

## **Open Eyes, Burning Hearts Narrative Lectionary Connections**

Many congregations in the Southwestern Texas Synod are using the Narrative Lectionary. For these congregations, this resource provides connections between the *Open Eyes, Burning Hearts Lenten Series* and the assigned Narrative Lectionary texts for the season of lent and Easter Sunday.

### **Using This Resource:**

While the following are by no means the only ways to use these resources, perhaps these ideas will spark your own creativity as you design meaningful worship for your community.

#### Idea #1

- On Sundays/regular weekly worship, read the Narrative Lectionary text as usual.
- In place of a typical sermon, use a session from *Open Eyes, Burning Hearts* (including the selected reading from Luke 24 and the discussion questions.)
- Follow the conversation by reading aloud the corresponding Narrative Lectionary based Reflection or your own thoughts on what God is saying through these texts in relation to your community.
- If your congregation has midweek services, consider reading and dwelling in the full text of Luke 24:13-34 each week or using the Playing with These Passages suggestions as a basis for a more creative worship experience.
- *Rationale: Sundays/regular weekly worship is often the largest gathering of the congregation. Practicing Dwelling in the Word and sharing God stories are important skills for the whole congregation. By allowing the congregation to share their stories before reading the Reflection, we are embodying the priesthood of all believers. God speaks through each of us, not just the designated worship leader. Reading the reflection aloud afterward, however, also gives those who would otherwise miss a traditional sermon the opportunity to listen to God's word spoken through you.*

#### Idea #2

- Utilize the sessions of *Open Eyes, Burning Hearts* as a midweek worship resource or Bible study.
- Continue Sunday worship/regular weekly worship as you normally would, perhaps utilizing the Reflection or Playing With These Passages sections as sermon fodder.
- *Rationale: Midweek Lenten services or Bible study groups are often times when congregations are open to experimentation. Many congregations are accustomed to these being creative worship experiences. If your congregation has never tried Dwelling in the Word or telling God stories, this may be a helpful way to introduce the practice.*

### Idea #3

- Post the story starter questions from *Open Eyes, Burning Hearts* on your favorite social media platforms (or publish through email/regular print publications). Use this as a discussion starter to get buzz going ahead of your worship time or as a forum for conversation outside your church building walls.
- At the end of a week of “conversation,” bring together all that you’ve heard by prayerfully raising up your own reflection on both the texts and the shared stories or share a portion of the one written in this resource.
- *Rationale: Getting conversation going outside the church building walls about God’s activity in our daily lives is the ultimate goal of these faith practices.*

## March 6, Ash Wednesday

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 18:1-9

*1 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2 He called a child, whom he put among them, 3 and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. 6 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes! 8 "If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell of fire.*

### Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Session 1) Focus Passage- Luke 24:13-16

*13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, <sup>16</sup>but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*

### Reflection

From ancient India long ago emerged a story that has been repeated in many cultures and with many variations. It is the story of a group of men who were blindfolded and asked to describe an elephant. The man holding the trunk described the elephant as being like a thick snake. For another, who was touching the ear, the elephant seemed like a kind of fan. Another person, whose hand was upon its leg, said the elephant is a pillar, like a tree-trunk. The man who placed his hand upon the elephant's side described it as being like a giant wall. The man at the elephant's tail described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, describing the elephant as hard, smooth and like a spear. Being blindfolded and limited to their own piece of the elephant, they could not fathom the entirety of the animal. In different variations of the story the men become angry at one another and, in some versions, even violent in their insistence on their own perspective.

Those blindfolds kept the men in the story from experiencing the full reality of their surroundings—as well as understanding how their neighbors' differing descriptions were also true. The blindfold was a barrier to their understanding. So was their insistence on their own perspective being the "right" one.

