. If what your hand does causes you to stumble off the path, then cut it off and throw it away! It would be better to live this life with only one hand than to go with two hands into the Valley of Smoldering Fire – a fire that cannot be put out. If where your foot walks causes you to stumble from the path, then cut it off and throw it away. It would be better to walk this life with only one foot than to walk with two feet right into the Valley of Smoldering Fire – a fire that cannot be put out.

DAY 1 *Continued****Meditation***

The first communities the bishop appointed me to serve were two small rural communities. They each had an average worship attendance of thirty people. These two churches were in communities of less than five hundred people each and they were about three and a half miles apart. In one community there was a bar that served food on Sunday afternoons. One Sunday, soon after I began the appointment, I and my family were invited to have lunch at this bar. I declined as I was concerned that someone might see me entering this establishment and think it was okay to go into a bar. I did not want to be a stumbling block to someone else.

After some processing and discussion with my District Superintendent and trusted colleagues, I began to realize that just going into the bar would not be a stumbling block, and in fact could offer opportunities to invite people into a relationship with Jesus.

As Disciples of Jesus Christ, we have a responsibility to care for and protect each other from spiritual harm. However, we need to be careful that our responsibility is not overpowered by a feeling of paternalism. Paternalism allows for a system where a person in a role of authority might supply for the needs or might regulate conduct in matters that may affect the person under authority as individuals, as well as their relationship to authority and one another. This undermines the shared responsibility we have with one another and with God in the Kingdom of God.

Closing Prayer

Gitchi Manidoo, Great Spirit, I confess that there have been things that I have done that caused others to stumble. Forgive me. Help me to see the things in my own life that could be a stumbling block to others. May those stumbling blocks be used to allow others to come to know you. May I be a responsible disciple who is ever watchful of being paternalistic. Thank you, Great Spirit, for the wisdom you provide. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

DAY 2**Opening Prayer**

Gitchi Manidoo, Great Spirit, you are the awesome Creator of the Universe. You give me everything I need to survive in this universe. For this I am deeply grateful. I come today hoping that you will speak to me through this scripture. That my heart will be open to discerning your message through your word. Send your Holy Spirit to whisper into my ear [tell me] what you would have me learn today. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Scripture**Mark 10:13-16 (FNV)**

The people were bringing their little children to Creator Sets Free (Jesus) so he would lay his hands on them and bless them, but his followers spoke harsh words to the ones bringing them.

When Creator Sets Free (Jesus) saw what his followers were doing, it made him angry, so he said to them, "Let the little children come to me! Do not turn them away. Creator's good road belongs to the ones who are like these children. I speak from my heart, the only way onto Creator's good road is to become as trusting as a little child."

He then took the children into his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Meditation

In the Ojibwe culture children are held in high regard. They are the future! Without them our entire culture dies. In the Sweetgrass teaching, we learn that there are twenty-one total stands of sweetgrass in a sweetgrass braid. The first seven braids represent the previous seven generations, the next set of seven strands represent the seven grandfather teachings: love, respect, humility, bravery, honesty, wisdom, and truth. And the final seven stands represent the next seven generations. As the three sections are woven together into a braid, we are reminded that all of life is intertwined together; our ancestors, our own life and the way we live it, and the next seven generations. We are responsible for ourselves and the way we conduct ourselves and we are responsible for the next seven generations. We must leave this earth better than the way we inherited it.

We see in this scripture that we share responsibility with one another and Jesus who shows that everyone in the community, including the disciples, has a role in welcoming and caring for the vulnerable and the least among them and ourselves.

Closing Prayer

Creator of all, you speak to me in so many ways. I am amazed by the things I learn each day through your word and the world around me. Help me to be aware of the shared responsibility I have with the rest of my community and especially as a Disciple of Jesus Christ. Prompt me when I am not aware of my actions that will have a negative impact on the next generations that will inhabit your universe after I leave this place. May I be an example to others in how to care for one another, even those who are the most vulnerable in society. In the name of the Christ, I pray. Amen.

DAY 3

Opening Prayer

Great Healer, you can offer healing in all cases, but you ask us to share the responsibility for our friends and neighbors' health and welfare. Soften my heart as I meditate on your words. I pray all of this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Scripture

Mark 2:1-12 (FNV)

Healing At Village of Comfort

After many days Creator Sets Free (Jesus) went back to Village of Comfort (Capernaum), but word got out that he had returned home. So many people had gathered in the house

that there was no more room. Even the entrance was blocked. Creator Sets Free (Jesus) began to teach the people there when four men came carrying a paralyzed man on a sleeping mat, but they could not get past the crowd. In their desperation, they climbed up to the rooftop and broke through the roof right above Creator Sets Free (Jesus). They lowered the paralyzed man down, sleeping bundle and all.

When he saw their faith in him, he said to the paralyzed man, "Young man, you are released from your broken ways and the things in your heart that are not true to Creator's good road."

Who Can Forgive Broken Ways?

There were some scroll keepers there who began to wonder in their hearts, who is this man to speak against the Great Spirit with such disrespect? Who but the Maker of life can release a man from his wrongdoings?

