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A Lenten Lexicon



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A Lenten Lexicon: An Introduction

The Dutch painter Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn's well-known oil painting "The Return of the Prodigal Son" captures one moment in the biblical parable (Luke 15:11-32). The painting shows the repentant son kneeling before his father who tenderly embraces and receives him. Though Rembrandt explored many scenes of this parable through drawings, etchings, and other paintings, this most famous painting seems to show us the artist's interpretation of verses 20b-21.

Because I regularly see reproductions of this painting when walking the Camino de Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage, this scene has become fixed in my mind's eye. It hangs in nearly every cathedral, chapel, and church along the various French routes of the Camino. Rembrandt's painting has been reproduced as a large banner, and I came to understand that the Roman Catholic Church decided to utilize it there as an evangelical invitation to locals, tourists, and pilgrims. "Revenez à Dieu de tout votre cœur" are the words added to Rembrandt's painting reproduced on these banners, positioned above the figure of the father who compassionately holds his repentant son. The words announce "Come back to God with all your heart." These words from the prophet Joel, always appointed as one of the scripture readings on Ash Wednesday, now daily call out from the banner to all who have ears to hear.

Lent is always this pilgrimage, always this journey—for each of us to return to God with all our heart. In the church's early centuries, Lent was the final forty-day journey made by those who had been preparing for baptism for years. It was an intense time, marked by fervent prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (Matthew 6:1-18).

Lent was and is always the season for all of us, even the already-baptized, to renew our faith. We all enter a time when we are invited to intensify our own journey as the baptized ones whose lives are patterned in Christ's own dying and rising. We find life in self-giving as he did; we find freedom in his power over sin and death. We renew our baptismal vows to walk with purpose as Christ's own in this world, renouncing evil and committing ourselves to his ways of love, justice, and peace. Just as those early Christians were learning what it meant to align themselves with Christ as Lord and Savior and to live as Christ's own in their lifetime, we do the same. In fact I have chosen another verse from this

same parable as my intention while on these Camino pilgrimages: “he came to himself” (Luke 15:17a). This verse tells the beginning of the prodigal son’s turning; it begins his *metanoia*, repentance, and his return to his home. I hope my journey through the lenten forty days are like all of my Camino pilgrimages—always the opportunity to come to myself, assess my thoughts and behaviors, and re-orient myself again as one who belongs to Jesus Christ, the Crucified-Risen One, whose merciful love is for the life of the world.

The church has a language for Lent: a particular set of words, a specific vocabulary for its lenten symbols and actions. Baptism, repentance, and renunciation are only some entries in the Lenten Lexicon. Just as I learn the vocabulary of cooking in order to prepare a meal—stir, fold, assemble—so do I become a better pilgrim on the lenten journey when the lenten vocabulary maps my walk. Like way-markers, these vocabulary words help us know where to go, why we are going there, and what succor accompanies us even as we navigate the dangers and troubles of our age.

Here is a Lenten Lexicon, with entries written by graduates of Austin Seminary. You will find devotions for days throughout Lent and into Holy Week and the Great Three Days. You will even find an entry that takes the church into Bright Week and the Great Fifty Days. Along the way we suggest reading the devotions on Wednesdays and Fridays, the days reflecting the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ. Here I add a note of gratitude to the Reverend Benjamin P. Masters (MDiv’17) who partnered with me to choose vocabulary words and who selected accompanying scriptures. Thank you for helping us keep the Fast so that we may keep the Feast!

Some of the words may be new words, some words’ symbolic meanings might be renewed here, and perhaps some definitions will clarify or even correct what we thought about that word. This Lenten Lexicon is part of the Church’s vocabulary; these words are never an end in themselves. Their subject is always about faith, life, homecoming—returning to God. May God bless our steps and grant us the joy of the Easter Feast at the end of the journey.

— Jennifer L. Lord

*The Dorothy B. Vickery Professor
of Homiletics and Liturgical Studies*



Baptism *Romans 6:3-5 or 3-11*

Baptism is the sacramental sign of our union with Jesus Christ. Through the gift of baptism we participate in Christ's dying and rising; we are set free from sin by God's grace; we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit; we are claimed as beloved children of God; we are made members of Christ's body, the church; and we are marked with the seal of God's new creation.

Paul draws out the deep meaning of baptism in his letter to the church in Rome (Rom. 6:3–11). Buried beneath the waters, we share in Christ's crucifixion, destroying the powers of evil and death. Rising from the waters, we share in Christ's resurrection, entering God's realm of righteousness and life. Paul says those who have passed through these waters should think of themselves as "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11).

From beginning to end, Christian life is a baptismal journey. Our dying and rising with Christ in baptism is a first step in faith, the beginning of the lifelong path of discipleship. Each day we seek to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4), turning away from evil and turning towards the love of Christ. At the end of life, we say that those who have died in the Christian faith have completed their baptism. Now, for them, death is no more; they are united with Christ in life everlasting. For this reason, Romans 6 is often used in the funeral liturgy.

The liturgy for Ash Wednesday involves making the mark of the cross on our foreheads with ashes. For those preparing to be baptized at the Great Vigil of Easter (where Rom. 6:3–11 is read), the sign of ashes marks the place where they will soon be anointed with oil as a seal of the Holy Spirit. For those already baptized, the sign of ashes is a way of retracing that baptismal seal and embodying Paul's words: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Rom. 6:3).

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return"—a stark proclamation of finitude and frailty in the Ash Wednesday service. But for the community of the baptized, those who share in Christ's death and resurrection, these words evoke a proclamation of promise and joy: "Remember your baptism and be thankful."

— *David Gambrell*

Catechesis & Catechumens *Psalm 78:1-4*

Growing up in northern New Mexico, my parents had a beautiful collection of pottery from many of the nineteen Pueblos in the state. One of my favorites was a storyteller figurine, depicting a large seated figure with her mouth open and children crawling all over her: her lap, her shoulders, her back. Storyteller pottery figurines, now a popular motif in Pueblo pottery, were first created by Helen Cordero, a member of Cochiti Pueblo, who created her first storyteller in the 1960s as a portrait of her grandfather. Cordero was known to tell buyers of her famous storytellers, “You listen someday, listen real hard, he’ll be telling you. Listen very closely, and he’ll be telling you stories.”

