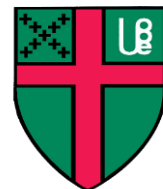


# Reflections on Social Justice for the Lenten Season (Year A)



## The Episcopal Networks Collaborative

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## About this project...

The Lenten readings provide rich material for reflecting on social justice topics. Lent is a most suitable time for Christians to use for reflecting on personal and societal concerns.

The following questions may be useful in your sermon preparation:

- 1) What does our religious teaching say to us about the selected issue?
- 2) What does the secular culture teach and tell us about the selected issue?
- 3) What is our personal experience with the selected issue?
- 4) Compare 1, 2 and 3. Where are there tensions? Similarities?
- 5) What are we called to do?
- 6) First steps?

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## About the Readings

*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

*The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA.*

*The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.*

## Additional Resources

### *Episcopal Networks Collaborative Issue Papers*

<http://enej.org/assets/pdfs/Economic%20and%20Social%20Justice%20Issue%20Papers%202015.pdf>

### Issue Papers: Table of Contents

Racial Oppression in America – Tiffany King  
Incarceration in the USA – The Rev. Dr. Paula M. Jackson  
The Widening of the Wealth Gap – Laura Russell  
Taxes and Economic Justice – John Mark Summers and Laura Russell  
The Making of a Segregated Neighborhood – Laura Russell  
The U.S. Housing Crisis and Political Repression – The Rev. Sarah Monroe  
Trade Agreements -- The Rev. Dr. Christopher Johnson  
Immigration, Hope and Desperation – Dianne Aid, TSSF  
Predatory Lending -- Verna Fausey and Laura Russell  
Human Trafficking -- Sarah Leech and Laura Russell  
Community Investing – Sue Lloyd and Verna Fausey  
Resolutions Relating to Concerns of the Episcopal Networks Collaborative  
    Addition to Baptismal Covenant – EpEN  
    Facilitate Dialogue on Climate Change and Divestment Strategy -- EpEN  
    Living Wage Principles - The Rev. Dick Gillett

*These issue papers are intended to help the reader with material on suggested sermon topics for Lent.*

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## Lenten or Easter study on our economy

The Episcopal Network for Economic Justice provides these suggestions as a way to promote congregational study and practice in our changing economy. Rana Foroohar in her recent book Makers and Takers: The Rise of Finance and the Fall of American Business provides us a valuable synopsis of our economic system over the last eight decades. This is a very readable work that provides basic insights into our changing economic system. She argues that we have entered into a new period of Capitalism and that the rules and practices are changing rapidly.

Walter Brueggemann in his new work God, Neighbor, Empire: The Excess of Divine Fidelity and the Command of Common Good presents again the case for neighborly practices to be the essential economic practice of the biblical narrative promoting the Kingdom of God. We are recommending these two books as a focus for congregations to learn about where we as a society are in our economic practices and to explore what is the biblical ethic and how do we practice this ethic in our current situation.

In his opening preface, Brueggemann points out how the basis of biblical practice is relationality but in our current society we have reduced relationality to commodity and technique. The book focuses on the integration of justice, grace and law in the mission of God. These, he argues, should all be practiced to further the common good. Dr. Brueggemann is asking us, as ENEJ leaders in our church, to ask the following questions.

1. God of justice relentlessly pursues the well-being of those "below." Does your congregation know those who are the "below?" Do you have a relationship with them. How are you enhancing their participation in the common good?
2. Walter Brueggemann points out that biblical fidelity is found in relational activity which he calls "othering." How are you as a congregation participating in looking after the good of the other?  
Our society is fixed on "selfing."
3. The biblical narrative expects us to expand our social relationship with neighbors, strangers and enemies. As Brueggemann points out, neighborliness leads to tangible practices of lending generously, conducting all affairs justly, and distributing freely to those in need -- and possibly especially -- to strangers, outcasts, and enemies. Perhaps your congregation could conduct an audit to identify how you are now or could be practicing neighborliness.

