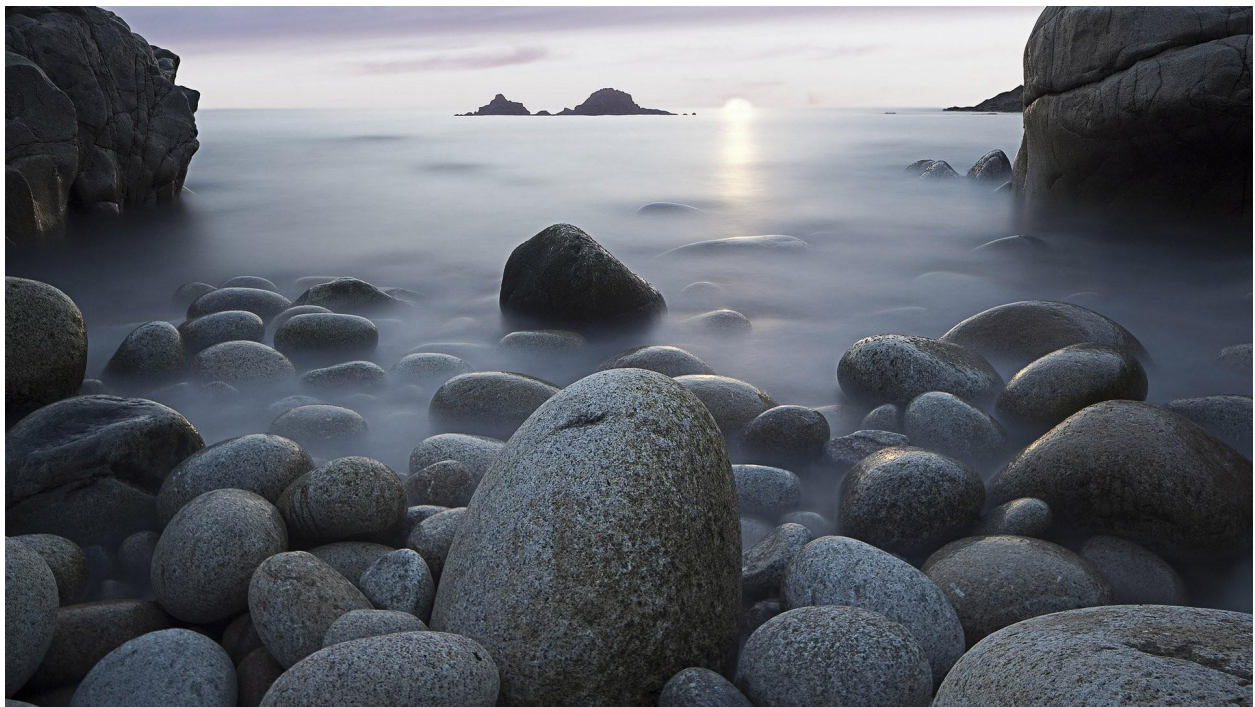


# *Contemplative Practices*

Lent 2023



All Souls Episcopal Parish  
2220 Cedar Street, Berkeley California

*This Lent, we are focusing our communal gatherings on contemplative practices. Every Wednesday during Lent, a facilitator will lead us in a new practice. We encourage you to use this booklet as a guide to continue practicing throughout the week.*

# The First Week of Lent

(February 26th-March 4th)

---

## *Opening Prayer*

Spirit of the desert,  
you drove Jesus  
to the edge of the world  
to find his truth and calling:  
scour our hearts  
and awake our hunger  
that freed from empty clinging  
we might find ourselves in you;  
through Jesus Crhist, the Lord of the wilds.  
Amen.

## *Poem*

*Changes* by Seamus Heaney

As you came with me in silence  
to the pump in the long grass

I heard much that you could not hear:  
the bite of the spade that sank it,

the slithering and grumble  
as the mason mixed his mortar,

and women coming with white buckets  
like flashes on their ruffled wings.

The cast-iron rims of the lid

clinked as I uncovered it,

something stirred in its mouth.

I had a bird's eye view of a bird,

finch-green, speckled and white,  
nesting in dry leaves, flattened, still,

suffering the light.

So I roofed the citadel

as gently as I could, and told you  
and you gently unroofed it

but where was the bird now?

There was the single egg, pebbly white,

and from the rusted bend of the snout  
tail-feathers splayed and sat tight.

So tender, I said, "Remember this.

It will be good for you to retrace this path

when you have grown away and stand at last  
at the very center of the empty city."