In the early church, the forty days of Lent represented the culmination of a baptismal candidate’s preparation to join the church. After three years of *catechesis* (instruction in the faith), the *catechumens* (those being instructed) would devote themselves to prayer, fasting, and study in the days leading up to their baptism during the Easter Vigil. These early Christians learned, as we all still do, the ancient and treasured stories of our shared faith, the stories of God’s loving, salvific actions in the lives of our ancestors, all leading up to God in Christ’s victory over the powers of sin and death, the mystery of which Lent prepares us to delve into on Easter.

During these forty days of Lent, all of us become catechumens again. No matter how long ago we first entered into the death and resurrection of Christ in the waters of baptism, we are invited to take this season to prepare to enter again into that mystery, listening very closely to the stories of our faith, to those ancient words “from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us.” And as we fast and pray and prepare, as we hear and tell stories, we find the ways the stories of our own lives are themselves stories of God’s love and grace and presence.

– Daniel Williams

Fasting *Matthew 6:16-18, alternatively Isaiah 58:1-12*

When you fast. When, not if. And yet, as Christians we have largely moved away from fasting. We like to fudge with the task, opting to “fast” from social media, harsh words, bad habits. But true fasting is a break from food. And the kicker? These are Jesus’s words from arguably the

most important Christian text—his Sermon on the Mount. I know there is a time to keep and a time to throw away (that *might* be scriptural). So, while I can let go of many things, somehow, it is really hard to throw away the very words of Jesus. Fasting from food seems to matter—to Jesus, and to his disciples, including us.

So, why fast? Perhaps if we understood, we'd be more inclined.

Scripture tells us Jesus loved food. He loved to feast. He attended banquets, weddings, provided parables around parties, and made food the center of his memorial ritual: “Remember me when you eat” were his parting words to his friends. Food is a big deal to Jesus. It makes as much sense today as it did in Jesus’s time. Food nurtures us physically and spiritually. The loss of communal eating during this global pandemic (a strange form of fasting, is it not?) has made us acutely aware of the role of food in sustaining our physical, mental, and spiritual health. Its absence is the absence of relationships, connections, community, and, perhaps most importantly, God. We hunger and thirst for these core elements of our humanity.

When we hunger, we feel our humanity. Without the energy from sustenance, we are still and quiet. We feel pangs. We are stripped down, bare, shedding all the diversions around us. Jesus’s call to fast is a call inward, towards self-reflection. When there are no distractions, no food, no greed, no broken relationships between God and us, when we are alone with God, how are we? How is it with our minds? Our hearts? When no one is looking, in the deepest corners of ourselves, the secret places where only God meets us, is it well with our souls? This is why we fast, why we pray, why we give and confess.

The Sermon on the Mount is not easy. Fasting, almsgiving, praying, confessing, and forgiving are not easy. And yet, Jesus calls us to each of these tasks, knowing it brings us closer to our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

— Sarah de la Fuente

Almsgiving *Matthew 6:2-4*

A friend of mine who lived on the streets in Austin
flew a sign while he played his guitar
making all kinds of coins clink into his case
and it was a sign that said,

“FEAR CHANGE? Leave it here.”

It was, perhaps, the most creative equivalent to

“Alms, alms for the poor!” that I ever saw.

And it always reminded me of my friend from college
who HATED change about as much as I loved it,
so he would come visit me in my room
and turn his pockets inside out
as change scattered across the carpet
and into nooks and crannies
having no idea how many dollars and cents
I could put together from what he discarded—
collections of coins that soon enough would
help me afford a coffee to get through
another long night of studying.
And each time I bought another cup,
I whispered to myself, “Thank you, Tommy”
even though he had no idea
how he was helping me
because he would say I was the one doing him a favor.
So every time we get to this season
where we are called to participate in almsgiving
and acts of kindness, I find myself again
stumbling into a season where I carry around those coins
that I’ve collected in jars in my house
and listening to them clink into guitar cases
and tip jars, adding up to a cup of coffee for someone else
to make it through another day
and it makes me wonder—if we all do it ...
if the whispered “thank you”s
are exactly what God is hoping to create and recreate
every time we stumble through this lenten season,
like a cacophony of gratitude spilling out and over
while we recognize again—
that our lives are bound up in one another
exactly how God designed it.

“Alms, alms for the poor!”

A reminder that our worship continues into the streets
that every jar may jingle and guitar case may clink
to make the music—the magic—the liturgy
that brings delight to the heart of God.

– Lindsay Conrad

Confession of Sin *1 John 1:5-10 (or, 8-9)*

I am in a faith tradition in which confession of sin is not emphasized. We put more emphasis on grace. But I have found that without confession, grace is much more difficult, if not impossible, to embrace.

In 1 John 1:5, the scripture tells us that God is light and in him there is no darkness. Sin is like a curtain in our life. When we are living our life following the example that God has given us, the curtain is pulled open and the light of the Creator shines in. However sin is like the closing of that curtain. Every sin pulls the curtain closed until there is no light at all. Our lives are dark and we are wandering around in that darkness trying to find our way.

Confession of sin allows the curtains to reopen and the light of God to again shine in our lives. However, I think that we sometimes misunderstand what confession truly is. Confession is more than giving God a laundry list of misdeeds. To confess is to acknowledge and admit to motives or behaviors that are sinful against God or against others. We must not only admit and acknowledge, but we must articulate those things that we have done that were against God and others. But, too often we simply pray and ask God to forgive our sins without speaking our individual sins.

We are called to be light in the world, just as the Triune God is light. But until we are willing to confess boldly and bravely those sins that we have committed, we cannot throw open the curtain of our souls. We will constantly be stuck feeling our way around in the dark.

To be the children of God, to show the world the light of God's grace, we must be willing to be vulnerable and admit to God that we are broken and sinful beings. We have to give voice to those things that we do that are contrary to the way the Almighty would have us treat others. We must be willing to name that which keeps the curtain closed and our souls in darkness.

We must be a people who use confession as the path to becoming closer to our God. We must use confession as the relationship tool that brings us closer to our fellow human beings. Then, and only then, can we open the curtain and let the light of God shine in and through our souls.