The Episcopal Network for Economic Justice held our conference last spring in Cincinnati where we interacted with both Walter Brueggemann and Peter Block on the practice of economic justice in these changing and challenging times. These two books together provide both a framework of how our economic system has changed since World War II and what influenced these changes as well as our need to bring the biblical narrative to bear on the practice of economic justice.

Along with these two books we have identified five passages that might be used as a contemporary reading in the Sunday morning liturgy. These contemporary readings provide a current framework in which to incorporate your Gospel preaching toward the biblical practice of neighborliness. I also highly recommend the current issue of Anglican Theological Review which has reprinted The Social Teachings of the Church Year by Vida Dutton Scudder. She presented these lectures at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge in 1918.

The Episcopal Network for Economic Justice is here to support you in your efforts to practice biblical ethics in your community and to raise these same concerns before the larger Episcopal Church. Have a blessed Lent and may people see and know the Risen Lord in your practices within your community.

***The Rev. Geoffrey Curtiss  
St. James Episcopal Church  
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# First Sunday in Lent

Year A (RCL)

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Psalm 32

## The Collect

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## Old Testament

### Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loin-cloths for themselves.

## The Response

### Psalm 32

#### *Beati quorum*

- 1 Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, \*  
and whose sin is put away!
- 2 Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt, \*  
and in whose spirit there is no guile!
- 3 While I held my tongue, my bones withered away, \*  
because of my groaning all day long.
- 4 For your hand was heavy upon me day and night; \*  
my moisture was dried up as in the heat of summer.

- 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you, \*  
and did not conceal my guilt.
- 6 I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." \*  
Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.
- 7 Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble; \*  
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.
- 8 You are my hiding-place;  
you preserve me from trouble; \*  
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.
- 9 "I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; \*  
I will guide you with my eye.
- 10 Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding; \*  
who must be fitted with bit and bridle,  
or else they will not stay near you."
- 11 Great are the tribulations of the wicked; \*  
but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.
- 12 Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD; \*  
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.

## The Epistle

### Romans 5:12-19

As sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned-- sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

## The Gospel

### Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

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



'He will command his angels concerning you,'  
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

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

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

## Reflections for Study

The collect of the day ...we are assaulted by temptations and you know our weakness.

Where do some of temptations come from...our inner struggle for identity?

Genesis continues with this theme that we will be like God knowing good and evil.

The Psalm says do not be like the horse or mule which have no understanding.

### Contemporary Reading:

The clash is within each of us.

"The real 'clash of civilizations' is not 'out there' between admirable Westerners and Muslim zealots. It is here, within each person, as we oscillate uneasily between selfprotective aggression and the ability to live in the world with others."

And of course we may see that same clash within the (biblical) text, where the struggle for the other and against the other is pervasive. There may be ground against the other, but it will not be found in the radical teaching of fidelity that draws the other into the orbit of fidelity. It is evident in every case -- with God, with Israel, with the Church -- that the reach to the other, the ultimate fidelity, is a reach that redefines the reacher. So God, in a reach beyond self to creation, to Israel, to the poor, becomes a different God. So Israel, in its reach toward widows, orphans, and immigrants, becomes a different kind of chosen people. So the church, in its Spirit-led reach to Gentiles, becomes a different kind of community. It is not, "To thine own self be true." It is rather, "To the farthest reach of the other, be true." (God, Neighbor, Empire by Walter Brueggemann. Pages 55-56)

One way of exploring the Gospel text is Jesus' inner struggle for identity. Is identity based on fulfilling commands or is it based on something else? What does it mean to be Spirit-led?

What is the farthest reach of the other in your community?

# Second Sunday in Lent

Year A (RCL)

Genesis 12:1-4a  
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17  
John 3:1-17  
Psalm 121

## The Collect

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## Old Testament

### Genesis 12:1-4a

The LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.

