**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer for March 14, 2021**

**Fourth Sunday of Lent – and start of Daylight Savings Time**

*“Whoever practices the truth comes to the light.”* John 3:21

**CHECK-IN** and then Betty mutes everyone. **(Suzie De Quattro and Betty Thompson)**

**WELCOME (Richard McGinnis)**

Welcome, everyone!

* My name is Richard McGinnis and I prepared the Communal Prayer for today.
* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Thanks to Linda Donaldson, Marilyn Voight, Stu Sklamm, Pat and Greg Campbell, and Reggie Ott for leading our music.
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today: Mia Brown, Tim Brown, Kate Monagan, Sr. Marie McCarthy, Jim DeQuattro, Donna Sasser, Joan Sklamm, Maryann Dolan, Kathy Heller and Sr. Jo’Ann DeQuattro.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please let us know.

**SETTLING IN (Richard McGinnis)**

Let’s settle in.

We are not all in the same physical space, but we can still be together by sharing a common breath.  So let us begin by slowly taking one collective breath together. In and out.   With each breath let the Spirit of God settle deeper into you. Let your breath carry away tensions from your body and distractions from your mind.  In and out.   Now let’s take 3 more breaths.  One to be here…one to be together…and one to make space for the light of God in you.

Now Linda Donaldson and I will lead us into our prayer together.

**OPENING RITUAL**  **(Richard McGinnis and Linda Donaldson)**

Richard: Beloved Community, Lent is the call to move from darkness to light.

All: O God, we hear you calling.

Richard: Beloved Community, we begin just where we are.

All: O God, we hear you calling.

Richard: Lord, you have the words of everlasting light.

All: O God, we hear you calling.

Linda (and all, muted): “Hosea” by John Michael Talbot

Come back to me with all your heart,
Don't let fear keep us apart.
Trees do bend, though straight and tall;
So must we to others' call.

Long have I waited for
Your coming home to me
And living deeply our new lives.

Richard: “Lent is a call to weep for what we could have been and are not. Lent is the grace to grieve for what we should have done and did not. Lent is the opportunity to change what we ought to change but have not. Lent is not about penance. Lent is about becoming, doing and changing whatever it is that is blocking the fullness of life in us right now.” (Joan Chittister, OSB)

(**Betty:** Start slide 1 during last sentence above.)

Richard: Let’s pause and reflect on what is hindering the light in us right now. [Pause]

Richard: Let us pray together:

All (muted):

I know I have often sinned in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and what I have failed to do.

I place my trust in your mercy, O God.  And I ask that you, my sisters and brothers, pray for me as I seek to be light.  Amen. **(Betty:** Stop slide 1.**)**

Linda (and all, muted):

The wilderness will lead you
To the place where I will speak.
Integrity and justice
With tenderness
You shall know.

Long have I waited for
Your coming home to me
And living deeply our new lives.

**CALL TO WORSHIP / GATHERING PRAYER** **(Linda Donaldson)**

God of the desert, God of the mountaintop, God of all captives, we are here to walk in your light and to carry your freedom to the world. May we inquire, nudge, and challenge each other to recognize what is ours to do.

Amen. [Brief pause]

Richard will now introduce us to today’s theme.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Richard McGinnis)**

Today’s readings lead us from the darkness of our unfaithfulness and sin to the light of God’s mercy. God’s love overwhelms all of our misdeeds and infidelities with a mercy that is as complete as it is enduring. That love is both an absolution and an invitation to become a co-creator in works of love.

We’ll begin with a combined reading from the Old Testament and from Paul that shows us God’s graciousness to us.

In the first reading from the Book of Chronicles, we see that the infidelity of God’s rulers, of his priests, and of his people leads to destruction and to years of captivity. Yet God does not abandon them. He remains faithful to the people and shows them mercy through an unlikely person, the new conqueror, Cyrus, the King of Persia. Cyrus liberates the surviving Israelites and restores the Temple in Jerusalem.

In Ephesians we hear that God’s love is a gift freely given that we receive through faith in Christ. Our transgressions can deaden us to the light that is God within each of us. We are God’s works of art, created for the good that God intends for us to perform.

John’s Gospel starts with those beautiful and familiar words that “God so loved the world” that God sent his beloved son to change our minds about God – not to pay the bill for our sinfulness but to reveal the true nature of God as love. We hear Jesus tell Nicodemus that in a world that sometimes prefers darkness, we are made for God’s light and truth.

The challenge posed by these readings is how to deepen our faith in Christ. The reflection reading is the story of how one individual met this challenge—Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy*.

The readings call for a cultivation, an exploration, and an intensification of belief in Christ that is fueled by confidence in the limitless mercy of God.

*(Slight pause)*

Richard: Mia Brown will read from the Second Book of Chronicles and Tim Brown from the Letter to the Ephesians.