— Jackie Freeman

Atonement *Romans 3:23-26*

The term “atonement” has its roots in the Old Testament, particularly within the Torah. It refers to a cluster of ideas that center on the cleansing of impurity or appeasing God through a sin-offering. In the ritual narratives found in Exodus and Leviticus, we are told that to make atonement, *kippur*, the high priest must sprinkle the blood of the sin-offering (an animal completely unblemished) over the covering slab of gold known as the *kapporeth* of the Ark of the Covenant. Most biblical interpretations translate *kapporeth* as the “mercy seat,” implying the solemn and unique role this had in achieving restoration for those who sought forgiveness. This ritual only took place during the Day of Atonement (*Yom HaKippurim*) celebration (see Leviticus 16). The Jewish community continues to celebrate this by observing Yom Kippur.

The Apostle Paul borrows the imagery and ritualistic meaning of the Hebrew tradition by presenting Jesus as the “sacrifice of atonement.” Unlike any other instances in the New Testament (except for Hebrews 9:5), Paul uses the word *hilastérion*, the exact Greek translation of the Hebrew word *kapporeth*, to shift our understanding of atonement from simply a propitiatory act to a revelation of ultimate mercy from a God who cannot let God’s beloved creation perish. Jesus becomes the unblemished sin-offering who takes the mercy seat on our behalf so that we may find forgiveness and restoration with God. The most extraordinary act of mercy indeed.

There are various theological theories of atonement based on what the New Testament expresses—from Jesus being the ransom paid for our sins to his being the scapegoat that substitutes for us. However, what Paul writes in this particular text should serve as a rather refreshing take on atonement. For me, it is important to remind myself that the God in whom I believe is also a God of mercy. When the days are darker than usual and I find myself lost and afraid, away from God’s presence, it is essential to remember that there is someone who intercedes for me, not with anger or disappointment, but with mercy and love, reminding me that I will always have a place to belong. That is the God in whom I place my trust and faith—a God who will not let God’s beloved perish but instead gives them eternal life.

—Jasiel Hernandez Garcia

Forgiveness *Luke 7:41-48*

“Who is this who even forgives sins?” These are the words of the ones at table with Jesus when he dines at Simon’s home, visited by an unnamed woman bearing an alabaster jar of ointment to anoint His feet. The witnesses to this demonstration of grace and to Jesus’s lesson to Simon wonder with what authority Jesus forgives, and perhaps, although scripture is silent on the matter, they may also wonder if they themselves belong in the camp of those who have been forgiven much, or in the camp of those who have been forgiven little instead.

Like the table companions from Luke’s narrative, awe is our response—and it is always an appropriate response—to the possibilities that unfold from the gracious reality of forgiveness. It is tempting to place ourselves in the position of Simon or the unnamed woman, but for many of us, the two serve as a powerful reminder of our human tendencies to hold grudges rather than forgive debts. Yet in that moment when Jesus speaks a word of instruction to us again, he shows us a different economy of grace. Jesus, the host when we partake of the Lord’s Supper, shows us, as He showed the people gathered at Simon’s, that forgiveness is an expression of divine love.

As we seek to follow and learn from Christ this Lent, let us discover anew that forgiveness is the divine hostess gift, to be given thoughtfully and received graciously wherever Jesus is encountered in the form of another in this kin-dom of God to which we are called and which cannot exist when great love is not shown. Forgiveness is not a one-time action or intention, but rather a commitment to a reconciling way of life, so that the brokenness in and of our world can be restored.

As Jesus reminds Simon and the unnamed woman, there is no debt too great for the grace and mercy of God. We believe this when we pray in worship, “forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” We believe this when we weekly confess our sins and receive assurance that God has forgiven us. May forgiveness be not only a ritual of corporate worship, but also a ritual of the worship that is our lives. May the reality of that grace wash over us, like the woman’s tears that washed the feet of Jesus, for the embodiment of forgiveness is always a sight to behold.

– Meg Vail

Remembrance of Your Baptism *Isaiah 12:2-6*

The first time I went to a Catholic mass I have a distinct memory of losing my mom for a moment as we entered the sanctuary. One minute I was beside her, the next I was three steps ahead, confused about where she'd gone.

I lost my mom because at the entrance of the sanctuary was a basin of water. As I charged ahead, eager to find a seat, she stopped, dipped her fingers in the water, and crossed herself. Much to my confusion, as I looked over my shoulder searching for her, I saw that almost everyone was doing this. *Pause, dip, cross.*

We never did that at my church. I wasn't raised Catholic, I was born and baptized and am now ordained in the Presbyterian Church. But my mom grew up Catholic, and those rituals are deep in her bones, even after moving membership to our protestant church. Even though her actions were unfamiliar, I sensed in that moment something holy in the ritual. The people weren't flicking water at one another or quickly wiping their hand off on their clothing. Instead, it was a simple and profound *pause, dip, cross.*

It took many years before I could understand the implications of that act. That moment in time at the beginning of worship when each person remembers the waters of their baptism and is reminded, by touching the font, that baptism isn't singular and separate from the rest of our lives.

When we come together to worship, when we confess our sins and receive our pardon, when we hear the good news read and proclaimed, when we share in communion, even when we leave at the end, we are remembering Christ's gift of grace through the waters of baptism. The gift of God's grace is not limited to a single act or moment or service. God's grace is the foundation of who we are and all that we do. Baptism, the healing waters of grace, is the foundation of our whole lives.

It may be that sitting in your sanctuary or chapel is a basin of water, a baptismal font. The next time you pass it I invite you to take a moment. Look at the waters, touch it if you want. Remember that God's grace covers and surrounds, cleanses and heals, and is always with us.

– Alex Pappas

Reconciliation *2 Corinthians 5:16-21*

Reconciliation is defined as the end of the estrangement, caused by original sin, between God and humanity. The scriptural references in

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 bring about a deeper understanding of God's expectations for our roles as believers in Christ. It has been suggested that there is a conceptual link between the reconciliation Greek word group *katallage* (or *katallasso*) and the Hebrew word *shalom*, translated as "peace." When true reconciliation occurs, the two formerly hostile sides become respectful of each other—and, ideally, friends. Well, we all know reconciliation requires considerable heart work and a willingness to know and follow God. It is not until we, as believers, work feverishly together that honest work can happen.