# *Contemplative Practice: Walking the Labyrinth*

## About the Practice

Labyrinths are an ancient symbol and spiritual tool found in many different faith traditions. Dating back over 4,000 years, the earliest labyrinths were discovered in India, North America, Europe, and beyond. While their forms and designs may vary, all labyrinths consist of a single, circuitous path towards a center. Unlike a maze which features many routes and dead ends, a labyrinth has only one way in and one way out. This allows walkers to engage with the labyrinth as a form of contemplation, prayer, and spiritual centering. The design of the Jordan Court Labyrinth is an adaptation of the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France. Built in the early 13th century, contemplatives and lay people alike would have walked this labyrinth as a form of spiritual pilgrimage, particularly when pilgrimage to Jerusalem was not possible.

## How to Walk the Labyrinth

*Though there are countless ways to walk a labyrinth, we offer the following suggestions to serve as a guide:*

*Preparing:* Before you begin walking the labyrinth, take a moment to still yourself. You might like to set an intention, ask for guidance in a particular area of your life, offer gratitude, or recite a mantra to still your mind.

*Journeying towards the center:* When you are ready to begin walking, walk mindfully towards the center of the labyrinth, placing one foot in front of the other. This first stage of walking can be used as a time of letting go. You might ask, “What do I need to release in order to stay present to this experience?”

Notice distractions, quiet the mind, and to allow the rhythm of walking to be felt in your whole body.

*Resting in the center:* When you arrive at the center, pause here to open your heart and receive. What does the still, small voice inside you want to say? Stay and reflect here as long as you like.

*Returning:* The journey back to the start of the labyrinth is a time to integrate any insights or feelings from your time walking. What moved in me? What do I want to remember from this experience? Is there any action I feel compelled to take?

We invite you to walk mindfully, placing one foot in front of the other. You might choose to notice the thoughts that arise as you walk, feelings, sensations in the body, or all of the above. Walk at the pace that your body naturally wants to go. If someone else is walking the labyrinth, please be respectful of each other's space as you cross paths. We ask that you not disturb others walking or residents, and refrain from taking photos of walkers out of respect for their time of contemplation.

As an alternative to walking the labyrinth, you might choose to follow the path of the labyrinth by tracing it with your finger or simply following it with your eyes.

# The Second Week of Lent

(March 5th-11th)

---

## *Opening Prayer*

Holy God,  
whose wild Spirit's breath  
defies our frozen idols:  
take the night time of our fear  
and make it a welcoming womb  
for us and all the world;  
through Jesus Christ, in whom we are born anew.  
Amen.

## *Poem*

*The Litany* by Dana Gioia

This is a litany of lost things,  
a canon of possessions dispossessed,  
a photograph, an old address, a key.  
It is a list of words to memorize  
or to forget—of *amo, amas, amat*,  
the conjugations of a dead tongue  
in which the final sentence has been spoken.

This is the liturgy of rain,  
falling on mountain, field, and ocean—  
indifferent, anonymous, complete—  
of water infinitesimally slow,  
sifting through rock, pooling in darkness,  
gathering in spring, then rising without our agency,  
only to dissolve in mist or cloud or dew.

This is a prayer of unbelief,  
to candles guttering and darkness undivided,  
to incense drifting into emptiness.  
It is the smile of a stone Madonna  
and the silent fury of the consecrated wine,  
a benediction of the death of a young god,  
brave and beautiful, rotting on a tree.

This is a litany to earth and ashes,  
to the dust of roads and vacant rooms,  
to the fine silt circling in a shaft of sun,  
settling indifferently on books and beds.  
This is a prayer to praise what we become,  
“Dust thou art, to dust thou shalt return.”  
Savor its taste—the bitterness of earth and ashes.

This is a prayer, inchoate and unfinished,  
for you, my love, my loss, my lesion,  
a rosary of words to count out time’s  
illusions, all the minutes, hours days  
the calendar compounds as if the past  
existed somewhere—like an inheritance  
still waiting to be claimed.

Until at last it is our litany, *mon vieux*,  
my reader, my voyeur, as if the mist  
steaming from the gorge, this pure paradox,  
the shattered river rising as it falls—  
splintering the light, swirling it skyward,  
neither transparent nor opaque but luminous,  
even as it vanishes—were not our life.



# *Contemplative Practice: Intercessory Prayer*

## About the Practice

“One way we speak to God from the heart is through intercessory prayer. Intercession is a concrete expression of the social dimension of prayer. It includes our concerns for other persons, communities, nations, the earth, and our fellow creatures.”