As we begin dwelling in Luke 24, we come right away to the announcement that these two individuals are walking and talking and Jesus shows up to walk and talk with them. But their eyes are kept from recognizing him. We aren't told what it is that has blinded them. It's certainly not a physical barrier like the blindfolded men and the elephant. Perhaps it is their grief or the exhaustion of the days of being in Jerusalem during Jesus' trial and crucifixion that have rendered them sightless. Maybe it is their own sense of reason that keeps them blind to the reality of Christ's presence. Whatever it is, this journey begins with limited understanding on the part of these sojourners. Something is acting as a stumbling block to their ability to recognize God's presence on the road with them.

In Matthew 18:7, Jesus says that occasions for stumbling are bound to come. There will be times when we are unable to see God's presence with us. There will be times when we will encounter barriers to hope or feel blind to God's activity. But the call of Matthew 18 is to go about our lives removing as many of those barriers for ourselves and others as possible. Jesus talks about becoming like a child in this regard. Small children are expert caregivers. They recognize pain in others and are quick to respond. They know what it feels like to be weak and in need of others help and so they are often quick and generous when they are in a position to offer comfort.

This Ash Wednesday, we too acknowledge our weakness, our own blindness, and the ways in which we have acted as stumbling blocks to others. We are often like the blindfolded men arguing at the side of an elephant—insistent upon our own perspective and unwilling to acknowledge others'. We are too often like those Emmaus road travelers, going on our way without seeing God's presence right beside us.

As we enter this Lenten season, we confess our sin of blindness to God's activity and ask for God's holy, life-giving Spirit to turn us around—to empower us to listen to one another and the perspectives that we have not yet *really* heard, to open our eyes to God's presence with us, and to walk with us in these days of identifying and tossing aside those stumbling blocks to faith.

#### Playing With These Passages

- Set out small bowls of ashes and blank paper. Encourage your congregation to dip their fingers in the ashes and to create works of written or drawn art. Perhaps these pieces of art are visual confessions. Perhaps they are illustrations of current stumbling blocks. Perhaps they show the feeling of hopelessness. Perhaps they are reminders of God's presence.

## Week of March 10

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 18:15-35

*15 "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." 21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. 23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe.' 29 Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?" 34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35 So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."*

### Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Session 2) Focus Passage- Luke 24:17-20

*17 And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' 19 He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.'*

## Reflection

There are times in life when we are stopped dead in our tracks. We stop what we are doing, suddenly and irreversibly sidetracked by what has just unfolded in front of us. It can be an emergency that does it—a sick child, a phone call about a loved one's accident, a lost pet. Or it can be something smaller, but attention grabbing nonetheless—like a comment that stuns the room into silence or a sudden knock on the door. In such instances our thought process is interrupted and redirected.

In the case of the Emmaus road travelers, Jesus showing up was one such interruption. He asks the question, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" The question stuns the pair and they can't help but engage with this stranger about all the things they think he should know. Their walk is hijacked. Their path interrupted. From now on they will continue to walk and talk, but it will be with Jesus.

Encounters with God are meant to be path altering. Something is wrong if we meet God and are able to keep going as we were before. The parable we read today from Matthew 18:23-35 is a graphic illustration of this. The man who owed ten thousand talents should have left the encounter with the gracious king as a changed man. Instead, with disastrous consequences, he continued on his way to demand payment from a fellow slave. The encounter with grace should have redirected him.

A real danger in our faith lives is not allowing our encounters with God to change our public presence. Grace will always redirect us from our own inclinations toward our neighbors, toward those in need, toward God's presence with us and at play in the world around us. Our lives reflect that change. Telling the stories of how we have experienced God is another way of acknowledging that we have been changed and it opens up the possibility that we will grow to recognize God's presence in one another's stories too. The pull of the Spirit, the tug of God's interruption, can come in many forms. The result, however, is always the opportunity to join God in a life-altering adventure!

## Playing With These Passages

- Do a search online for finger labyrinth patterns. Labyrinths are different from mazes in that there is only one way in and one way out. Print enough copies for each person to have their own finger labyrinth. As you trace the pattern toward the center, think about how your life would be different without God's presence. Stop in the middle and thank God for being with you every day. As you trace your way back out of the labyrinth, pray for God to reveal God's presence to you even more clearly.