Reconciliation is a concept that's been tossed around for decades in regards to race relations. If people truly understood what it really meant, they wouldn't use it so loosely. It is not merely for kumbaya moments or stringing along nice words. It about a deep reckoning in the soul of a person, or people, who must acknowledge and be held accountable for their actions in the split. So, then, we are called to love other people and work to benefit them rather than to judge.

My ministry took on a whole new direction after the death of my beloved mother by a young white supremacist in 2015. After that tragedy the world mourned with us and called for reconciliation. After about two years I forgave him. It was the public acknowledgment of this forgiveness that sparked new conversations on the meaning of forgiveness for Black believers. I believe there can be no peace without forgiveness. That spiritual act was truly reconciliation on a level many would never understand.

Every day as I go out to do the work, I am a minister of this reconciliation, whether through my writings, speeches, or activism. I've become an agent to bring reconciliation to all spheres of the world. This includes reconciliation between people and God (evangelism and discipleship), between people and people (conflict resolution), and between people and their work. If we do these things, we will be in a position to bring Christ's power to reconcile the people, organizations, places, and things of the world so that they, too, can become members of God's new creation.

– Sharon Risher

Eucharist *Luke 24:28-35; alternatively 1 Corinthians 10:16-17*

Among the several spiritual practices within the life of the church which have been substantially curtailed by the new reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, is the Holy Eucharist, also called The Lord's Supper. The Eu-

charist, along with Baptism, are the two sacraments recognized and celebrated by most Christian churches of the Reformed tradition.

The Eucharist is an enactment commanded by our Lord Jesus to His disciples. It is also something that the Apostle Paul wrote about as an integral practice of the fellowship of believers while addressing its importance to the faith community residing in Corinth.

The Apostle Paul writes, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (I Corinthians 10:16-17).

In the Presbyterian Church, we understand the Eucharist to be the sign and seal of eating and drinking in communion with the crucified and risen Lord. The PC(USA) stands as a church with an open table; and by this I mean, the Lord’s Table is open to anyone who wants to partake, regardless of his/her station in life.

In a world where countless walls have been erected, divisions abound, and the exclusions of others continue to be prevalent—and in some cases, some who are gripped by fear and mistrust—the Eucharist is a marvelous reminder that as children of God, all of us have unobstructed access to it and all are welcomed.

I concur with Gordon Lathrop who writes in *Central Things: Worship and Sacrament*, “The meal of Christ’s gift is one of the essentials of Christian worship, especially on every Sunday and festival. That is the piece of bread and the sip of wine the Christians and believers will eat and drink as part of their coming together.”

In more than one occasion, while officiating the Eucharist, I have gotten so emotional that my throat has closed in, and the utterance of the words of institution has been a very laborious and exhausting exercise. This is the result of reflecting on my own inclusion in the body of Christ. I experience this enactment as something of extraordinary meaning and of immense spiritual value, because I know that there, at the Lord’s Table, is a place where I am neither guest nor stranger but one who is treated as a child of God.

– Ezequiel Herrera-Rodriguez

Sacrifice *Psalm 51:15-19*

Chef Samin Nosrat, author of *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat*, tells it like it is: “Fat

carries flavor.” God’s covenant people couldn’t agree more.

By way of sacrifice, the people feasted with the Holy One, and burning that rich, flavorful fat as an offering to God was right and good. (Ask Eli’s sons what happens if you keep the fat for yourself.)

In the landscape of Lent, we don’t associate deliciousness with sacrifice. We may have given up such indulgence after Mardi Gras, forgoing pleasure in these forty days for the sake of being present to God and neighbor. Indeed, ignoring the wounded world and our complicity in its pain renders the joyful feast a farce. With the psalmist we pray, “A broken spirit is my sacrifice, O God” (Ps. 51:17), our hearts humbled by the knowledge of our fault and frailty.

But keep reading past Ash Wednesday’s appointed verses, to the very end of the psalm. Restored to right relationship, the poet looks forward to feasting with God again. Imagining the sacrifice of bulls conjures the smoky aroma of burning fat rising to heaven.

As leaders in my congregation prepare to gather worshipers in-person, after an extended season of worshiping online, sacrifice is on my mind. Because singing produces aerosolized droplets—and thus increases the risk of transmitting SARS CoV-2—we will abstain from the practice of congregational song, hungry as we are for shared harmonies.

Yet even in our humbled state, we will offer to God our sacrifice of praise. Even with an altered table fellowship, we will find our places at the joyful feast of the people of God. Breaking bread with the risen Savior, we will call to mind the mystery of God’s self-offering in the flesh and blood and breath of Jesus Christ, a gift that sustains us in every season.

— Ben Masters

Resurrection *1 Corinthians 15:20-26*

It came as a surprise to me when I learned the church has no orthodox position on atonement. What exactly did Jesus do that saved us? The Bible Belt answer has always been that Jesus died for our sins—some form of penal substitutionary atonement which posits that as sinners we owe a price for our sins, and Jesus paid that price with his sacrificial death. The beauty of saying that is not the only answer is that Jesus’s life and Jesus’s resurrection also play a part in the atoning work of God.

By Jesus’s willingness to leave his “form as God” and be incarnated into “human likeness” (see Phil. 2:5-11) and showing us what love looks like, Jesus saved us by living among us. Salvation by love living among

us, is an Abelardian form of atonement. The power of love, love that is willing to die (see I John 4:7 and on), saves us.

But, we also have the *Christus Victor* model of atonement. Jesus saves us by beating our mortal enemy, death. The Devil may have thought he won when Jesus died, but “up from the grave he arose, with a mighty triumph o’er his foes.” Does resurrection matter? Yes, we do not have a savior who lived a good, loving life and left. Yes, we do not have a savior who, like John Brown’s body, “lies a moldering in his grave.” Yes, we have a savior who defeated death on our behalf.