Under tribal law the only way to be forgiven for broken ways or wrongdoings was to go to the sacred lodge and have a ceremony performed by a holy man. By releasing this man from his broken ways, Creator Sets Free (Jesus) was claiming to have the right to do this himself, which, to the spiritual leaders, was wrong.

In his spirit, Creator Sets Free (Jesus) knew right away what they were thinking and said to them, "Why are your hearts full of these thoughts? Is it easier to tell a paralyzed man, 'Get up and walk,' or to say to him, 'you are released from your wrongdoings'?"

The room became quiet as he waited for an answer from them.

"This is how you will know that the True Human Being has the right to forgive bad hearts and broken ways on this earth."

He turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Get up, roll up your sleeping bundle, and walk home."

Right away the man stood up, and, in front of them all, he rolled up his sleeping bundle and walked out. Great amazement filled the hearts of all who were in the house as they gave praise to Creator.

"Who has ever seen this kind of mysterious and powerful medicine?" they asked.

DAY 3 *Continued****Meditation***

In March of 2020, our entire world was turned upside down with the Covid-19 pandemic. There were so many people who were gravely ill and died from Covid. In the State of Minnesota, there are eleven federally recognized tribal nations. From March 2020 to at least 2022 masks were required to be worn in any buildings or gatherings of Native

Commented [GC25]: Again, stick to exactly what Jesus said in scripture...which was, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Commented [EM26R25]: Leave as is please.

American people. Even today many Native American people will wear a mask to protect themselves and others.

There was a different attitude among Native American people when it came to mask wearing. Of course, the masks were a pain and difficult for many to wear, but we did it. The attitude was that we wear the mask to protect our Elders. In the beginning of the pandemic, it was the Elders and those with health concerns who were most at risk. We understood that we had the potential to lose all our Wisdom Keepers, the Elders in our community. We took responsibility for caring for one another by wearing a mask.

In the story of the paralytic and his friends, we see that the friends took responsibility for caring for their friend. Jesus recognizes their faith and heals the man. There are many situations in our lives when we must take a step out of our comfort zone and take some responsibility for the care and welfare of our neighbors.

Closing Prayer

Yahweh-Rapha, your partnership with humanity is amazing and appreciated. I praise You for all that You are and all that you provide. I recognize You as the Creator of all and know that I am to be in a partnership with You where I share some responsibility for my neighbors and friends' wellbeing. Speak to the places in my life where I need to be more cognizant of the needs of others. May our shared responsibility for one another be a blessing to those who would be the beneficiary of our care and concern. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

DAY 4***Opening Prayer***

Beautiful, Great One, you alone know my heart. You know everything about me—my positive qualities and my negative qualities. Breathe into me Your spirit. Help me to discern what you would have me learn today. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Scripture

Mark 3:13-19 (FNV)

Twelve Message Bearers

Creator Sets Free (Jesus) went up the mountain and gathered to himself some of his followers. He chose twelve of them to learn his ways by being with him, so he could send them out to tell the good story and to have the power to force out evil spirits. He called them his message bearers.

Here are the names of the twelve he chose: Stands on the Rock (Peter), the name he gave to One Who Hears (Simon); He takes Over (James) the son of Gift of Creator (Zebedee) and his brother He Shows Goodwill (John), whom he also called Sons of Thunder; Stands with Courage (Andrew); Friend of Horses (Philip) Son of Ground Digger (Bartholomew); Gift from Creator (Matthew); Looks Like His Brother (Thomas); He Takes Charge (James) the son of First to Change (Alphaeus); Strong of Heart (Thaddaeus); One Who Listens (Simon) the Firebrand (Zealot); and Speaks Well Of (Judas), the one who would betray him.

DAY 4 *Continued****Meditation***

Leadership is a strange thing! Over the years I have come to realize that some people are natural born leaders and others must really work at it. There are some leadership qualities that are simply a part of a person's personality, and other qualities that can be taught. For several years, I facilitated Leadership Training with college students. It was always fun!

As part of that training, we discussed power and how it can be useful to do good in the world, or when it is abused, it will destroy you and the work you are engaged in, along with your credibility. We also discussed authority. Unlike power, authority can be transferred or delegated. Authority is the power to give orders, make decisions, and to enforce obedience.

In this story, Jesus transfers his authority to his twelve disciples. He taught them everything they needed to know to share the "good story" and then he transferred his authority to "force out evil spirits."

After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, these same disciples (not including Judas) went out into the world to share the "good Story" and to "force out evil spirits." What would have happened if they had not accepted Jesus' authority to do this work?

We too are given Jesus' authority to share the "good story" with all those around us. What will happen to Kin-dom building if we don't accept Jesus' authority and share the story of the promise of eternity through salvation?

Closing Prayer

Almighty God,

You have given examples through your scriptures of how I am to live in this world as a cohabitant with my neighbors. If only I could follow Your example perfectly, our world

would be a better place. I am grateful that You offer the gift of grace and forgiveness when I fall short. As I discern the message of this story, I pray that I can use the authority you have given me to share the "good story" of Jesus with those whom I encounter in my life each day. Thank you for trusting me with this authority. In the name of our Savior, Jesus. Amen.