## Week of March 17

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 18:15-35

*1 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4 and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. 5 When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. 6 And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" 7 They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." 8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." 9 When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12 saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." 13 But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" 16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*

### Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Session 3) Focus Passage- Luke 24:21- 23

*21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.*

### Reflection

Sometimes our own hopes blind us to the goodness of God's activity among us. That was certainly the case for those on the Emmaus road. They had hoped that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel. They were so certain in their own expectations of what that would look like that they missed the redemption that God was doing even as Jesus was standing right in front of them! Their hopes blinded them.

So did the expectations of the laborers in the parable from Matthew 20 blind them to the goodness of the landowner. When the first laborers (the ones who had been on the job the least amount of time) received a full daily wage, the expectation started growing among those who had been working all day that they would receive more. Their expectations blinded them to the generosity on display before them.

We are the same. Our own hopes and expectations can keep us from recognizing the goodness of God. We are often lulled into thinking that God only works in certain ways or that God will only speak through particular people. We put parameters on God's grace and we draw lines around who is a part of "us" and who is not. We listen to the stories of some, and we ignore others because they don't fit our expectation or our vision of what God is doing.

Our sight is not God's sight. Our ways are not God's ways. Sometimes our expectations need to be shattered and our hopes crushed so that we can see what we are missing—so that the goodness of God can be revealed to us.

#### Playing With These Passages

- Search YouTube for the clip from Apollo 13 called "Getting Home." In this scene the character played by Tom Hanks is recounting his experience as a pilot. His plane was suffering multiple malfunctions. His instrumentation was all gone. Then the lights short-circuit. It would seem like the most desperate of situations. But the lights going out were the key to his survival. With no lights in the cockpit, he was able to see churned up phosphorescent algae glowing in the sea below him. The lights of his cockpit would have blinded him to the saving grace right below.



## Week of March 24

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 22:1-14

*1 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other slaves, saying, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' 5 But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' 10 Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, 12 and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."*

### Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Session 4) Focus Passage- Luke 24:22-24

*22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'*

### Reflection

Both of these passages illustrate the tragedy of the missed invitation. In Matthew's parable, the kingdom of heaven is compared to a king throwing the best party who is rebuffed by his intended guests. The invitation is ignored, made light of, disrespected... wasted.

There was a missed invitation for our travelers on the Emmaus road too. They had already heard the good news of Jesus' resurrection told through the witness of the women who had gone to the tomb early that morning. Yet they did not believe the women's story. They didn't even go themselves to see what was (or wasn't) in the tomb. Instead, they headed home, looking sad as if the women had said nothing at all. They missed the invitation to be first-hand witness to the miracle of the resurrection.

Was it the fact that it was women who had brought that first announcement of the resurrection that made it unbelievable to them? Could they not hear the good news because of who delivered it?

Are we guilty of the same? Are there times when we miss invitations to deeper relationships or even miracles that God might be doing because of who it is that we are invited to listen to? Are there times when we too might be in danger of disrespecting the invitation of God, wasting the generosity of the king, because we make light of it and are content to go about our own business?

Thankfully, God's invitation isn't a one-time deal. Even though the two Emmaus road travelers missed the first announcement of the resurrection and didn't go to the tomb themselves to see it empty, Jesus still showed up to them. Jesus came to where they were along that dusty road and walked with them until the time when they could see the miracle unfolding around them.

Maybe this week is our invitation too... to recognize the presence of God along our dusty roads and to listen carefully for the invitations that follow.

#### Playing With These Passages

- Brainstorm ways of encouraging people to mingle with those that they haven't previously gotten to know well. Perhaps you could try one of those party games where people collect the signatures of those who have done different things (or have had different experiences) to fill up a bingo card. If you are really bold, shuffle pews or come up with a creative way of pairing people as they come into the church. Sometimes we all need an excuse to reach beyond our comfort zone in establishing opportunities to hear one another!