Like Paul tells us in First Corinthians, death came to us by way of Adam, that is, we are mortal humans. Resurrection comes to us, like Christ, by Christ. Hallelujah, Amen!

– Gordon Blackman Jr.

Anamnesis 1 Corinthians 11:1, 23-26

In the church of my teenage years, the communion table sat solidly in the center of the chancel. Although we only celebrated communion on the first Sunday of the month, the ledge of the table reminded us as we were gathered for worship each week, “THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.” Carved deeply into the oak, those words were often my focal point during the prelude and offertory. And I wondered why we were remembering the Last Supper even on weeks that we weren’t partaking in the feast.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth to be imitators of him, as he is an imitator of Christ. Further along in the epistle, we find what most would recognize as “The Words of Institution,” words that ministers speak each time we are gathered at the table. Paul reminds us that these words are what he received from the Lord and has handed down to us. That we are gathered, just as the disciples were around the table, and when we partake in the feast that has been prepared for us, we are to remember Jesus in the bread and the cup.

But, we are mistaken if we believe that the Lord’s Supper is limited to only the actual memory of the Last Supper. The word for remembrance, *anamnesis* is not a passive memory, but it has a sense of active memory. We are, by remembering Jesus, entering into the mystery of the Eucharist. We remember, not just one moment, but all of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. We are gathered in the feast that leaves us hungry for justice, the feast that is a foretaste of the Kingdom to come.

So, indeed, siblings in Christ, let us actively remember our identity, our salvation, God's grace, all that was, and is, and is to come whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, in remembrance of Christ.

– Chelsea McCutchin

Triduum/Three Days *Exodus 12:14-17 (or Exodus 12:1-17)*

Triduum. Three days that mark the end of Lent and prepare us for the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil. Even though we celebrate over three days, Triduum is actually one full service, one movement, in which we participate in the Paschal Mystery, the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a time of remembering our salvation history and a time of preparation for baptism, for joining the community. Scholar Gabe Huck wrote in *The Three Days: Parish Prayer in the Paschal Triduum*, "The Triduum, the very soul of our year, is what it is because of the baptizing: there is the passion, the dying, and the rising of the Lord Jesus, met in our midst. There is the encounter with these death-dealing yet life-giving waters that forever define each of us as Christian and all of us as church."

Like many Austin Seminary alumni, my first celebration of Triduum was in seminary and was an experience I will not soon forget. I remember: the energy as we stood around the fire, the smells and sights as we lit up McCord by candlelight, the surprise at being able to not only sit through but enjoy twelve readings and responses, the chaotic but joyful parade to the chapel, being soaked by the waters of baptism, more readings, preaching, the taste of bread and wine, the breaking of the fast. Triduum engages all the senses. It leaves you both fulfilled and exhausted.

What I love about Triduum, and how it differs from Easter Sunday, is that so much of the Triduum we celebrate in the dark. It's intimate and mysterious and, I think, a little bit more akin to that first Easter day. It is the day we commemorate the Risen Lord. A day we join in community to participate in God's life-saving work. That's a big deal! And kind of overwhelming! Real and yet inconceivable: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. I can think of no better way to ponder and celebrate this mystery of faith than to walk through the Three Days with beloved community. Thanks be to God for Austin Seminary for introducing so many to the blessed Triduum.

– Allie Utley

Maundy Thursday

John 13:12-17, 34-35 (or, John 13:1-17, 31-35)

Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.”

I said to him, “You will never wash my feet. Never. I’m a professional footwasher, Jesus. Actually, I was educated at a first-rate institution for footwasher types. But even before that—a long, long time before that — family life shaped me into a footwasher. My personality’s rooted in the fulfillment of ‘helping.’ You know this, Jesus. I was ordained to wipe the dust off others’ heels, to scrub the gunk between their toes. That’s what people expect of me. That’s why they ‘pay me the big bucks.’ That’s what I’m here for. That’s my role. Heck, that’s my identity!”

He sat there, silently, staring into my eyes with that look of his, that look that pierces into my soul with equal parts knowledge and grace. Then he got up, and without saying a word, filled the bucket with water from the faucet. He snatched a towel from the rack, slung it over his shoulders, walked over to me, and with a groan crouched onto the floor. Then he began ...

I saw the face of Jesus when the 92-year-old parishioner lay dying in the room of the care home—after I, kneeling beside her bed, clasping her hand, rounded out the prayer with “amen”—began praying in a faint voice for me, asking for God to guide me in my ministry.

I saw his face when the man from El Salvador seeking asylum—having crossed three international borders, ridden atop a freight train for hundreds of miles, shivered in an I.C.E. holding cell at the border, was then shuttled to my church where he slept for two nights on a cot right before boarding a three-day Greyhound ride to a city across the country he’s never been to—placed his hands on my head in a gesture of blessing, “Señor, gracias por este pastor, hermano mío. Por favor protéjelo...”

Greg Boyle calls it “exquisite mutuality.” It’s in each of those moments when the Teacher flips the script on me and, through the voice and hands of the person I’m trying to serve, bathes me with his compassionate presence, I remember his commandment: love and serve one another. And somehow it sinks into my guarded heart that his command is for us to receive as well as give.

— Bart Smith

Stripping of the Altar

Matthew 27:26b-31; alternatively Psalm 88

In many churches, after sharing the Eucharist on Maundy Thursday, worshipers end their time together by stripping the altar. In my congregation, the lights are dimmed and, with tender care, we cover the cross in black cloth and remove all the paraments from the chancel. This solemn action transitions us into Good Friday, when we will assemble in a space laid bare of reminders of our hope in Christ. The stripping of the altar is our invitation to feel in our bodies that very forsakenness and abandonment that Jesus would experience in his suffering and death. The solemnity of the moment strikes in us a sense of pain as we imagine Jesus being stripped, mocked, and spat on by Roman soldiers. In some traditions, the words of Psalm 88 fill the forlorn sanctuary. They echo through our bodies as we depart in silence and shadow. The stripping of the altar is a “hinge” between Thursday and Friday, beckoning us across the threshold into the second of the Great Three Days.

