



SPEAK A WORD

2022 LENTEN STUDY

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We Beseech Thee

The flow of each week is: Scripture, thematic focus, prayer-poem, moment of reflection, and closing hymn.

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Speak A Word

In intentional moments, like the season of Lent, we quiet ourselves to hear the heartbeat of the Spirit, the wisdom of Jesus, and the will of our Creator. With anticipation, let us listen for the voice of God through Scripture, prayer and one another.

Creator God,

Deep in the night,
within the silence,
I hear your voice.
You speak to me
and fill my hearing
with your Holy Word.

Early in the morning,
within the stillness
of my mediation,
I hear your voice.
You whisper into my
spirit your Holy Word.

In the womb of prayer,
within the rapture,
I hear your voice.
You speak to me
and fill my consciousness
with your Holy Word.

May I be comforted by
your words of grace.
May I be corrected by
your words of instruction.
May I be renewed by
your words of resurrection.
May I be encouraged by
your words of prophecy.
May I be changed by
Your Word. Amen

– By LaTrelle Miller Easterling, January 13, 2015

Beloved,

Before COVID-19, I wholeheartedly anticipated a more traditional focus upon the sacrifices of Lent and a time of deep introspection. However, after two years of loss, exhaustion from all the changes in lifestyle and church and from the struggles over just about everything, many come to this season weary and spent.

You are now invited to lean deeper into discipleship and the comforting, life-saving, hope-bringing, counter-cultural, transforming power of God. God's Word still speaks to us individually and corporately. When we immerse ourselves in it with intentionality, it can spark creativity and inspire us to speak as well. This study consists of Scripture, prayer-poems and reflections where we speak words of Life into one another as we reflect. These prayer-poems came as a gift over the years from the Spirit to me. I share some of them with you in the hope that they bring opportunities for conversation, creativity and growth.



Prayerfully consider joining a fast for connection with others on a Journey to Beloved Community: Six Actions for Being and Becoming. In so doing, may we increase our capacity to live out the Word and better love God and neighbors.

May your Lent be blessed.

*– LaTrelle Miller Easterling
Bishop, Baltimore-Washington and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences
The United Methodist Church*

(For those who would like to preach alongside this study, Feasting on the Word Lenten Companion: A Thematic Resource for Preaching and Worship is an excellent resource that has been used to create the outline for this study.)

SEEK



Week 1: Seek Truth

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

[Numbers 21:4-9:](#)

The Bronze Snake's Healing Power

[John 3:1-21:](#)

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

Notice the role of questions in these Scripture passages. When we're broken, when we're feeling less than whole, we turn to God seeking direction. New life is ours if we are willing to open our hearts, claim the courage to not take the easy path and live among the deepest questions. Today, in this pandemic, we wear masks to protect and preserve life. But how willing are we to discard our metaphorical masks and stand with vulnerability before the mirror as we seek truth?

NO MORE MASKS

God of Truth,

What would happen if we removed our masks?

If we removed our masks and stood in truth before you?

If we removed our masks and stood in truth before one another?

If we removed our masks and stood in truth before the mirror?

Strengthen our faith that the burden of the mask is unnecessary before you.

Reveal the joy that could be ours if we really accepted others as you created them.

Encourage our hearts that we might understand the *shalom* of loving our true selves.

No more masks. Amen.

– by LaTrelle Miller Easterling, October 31, 2014

MOMENT OF REFLECTION:

Nicodemus comes seeking light, even as he uses darkness as a cover. Do you ever wrestle between darkness and light? What is one area in your life in which you hide your true self by putting on a mask or cover? How does this mask separate you from who God intends you to be?

If you are doing this study in a small group, take turns sharing your response. After each person speaks, the group will respond: "Be born again of the Spirit. Know that God loves you beyond measure, just as you are."

After you have finished sharing, discuss:

- In what ways do our masks keep us from being truly born anew?
- How might your faith community help one another to seek truth and remove the burden of the metaphorical masks we all wear?

CLOSING HYMN
(CHOOSE ONE):

"Lord of the Dance,"
UMH #261

"What Wondrous Love
is This," UMH #292



Week 2: Trust in Provision

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

[Exodus 17:1-7:](#)

Water from a Rock

[John 4:1-42:](#)

The Samaritan Woman at the Well Meets Jesus

God, the maker of heaven and earth, has provided for creation since before the earth was even formed. God knows our needs, both physical and spiritual. God also desires that we demonstrate trust and belief in God's providential care.