## Week of March 31

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 22:1-14

*1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, "Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." 7 Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." 9 But the wise replied, "No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." 10 And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." 12 But he replied, "Truly I tell you, I do not know you." 13 Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.*

### Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Bonus Session<sup>1</sup>) Focus Passage- Luke 24:25-27

*<sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*

### Reflection

It is almost always easier to look back and see God's activity in the past than to recognize it in the moment. Years later we can look back and see that even some things that were disappointing at the time turned out to be blessings in disguise. We can recognize in hindsight God's guiding hand.

In hindsight, the Emmaus travelers realized that they should have known something special was happening as the stranger interpreted scripture to them. They say later that their hearts were burning within them at the time. But in the moment they couldn't put two and two together.

In hindsight, the foolish bridesmaids in Matthew's parable realize that they have been caught unaware. They should have been anticipating the arrival of the groom.

The saying goes, *hindsight is 20/20*.

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<sup>1</sup> A bonus session of the *Open Eyes, Burning Hearts* series for use in conjunction with this narrative lectionary text is included immediately following this week's resources.

Recognizing God's activity in hindsight is a good start. Even better is to learn to see God's activity among us now. We probably won't be able to see the full picture in real time, but to ask the question about what God is up to among us sets the stage for us to start to pay attention to where God is showing up even in our lives today so that we might join in what God is doing here right now.

#### Playing With These Passages

- Make a roadmap of your life. Be sure to put in all the major events and milestones. Include both highs and lows. Pay special attention to noticing how God might have been at work in each of those different events. Make note on your map of where you felt or can now see God's activity.

## Open Eyes, Burning Hearts Bonus Session

Luke 24:25- 27

*<sup>25</sup>Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' <sup>27</sup>Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.*

Read this text aloud two times. One reader should be a female voice and one reader should be a male voice.

Break up into pairs or trios for conversation about what is heard as the text is read. Practice mindful listening by making sure everyone gets to share.

- What are the words or phrases that catch your attention?

Connecting scripture to life through telling a story.

- Tell a story about a time you can look back on and recognize that God was with you or providing for you.
- How can you tell that God was with you then?

Group Feedback.

- Popcorn share to get a sense of the stories. As a leader, you may want to make some connections or observations.
- What helps us to recognize God's presence at work in our lives?

Preparing for next week.

- Re-read these verses daily. Ponder what it must have been like to hear Jesus interpret scripture along the road. What parts of scripture do you wish could be explained to you today?
- Try reading scripture with someone new this week. Attend a new Bible study or read with a family member or friend. How do different voices help open up new understandings?
- Where are you seeing God in these moments?

Song

- ELW 676 Lord, Speak to Us, That We May Speak

Prayer

Ever-present God, your love endures and your grace provides from generation to generation. As you spoke through the prophets, now speak to us that we might know your will, follow your ways, and recognize your movement among us.

## Week of April 7

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 25:31-46

*31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40 And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" 45 Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

### Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Session 5, Hospitality Focus) Focus Passage- Luke 24:28-29

*28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. <sup>29</sup>But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them.*

### Reflection

Imagine how different the Emmaus road story might have turned out if the two travelers had not extended an invitation to the stranger to come and stay with them. Would the two have ever known that the stranger was Jesus? Would they have later (like those from the Matthew text) asked, "Lord, when was it that we saw you?"

Sometimes what starts as a simple invitation to get to know one another, to dine together, or to talk more turns into an opportunity for God to reveal God's presence with us. When we act with love toward a stranger, we are acting in love toward God. Through these interactions we become more aware of God's activity and presence in the world.

Learning to see God in the stranger takes practice. It's not always easy to overcome our suspicions or our own busy schedules to take time to really get to know someone new. The invitation, though, may prove life changing.