## The Response

### Psalm 121

#### *Levavi oculos*

- 1 I lift up my eyes to the hills; \*  
from where is my help to come?
- 2 My help comes from the LORD, \*  
the maker of heaven and earth.
- 3 He will not let your foot be moved \*  
and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.
- 4 Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel \*  
shall neither slumber nor sleep;
- 5 The LORD himself watches over you; \*  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand,
- 6 So that the sun shall not strike you by day, \*  
nor the moon by night.
- 7 The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; \*  
it is he who shall keep you safe.
- 8 The LORD shall watch over your going out and your coming in, \*  
from this time forth for evermore.

## The Epistle

### Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

## The Gospel

### John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

## Reflections for Study

The collect of the day encourages us to "be gracious to all who have gone astray." Who are the ones in your community who have been driven astray?

YHWH says "I will bless you that you will be a blessing." If we consider this a plural you, how are you as a congregation being a blessing to your community?

**Contemporary Reading:**

And so, the divide between the markets and the real economy, between Wall Street and Main Street, grows. All of these distortions have given a scary boost to the risks inherent in our financial system. With so much money and power concentrated in the hands of so few, ours is a top without a bottom. Rising inequality, falling productivity, and distorted incentives have created a world in which virtual enterprises prosper while real ones, with real workers, struggle. (Makers and Takers by Rana Foroohar. Page 24) Nicodemus seeks to understand this Spirit of God, where the wind blows where it chooses, you hear the sound of it, you know not where it comes or where it goes. We who are born of the Spirit...where are we being blown by the Spirit particularly in this changing economic reality?

## Third Sunday in Lent

Year A (RCL)

Exodus 17:1-7  
Romans 5:1-11  
John 4:5-42  
Psalm 95

### The Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### Old Testament

#### Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

## The Response

### Psalm 95

#### *Venite, exultemus*

- 1 Come, let us sing to the LORD; \*  
let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.
- 2 Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving \*  
and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.
- 3 For the LORD is a great God, \*  
and a great King above all gods.
- 4 In his hand are the caverns of the earth, \*  
and the heights of the hills are his also.
- 5 The sea is his, for he made it, \*  
and his hands have molded the dry land.
- 6 Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, \*  
and kneel before the LORD our Maker.
- 7 For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. \*  
Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!
- 8 Harden not your hearts,  
as your forebears did in the wilderness, \*  
at Meribah, and on that day at Massah,  
when they tempted me.
- 9 They put me to the test, \*  
though they had seen my works.
- 10 Forty years long I detested that generation and said, \*  
"This people are wayward in their hearts;  
they do not know my ways."
- 11 So I swore in my wrath, \*  
"They shall not enter into my rest."

## The Epistle

### Romans 5:1-11

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

## The Gospel

### John 4:5-42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

## Reflections for Study

The collect of the day....we have no power to help ourselves that we may be defended from all assaults and adversities. Do you accept you have no power?

When we face economic and political questions do we ask...

Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Is the Lord not among us?

Are we tempted; do our hearts harden?

When we are driven out to the wilderness away from our culture of self-sufficiency do we find our hearts harden or do we seek the Lord who is among us?

The Gospel finds Jesus at the well in Sychar. Where is the food we seek to do the will of the One who sent Jesus. It is in our communities and we are called to complete that work. Where is the Living Water?

Do we listen to the cries of the people in our community? What do we hear? How can we participate with God in completing the work of justice?

### Contemporary Reading:

Listening...involves an active willingness to construct relationships of attention...without moving ourselves toward the background, we cannot hear at all...Political listening cannot be grounded in passivity or an absence of self, for politics itself requires precisely the opposite...It is the interaction of our efforts that results in a decision, a joint action....There must of course be an equality in terms of the role one plays. All must engage in shifting back and forth between perspectives, speaking and listening in turn. (A quote from Susan Bickford in *God, Neighbor, Empire* by Walter Brueggemann. Pg. 141.)

## Fourth Sunday in Lent

Year A (RCL)

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

Psalm 23

### The Collect

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### Old Testament

#### 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the LORD.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

## The Response

### Psalm 23

#### *Dominus regit me*

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd; \*  
I shall not be in want.
- 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures \*  
and leads me beside still waters.
- 3 He revives my soul \*  
and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake.
- 4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I shall fear no evil; \*  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
- 5 You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; \*  
you have anointed my head with oil,  
and my cup is running over.
- 6 Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, \*  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

## The Epistle

### Ephesians 5:8-14

Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake!  
Rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”



## The Gospel

### John 9:1-41

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

## Reflections for Study

The collect of the day declares that God came down to be the true bread that lives in us. How is this true bread living in us? What are we being as the true bread for the larger community?