When we encounter Christ in our everyday vulnerabilities, he can renew our souls with living water. Jesus knows our hearts and when we claim and proclaim him as Lord, blessings rain down.

MOMENT OF REFLECTION:

Where in your life have you grumbled against God? Do you trust that God is present when difficulties arise in your life? What are you really thirsting for in this season; what are you bringing to Jesus at the well?

After each person who wishes to shares, discuss:

- Describe a time you behaved like the Israelites in our Scripture reading and how God provided for you in the midst of that experience.

YOU HAVE ALWAYS MADE PROVISION

Darkness covered the face of the deep and
Nothing that is formed had been formed as chaos loomed,
And you called forth order and light and seasons and life.
You have always made provision, and yet I doubt.

Manna rained down from the heavens and
Water sprang forth from impervious rock
In the desert places you provided succor for life.
You have always made provision, and yet I grumble against you.

Enemies pursued and encamped around me
As the hoofbeat of horses and the breath of death was hot on my back
You parted the waters into walls of safe passage on dry ground.
You have always made provision, and yet I lack faith.

Judgment rose against the rejected and the sting of exclusion pierced the heart
Seeking the solace of the solitary and yet imprisoned within the same
You cast aside custom and transcended tradition to see me and speak
truth into my life.
You have always made provision, and yet I lose hope.

You have always made provision
You are making provision
You will always make provision

May I learn to trust you as Jehovah Jireh.
May I learn to have confidence in your provision.
May I learn to tell others of your constant providence.

– by LaTrelle Miller Easterling

If you are doing this study in a small group, take turns sharing your responses. After each person speaks, the group will respond:

“May you drink from the water that Jesus gives and never be thirsty again.”

- In what ways could your congregation do a better job of proclaiming God's refreshment and renewal to your community? How are you bringing the promise of resurrection to those you encounter?

CLOSING HYMN:

“There's a Wideness in God's Mercy,” UMH #121



Week 3: Anticipate Healing

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

[Isaiah 35:4-7a:](#)

Prophecy of a Messiah who Heals

[John 9:1-42:](#)

A Blind Man is Healed by Jesus

How many times in our lives have we been blind to the truth, have we been wounded, have we hurt or been unable to fully live into the image of God in which we were created? When have we valued rules or procedures more than compassion? God is with us – always – and God heals.

MOMENT OF REFLECTION:

What restoration and healing are you longing for? What healing is necessary in the community around you and in the world? Where do our eyes need to be opened to fuller understanding of God's intention for the beloved community?

If you are doing this study in a small group, take turns sharing your responses. After each person speaks, the group will respond:

"Be strong! Don't fear! May God's mighty works be displayed in you."

After you have finished sharing, discuss:

- How would you explain to someone who is new to the church what it means to feel the healing touch of God?
- What do we risk when we continue to walk in spiritual blindness?
- In what areas do you think the church today is blind? How might your faith community seek a miracle and help restore healing and wholeness to those in your midst and beyond?

CLOSING HYMN:

"Breathe on Me, Breath of God," UMH #420

MASTER HEALER

God of All Healing,
You who knit us together in the womb of a woman,
fashioning our bodies in intricate ways –
fearfully and wonderfully made,
bearers of the image and likeness of the Creator,
temples of the Holy One –
know every cell and sinew.

When we long for healing beyond the bounds of
human hands and medicine,
beyond the threshold of disease and diagnosis,
we turn to you.

You are the Master Healer.

When you touch we are healed.
When you touch we are whole.
When you touch we are restored.

Touch, God of all healing, touch. Amen.

– by LaTrelle Miller Easterling, April 29, 2014

When You Cannot Cry

When the wounds are too numerous to count
and their sources too varied and disparate,
yet concentrated enough to create a compound
fracturing of the heart,
And, you cannot cry...

It is time to find a quiet space...

it is time to disconnect and disengage...

it is time to cease doing...

it is time to return to the center of all centers...

it is time to surrender to the breath of all breath...

it is time to seek the shalom of Jehovah-Rapha...