What does this mean for us during this season where suffering has lingered over our lives? A year since the pandemic first captured our attention, we feel the groan of abandonment in our very bones. We mourn the catastrophic coronavirus death toll, hundreds of thousands in the U.S. and millions worldwide. We remember the black and brown lives cut short at the hands of injustice. We strain to hear bold and compassionate witness; the silence of Christians is palpable. In many ways, stripping the altar is an invitation for us to remember who in our midst is abandoned, suffering, and forsaken.

In the laments of the psalmist, may we hear the cries of our siblings, moaning “I can’t breathe,” and “Mama.” As symbols of faith slip from our sight, may we glimpse what sorrow and systemic injustice have laid bare. May we linger in the darkness for a moment and ponder, How will I be a witness at the foot of the cross? Go forth in silence but return tomorrow, for silence does not have the last word.

— *Hierald Osorto*

Solemn Intercessions

1 Timothy 2:1-6; alternatively John 19:25b-27

Solemn intercessions sit at the heart of the human relationship with God. Just as we are reminded in our 1 Timothy reading for today, the

body of Christ is invited to pray for the world and all that is in it, joining with Christ in an open embrace for all of God's beloved creation. We pray for those in power as well as those without power. We pray for those who have a lot as well as those who have nothing. In this posture of prayer, we join our voices with the choirs of voices who know that the kingdom has not yet come and justice has not prevailed. We come before God and one another bringing the afflictions of the world, hoping for the day every tear will be wiped away and there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain (Revelation 21:4).

While we first experienced Lent in a pandemic last year, this Lent brings new and different burdens. The weight of exhaustion after more than a year in "unprecedented times"; the separation that never seems to end; continued hope in the midst of a foggy future. We carry the weight of a society crying out for truth, justice, and reconciliation. There is so much pain and suffering in the world. We have a lot to bring before God.

In this moment, we join our voices together and pray not only for our own sin but for the sins we witness. We know that no matter what we do here on earth in pursuit of the kingdom, the kingdom will not be fulfilled without God's divine intervention. We humble ourselves in the presence of God and each other, remembering that in life and death we belong to God, and thus we ask God to intervene in the matters of this world. We pray for everyone, in all positions, for all creation that God might hear our afflictions and we might be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As we look toward Easter, may we remember the needs of the world. May we carry the truth that the promise of Easter is for all of God's creation. May we pray together, even when we are apart.

– Savannah Caccamo Demuyneck

Solemn Reproaches *Psalms 78:10-17*

Good Friday is a day filled with unending irony. The way by which the church gathers is to sit with the truth of how love can be crucified. The role humanity embodies in the horrific event of the crucifixion of Christ is present.

Richard Miesel writes in *The Good Friday Liturgy and Anti-Semitism*, "The reproaches have been described as 'unsurpassed in warmth, in poetic grandeur, and in biblical inspiration.'" Indeed, there are few liturgies

in the entire calendar of the worship year in the church encapsulating the covenant of God and God's people alongside the sorrow engulfing the world when the relationship is betrayed.

The liturgy of the reproaches invites the church to hear the words of Jesus speaking to all the sinners of the earth. In the worship event of Good Friday, the church participates in the awareness of who is responsible for the death of Christ—which is all of us.

Through the history of the Christian church, the liturgy found in the reproaches is to place the blame of the cross directly upon the entity of the Jewish people. Sadly, it took almost two millennia for the Christian church to revisit the subtext of reciting liturgy embracing anti-semitism especially in the context of the crucifixion. The imagery of Israel in the reproaches contributed to placing blame solely on “the Jews.” Thankfully, the liturgy endured a recast in writing by which the entire people of God were placed at the foot of the cross to hear the cries of Jesus as he dies. In short—the solemn reproaches of the cross is the culmination of sinners before the cross of Christ.

The liturgy is the call and answer of Jesus and the church through eleven cycles. Each time Jesus utters who we as a church were made to be and who we have become—the church answers with the same cry each time: Holy God, Holy and mighty, Holy immortal One, have mercy on us.

The solemn reproaches of the cross can be read or sung. Music enhances the drama of the afternoon and one suggestion as a resource is the Robert Buckley Farlee condensed version with soprano, SATB, and piano.

The last words sung/spoken on Good Friday by the church: have mercy on us.

Then, all depart in silence.

— Monica Hall

Good Friday *Isaiah 53:3-6*

On this day we remember and mourn the crucifixion of Jesus. In years past, we've gathered on this day to read the story of Christ's trial and death. To sing “Were You There.” To extinguish candles one by one, lowering the light of the sanctuary until it is shrouded in the darkness of the tomb.

This year, though we long to gather, we need not extinguish candles

in order to feel the darkness of the tomb. We have been in it for more than a year now. One by one, life after precious life has been lost to sickness and disregard for human life. One by one, the beautiful light of each of these lives has been extinguished. Yes, we have found ourselves in the darkness of the tomb for too long.

Yet we are called to remember on this day, that even Good Friday belongs to the God of Easter. Which is to say that Good Friday is a crucial part of the story of redemption that God is writing.

I once spent a summer in Guatemala City, where I was surprised to find that every depiction of Christ I saw (and I saw them everywhere) was of our suffering Lord. Though I expected to see Catholic crucifixes, I was not prepared to see so often a Jesus that was unfamiliar to me at that time—bloody and broken, carrying his cross. Wherever there was art, it seemed, there was a painted or woven cross-bearing God.

Over time, I began to understand. In places and times of great pain (where poverty is immense and genocide recent, for example) it is the cross-bearing Jesus, more than his empty cross, that brings hope. For it is this God that knows our pain. This God who walks alongside us in our suffering. This God who endures with us when relief is not yet in sight. This God in whom we can find meaningfulness in living, even when life is marked by broken hearts and broken bodies.

We have been in the tomb for too long now. But today we remember that even here, we are with Jesus.

May we walk with our cross-bearing God.

May we see more clearly those who are bearing crosses around us.

May we help to bear the weight.

And may we prepare our hearts for Easter.

