**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer for March 21, 2021**

**Fifth Sunday of Lent**

*“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  (Betty or Suzie)**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Alicia and George Urban prepared today’s communal prayer.
* Thanks to Reggie Ott, Stu Sklamm, Linda Donaldson, Marilyn Voigt, and Pat Campbell for leading our music.
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today: Karen and Dan McCarthy, Ann LoPiano, Anne Regan, Joan Sklamm, Gail DeGeorge, and Peg Duchesne.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please put a note in Chat or email later.
* We will have services at 7:30 in the evening on Holy Thursday and Good Friday.
* In response to a request, we will try something new so that you have the reflection questions available for more than 2 minutes. We will post them in Chat. But we still ask you not to use Chat for your thoughts and comments until after the final song.

**SETTLING IN (George Urban)**

We are not all in the same place, 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.

**OPENING RITUAL**  **(George and Alicia)**

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

All: O God, we hear you calling.

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

All:  O God, we hear you calling.

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

All:  O God, we hear you calling.

Linda (and all, muted):  “Change our hearts (this time)” by Rory Cooney

Change our hearts this time,  
You word says it can be.  
Change our minds this time  
Your life could make us free.  
We are the people your call set apart,  
Lord, this time change our hearts.

**George**: “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 during last sentence above.

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

Alicia and George:  Let us pray together:

All (muted): **(Alicia)**

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.)**

Linda (and all, muted):

Change our hearts this time,  
Your word says it can be.  
Change our minds this time  
Your life could make us free.  
We are the people your call set apart,  
Lord, this time change our hearts.

**CALL TO WORSHIP / GATHERING PRAYER** **(Karen or Dan McCarthy)**

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]

Alicia Urban will now introduce us to today’s Old Testament reading.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME                              (Alicia Urban]**

Last week we read again of God’s infinite mercy.  Our readings for today tell of the length and breadth of God’s love and forgiveness.  We begin with the prophet Jeramiah’s announcement that the Lord promised to make a new covenant with the Israelites in exile.

Though we are familiar with the term, what did ‘covenant’ mean to Jeremiah? Covenant was an agreement of a superior with a servant.  The King or landowner would offer protection if the vassals would obey and respect him and follow his decrees. Scripture scholar Father Lawrence Boadtwrites: “…the idea of covenant originally meant a ‘shackle’ or ‘chained,’ but it came to be any form of binding agreement. …..the covenant with the nation of Israel created unity of the nation Israel not based on blood relationship but on submission to the divine will and the confession that he alone is God. In return, God pledges himself to be Israel’s personal protector….”

The Israelites agreed and then broke covenant over and over again.  Scripture shows us the pattern:  breaking covenant when things went well or defeating enemies; repenting when threatened or defeated: like “help, help, we’re sorry,” then asking for forgiveness.  Always, God forgave them, again and again.  It is like a 4-act play: sin, punishment, repentance, forgiveness.    Doesn’t this pattern continue today?

In Jeremiah the Israelites were offered a new covenant, not written on tablets but on their hearts.  We too can turn to God, repent, be forgiven and renew our relationship.

Marilyn Voight will lead us into the readings and Anne LoPiano will read from Jeremiah.

**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.

**READING 1** [**Jer 31:31-34**](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/jeremiah/31?31) **(Anne LoPiano)**

The days are coming, says the LORD,   
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel   
and the house of Judah.  
It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers  
the day I took them by the hand   
to lead them forth from the land of Egypt;   
for they broke my covenant,   
and I had to show myself their master, says the LORD.

But this is the covenant that I will make   
with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD.  
I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts;   
I will be their God, and they shall be my people.  
No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives  
how to know the LORD.  
All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD,   
for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTIONS (Anne Regan)**

How do you feel when you renew your personal covenant with our Triune God~~?~~

How do you feel about God’s writing divine expectations on your heart?

Do you have a heart open to receiving God’s commandments? What might be in the way?

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

Betty:  Next, Alicia will introduce us to John’s gospel.

**GOSPEL INTRODUCTION (Alicia)**

John organizes the major theme of his gospel into 7 signs that lead to his “Hour.” The theme begins at the wedding feast at Cana. Jesus told his mother that it was not his hour even though he changes the water into wine.  In this segment he tells his disciples his “hour” has come, his hour of glory: death and resurrection.  He urges his friends to hear two messages:  give your whole self away (like a seed) and enter with him into abundant divine life.