#### Playing With These Passages

- Set out blank note cards and craft supplies. Encourage the congregation to make invitations. It could be an invitation to dinner, an invitation to attend church, or an invitation to a special event going on in your community. Encourage each person to make and then deliver the invitation personally. If crafting an invitation doesn't seem right, go for the style of invitation that does. Create a Facebook post, send an email, make a phone call, make plans to stop by someone's shop, etc.

## April 14, Palm Sunday

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 25:31-46

*1 When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, just say this, "The Lord needs them." And he will send them immediately. " 4 This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, 5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." 6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" 10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." 12 Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13 He said to them, "It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers." 14 The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry 16 and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?" 17 He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.*

### Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Session 5, Prayer Focus) Focus Passage- Luke 24:28-29

*28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them.*

### Reflection

When Jesus entered the temple after riding into Jerusalem, it was not with the behavior typical of a guest. He was not quiet or respectful. He was not subtle or well-mannered. Instead, he went about cleaning up as if the place were his own home. In fact, he practically called it such when he quoted, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer.'"

Prayer is connection with God. With the arrival of God in our lives comes the potential for holy interruption. God cleans house in us too. When God shows up in our lives, things will get rearranged!



The Emmaus road travelers probably didn't realize what they were getting into when they extended the invitation to the stranger to stay with them. Unbeknownst to them, they were inviting Jesus into their kitchen. Jesus wound up rearranging a few priorities for them too!

As we enter this Holy Week, we do so with the prayer for God's holy interruption to reshape us and rearrange our priorities as well. May we find this week inhabited by God's unexpected blessings!

#### Playing With These Passages

- Rearrange your church's celebration of this Palm/Passion Sunday. If you typically do a procession with palms on the inside of your church, try processing outside. If you usually do an outdoor processional, try switching up your route or even turning your whole church service inside out. Hold a portion, or all, of your service outdoors on your front lawn or maybe even in a local park.

## April 18, Maundy Thursday

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 26:17-30

*17 On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 18 He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, "The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.' " 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. 20 When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; 21 and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." 22 And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" 23 He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." 25 Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so." 26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." 30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

### Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Maundy Thursday Session) Focus Passage- Luke 24:30-31

*<sup>30</sup>When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. <sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*

### Reflection

The Passover celebration was a remembrance of what God had done for God's people in freeing them from slavery. Everything about that meal was designed to be a reminder of God's saving activity. Jesus gathering with his disciples around that Passover table was a powerful juxtaposition. Jesus' own body and blood were about to become a new saving covenant.

For the travelers on the Emmaus road, it was at the table when Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them that they finally recognized the presence of their savior.

Tables are important places. They are places of remembrance and celebration. They are places where we gather to reminisce or talk through upcoming plans. They are places where we connect with one another.

At our Lord's table, it is also the place where we come to know that we have been made into one body in Christ... that we are forgiven and freed to live as friends of God.

Today we recognize our Savior in this meal. God has been walking with us. Christ has come to us.

#### Playing With These Passages

- Consider inviting your congregation (and perhaps even the wider community) to bring foods that are of special significance to them or are particularly important to their heritage. Create a mini-food festival where members of the congregation can taste one another's food and hear the stories of why each food is significant.

## April 19, Good Friday

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 27:27-61

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30 They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31 After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. 32 As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. 33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34 they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35 And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; 36 then they sat down there and kept watch over him. 37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." 38 Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39 Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." 41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42 "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43 He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son.'" 44 The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way. 45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" 47 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." 48 At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." 50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53 After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54 Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" 55 Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. 57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58 He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59 So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60 and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had

*hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61 Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.*

Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Good Friday Session) Focus Passage- Luke 24: 31

*<sup>31</sup>Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*

Reflection

At some point in our lives many of us have Good Friday experiences. There are times in life when God seems to be absent... when God seems to have vanished. In good times we might take God's presence for granted, but in the hard times, God's absence screams at us. It's in these darkest of moments that we, like those at the foot of the cross, challenge God. If God can, why doesn't God stop the dying, stop the pain, give us the miracle?