— Jean Corbitt

Veneration of the Cross

John 3:13-17; alternatively Revelation 22:1-2

Veneration of the Cross as part of the Good Friday ritual traces its roots to the fourth century in Jerusalem where pieces of wood believed to be fragments of the original cross were placed on the table. The faithful would come forward, bow, and touch the wood with their forehead, eyes, and lips. Our modern practices include undraping of the cross, the procession of a rough-hewn wooden cross which is placed in front of the people, and the approach of the faithful to bow or kneel, place a hand

on or kiss the cross, and pray. In the Good Friday liturgy, venerating the cross typically occurs after the solemn intercessions and before the solemn reproaches.

Venerating the cross is a symbol of devotion. It is not, however, worship of the cross as an object. Rather, in our devotion, we remember Christ whom we worship as Savior of the world.

In the continuation of the conversation with Nicodemus recorded in John 3, Jesus says, “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.” Jesus’s reference to Moses placing a bronze serpent on a pole in Numbers 21:9 is likely identifying his coming crucifixion as a lifting up. However, it is more than simply foreshadowing Jesus being lifted up on the cross.

In John’s gospel, the crucifixion is not just the horrifying execution of Jesus as portrayed in the synoptic Gospels. For John, Jesus is also being lifted up as king. His enthronement becomes complete in John 19:30—“It is finished.” The Son of Man is lifted up that all might behold the redemption represented thereby.

John 3:16-17 reminds us that, in our veneration of the cross, we should recall the salvation offered by the cross as the fulfillment of incarnation—the Word made flesh—which begins John’s gospel. Jesus saves us through the cross not simply as a future promise of eternal life. Taken together these verses remind us that God entered our finite world in the person of Jesus to redeem us not just at a future point in our linear conception of time. Jesus also came to save us that through Him we may be in relationship with God in the right now. This, too, is the good news proclaimed in the lifting up of the Son of Man.

– Kevin Henderson

Easter Vigil *Psalms 136*

In his book *Holy Things*, Gordon Lathrop describes the Easter Vigil as the “mother of all liturgy,” and with good reason. In practice, the Easter Vigil is the third and final worship movement of the Great Three Days, preceded by Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, and is celebrated at twilight on Holy Saturday. The liturgical order consists of four parts: a service of light which heralds the good news of the resurrection as fire is lit and the *Exsultet* is sung; a service of twelve Old Testament readings that remember the sweeping narrative of salvation history; a service of

Baptism that recalls the ancient tradition of welcoming new Christians into the life of the church on the eve of Easter through the waters of Christ's death and resurrection; and finally a service of Eucharist where the risen Christ and the body of Christ meet at the table of bread and wine. It is a long worship service because it has a long story to tell. The story of the Easter Vigil is told through story and song, symbol and sacrament, in art and movement, in visceral elements of fire and water and bread. It is a story told through the lives of people gathered at this holy crossroads of time and space, who perhaps are even held out of time and in between spaces as the liturgy of the Vigil unfolds.

A teenager in my youth group once asked me why we were celebrating Easter twice, once at the Vigil and again the next day on Sunday morning. Good question. This is how it makes sense to me: Easter Sunday celebrates the story when the women and disciples first encounter the resurrection news, while the Easter Vigil celebrates resurrection itself—the salvific action of God toward the world both within and beyond our understanding of time. Psalm 136 captures this beautifully as it recounts the salvation history of the past accompanied by the future-looking refrain, God's "steadfast love endures forever," and set in the context of present thanksgiving. It is at this crossroads of past, present, and future where the fullness and foretaste of God's saving love is remembered, celebrated, and hoped for. The Vigil enlivens the meaning of resurrection that we, the followers of Christ in today's world, then encounter on Easter morning and carry into the world.

— John Leedy

Holy Saturday *Luke 23:50-56*

Do you ever wonder how you will respond to tragic devastation? If our passage in Luke is any indication, the response lies in expectation.

My ability to hold on to any hopeful expectation is weariest at the bitter end. When I think I've done all my great heroics and given all I have to give. Here on this day we are at the end of the road, the back of the cave, and behind a stone door—where all shreds of reasonable expectation are wrung out.

Maybe you are willingly opening this reflection—maybe dragging—you are sober and tired.

We smell death and sense its presence.

It takes no convincing this year to acknowledge the massive, amor-

phous, perpetual power of evil.

According to Luke, Joseph of Arimathea waited with expectation in God's promise of victory. His expectation of God's promise drove him straight back to the face of visible power to ask for the body of Jesus. Take that image into your mind—walking up to the powers of the world, asking for the seemingly devastated body that carried the promise and gift of life. Tortured and lifeless. Limp and cold.

With tender care Jesus body was cleansed, wrapped, and prepared by the women who knew him.

This is where we wait. I've been imagining Christ "descending to hell" as we say when we recite the Apostles' Creed. Walking the streets crying out the names of his beloved—come, come, this is not the end—return with me. Calling and searching—gathering again his people.

The weight of bitter sadness threatens to overcome.

We tell again the story of God and God's promise to be with us and for us. From the beginning of all creation, through the words of the Holy people of Israel, in the voices of the prophets. Again, we rely on generation upon generation of story and promise—God will not abandon God's people.

This is not the end; we wearily ask to dissolve fear and renew calm. Expect the claim of your baptism to remain steadfast. God has claimed us, redeems us, and will conquer even death.

On this final day.

These last hours.

Our moment of exacerbated surrender.

Silence is no threat.

Evil will not overcome.

Sorrow and death are not the end.

Let us wait in expectation for God's promise to burst to new life.

— Kallie Pitcock

Easter/Pascha *1 Corinthians 5:7-8; alternatively 1 Peter 1:18-21*

Freedom, liberation, life-saving, life-giving, kill the fatted calf, promised land in sight, choirs of angels singing, creation rejoicing, a new dawn, fresh air, feast, abundance, Passover, Paschal lamb, death, resurrection.

Pascha in Hebrew means Passover, signifying the Jewish feast when freedom from the bondage in Egypt is celebrated. For us as Christians, we, too, need liberating from sin and death. Jesus Christ is our Paschal

lamb. Easter is our celebration or feast where the death and resurrection of Christ frees us from the bondage of sin, death, and evil.