The service on intercessory prayer draws heavily on the excellent book by Marjorie J. Thompson (MJT): *Soul Feast, Newly Revised Edition*. New Rev edition. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

## How to do Intercessory Prayer

### 1. Drawing on [Romans 8:26-27](#) (NRSVUE):

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

MJT writes:

No matter what we think about the origins of our prayers, they are all a response to the hidden workings of the Spirit within. [...] Perhaps our real task in prayer is to attune ourselves to the conversation already going on deep in our hearts.

and:

Listening is the first expression of communication in prayer. We know that listening precedes speaking in the development of children’s language skills. The same order applies to the development of our prayer life.

**How have you been listening to God in this Lenten season? What have you been hearing? For whom or for what are you praying at this time? Why? What are your hopes in these intercessory prayers?**

2. MJT writes about being present to God in prayer:

The one condition that precedes *every* kind of prayer is being present to God with conscious awareness. God is always present with us, whether or not we can feel this reality. In a very real sense, then, the foundation of all prayer is being present to the presence of God. As Quaker writer and teacher Douglas Steere points out, “in order to pray, you have to stop being ‘too elsewhere’ and to *be there*.” We have all experienced times when we are present in body but unavailable mentally to one another. When we want to communicate well, we try not to be distracted by time limits, inner thoughts, or external circumstances. The same consideration needs to be given to God. Attending to the moment of encounter is crucial. The breathing, quieting, and “centering” so frequently recommended in prayer are simply ways of helping us focus on the One we wish to be with.

**How do you prepare yourself to be present to God in praying? What challenges have you been facing?**

3. MJT writes about the ambivalence and confusion we often have around prayer:

People frequently feel confused about praying for others. Often our prayers are not answered in the way we desire or expect. We pray for healing and it does not come; we pray for peace and conflict increases. We wonder whether God does not will the good we intend by our prayers or if perhaps we are not praying rightly. We feel guilty that we do not have enough faith, and we feel angry that evil and suffering are allowed to destroy so much peace and happiness. Sometimes prayer seems to us the feeblest and least desirable option, but the only one left under the circumstances: “All I can do for you is pray.”

**Do any of these scenarios resonate with you? If so, how do you wrestle with them?**

4. MJT poses the following questions for our reflection:

Are there strong feelings in your life that you are hesitant to express in prayer? Can you identify why you hold them back? How do you respond to the Psalms as a whole? What in particular attracts or repels you?

**How are you learning to “speak from the heart with unreserved honesty” and to not censor prayer as you pray?**

**5. Consider using a journal to deepen your practice of listening to God.**

Many seekers have discovered that journal keeping can be a way of listening to oneself and to God. Christians through the centuries have written spiritual autobiographies, personal diaries, and journals. Some were written to be read. Others were so personal and confidential that they were burned upon the writer’s death. Journal keeping takes varied forms today: a prayer journal might record the insights, questions, and feelings that arise from scriptural meditation; it might be used to record and reflect upon dreams; or it might focus on life issues, struggles, and decision-making processes. One interesting technique in contemporary journal keeping is the device of dialogue with key people in our lives or with different voices inside our selves. Writing an imaginary dialogue with a biblical character can be helpful...

Journals give us a record of our spiritual questions, struggles, and insights over time. Reviewing them, we may start to recognize larger patterns: the characteristic marks of our journey, where we have grown and where we have gotten stuck, how we discern God’s gracious presence and guidance through it all.

# The Third Week of Lent

(March 12th-18th)

---

## *Opening Prayer*

Lord of the wellspring,  
source of life and truth:  
Jesus asked for water  
from the hands of a woman  
in the land of the strangers;  
may he teach us to name our need,  
to love our neighbor  
and to worship you  
in spirit and in truth,  
through Jesus Christ, who shows us who we are.  
Amen.

## *Poem*

Where Does the Temple Begin, Where Does it End?  
By Mary Oliver

There are things you can't reach. But  
you can reach out to them, and all day long.

The wind, the bird flying away. The idea of God.

And it can keep you as busy as anything else, and happier.

The snake slides away; the fish jumps, like a little lily,  
out of the water and back in; the goldfinches sing  
from the unreachable top of the tree.

I look; morning to night I am never done with looking.

Looking I mean not just standing around, but standing around  
as though with your arms open.

And thinking: maybe something will come, some  
shining coil of wind,  
or a few leaves from any old tree—  
they are all in this too.

