

2016

Daily Reflections

A Season of **Peace** 



PEACE & GLOBAL WITNESS
SPECIAL OFFERINGS



Sunday, September 4, 2016

The Table of Peace

Matthew 5:21–37

Submitted by Matt Gaventa, Amherst, Virginia

When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you . . .—Matthew 5:23–24

Reflection: If You Remember

The legendary preacher Fred Craddock, reflecting on this passage, tells the story of a woman who worked as the receptionist for a high-profile international organization in Geneva dedicated to peacemaking and reconciliation. “It was a good job and a well-paying job,” he says, but she quit after six years because her bosses, so committed to peace and reconciliation, could not be bothered to engage her in conversation. As Craddock tells her story, “all those marvelous people coming and going, trying to bring about the healings of the nations, never spoke to me. The people for whom I worked never called me by name.”

Peacemaking begins with us, in the relationships of our own lives. In this season of peace, we build toward World Communion Sunday with stories of peacemakers and justice-seekers from all across the world. It’s easy to feel a bit overshadowed. And yet peacemaking really begins with us, with our friends and family, and with our actions. So as we approach the table of World Communion Sunday together, if you remember, before we gather, that your brother or sister has something against you: go, make peace. And then come back and offer your gift.

Action: Name one strained relationship in your life. How can you make amends in this season?

Prayer: God, send your Spirit of peace upon our hearts, that we might be peacemakers in our own lives.

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Monday, September 5, 2016

The Table of Peace

Galatians 5:16–26

Submitted by Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness . . .—Galatians 5:22**

Reflection: My Namesake

I was born in the United States to parents who had emigrated from South Korea. Most children in my situation are given a Korean name upon birth along with an “American” name. This tradition of a Korean name is usually given from a grandparent, but for lots of complicated reasons, my siblings and I were not given Korean names.

My parents, hoping that one day my grandfather would give us one, waited and gave us each “American” names. I was given the name Irene, which in Greek means “peace.” When I asked my parents later why they chose that name, my mom told me she named me after her first friend in the US, someone who was kind to her and welcomed her.

Peace can mean so many things to different people, but what a gift to be named after someone remembered for her kindness and welcome!

Action: What simple act of kindness or welcome can you extend today that might bring shalom?

Prayer: Dear God, help us to bear and share the fruit you give to us. Amen.

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Tuesday, September 6, 2016

The Table of Peace

John 16:29–33

Submitted by Abby Mohaupt, El Granada, California

**In the world you face persecution. But take courage;
I have conquered the world!—John 16:33**

Reflection: Take Courage!

I was walking in Bethlehem on the Mosaic of Peace trip to the Holy Land in 2014. We had just visited the graffiti'ed walls that separate the Palestinians from the Jews, a tangible reminder that the Holy Land is broken and troubled. I was trying to not be afraid of the world around me.

A little girl tried to greet me, but it was hard without a shared language. I knelt down in front of her, and she gestured at my earrings: plain, little hoops that I hadn't taken out in a year.

Give them to me, she seemed to be saying. I hesitated. *Should I give them to her?* Then she took out her own earrings and held them out to me.

A trade.

I laughed as I wiggled my hoops out of my earlobes and handed them to her. She looked at me. I took my earrings back, but only so I could fasten them in her ears.

"Thank you for coming," she said. And then she disappeared up the street.

Action: How can you make a "troubled" part of your community a place of peace? What gift could you offer?

Prayer: Holy God, help us be unafraid and open to unexpected places and encounters of peace. Amen.

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Wednesday, September 7, 2016

The Table of Peace

Matthew 5:1-11

Submitted by Sabrina Slater, Spokane, Washington

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.—Matthew 5:9

Reflection: Child of God

Recently, in a devotional time with youth, one teenager shared that they had promised their mother that they would change their name as soon as they turned eighteen. Their given name was too common. They wanted a name they could choose for themselves. Would you? How many of us always like our names?