DAY 5**Opening Prayer**

Gitchi Manidoo, Great Spirit, thank you for this beautiful day and for the ability to be a co-creator with you. Send the winds to speak to me in a way that I can understand the message you would have me take away from this time in your word. May these few moments be impactful on my life. In the name of Jesus, the Christ I pray. Amen.

Scripture

Mark 12:41-44 (FNV)

The Sacrificial Gift

Creator Sets Free (Jesus) found a place to sit across from the storehouse of the sacred lodge. He watched as people came to put their gifts on the offering blanket. The ones with many possessions were putting down more than others. Then, he saw a poor widow come to the blanket and place two small, poorly beaded earrings on it, worth almost nothing.

He gathered his followers around him and told them about the widow's gift.

"I speak from my heart," he said, "this widow has given more than all the others. What they gave was only a small part of their many possessions, but this poor widow has given all she had left to live on."

Meditation

For several years I was a single mother, going to college, and living in government subsidized housing. I did not have much for financial resources. I remember saving change in a little white piggy bank. That change was used toward the end of the month to purchase milk or to do a load of laundry at the coin operated laundry mat. In the church we talk a lot about "giving out of our abundance." For some we don't have abundance. We are just scraping by.

When the offering plate was passed in church, and I had only a five-dollar bill to place in it, I would often feel guilty that I couldn't give more. One Sunday after church I had a serious discussion with the pastor of the church I belonged to at the time. He reminded me of the story of the Widow who had so little to give.

The story is not so much about the amount that we give. But more about her act of giving, which reflects the shared responsibility of supporting the faith community and caring for the less fortunate. It emphasizes that shared responsibility is not about the amount given, but the heart and willingness to contribute according to your ability.

Closing Prayer

Generous and Loving God, you are all knowing. You know the resources I have available, and you know my heart and abilities. When I feel guilty because I cannot provide more, remind me that the amount I give is not nearly as important as the spirit of my giving. May whatever resources I give—time, talent, and financial gifts—be in the spirit of shared responsibility with you and others. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

DAY 6**Opening Prayer**

O Great Spirit, speak to me through your written words. Send you spirit to fill me with wisdom and knowledge. Help me to discern how this passage of scripture and this story will help me to take up the cross and follow Jesus. I pray this in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Scripture

Mark 8:34-38 (FNV)

Carrying the Cross

He then gathered his followers and the crowd around him and said, "Any who want to walk the road with me must turn away from their own path and carry their own cross as they follow me to the place of ultimate sacrifice.

"The ones who hold on to their lives will not find life, but the ones who are willing to let go of their lives, for me and for the good story I bring, will find the true life. How will it help you to get everything you want in this world but lose the true life? Is there anything in this world worth trading for it?

"There are bad-hearted and unfaithful people living today, in this generation, who are ashamed of me and my message. So, when the True Human Being comes to show the power and shining-greatness of his Father along with his holy spirit-messengers, he will also be ashamed of these people."

Meditation

In 2020, I viewed a local school board meeting. I was utterly appalled when the board debated about whether students should wear a face mask when they returned to school that fall. During the discussion the Chairwoman of the school board made the statement, "As board members I think it would be good if we could be role models to students and families by wearing the mask and following the law." Another board member and coach responded, "I am not a role model and will not be forced to wear a mask."

When I heard a coach and board member make this statement, I made the decision to run for the school board. I felt so strongly that board members and coaches are role models. I won that election in November of 2020.

The first two years of serving on the school board were a nightmare as I had numerous threats made on my life and my family's lives, and constant threatening emails. I had taken up my cross and was following Jesus. It would have been easy to resign, but I knew I needed to finish my term as a good role model. It is not easy to carry the cross. I couldn't have done it without the support of family and friends.

While this passage of scripture refers to individual commitment, it also implies a shared journey of discipleship. Everyone who follows Jesus bears responsibility for living out this calling, supporting each other in process, and facing the cost of discipleship together.

Closing Prayer

Life giving Great Spirit, I honor you and thank you for giving Jesus as a sacrifice for all of creation. Through scripture Jesus shows and teaches me to take up the cross and follow in his footsteps. I pray that on this day and always I will be a good role model continuing to grow in discipleship by being responsible for myself and supporting others as they travel through their own discipleship journey. I pray all of this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

PART 2**Sunday School Class Lesson for 45 Minutes****Main Idea**

By sharing responsibility and accepting authority, the local church will be strengthened.

Opening Prayer

Great Spirit, come near as we examine your word. Send your Holy Spirit like the wind, to blow through and bring understanding to my heart and mind. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

Opening Exercise/Activity:**Examining the Plate**

If we think of the ministries of the church as being a plate, the plate can get quite full. Especially, if there are only a few people leading ministries. How full is your congregation's ministry plate? As you examine each of the congregation's ministries, ask yourself, how impactful are they? Can you take a ministry off the plate to make room for something that might be more impactful? This is an exercise to assist in evaluating sustainable ministries within your congregation and to determine if they are ministries with shared responsibility between the pastor and laity.

1. Make a list of ministries your congregation is involved in.
2. Examine each one. Does the pastor lead the ministry alone, or is there laity involved?
3. Which ministries are vibrant and are there any that have outlived their life?