It is time to heal.

– by LaTrelle Miller Easterling, June 29, 2018



HOPE

Week 4: Have Hope

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

[Ezekiel 37:1-14:](#)

Valley of the Dry Bones

[John 11:1-46:](#)

Lazarus is Raised from the Dead

As we read of dry bones lying in the valley dismembered and scattered, they appear beyond any hope for regeneration. And yet, God speaks through the prophet and that which was dead lives again. We have hope! Doubt, despair, pity and hopelessness challenge us all. Life can overwhelm. But God offers a life-giving fresh movement of the spirit, "All will be well."

WHY IS IT WELL?

Gracious and Holy God,

As the words rise from my lips
and fall upon the ears of the world
I ask myself, "Why is it well with my soul?"

It is well because I have resigned myself
to the belief that my present circumstances
will dictate my future or control my destiny?
No!

It is well because the God I serve intervenes
in circumstances and turns them into possibilities
and opportunities not yet envisioned.

It is well because I have accepted that those who
persecute me will always have the upper hand?
No!

It is well because the God of deliverance
has already mapped the course for my
victory and felled the arrows in flight.

It is well because I have acquiesced to the notion
that my very being is flawed, detestable, or undesirable?
No!

It is well because the God of creation has whispered
in my ear
that my being,
my essence,
my core,
is precious, noble, exquisite, beautiful, brilliant and
blessed.

It is well because I have believed that joy and security
will only be mine in the life to come?
No!

It is well because God has assured me that I will live
to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

It is well with my soul because today God is able –
right here and right now –
to transform and transcend,
breakthrough and bestow,
cleanse and create,
liberate and love.

It is well! Amen.

– by LaTrelle Miller Easterling, September 16, 2014

MOMENT OF REFLECTION:

What situation seems dead, dried-up or devoid of
possibility in your life? Do you believe God can speak
new life into it?

If you are doing this study in a small group, take
turns sharing your responses. After each person
speaks, the group will respond:
"God has put God's breath in you. Rise up! Live!"

After you have finished sharing, discuss:

- Is it well with your soul? Why?
- For your faith community, how is hope a spiritual discipline and a declarative proclamation? Are you willing to prophecy to the dry bones in our valleys?

CLOSING HYMN:

"It is Well with My Soul," UMH #377



Week 5: Love Abundantly

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

[1 Kings 17:8-16:](#)

Elijah and the Widow's Oil that Does Not Run Out

[John 12:1-11:](#)

Mary of Bethany Anoints Jesus' Feet

This week our sacred texts reveal sacrificial, unconditional love on full display. Too often in life we are scared of our circumstance or snared by the challenges of the day. This week we name our truth as we remember Christ's promise of abundant life – a life that is beyond all our imagining, a life of discipleship, rich in the fullness of God. With heart, mind and soul we listen for that still, small voice and accept the blessings of God's extravagant love.

MOMENT OF REFLECTION:

The widow named her burdens—"only a handful of flour in a jar and a bit of oil in a bottle...We'll eat the last of the food and then die." Name your burdens and also where you see signs of God's abundant love.

If you are doing this study in a small group, take turns sharing your responses. After each person speaks, the group will respond: "Don't be afraid! Listen for God's messengers of abundant love."

After you have finished sharing, discuss:

- How does the extravagant love of God unexpectedly show up in your life and the lives of those you love?
- How can your church more intentionally celebrate the ways God's extravagant love works miracles: overcoming challenges, healing brokenness and bringing hope to despair?

CLOSING HYMN:

"Great is Thy Faithfulness," UMH #140

YOUR EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

Good and Gracious God,

Your extravagant love is poured over my life as a balm, as a salve to heal my brokenness and restore my joy. Even as death encircled me and my very breath was being stripped away, your love saved me.

Your extravagant love provided abundance in my deepest hour of need. As I laid awake and heavy burdened by the weight and worry of
 Hunger without sufficient food
 Diagnosis but no means for care
 Impending storms and insufficient shelter
 your love restored me.

Your extravagant love performed miracles when mountains seemed too high and valleys appeared too low. As circumstances became challenges and challenges became crises you took notice of my despair and spoke calm over my life, your love blessed me.