And yet God has given us a name that we cannot change. All around us, we hear our world's brokenness: the death toll from gun violence, wars waged abroad and at home, people living in terror around the globe. The news hurts—it's overwhelming! And I don't want to read *The Beatitudes* because I know my name: *peacemaker*.

Through Jesus Christ we have been called children of God, and that means we are called peacemakers. Some days it's hard; some days we might be so tired we want to change our names, but it doesn't matter. It doesn't even matter where you stand in the policies and politics of the day. In the end, we are all called children of God. In the end, we are all called to be peacemakers.

Action: Find one way to pursue peace today. Join a peacemaking group, visit a town hall meeting—or at least sign up for updates from the PC(USA) Office of Compassion, Peace and Justice!

Prayer: Creator God, please give us the strength to live into our divine name. Give us wisdom in pursuing peace. Amen.

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Thursday, September 8, 2016

The Table of Peace

Isaiah 52:7–10

Submitted by Steve Willis, Bedford, Virginia

**How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet
of the messenger who announces peace!—Isaiah 52:7**

Reflection: Longing for Peace

Out the front door of our house, I can be on the Appalachian Trail in close to 15 minutes. The Blue Ridge Mountains are some of the oldest mountains in the world, and yet they still dazzle with the wonder of laurel and rhododendron blooms and still teach the lessons of natural interconnection.

In my short span of days, I have been on the trail long enough to know that anyone who spends time on the Appalachian Trail does not have beautiful feet. In this Isaiah verse, there must be something about the messenger's news of peace that makes her feet beautiful.

How we long for shalom!—for the wholeness, the fullness and goodness of life! Yet at the base of the mountain, amidst everyday life, we experience it as fragmented and torn. If you are not at this moment feeling the fullness of God's peace, can you be in touch with this deep yearning?

Action: In a moment of quiet reflection, can you feel your heart beat? Where does your heart long and ache for peace within your life?

Prayer: God of peace, let my longing turn me to you. Make me attentive to the longing of my neighbor. Amen.

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Friday, September 9, 2016

The Table of Peace

Mark 12:28–34

Submitted by Stephanie Quintana-Martinez, Puerto Rico

And to love God with all of the heart, a full understanding, and all of one's strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more important than all kinds of entirely burned offerings and sacrifices.—Mark 12:33

Reflection: Above All, Love

Despite a full agenda, we went around the table sharing words of love and appreciation for each other before starting our meeting. Violence everywhere is a constant reminder that our work for peace and justice is endless and urgent. In the midst of such urgency, it's easy to overlook the power of intentional communal love as we seek a more peaceful and just world.

The ministry of the gospel is, above all, about love. Jesus instructs us to love ourselves and to love our neighbor. Therefore, as we seek to fulfill our calling to do justice, love should be at the center of our life in community. Love, in intention and in practice, should be an embrace, an act of resistance against violence, and an instrument of peace.

Action: Next time you sit at the table during a social justice meeting or a church gathering, take time for words of appreciation and affirmation for your brothers and sisters working for justice and peace. Prioritize love as an important task in the peacemaking agenda.

Prayer: Jesus, in a world broken by violence, might we work faithfully for peace surrounding and uplifting each other with deep love. Amen.

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Saturday, September 10, 2016

The Table of Peace

Psalm 34

Submitted by Erin Counihan, St. Louis, Missouri

Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.—Psalm 34:14

Reflection: The Bunker

We called it “the bunker,” but it was really just four sleeping bags laid out in a row in front of the television in my old apartment off of Broadway. In the days after September 11, 2001, we got up in the morning, went to work, and then immediately came back to the bunker to check in with Tom Brokaw, to absorb any new information, to stare silently at the images on that screen, and to pray for peace.

Zipped tight in our bunker, I prayed and prayed for peace and safety and peace and more peace. I didn’t want to be outside. I wanted God to just fix things. *Fix us*. I still pray that prayer sometimes. When I’m especially scared. Because it would be so much easier if God would just do it for us. But the answer I almost always get, and the answer I kept avoiding in those bunker days, is clear: *seek peace, and pursue it*. God wants me involved in this peace. God wants us involved in this peace.