The centurion standing at the cross only realized that Jesus really was God's son after he had taken his last breath. The Emmaus travelers only realized Christ's presence in time for him to vanish from their sight. Sometimes it is in the moments of humility, the moments of seeming absence, that we come to know most deeply the blessing of God's presence.

Today, we embrace the absence of God. Today we mourn the death of God. Today we dwell in the space of emptiness because this is where God is. Today we find God not in miracles and glory, but in the pain of suffering, in death and darkness. We witness God here tonight, so that we might also come to recognize God in the darkest moments of our lives too.

Playing With These Passages

- Search online for a slime recipe or check out your local toy shop for pre-made versions. If at all possible, go for a variety that is available in black. Gather enough that each person is able to have at least a small, squishable amount. As you feel the slime slip through and stick to your fingers, think about the yuckiest times of your life. What does it mean to you to know that God was wallowing there with you?

## April 21, Easter

### Narrative Lectionary Text- Matthew 28:1-10

*1 After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. 2 And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. 4 For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. 5 But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you." 8 So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*

### Open Eyes, Burning Hearts (Bonus Easter Session<sup>2</sup>) Focus Passage- Luke 24:32-35

*<sup>32</sup>They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

### Reflection

After hearing the announcement at the tomb that Jesus was alive, the women left with both fear and great joy to go and tell the story of what they had seen to Jesus' disciples.

After realizing that it was Jesus that they had been walking with all the way, the Emmaus Road travelers got up and reversed their course. Even though it was late, they immediately got up and returned to Jerusalem to go and share what had been made known to them. When they got there, they swapped stories. Jesus had appeared to Simon too!

Today, we receive the good news of Jesus' resurrection. In word and song, in sacrament and fellowship, we have become witnesses to God's gift of new life. Now, it is also time for us to go, to tell our story and to listen to the stories of others around us. It's time for us to share the stories of what God is doing both in our congregation and outside of our church walls.

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<sup>2</sup> A bonus Easter session of the *Open Eyes, Burning Hearts* series for use in conjunction with this narrative lectionary text is included immediately following this week's resources.

You have been given a story to tell. Everything that you are, everything about you—your experiences, your thoughts, your perspective—these are gifts from God to the world. It is quite possible too that others we encounter are meant to be ones through whom God will show more of God’s self to us.

This is your invitation. Go and tell your story. Listen to the stories of others. May Christ—alive and moving— be revealed!

#### Playing With These Passages

- Make an “Alleluia” or “He is Risen” Easter decoration to put in your front yard, car, or office. When someone asks you about it, share about your experiences this Easter.

## Open Eyes, Burning Hearts

### Bonus Easter Session

Luke 24:32-35

*<sup>32</sup>They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' <sup>33</sup>That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. <sup>34</sup>They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' <sup>35</sup>Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

Read this text aloud two times. One reader should be a female voice and one reader should be a male voice.

Break up into pairs or trios for conversation about what is heard as the text is read. Practice mindful listening by making sure everyone gets to share.

- What are the words or phrases that catch your attention?

Connecting scripture to life through telling a story.

- Where have you felt God's presence this week?
- What do you think God is up to in your life/in the life of this congregation/in our community?

Group Feedback.

- Popcorn share to get a sense of the stories. As a leader, you may want to make some connections or observations.
- Where is God showing up in your faith community?

Preparing for next week.

- Although we have come to Easter and to the end of this particular series on Luke 24, you may choose to continue to dwell in this passage in various ways both as a congregation and as individuals.
- Reflect on the past Lenten season. How has God spoken to you through this text? How has God spoken through others in your congregation? Has any new vision of God's activity emerged?

Song

- ELW 665 Rise, Shine, You People!

Prayer

Risen Lord, we thank you for entering our story to transform it from one of desperation to that of joy. May we be bold in sharing the story of what you have done for us and also in listening to others, that your life may be revealed in us all.