And now I will tell you the truth.  
Everything in the world  
comes.

At least, closer.

And, cordially.

Like the nibbling, tinsel-eyed fish; the unlooping snake.  
Like goldfinches, little dolls of goldfluttering around the corner of the sky  
of God, the blue air.

# *Contemplative Practice: Imaginative Prayer*

## About the Practice

St. Ignatius of Loyola was a Spanish Catholic priest, theologian, and founder of the Jesuits. Through his own prayer experience, Ignatius came to believe that God could be found in our deepest desires, our memories, and in our imaginations. The following prayer is adapted from St. Ignatius' account of imaginative prayer, found in his spiritual "manual" *The Spiritual Exercises*.

## How to do Imaginative Prayer

1. *Prepare yourself to receive God's grace.* Find a quiet place and give yourself a few moments to settle in. Take some deep breaths and ask God to be with you during this time of prayer. Read over the instructions to familiarize yourself with the flow of the prayer.
2. *Ask God for a particular grace.* What do I want during this time of prayer? What does my heart desire? For Ignatius, tapping into our desires was a way to keep prayer grounded in reality. Some examples might be to pray for the grace to be more aware of how God is near, a greater trust in God, to know God more intimately, to grow in interior freedom, or to become aware of what stands in the way of your relationship with God.
3. *Read the Gospel.* Slowly read over John 14:17-44 one or two times to familiarize yourself with the story of Lazarus.
4. *Enter the scene.* Once you have a sense of the events taking place in the story, set aside the text. Now enter the scene in your imagination: picture Jesus arriving at the town of Judea.
  - a. Immerse yourself in the environment. Feel the heat of the sun, the texture of the air. What do you see around you? What do you hear? What smells fill the air? Take a few moments to simply be in this environment.
  - b. Look at Jesus' face, his expression, his eyes. What do you notice? Who is Jesus with?

- c. Now place yourself in the scene. Are you one of Jesus' companions? Martha? A villager? An animal? The clouds? Don't overthink it, follow wherever your imagination takes you.
5. *Pray through the story.* See in your mind the events of the story taking place, paying attention to Jesus, how he responds and what he feels. Notice, too, what arises in you—what feelings, memories, and sensations move through you as you experience this time with Jesus.
  - a. Pay particular attention to any moments of “consolation”, moments when you feel a closeness to God, an opening of the heart, a sense of charity, warmth or abiding peace.
6. *Review your prayer.* Ignatius often encouraged keeping a written account of prayer to help absorb the experience. As you look back on your time in prayer, make note of any spiritual movements that took place.
  - a. What happened during your prayer?
  - b. What feelings did you experience?
  - c. When did you experience consolation— a sense of warmth, closeness to God or others, a sense of peace or an opening of the heart?
  - d. What did you receive during this time of prayer?

# The Fourth Week of Lent

(March 19th-25th)

---

## *Opening Prayer*

Creator and Healer,  
root of all goodness,  
working your Sabbath will  
in the chaos of our life:  
teach us the insight  
that gives true judgment  
and praises you  
wherever you are found,  
making miracles  
from spit and mud;  
through Jesus Christ, the Son of the earth.  
Amen.

## *Poem*

*The Good Portion* by Paul J Willis

*Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.*  
(Luke 10:42)

Is it waking to this calm morning  
after a night of dry winds?

Is it scrambled eggs, the ones with cheese,  
or the hot glaze of a cinnamon roll?

Is it the way you laugh over breakfast,  
that generous gift, your laughter?



Is it rinsing the plates and pans in the sink?  
Or leaving them in a cockeyed stack,

these things of use, these things of beauty  
that will not be taken away?

## *Contemplative Practice: Ignatian Examen*

### About the Practice

In addition to writing *The Spiritual Exercises* that we learned about last week, St. Ignatius also created a prayer practice that was initially intended for the priests of his order so they could pray “on the go” in the middle of the day. The Examen is a chance to review our day with Jesus and to look at our actions and thoughts through his eyes as well as through our own lens. It gives us the chance to ask, *Where did you show up today, God?* And, it helps us notice the moments when we strayed from God’s desires for us. It is a simple conversation with God where we practice facing God as we are.