Your extravagant love calls me to a life of extravagant praise
 my tongue extols your greatness
 my knees bend in adoration
 my feet dance in gratitude
 my whole being praises your holy name!

Your extravagant love is my all and all.

– by LaTrelle Miller Easterling, January 12, 2013



Week 6: Humbly Serve

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

[1 Samuel 16:1-13:](#)

Anointing the Boy David

[John 13:1-17:](#)

Jesus Washes Peter's Feet

God's selection and expectations of leaders are more about the condition of one's heart and quality of humility than societal presumptions. From riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, to washing the disciple's feet, to forgiving on the cross, Jesus continues to reverse expectations and God exalts the lowly and humbles the proud.

MOMENT OF REFLECTION:

How do your actions mirror the example of Jesus as he washed the disciples' feet at the last supper? What do humility and equality mean before God?

If you are doing this study in a small group, take turns sharing your responses. After each person speaks, the group will respond:

"May you continue to pattern your life after Jesus and be blessed along the journey."

After you have finished sharing, discuss:

- How is the life of Jesus teaching you to have a servant's heart? Why is convicted humility so important in the life of disciples?
- How does your faith community select and equip leaders to serve as agents of God's transforming, equalizing love? What more can be done?

EQUAL IN GOD'S SIGHT

Holy God,

How long until we believe in your Word, O God?

You do not privilege male over female, nor female over male;
There is no master race, no peoples beloved more than another;
No being was created to be enslaved, nor to live in forced servitude;
Your blessing falls on all without reservation.

How long until we live your Word, O God?

Courts, councils, and countries cannot confer on humanity more
dignity, worth or status than your image imparted on all flesh.
There exists no creed, constitution or covenant that supersedes
your divine will for equality, equity, and egalitarianism.
May our practices fulfill your prophecy on earth as it is in heaven.

How long until we teach your Word, O God?

May we cease devaluing, demeaning, and destroying one another
out of greed, hatred, and lust.

From the pew to the pulpit, may our words resound with your
truth that all flesh – all flesh – is equal in your sight. Amen.

– by LaTrelle Miller Easterling, June 20, 2014

CLOSING HYMN:

"They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love," TFWS #2223

JOURNEY

Triduum: Journey to the Cross and Beyond

As the sacred drama of Holy Week unfolds, we are called to be participants in that holy story. How do we journey with Jesus through the last supper and how will we stand at the foot of the cross? What words do we cry out to heaven? And how does God, with unexpected grace, respond?

IN THIS HOLY TIME CONSIDER:

- What part of the story of Jesus' last week on earth most resonates with you?
- What are the modern-day Calvaries that face our world?
- What might the stories of Holy Week awaken in your faith community this year?

Holy Week Truths to Ponder

In dying, Christ taught us how to live.
 On the cross, Christ
 Forgave his enemies
 Included the condemned
 Cared for others
 Prayed for understanding
 Humbled himself
 Completed his mission
 Trusted God completely
 Will we choose life, or will we choose death?
 Were you there, when Christ taught us how to live?

– by LaTrelle Miller Easterling

WE BESEECH THEE

Holy God,
 Fear again permeates the air as bullets and words rip through flesh and confident facades, leaving shrapnel and security in their wake.
 Calm us, Holy God.

Terror traces the globe and pierces the everyday joy of ordinary people who have not transacted in violence nor traded in deceit.
 Hold us, Holy God.

Hatred brews in the hearts of men and women and boils over into the rage of miscellaneous murder and maiming and mayhem, never counting the cost.
 Cleanse us, Holy God.

Dealing in death has become a common occurrence and our minds have grown numb to the taking of lives and carnage in our streets.
 Wake us, Holy God.

We blame others for the disappointments of our lives rather than looking inward and owning our own decisions and mistakes and missteps.
 Focus us, Holy God.

Prophets and preachers and politicians and pundits have too often been distracted by the shiny objects of nothingness, rather than shining a light into the darkness, casting out lies and revealing your truth.
 Speak to us, Holy God.

We are soul-sick and heart-sick and yet continue to turn to panaceas that do not heal, will not release, and cannot loose.
 Heal us, Holy God.

Help us God, even if we do not ask, for it is clear that we cannot help ourselves. Amen.

– by LaTrelle Miller Easterling