PART 2 *Continued***Scripture:****Mark 6: 7-13 (FNV)**

He then gathered his twelve message bearers together, gave them power over unclean evil spirits, and began to send them out two by two. He told them to take nothing with them except a walking stick – no traveling bundle, food, or money pouches. They were to wear only one outer garment and have one pair of moccasins for their feet.

“When you come to a village, stay in one home until you leave. If no one in that village welcomes you or will listen to your message, then go from there and shake the dust from your moccasins as a sign against them.”

So the twelve went out traveling two by two, and everywhere they went, they told people to return to Creator's right ways. They forced out evil spirits and poured herbal oils on many who were sick and healed them.

Story to highlight week's theme:

When I answered the call to ministry, I was a bit older. I had already had a full career. My husband and I owned a home and were fairly settled. Answering the call to ministry was a scary endeavor for me. It meant that life as I knew it, would change. We (my husband and myself) would need to sell our home and become dependent on the communities/churches to which the bishop would appoint me. We sold everything and moved about a three-hour drive from what had been home.

The first appointment was a little rough for me and the congregations. I did not realize that I was to be in shared ministry with the congregation. I had to learn that I had responsibilities and the congregation had responsibilities, and that ministry was a shared experience between the spiritual leader and the laity. I only served this appointment for twenty months.

The second community/church the bishop appointed me to serve is much different. I am currently serving in my tenth year here. The congregation does not expect me to do ministry by myself, and I do not expect the congregation to do ministry by themselves. We are ministry partners. This has proven to be a fruitful combination.

When Jesus sent out the Twelve Apostles, He sent them in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits and instructing them to rely on the hospitality of others. This reflects a shared responsibility between those who preach and those who support them, as well as the importance of partnership in ministry.

PART 2 *Continued***Discussion Questions:**

1. How can pastors and laity better partner together to fulfill the mission of the church? What practical steps can be taken to strengthen this partnership?
2. What are some ways the congregation can support their pastor, and how can the pastor empower the congregation to use their spiritual gifts?
3. In what areas of ministry do you feel the laity could step up and take more responsibility? How can church leadership create opportunities for this?
4. What does a healthy pastor-laity partnership look like in a church setting? What challenges might arise, and how can they be addressed?
5. How does shared responsibility in ministry reflect the biblical model of the body of Christ? How can we ensure that everyone—pastors and laypeople—are actively involved in the church's mission?

Call to Action:

In the work of God's Kingdom, the ministry of the church is not the responsibility of the pastor alone, but a shared calling for all believers. A powerful and thriving church emerges when the pastor and laity partner together, each bringing their unique gifts and strengths to serve God and the community.

Pastors are called to shepherd, guide, and equip the saints for ministry. The laity, as the body of Christ, are empowered to actively engage in the work of the Gospel. Together, the pastor and laity build a culture of partnership where pastoral leadership and the ministry of the laity are intertwined. Support one another, pray for each other, and stand united in the work of the Lord. This partnership is essential for a healthy, growing, and impactful church.

In this divine partnership, the church becomes a beacon of hope, love, and transformation. The mission of the Gospel is too great for one person—it takes all of us, pastors and laity alike, working in unity to fulfill God's calling.

Answer the call today – however this may look for you. It may look like pastoring a church. It may look like partnering with other laypeople bridging the church and world. It may look like serving on the prayer team, worship team, or missions team. Join hands in ministry and watch as God moves powerfully through your collective efforts.

Closing Prayer:

Beautiful Great One, I am grateful for all you provide. You give us the church to be the body of Christ in the world. As Jesus' Disciple, you give me responsibilities and authority to offer healing and hope in the world. I pray that you would provide me with the courage to take on these responsibilities and accept your authority to engage in ministry partnerships with clergy, church staff, and laity. May I be the disciple you would have me to be. In the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Part 1:
Daily devotions for six days

Writer:
Rev. Noé Gabriel López

Theme:
Shared Power

DAY 1

Opening Prayer

God of all people, give us the grace to use the power and privilege we hold to serve others, following the example of Jesus, who empowers the lowly and restores the downtrodden. Amen.

Scripture

Luke 4:16-21 (NRSVUE)

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Meditation

Jesus begins His ministry by invoking the powerful words of the prophet Isaiah proclaiming that he has been anointed to "bring good news to the poor," "proclaim release to the captives," and "let the oppressed go free." From the beginning of his public ministry, he makes clear that his mission is one of liberation and not of subjugation, one of empowerment and not of disenfranchisement.

After all, as the God-human Jesus empties himself (Philippians 2:5-7) and chooses not to cling on to power. Instead in becoming human, he shares of himself to humankind who so desperately need his message of good news.

This declaration radically opposes holding on power, which seeks to maintain control over others to preserve privilege. Instead, Jesus calls for a sharing of power that liberates those who have been imprisoned and oppressed. His mission offers a vision of the kin-dom of God as a place where power is shared and wielded for the common good, not held in the hands of a few.

As followers of Jesus, we are invited to examine how we use our own power— whether financial, social, or political. Are we hoarding it, or are we using it to empower those who have been excluded or oppressed by unjust systems? True discipleship means participating in the mission of shared power that Jesus proclaimed, where all people can live freely and flourish in community.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, help us to see where we hold power and give us the courage to use it to liberate and uplift others, just as Christ did. Amen.