Coughing, sputtering. Wild eyes darting all around. Gasps of breath. Looking for a point of reference. Facing East. On Easter morn, your new life begins. Your baptismal eyes see afresh all that God is doing. Your eyes of grace now see. This is what happens when you surface from your baptismal waters. You may not remember your baptism if you were baptized as an infant. Others of us remember the sprinkling we received. Others remember the sputtering and coughing. No matter how your physical baptism happened, your new life begins out of those waters. It's not something for the afterlife, this resurrection thing. This freedom. This life-saving, life-giving love. It happens every year. Every Sunday. For every Sunday is a mini-Easter. Even those Sundays in Lent! Otherwise, Lent is forty-six days.

We often practice Easter as a one-time-a-year event. We celebrate our baptisms perhaps once a year on Baptism of the Lord Sunday. What would Easter look like if each Sunday we saw the world with new eyes? With new life? With our Lord appearing among us resurrected? Dare we say, what if we are resurrected every Sunday from sin and death? This is what we proclaim on Easter. That Death's snares have no hold, for in Christ we are made new. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old life is gone and a new life has begun. Easter. Freedom. Over and over again.

In the congregation I serve, we pour the water every Sunday in our baptismal font. I speak the words above. And then I have begun to add a few more words. Welcome Home. You see that is what sin and death do to us. They take us away from God's home. The home where we are known and cleansed. The home that gives us life and sustenance. Sin and death want you to believe you have no home. But alas, when the waters wash over you every Sunday, every Easter, every day, you are made new in grace and love. Kill the fatted calf. You have made it home. So on every Easter our final words are these ... Alleluia! ... and God's words to us are ... welcome home, child.

— Lisa Juica Perkins

Eighth Day and Bright Week *Revelation 21:1-6*

Have you been to church eight days in a row wearing only a white robe? If so, call me, I want to meet you. The early fourth-century church tra-

ditionally baptized new Christians during the three-day Great Vigil of Easter. The baptism included full immersion, anointing with scented oil, and a white cloth garment to wear. The newly baptized Christians continued to wear those white baptismal garments for the eight days following Easter. During these eight days (or Pascal Octave), the new Christians would attend worship services filled with catechesis, and they would carry around a Christ candle. These newly baptized folks were easy to spot in their “bright” baptismal garments attending eight days of catechism with their “bright” candle lit. It was, indeed, a “Bright Week”!

Eight is a special number in traditions of the church—Jewish families circumcise on day eight after birth; fonts in our sanctuaries are eight-sided; and some sanctuaries are intentionally built with eight sides. Even the columbarium where I serve is octagonal. The women found Christ’s empty tomb the day after the sabbath (Mark 16:1-2). Sabbath is day seven of the week. Instead of starting again with day one of the week, Christ’s resurrection ushered in a new era. Day eight became the day when God has made the newly baptized as new creations and the day when God redeemed all of creation and made it new. These eight days after Pascha are set apart as a time without time, a time of being closer to God, a time when Christ might literally return. Many use “Eighth Day” theologically to describe that day that is beyond time, that day when we are in perfect communion with Christ, that day when God will wipe away every tear and there will be no more mourning and no more crying. That eighth day was two thousand years ago and the eighth day that is yet to come.

You and I may not be new Christians, but this year has transformed us. It is due time to look at our baptismal promises anew and reorient ourselves to this one whom the women did not find in the tomb. In many ways, we are all Eighth Day People and our whole lives are spent in Bright Week—just baptized, daily learning about Christ, and the shine from our fresh baptism can still be seen.

— Sally Wright

Contributors



The Reverend Dr. David Gambrell (MDiv'98) is associate for worship in the PC(USA) Office of Theology and Worship and co-editor of the *Book of Common Worship* (WJKP, 2018).

Daniel Williams (MDIV'16) is director of education at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas.



The Reverend Sarah de la Fuente (MDiv'15) is parish associate at Central Presbyterian Church and officiant at Central Ceremonies in Austin, Texas.

The Reverend Lindsay Conrad (MDiv'13) is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Mankato, Minnesota.



Pastor Jackie Freeman (MDiv'20) leads First United Methodist Church and Rabke United Methodist Church in Cuero, Texas.

The Reverend Jasiel Hernandez Garcia (MDiv'18) is associate pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia.



The Reverend Meg Vail (MDiv'17) is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Logan, Utah.

The Reverend Alex Pappas (MDiv'19) is associate pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Shreveport, Louisiana.





The Reverend Sharon Risher (MDiv'07) is the author of *For Such a Time as This: Hope and Forgiveness after the Charleston Massacre*. She is a member of the Austin Seminary Board of Trustees.

The Reverend Ezequiel Herrera-Rodriguez (MDiv'19) is evangelist for the Rio Grande Valley for Mission Presbytery in Pharr, Texas.



The Reverend Ben Masters (MDiv'17) is pastor of Hector & Lodi Presbyterian Church in Brooktondale, New York.

The Reverend Gordon Blackman Jr. (MDiv'14) is pastor of Alpine Presbyterian Church in Longview, Texas.



Chelsea McCutchin (MDiv'18) is minister of education & community engagement at University Christian Church in Austin, Texas.

The Reverend Allie Utley (MDiv'13) is interim chaplain for the Graduate School of Theology in Redlands, California.



The Reverend Bart Smith (MDiv'12) is pastor of St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona.

Hierald Osorto (MDiv'18) is executive director for student equality and community engagement at Ithaca College in Hector, New York.





The Reverend Savannah Caccamo Demuynck (MDiv'20) is the pastoral resident at Meyers Park Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The Reverend Monica Hall (MDiv'08) is pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Ogden, Utah.



Jean Corbitt (MDiv'20) is the pastoral resident at Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas.

The Reverend Kevin Henderson (MDiv'16) is pastor of Sunrise Beach Federated Church in Sunrise Beach, Texas.



The Reverend John Leedy (MDiv'11) is associate pastor for University Presbyterian Church in Austin, Texas.

The Reverend Kallie Pitcock (MDiv'20) is the Austin Seminary Dickson Resident at St. Philip Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas.



The Reverend Lisa Juica Perkins (MDiv'11) is the pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Sherman, Texas.

The Reverend Sally Wright (MDiv'12) is pastor for pastoral care at Village Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village, Kansas.



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—*Mission Statement*

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