As we enter into our readings, Marilyn Voight will lead us in song:

**ENTRY INTO READINGS** **(Marilyn Voight)**

Marilyn sings (and all, muted):

Lead us from darkness to light. Lead us from darkness to light.

Lead us from darkness, lead us from darkness,

Lead us from darkness to light.

**READINGS 1 and 2**

**READING 1** 2 Chronicles 36: 14, 16, 19-20, 22-23 **(Mia Brown)**

In those days, all the **princes of Judah**, the **priests**, and the **people**
added infidelity to infidelity,..until the anger of the LORD against his people was so inflamed that there was no remedy.
Their enemies burnt the house of God,
tore down the walls of Jerusalem,
set all its palaces afire,
and destroyed all its precious objects.
Those who escaped the sword were carried captive to Babylon,..
until the kingdom of the Persians came to power.

*[Slight pause]*

.., the LORD inspired King Cyrus of Persia
to issue this proclamation...”the Lord, the God of Heaven, has…charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever, therefore, among you belongs to any part of his people, let him go up, and may his God be with him!”

*[Slight pause]*

**READING 2** Eph 2:4-5, 8, 10 **(Tim Brown)**

The next reading is from the Letter to the Ephesians.

God, who is rich in mercy,
because of the great love he had for us,
even when we were dead in our transgressions,
brought us to life with Christ….

For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and this is not from you; it is the gift of God…
For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works
that God has prepared in advance,
that we should live in them.

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim De Quattro)**

When have you channeled your anger in a constructive, restorative manner toward someone whose behavior hurt or damaged you?

When has unexpected or undeserved forgiveness lit up your life or the life of someone you know?

**SILENT REFLECTION** **(Betty:** Slide 2, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

Richard: Now Kate Monagan will read from the Gospel of John.

**GOSPEL READING 3** JN: 3:14-17, 19, 21 **(Kate Monagan)**

Jesus said to Nicodemus:
“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so must the Son of Man be lifted up,
so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life.
For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him…
And this is the verdict,
that the light came into the world,
but people preferred darkness to light,...
But whoever lives the truth comes to the light,
so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.”

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim De Quattro)**

When have you been able to lift up Jesus to a discouraged, frustrated, or unhappy person?

Fr. Richard Rohr tells us that Jesus came into the world to change our mind about God; how has your mind changed about God in your lifetime?

**SILENT REFLECTION** **(Betty:** Slide 3, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

(Richard): Now Sister Marie McCarthy will read an excerpt from “just Mercy” by Bryan Stevenson.

**REFLECTION READING (Sr. Marie McCarthy)**

This reading is an excerpt from the book *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson, a renowned champion against the injustice that exists in our criminal system. In the excerpt, Bryan describes a period when he was brought low. Bryan was so tired and discouraged that he was tempted to abandon his work. In the process of wrestling with his situation, Bryan came to acknowledge that, like the criminal justice system in which he labored and like his clients, he himself was also broken. This acknowledgement caused a burden to be lifted from him. Bryan moved from darkness toward light. He overcame the temptation to despair--and was restored.

In the words of Bryan:

I was in my office, talking to Jimmy Dill on the night of his execution…

On the phone with Mr. Dill, I thought about all of his struggles and all the terrible things he’d gone through and how his disabilities had broken him.

For the first time I realized that my life was just full of brokenness.

And before I knew it, I was talking to myself aloud: “I can just leave. Why am I doing this?”

I frequently had difficult conversations with clients who were struggling and despairing over their situations…. Whenever things got really bad and they were questioning the value of their lives, I would remind them that each of us is more than the worst thing we’ve ever done.

I told myself that evening what I had been telling my clients for years. I am more than broken. In fact, there is a strength, a power even, in understanding brokenness, because embracing our brokenness creates a need and desire for mercy, and perhaps a corresponding need to show mercy. When you experience mercy, you learn things that are hard to learn otherwise. You see things you can’t otherwise see; you hear things you can’t otherwise hear. You begin to recognize the humanity that resides in each of us.

All of a sudden, I felt stronger.

I turned on the car radio,..and before long a preacher began a sermon. She started with scripture. She said:

Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, “My grace is sufficient. My power is made perfect in your weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weakness, so that the power of Christ may work through me. Since I know it is all for Christ’s good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim DeQuattro)**

What have you learned from being on the receiving end of mercy?

When has **your** brokenness and need for mercy caused you to recognize humanity in another?

When has an action for the sake of the Kingdom that you undertook with a sense of risk or personal cost proved to be a blessing?

**SILENT REFLECTION** **(Betty:** Slide 4, time 2:00, chime, stop slide**)**

**SHARING TIME (Maryann Dolan)**

We invite you to briefly share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you have reflected upon our readings and music. We welcome everyone who wants to speak, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening.