DAY 2

Opening Prayer

God of justice, reveal to us the ways we can redistribute power in our world, following Jesus' example of lifting up the lowly and humbling the mighty. Amen.

Scripture

Luke 1:46-55 (NRSVUE)

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name; indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Meditation

The story of Mary is one that upends the way we understand power in the world. In the early church, there was significant debate over Mary's title: Theotokos (Mother of God) vs. Christotokos (Mother of Christ). The church determined that Mary was in fact the mother of God since Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. God chose a young woman of humble means to bear Jesus. In response, Mary expresses her gratitude in the poetic words we know as the Magnificat.

Mary praises God for lifting up the humble and filling the hungry with good things while sending the rich away empty. This passage, often called the "Song of Mary," highlights God's commitment to reversing systems of power that provides limitless resources for the few and neglect the needs of the many. Mary celebrates a God who scatters the proud and the powerful, bringing down rulers from their thrones while raising up the lowly and meek.

This is a radical reordering of society— a vision of shared power that contrasts sharply with the power-hungry structures of empire and domination. God's justice isn't about accumulating power for personal gain; it's about sharing compassion, kindness, and love so that all may experience freedom, dignity, and abundance.

Mary's song invites us to reflect on how we can participate in this divine reversal of power. Where do we see systems that concentrate power in the hands of a few? How can we help dismantle those systems and build communities where power is equitably shared? As we journey through Lent, may we join Mary in singing praises to a God who shatters the chains of oppression and "fills the hungry with good things."

Closing Prayer

God of the lowly, help us to embody Your vision of justice by sharing what we have and working for the uplift of those who have been marginalized and silenced so that our souls can magnify You and Your gracious deeds. Amen.

DAY 3**Opening Prayer**

Merciful God, give us the strength to challenge unjust systems of power and the humility to share what we have with those who have been oppressed. Amen.

Scripture**Luke 3:10-14 (NRSVUE)**

And the crowds asked him, "What, then, should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

Meditation

When the crowds came to John the Baptist and asked what they should do to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom, John's answer was simple: share what you have. "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." He even challenged tax collectors and soldiers, calling them to use their power justly—no longer extorting or exploiting the vulnerable.

John's message reflects a core aspect of shared power: dismantling systems of economic and social exploitation and redistributing resources to those who need them. His call directly opposes power hoarding, which thrives on maintaining inequality to benefit a few at the expense of the many. Liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuría would emphasize this ideal: the rich are rich because the poor are poor. John's ministry prepared the way for Jesus by challenging people to live in ways that reflect the justice and equity of God's Kingdom.

Recently, I heard a pastor preach on this passage in which she said, "You don't actually have two coats. You have one coat and one opportunity to portray generosity." This is a message of sharing the fruit of God's spirit: generosity. Generosity challenges us to resist the notion that we are only here to fend for ourselves.

We are invited to take up John's call by examining our own lives and communities. Where are we holding onto excess while others go without? How can we use our privileges to challenge unjust systems and create a more equitable distribution of resources? Following Jesus means sharing power and privilege so that everyone can experience the fullness of life in God's Kingdom.

Closing Prayer

God of justice, help us to be more generous and to share our resources and challenge the systems that concentrate power in the hands of the few. May we walk in the way of Jesus, who taught us to share and serve with humility. Amen.

DAY 4**Opening Prayer**

God of the outcast, show us how to empower those who have been pushed to the margins, that we might share power in ways that bring healing and justice. Amen.

Scripture**Luke 7:36-50**

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus[a] to eat with him, and when he went into the Pharisee's house he reclined to dine. And a woman in the city who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair, kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner." Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "speak." "A certain moneylender had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt." And Jesus[b] said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

DAY 4 *Continued****Meditation***

A wise person once taught me, "the marginalized aren't voiceless, they are silenced." This story is about a woman who has been silenced by a society that deemed her as unworthy of dignity due to her sin.

Yet her audacious spirit provides the impetus for her to enter the house that was hosting Jesus. She anoints his feet with her tears and expensive perfume. While the religious leaders criticize her, Jesus defends her, elevating her above the powerful men in the room. He acknowledges her act of love and devotion, saying, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

This moment is a profound example of how Jesus gives attention to a person whom the powerful had come to see as abhorrent. Rather than allowing the powerful Pharisees to control the narrative, Jesus shifts the focus to the woman, empowering her and recognizing her dignity. He overturns the societal norms that sought to shame and silence her, giving her the power to leave in peace, forgiven and restored.

Jesus consistently models a sharing of power that empowers the oppressed, especially women, who were often denied agency in his time. In doing so, he challenges systems that keep certain groups in positions of subjugation. As followers of Jesus, we are called to empower those who have been silenced or marginalized, sharing power in ways that restore dignity and justice for all of God's children.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, help us to follow Jesus' example of empowering the marginalized. May we use our influence to uplift those who have been pushed aside, creating a world of justice and equality. Amen.

DAY 5**Opening Prayer**

God of strength and vulnerability, help us to recognize the power in humility and service, and to reject the false promises of domination and control. Amen.