Yet, he is troubled by what lies ahead. A voice comes from above and speaks of the glorification of Jesus. The scene is similar to the time of his baptism and transfiguration. Jesus tells the crowd, the voice comes for them. Then he tells his followers about serving him and how that ties to his words: “the Father “will honor whoever serves me.”

George Urban will read from the Gospel of John.

**GOSPEL** [Jn 12:20-33](https://bible.usccb.org/bible/john/12?20) **(George Urban)**

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Passover Feast  
came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee,   
and asked him, “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”  
Philip went and told Andrew;   
then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

Jesus answered them,   
“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.  
Amen, amen, I say to you,   
unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies,   
it remains just a grain of wheat;   
but if it dies, it produces much fruit.  
Whoever loves his life loses it,  
and whoever hates his life in this world  
will preserve it for eternal life.  
Whoever serves me must follow me,    
and where I am, there also will my servant be.  
The Father will honor whoever serves me.

“I am troubled now.  Yet what should I say?  
‘Father, save me from this hour’?  
But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour.  
Father, glorify your name.”  
Then a voice came from heaven,   
“I have glorified it and will glorify it again.”  
The crowd there heard it and said it was thunder;   
but others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”

Jesus answered and said,   
“This voice did not come for my sake but for yours.  
Now is the time of judgment on this world;   
now the ruler of this world will be driven out.  
And when I am lifted up from the earth,   
I will draw everyone to myself.”  
He said this indicating the kind of death he would die.

**REFLECTIONS**     **(Anne Regan)**

How do you feel about being able to die in aspects of your life today?  How might you fill those spaces with new, abundant spiritual life?

Put yourself in this scene and listen with the crowd to the voice from heaven. How does it feel to have the Voice of God speak to you?  How do you respond?

When have you given your whole self away in love?  How did it feel?

**SHARING TIME                            (George Urban)**

We invite you to briefly share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you have reflected upon our reading and music.  Try to remember to speak how you feel in response to our readings and reflections. Use 1st person singular if possible.

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.  We have posted the questions in Chat. However, please do not use Chat until after the final hymn. [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.

Now Greg and Pat Campbell will lead prayers of the community.

**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.

We pray for peace in our nation and in the world. May there be solidarity among all of us.

 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 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             (Gail DeGeorge)**

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                          (Karen or Dan McCarthy)**

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                     (Peg Duchesne)**

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

**From “The Hill We Climb” by Amanda Gorman**

When day comes, we step out of the shade,  
aflame and unafraid,  
the new dawn blooms as we free it.  
For there is always light,  
if only we're brave enough to see it.  
If only we're brave enough to be it. Amen.

**CLOSING SONG (Reggie Ott)**

“Save Us, O Lord” (Bob Dufford)

Refrain: Save us, O Lord, carry us back.

Rose your power and come.

Rescue your people, show us your face.

Bring us back.

O Shepherd of Israel, hear us.

Return and we shall be saved.

Arise, O Lord! Hear our cries, O Lord!

Bring us back! Refrain

Turn again, care for your vine;

Protect what your right hand has planted.

Your vineyards are trampled, uprooted, and burned.

Come to us, Father of might! Refrain

**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, 5th Sunday:  Take, O Take me as I am, image:  “One Searing Word”  by Jan Richardson.  Used with permission.  <https://janrichardsonimages.com/gallery.php?gid=62>
* Final blessing – Amanda Gorman, from “The Hill We Climb”: <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/20/amanda-gormans-inaugural-poem-the-hill-we-climb-full-text.html>
* Raymond Brown, [*An Introduction to the New Testament*](https://www.amazon.com/Introduction-Testament-Anchor-Reference-Library-ebook/dp/B01344K3LY)
* Lawrence Boadt, Paulist priest, Scripture scholar, and editor of Paulist Press, [*Reading the Old Testament*](https://www.amazon.com/Reading-Old-Testament-Introduction-Second/dp/0809147807)
* Grace Alceanu, homily for the Fifth Sunday of Lent at Catholic Women Preach, <https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/032120214>