So, let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. [Long-ish pause]

Now who would like to start our sharing? Remember to unmute yourself to speak and mute yourself again afterwards.

[Sharing]

[If there is silence more than about 30 seconds before anyone speaks:] Take whatever quiet you need before you speak.

[If there is extended silence during the sharing:] Is there anyone else who would like to share?  [Pause.]

[**Stop** by about 11:20.]

Thank you.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY(Greg and Pat Campbell)**

We have just listened to God’s word – in scripture, in everyone’s reflections, and in our hearts and minds. Let’s pause in silence to notice what prayer rises in us now. [Pause….]

Our response today will be:

 Pat: Hold us in your mercy.

 Pat (and all, muted): Hold us in your mercy.

Lord, we pray for the inspiration, especially during this season of Lent, to turn away from the darkness within us and the condemnation of others who offend us toward the light of your love which seeks the salvation of us all.

 Pat (and all, muted): Hold us in your mercy. (One time)

We pray for a deepening of our faith so that we may shine upon others the light of your love in all that we say and do.

 Pat (and all, muted): Hold us in your mercy.

We pray for your blessing upon the work of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and of the congregations which they support, and in gratitude for the visible sign of your love that their work provides.

 Pat (and all, muted): Hold us in your mercy.

For what else shall we pray? Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute yourself afterwards.

(Shared prayers)

O Great Love, we place all of our prayers, those spoken and those unspoken, into your care, and we entrust the outcome to you. Amen.

 Pat (and all, muted): Hold us in your mercy.

**OFFERTORY (Joan and Stu Sklamm)**

Joan: Loving God, each week we have been offering to you our intent to take a specific action. Week by week, we commit and recommit. Our commitments evolve as we let in more and more light. In musical meditation, we ask you, Holy One: how are we – how am I – to bring your light into the week ahead?

Stu plays: “Take, O Take Me As I Am” by John Bell [Repeat as needed for about a minute.] (**Betty:** Start slide 5 in Joan’s final sentence.

Stop slide after Stu plays, before Joan speaks.)

Joan: In thanksgiving for the presence and power of Jesus Christ, and in unity with the Holy Spirit, let us pray. God of abundance, we commit to sharing our time, talents, and treasures so we that we may be a light and a witness to the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Donna Sasser)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in and among us. [Pause.]

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet.

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the cup,

gifts of the earth and work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it. [Pause.]

Let us invite God into ourselves so that we become God’s living presence in our world. [Pause.]

Holy One, you transform us as you nourish us here.

May we nourish others with your presence.

Amen.

**OUR FATHER (Kathy Heller)**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with Christians throughout the world in the words that Jesus gave us:

***All (muted):*** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,

and do not let us fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil

for the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING** by Jan Richardson **(Sr. Jo’Ann DeQuattro)**

Let us extend our hands over each other and bless each other.

**Blessed are you**
who bear the light
in unbearable times,
who testify
to its endurance
amid the unendurable,
who bear witness
to its persistence
when everything seems
in shadow
and grief.

**Blessed are you**in whom
the light lives,
in whom
the brightness blazes—
your heart
a chapel,
an altar where
in the deepest night
can be seen
the fire that
shines forth in you
in unaccountable faith,
in stubborn hope,
in love that illumines
every broken thing
it finds. Amen.

**CLOSING SONG:** “We Are Marching in the Light of God” **(Reggie Ott)**

We are marching-

in the light of God;

we are marching in the light of God.

We are marching-

in the light of God;

we are marching in the light of God.

We are dancing-

in the light of God;

we are dancing in the light of God.

We are dancing-

in the light of God;

we are dancing in the light of God.

We are praying-

in the light of God;

we are praying in the light of God.

We are praying-

in the light of God;

we are praying in the light of God.

We are singing-

in the light of God;

we are singing in the light of God.

We are singing-

in the light of God;

we are singing in the light of God.

**RESOURCES**

* Opening Ritual – “Lent is a call…” quote from Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister: <http://rosemarieberger.com/2011/03/15/joan-chittister-lent-is-a-chance-to-grieve/>
* Opening Ritual – image from “Dawn: A Time-Lapse Photography Experiment” by John Davenport: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xF49lnywnAE>
* Offertory image, 4th Sunday: And live in me, image: "More enduring than sun and moon" by Jan Richardson. Used with permission. <https://janrichardsonimages.com/gallery.php?gid=62>
* Final blessing – Jan Richardson: <https://adventdoor.com/2014/12/12/advent-3-testify-to-the-light/>
* Scriptures, usccb.org
* Reflection reading: Bryan Stevenson, Just Mercy, (Spiegel& Grau Trade Paperback Edition 2019), 287, 288, 290-291, 294
* Music-“We Are Marching in the Light of God”, The Presbyterian Hymnal, Westminster John Knox Press (First Ed. 2013)