Scripture**Luke 22:24-27**

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. 25 But he said to them, "The kings of the gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you; rather, the greatest among you must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

Meditation

The Good News is full of paradox. In an attempt to get ahead and earn Jesus' partiality, the disciples argue about who among them is the greatest. Jesus replies by acknowledging the status quo and hierarchies of the world— *c'est la vie* (such is life). Then he states words that shake the foundations of my morality: But not so with you.

His response upends their understanding of what it means to be great. If you want to lead, you must serve. If you want to be great, you must be like the youngest. If you want to be first, you must be last. In God's Kin-dom, true power is found in service and humility, not in domination, control, or getting ahead.

This teaching directly challenges the world's obsession with power and maintaining power, where leadership is often equated with control and privilege. Jesus shows us a different way— one in which power is shared through service and vulnerability. To lead in God's Kingdom is to serve others, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

As we reflect on this passage, we are called to reconsider how we view power. Do we seek power for our own benefit, or do we use it to serve others? Are we trying to get ahead while simultaneously leaving others behind? True power in the Kingdom of God is not about controlling others, but about sharing our resources, our time, and our love to uplift and empower those around us.

Closing Prayer

Servant God, teach us to lead with humility and to use whatever power we have in the service of others. Forgive us when we fall short of your mandate to serve the least and the last. Help us to be more like Jesus who is the Christ. Amen.

DAY 6

Opening Prayer

God of justice, help us to build a world where power is shared and where justice reigns, as we follow Christ in working for the liberation of all people. Amen.

Scripture

Luke 19:1-10 (NRSVUE)

A He 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 him, 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 he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "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."

Meditation

Zacchaeus, a tax collector, had hoarded wealth through exploitation by taking more than what was required by tax laws. However, when he encounters Jesus, something changes. Zacchaeus vows to give half of his possessions to the poor and to repay anyone he has defrauded four times over. This act of repentance is a powerful example of how encountering Jesus leads us to change. It changes how we think about wealth and the greed it can instill in us.

After Zacchaeus encounters Jesus, and Jesus acknowledges his humanity, Zacchaeus doesn't just give back what he has stolen. Instead, he goes above and beyond, sharing his resources to restore justice to those he has wronged. This story illustrates the transformative power of grace, which compels us to let go of the worldly possession we strongly cling to, and share it with those who have been marginalized, belittled, and even stolen from.

In following Jesus, we are called to participate in this kind of radical change. Where have we benefited from systems of inequality? How might we, like Zacchaeus, use our resources and influence to bring justice and healing to our communities? The call to share means more than giving charity—it means dismantling systems of oppression and creating new ways for all people to thrive.

By redistributing resources, whether wealth, influence, or opportunities, we align ourselves with God's vision of justice. Zacchaeus reminds us that real change involves making amends for past wrongs and working to create equity for all.

Closing Prayer

God of grace and transformation, guide us in the work of redistributing resources so that all your children may live abundantly. May we, like Zacchaeus, repent of the ways we have misused our power and privilege, and may we instead use what we have to bring healing to our communities. Amen.

PART 2

Sunday School Class Lesson for 45 Minutes

Main Idea

Jesus teaches us to share and help others, just like he did with his followers. We can use what we have to help our friends, family, and community!

Opening Prayer

Dear God, Thank you for showing us how to share and love one another. Help us to be like Jesus, who shared his kindness and love with others and made the world a better place. Teach us to share what we have to make others happy and safe. Amen.

Opening Exercise/Activity:**"Sharing" Game**

Gather in a circle. Give each person a small basket or bag filled with play food (or any small items). Ask them to pass it around the circle. When each person gets the basket, they take one item and say something they are thankful for or something they can share with others (e.g., "I can share my smile," "I can share my lunch," etc.). Continue until everyone has had a turn.

Scripture:**Luke 9:12-17**

The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside to lodge and get provisions, for we are here in a deserted place." 13 But he said to them, "You give them something to eat." They said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people." 14 For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." 15 They did so and had them all sit down. 16 And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. 17 And all ate and were filled, and what was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Story to highlight week's theme:

Tell a story about a boy named Leo who brought his lunch to school. One day, during a field trip, some of the children in class forgot their lunches, and they were very hungry (raise your hand if you have ever been hungry). Leo saw his friends' sad faces and decided to share his sandwich and one of the two apples with one of his friends. At first, it didn't seem like enough for everyone, but as Leo started sharing, something amazing happened— other kids found small snacks they could share too. By the end, everyone had enough to eat because they worked together and shared what they had!

PART 2 *Continued***Discussion Questions:**

1. How do you think the people felt when they saw Jesus share the bread and fish?
2. Can you think of a time when you shared something with a friend or family member? How did it make you feel?
3. Why do you think sharing is important?
4. What can you share with others in your life, even if it seems small?

Call to Action:

Think of one thing you can share this week. It could be your time, a kind word, or even food. Journal about what you shared or tell a trusted friend what you shared. In your Sunday School class or small group gathering the following week, spend some time discussing how it went and what it felt like to share from what you have.

Closing Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for teaching us about sharing today. Help us to remember that even small things we share can make a big difference. Give us kind hearts and willing hands to help others this week. Amen.