In the Samuel/David narrative God looks into the heart. Do we come peaceably or to inflict violence and disruption? This is a basic question to the practice of our economics.

The Psalm invites us to overcome our fears for a table is being spread before me among those who trouble me. Are you among those who trouble you?

The Gospel invites us to consider how we perceive the world and what prejudices we have in our perceiving. Do we see only as a result of the parents and the household we were raised in?

Do we see only as a result of the environment we live in? Or do we see so that God's works might be revealed? Do we see and yet we are blind? The contemporary reading invites us to remove our blind spots from desiring self-sufficiency rather than the practice of neighborliness.

**Contemporary Reading:**

In our own time, I judge that role of totalism is played in our society by corporate capitalism, propelled by market ideology, inured to individualism, sustained by a strong military, and legitimated by the entitlements of patriotic exceptionalism...a mouthful indeed! That ideology is indeed totalizing; it claims that there is and can be no alternative.

With only a little imagination, we can see Pharaonic impulses being reperformed, because the ones with the most are the ones who worry about running out for lack of bricks, and that in turn propels accumulation, wherein a few have nearly acquired a monopoly, with violence against all others carefully disguised. This is perhaps a good faith enterprise, as was Pharoah's -- the practitioners really believe it. Or perhaps a not good-faith enterprise, but the mantras of "freedom and faith" are knowing covers that function to hide the work of government as the transfer of wealth. Whether good faith or simply convenient cover, this is the old, old story of injustice become the new, new song of self-sufficiency functioning in a way that denies and defeats the common good.

***(God, Neighbor, Empire by Walter Brueggemann. Pages 55-56)***

# Fifth Sunday in Lent

Year A (RCL)

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-45

Psalm 130

## The Collect

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## Old Testament

### Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.

## The Response

### Psalm 130

#### *De profundis*

I Out of the depths have I called to you, O LORD;  
LORD, hear my voice; \*  
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.

- 2 If you, LORD, were to note what is done amiss, \*  
O Lord, who could stand?
- 3 For there is forgiveness with you; \*  
therefore you shall be feared.
- 4 I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him; \*  
in his word is my hope.
- 5 My soul waits for the LORD,  
more than watchmen for the morning, \*  
more than watchmen for the morning.
- 6 O Israel, wait for the LORD, \*  
for with the LORD there is mercy;
- 7 With him there is plenteous redemption, \*  
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

## The Epistle

### Romans 8:6-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law-- indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

## The Gospel

### John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

## Reflections for Study

The collect invites us to accept the swift and varied changes of the world. This season of Lent we have provided material to understand these changes and to apply the biblical narrative to help discern the changes we are living through.

Like Ezekiel looking over the plain, where is the economic carnage in your community and/or state?

How is God inviting your congregation to speak prophetically?

Where is God noting what is done amiss?

### Contemporary Reading:

The rise of the money culture in the 1980's and the deregulation policies of that era led to a credit boom, wrapping more and more of the American middle class in a cloak of debt that made it increasingly hard for politicians to stand up to the banking industry. Is it any wonder then the debt, deregulation, finance, and money politics have grown hand in hand? In this sense, the subprime crisis of 2008-9 and the ways in which it was aided and abetted by Washington's failure to properly clean up the system afterward--is only the latest sequence in a dysfunctional dance between finance and politics that has been going on for hundreds of years. (***Makers and Takers by Rana Foroohar pages 298-299***)

Is the Gospel inviting us to open the graves of our friends and neighbors? If we are resurrection people who in our community needs to be called out from their tomb and given the opportunity for life? Do you know where they have laid them in your communities? Again, how can we participate with God in completing the work of the Kingdom?