### How to do the Ignatian Examen

1. *Pray for light.* Ask for the grace to pray – to see your everyday life through God’s eyes, because God sees things differently than we do.
2. *Give thanks.* Offer gratitude for God’s constant presence in your life. This offering of thanksgiving is itself a virtue.
3. *Review the day.* As you look back over the last 24 hours, remember that God speaks to you through your humanity – your thoughts, your actions, your feelings, and your bodies – and you are invited to listen to all of that. As you review your day, what do you notice? Where do you want to linger? Was there a particular moment that felt especially life-giving? Are there other moments in which, upon reflection, you are not proud of how you acted? These deeper messages from our experiences and heart are often ways that God invites us into deeper relationship, healing, and growth.
4. *Face your shortcomings.* As you sit with God and consider where you may have fallen short today, remember that God desires to know all of it. Being honest about your choices and thoughts helps deepen your relationship with God, who only wants to be close to you.
5. *Resolve to change.* Based on all you’ve discovered, where do you want to go now? Ask for God’s help in making better choices tomorrow... choices more rooted in compassion, in service, and in love.
6. *Gratitude, again.* Closing with gratitude is a way to remember that you are not alone, but are traveling with God, who accepts you and loves you just as you are.

# The Fifth Week of Lent

(March 26th-April 1st)

---

## *Opening Prayer*

God of compassion,  
You call us out of the bindings of death  
on this, our resurrection day:  
make us ready to surrender  
the fear in which we hide  
to step into your future  
Alive and unashamed;  
through Jesus Christ, the life of the world.  
Amen.

## *Poem*

*Stars* by Louise Glück

I'm awake; I am in the world—  
I expect  
no further assurance.  
No protection, no promise.

Solace of the night sky,  
the hardly moving  
face of the clock.

I'm alone—all  
my riches surround me.

I have a bed, a vase  
of flowers beside it.  
And a nightlight, a book.

I'm awake; I am safe.  
The darkness like a shield, the dreams  
put off, maybe  
vanished forever.

And the day—  
the unsatisfying morning that says  
I am your future,  
here is your cargo of sorrow:

Do you reject me? Do you mean  
to send me away because I am not  
full, in your word,  
because you see  
the black shape already implicit?

I will never be banished. I am the light,  
your personal anguish and humiliation.  
Do you dare  
send me away as though  
you were waiting for something better?

There is no better.  
Only (for a short space)  
the night sky like  
a quarantine that sets you  
apart from your task.

Only (softly, fiercely)

the stars shining. Here,  
in the room, the bedroom  
Saying I was brave, I resisted,  
I set myself on fire.

## *Contemplative Practice: Chant*

### About the Practice

It is helpful to differentiate between the acts of singing and chanting. Singing is often a very outward focused, declamatory experience. Chanting, on the other hand, is an inner activity which brings energy back into one's own body, and the body of the community.

This Lent we are experiencing a variety of chants from different traditions; from the Great Litany, to the ecumenical community of Taizé, from improvisation to the ancient Hebrew Passover chant from which The Exsultet is derived.

Whether practiced in private or in community, chant has the power to expand consciousness and unify community. Daily practice can be done almost anywhere at any time.

### How to Chant

1. Locate the breath. Whether you are seated or standing it is useful to place a hand or finger just above the belly button. Taking in breath through the nose should cause your belly to expand, naturally. Blowing out through the mouth one finds the belly contracting. Take the breath from as low as you are able - as if you are breathing from the ground up.
2. Once you've established a breathing rhythm, as you release the breath, gently allow yourself to sigh. As you continue, allow the sigh to become a single tone. This could be hummed or on a syllable, like "ah."
3. Once you are comfortable with the single note, try gently chanting the words of the Our Father on that note. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, and notice how your body and spirit feel.
4. This practice can be done in the shower (extra resonant!), in a space you've set aside in your home or office, taking in the splendor of creation on a hike, or even in the car, especially if traffic is bad.
5. If you've memorized a Taizé chant from our liturgies you can bring that to your mind and heart. The "magic" of Taizé chanting is the community at prayer, repeating a

simple phrase over and over, almost to the point of boredom, and beyond, when you find yourself transported by its profound simplicity.

6. We've been using a simple Gregorian chant during this season: the psalms provide perfect text, with all of human emotions, set to a repetitive succession of notes. The first half of each verse is chanted up to the \* asterisk, at which point the chanter(s) pause slightly before returning to the second half of the verse, which allows time to reflect on the Hebrew poetic rhythm and rhyming of ideas.
7. As you end your time of practice each day, pause a moment to give thanks for the ability to sing the praises of the God who made us and sustains us.

# Journal/Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---







A series of 20 horizontal lines spaced evenly down the page, providing a template for writing or drawing.