Part 1:

Daily devotions for six days

Writer:

Rev. YoungHak Lee

Theme:

Holding Discomfort

DAY 1

Opening Prayer

Gracious, loving God, open our hearts to Your truth. Help us learn to hold discomfort as a practice of our Christian faith by denying ourselves daily and taking up our cross. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Scripture

Luke 9:23-24 (NRSVUE)

Then he said to them all, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.

Meditation

In Luke 9:23-24, we are invited to embrace the profound challenge of self-denial. "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily." This call is a reminder that growth often comes through discomfort.

In our lives, we seek comfort—smooth paths, familiar patterns, and predictable outcomes. Yet, true transformation often lies on the other side of discomfort. When we hold the weight of our own cross, we acknowledge our struggles, fears, and doubts. This act of surrender doesn't mean giving up; instead, it is a courageous embrace of our authentic selves.

As you meditate, find a quiet space, close your eyes, and take a deep breath. Visualize your discomfort—a fear, a challenge, or an unresolved issue. Instead of pushing it away, hold it gently, as one would cradle a fragile object. Recognize that this discomfort is a part of your journey, a teacher offering insights into resilience and growth.

Consider the paradox of losing one's life to find it. When we let go of our need for constant comfort, we open ourselves to deeper connections, profound insights, and a sense of purpose that transcends temporary ease. Embrace the discomfort, allowing it to guide you closer to your true self and the heart of compassion. In this space of acceptance, we find the path to freedom and renewal.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, open our eyes to look around us. Grant us the courage to hold discomfort and the grace to work towards justice and liberation for all. Amen.

DAY 2**Opening Prayer**

Gracious, loving God, open our hearts today so that we recognize the privileges we hold. Help us use them to uplift others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Scripture***Luke 12:48 (NRSVUE)***

But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

Meditation

In Luke 12:48, Jesus teaches that with great privilege comes great responsibility. Often, we see our privileges—be they in race, economic status, or education—as personal gifts rather than obligations. Acknowledging these privileges can be uncomfortable, yet it is crucial for growth and service.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to confront this discomfort and recognize the power and resources we've been given. What privileges do you possess today? How can they be used to advocate for God's love and justice?

Holding discomfort is not about guilt but about awareness and action. It compels us to serve the marginalized and ensure that our privileges contribute to the well-being of others. In this way, we honor the responsibility that comes with our blessings.

Let us be mindful of how we can transform our discomfort into compassion and service. May we respond to God's call with humility and courage, using what we have for the greater good. As we do so, we align ourselves with God's vision of justice and love in a world that desperately needs it.

Closing Prayer

God of justice and everlasting love, open our minds and hearts today to the privileges we hold. Guide us in using them to serve others with love and humility. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

DAY 3**Opening Prayer**

God of Heaven and Earth, as we come before You today, help us to find strength in our discomfort. Teach us to embrace our struggles as opportunities for growth. Open our hearts to Your will, to align our desires with Yours. Amen.

Scripture**Luke 22:42 (NRSVUE)**

"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but Yours be done."

Meditation

In Luke 22:42, Jesus prays, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done." This moment in the Garden of Gethsemane encapsulates the essence of holding discomfort. Jesus faces immense anguish, yet He surrenders to God's will.

As we meditate on this passage, consider the cups we carry—our fears, anxieties, and the burdens that weigh us down. Holding discomfort can feel overwhelming, but it is often within these moments that we encounter profound growth. Jesus models for us the importance of honest expression. He reveals His desire for relief yet submits to God's greater plan.

Imagine your own struggles laid bare before God. Take a deep breath, acknowledging the tension within you. It's okay to feel discomfort; it's part of our journey. Allow this feeling to draw you closer to God, trusting that God walks with you through each trial.

Embracing discomfort opens the door to deeper faith and resilience. Just as Jesus faced His impending sacrifice, we, too, can find strength in our challenges, knowing they lead us to a fuller understanding of love, purpose, and surrender.

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank You for the example of Jesus in the face of discomfort. Help us to embrace our struggles and trust in Your divine plan. May we find peace in surrendering our will to Yours. Strengthen our faith as we walk through our own Gethsemanes. Amen.

DAY 4**Opening Prayer**

God of justice and everlasting love give us the courage and strength to confront injustice wherever we find it. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Scripture**Luke 12:51-53 (NRSVUE)**

Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Meditation

In Luke 12:51-53, Jesus poses a challenging truth: "Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." This stark statement invites us to confront the discomfort often accompanying our faith journey.

Take a moment to reflect on your life. Where do you feel tension or division? Perhaps it's within your relationships, your choices, or your values. This discomfort can feel isolating, yet it is also an opportunity for growth. Jesus understood that following Him would challenge the status quo, prompting us to prioritize our beliefs over comfort.

As you meditate, find a quiet space. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Imagine the divisions in your life as waves—sometimes crashing, sometimes receding. Acknowledge the feelings that arise: fear, uncertainty, and even grief. Instead of resisting these feelings, hold them gently. Understand that discomfort can be a catalyst for deeper understanding and connection.

Consider the promise of transformation. Just as seeds must break open to grow, we, too, must embrace discomfort to flourish. In this space of tension, seek clarity and courage. Allow the divisions to guide you toward authentic relationships and deeper faith.

As you sit with this discomfort, remember: through these struggles, we are shaped, finding peace not in avoidance but in the honest acceptance of our journey.

Closing Prayer

God of everlasting love and justice grant us the courage to stand against injustice, embracing its discomfort. Grant us the wisdom to act justly and compassionately in our faith journeys. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

DAY 5

Opening Prayer

Merciful God, we have sinned against you. Lead us in the path of repentance and reconciliation. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Scripture**Luke 15:11-32 (NRSVUE)**

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 wealth that will belong to me.' So, he divided his assets between them. A few days later, the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant region, and there he squandered his wealth in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that region, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. But 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 I will 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 to him, '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 slaves, '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 get the fatted calf and kill it, 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.

"Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years, I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command, yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

DAY 5 *Continued****Meditation***

The Parable of the Prodigal Son reveals God's unconditional love and highlights the transformative power of repentance and reconciliation. The son, filled with regret, returns home seeking forgiveness and mercy.

In our journey toward anti-racism, we must similarly acknowledge and repent for our complicity in systems of oppression. This process goes beyond mere remorse; it requires a genuine commitment to change our actions. Like the son, we must not only feel sorrow but also take steps to seek forgiveness and restore relationships.

This journey can be uncomfortable, forcing us to confront painful truths about ourselves and our communities. Yet, it is through this discomfort that healing and transformation occur. We are called to mend broken ties and support those we have wronged, working towards justice and understanding.

May we embrace the courage to acknowledge our shortcomings, allowing God's love to guide us as we strive for reconciliation and compassion in our communities. By taking these steps, we participate in the healing that leads to a more just and loving world.

Closing Prayer

Gracious Loving God, help us acknowledge and repent our sins as a church and as a society. Forgive us for our failings and guide us in the work of reconciliation and healing. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

DAY 6**Opening Prayer**

Creator God, empower each one of us to embrace new ways of being that reflect Your love and justice. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Scripture**Luke 18:18-23 (NRSVUE)**

A certain ruler asked him, "Good 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 commit adultery. You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.'" He replied, "I have kept all these since my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." But when he heard this, he became sad, for he was very rich.

Meditation

In Luke 18:18-23, we encounter a rich young ruler who learns that following Jesus requires giving up certain privileges and comforts. Embracing new ways of living often means challenging cultural norms and reexamining long-held beliefs.

This process can be deeply uncomfortable, as it asks us to let go of what is familiar and confront our attachments. Yet, living a life that reflects Christ's teachings is essential.

As we navigate this journey, may we find the courage to abandon our old ways and allow God's love and justice to transform us. This discomfort can lead us to greater compassion and deeper understanding, drawing us closer to Christ's heart.

Let us embrace the challenge of letting go, knowing that in doing so, we open ourselves to a richer, more authentic life in service to others and in alignment with God's will.

Closing Prayer

God of transformation, bless each of us to embrace new ways of living that align with Your kingdom values. May we be vessels of Your love and justice in the world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

PART 2

Sunday School Class Lesson for 45 Minutes

Main Idea

As Jesus' disciples, we are called to bear one another's burdens, and use the blessing and privilege we have to bless others.

Opening Prayer

Gracious and loving God, help us learn and grow in understanding Your love and justice. Grant us wisdom as we hold discomfort and confront racial injustices. In Jesus name, we pray. AMEN..

Opening Exercise/Activity:**"Privilege Walk"**

Participants will stand in a line and take steps forward or backward based on prompts related to privilege and oppression. For example:

- "Take a step forward if you can go shopping without being followed or harassed."
- "Take a step back if you have ever been treated differently because of your race."

After the activity, participants will discuss their feelings and observations about where they ended up in relation to others.

Scripture:**Luke 10:25-37 (NRSVUE)**

An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. Now, by chance, a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling, came upon him, and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Story to highlight week's theme:**"The Story of Ruby Bridges"**

Share the story of Ruby Bridges, the first African-American child to desegregate an all-white elementary school in the South. At six years old, she faced intense hostility and isolation. Despite the hatred and fear directed at her, Ruby displayed remarkable courage and forgiveness. Her story highlights the discomfort and challenges of confronting racism and the powerful impact of compassion and justice.

PART 2 *Continued***Discussion Questions:**

1. How did the Good Samaritan demonstrate a willingness to face discomfort for the sake of helping another?
2. In what ways can we relate to the various characters in the parable and Ruby Bridges' story?
3. What are some modern-day examples of people or groups who might be considered "Samaritans" in our society?
4. How does confronting racial injustice challenge our comfort zones and biases?
5. What role does our faith play in addressing issues of racial injustice?

Call to Action:

Pledge to Act: Make a personal commitment to take specific actions toward racial justice. Write down your goals and share them with a trusted friend, mentor, or community group for accountability. Regularly assess your progress and adjust your actions as needed.

Closing Prayer:

Loving God, Help us to carry the lessons we've learned into our daily lives. Help us to stand up against injustice and show compassion to all our neighbors. Grant us the courage to embrace discomfort for the sake of Your kin-dom. May we be instruments of Your peace and justice in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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