So out of our bunkers, friends—let’s get to work.

Action: What one thing can you *do* today to pursue peace? Do it.

Prayer: O Lord, in this troubled world, and in the dark corners of our own hearts, help us to be agents of your peace. Amen.

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Sunday, September 11, 2016

The Table of Justice

John 21:15–19

Submitted by Matt Gaventa, Amherst, Virginia

Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”—John 21:17

Reflection: Satisfy the Hungry Heart

As a teenage boy, I went through that phase when I could just eat everything, all the time. On Sunday mornings, if I had breezed through breakfast, church could be difficult. I wasn't thinking about the sermon. I was thinking about coffee hour, or lunch, or wherever my next meal would come from. And communion Sundays were the worst. I didn't really want a *symbol* of God's abundance. I wanted the actual thing, not some little thimble of juice and cube of bread. I could have eaten the entire loaf, and without it, I certainly couldn't feel the connection with God I was meant to feel in that moment.

Of course there's a big difference between being a privileged hungry teenager and actually living a life of hunger. Nonetheless, throughout the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly insists on the ministry of meeting the material needs of the people, as here in John, where he distills Peter's call into these three words. “Feed my sheep.” It's a reminder that ministries of material justice are at the very heart of what the church has always been called to do. It's a reminder that ministries of food, clothing, shelter, medical care—these are not symbolic outcomes of our communion table but rather the very building blocks of its sacramental power.

Action: During your church's next canned food drive, stack the cans on the communion table during worship.

Prayer: Jesus, fill us with your love, that we might fill the needs of others. Amen.

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Monday, September 12, 2016

The Table of Justice

Hosea 12:2–6

Submitted by Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

Hold fast to love and justice . . .—Hosea 12:6

Reflection: Love and Justice

In these times of fear-filled rhetoric and continued injustice for so many people in our country and the world, holding fast to love *and* justice together seems to be a practice that gets ignored and frowned upon. And although we have a lot of work to do and a long way to go, there's a group of women at the church where I serve who are holding love and justice together . . . in a way that I think even surprises them.

You see, a group of seasoned women of faith learned about and took on the issue of human trafficking a few years ago. Many had never heard of the issue and didn't even know it was a reality here in Silicon Valley. However, they took the time to educate themselves, attend seminars, and educate us as a congregation as well. Now, once a month, they stand outside the church along a busy road with posters that call attention to knowing the signs of human trafficking, giving information to passersby who stop to inquire. They've had police officers stop to talk to them and commend them on what they're doing, and they are hoping that perhaps someone might look into this particular justice issue they are raising. They choose to care and to act in love and justice.

Action: What is one justice issue that you might learn more about? What is a simple way to act upon it in love and in justice?

Prayer: God of love and God of justice, we ask that you would help us continue in our learning to promote love and justice for all people. Amen.

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Tuesday, September 13, 2016

The Table of Justice

Luke 18:1–8

Submitted by Abby Mohaupt, El Granada, California

**Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night?
Will he delay long in helping them?—Luke 18:7**

Reflection: A Little Perseverance

Outside the Trader Joe's in Berkeley was a woman sitting with a sign asking for food. We've all seen them, and usually we ignore them. But this particular woman was sitting with a sign that said, "I just want food."

I asked her, "What kind of food do you want?" "Orange juice," she said.

When I came out of the store, she said, "I've been sitting here all day! Thank you for seeing me."

And I wondered how often I've ignored people who are crying out for help. How easy it can be to respond!

Action: How can you respond to someone asking you for help? What would happen if you didn't ignore the request?

Prayer: God, help us listen to others, and help us know when to help, even as we ask you for help. Amen.

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Wednesday, September 14, 2016

The Table of Justice

Amos 5:1–25

Submitted by Sabrina Slater, Spokane, Washington

**But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness
like an ever-flowing stream!—Amos 5:24**

Reflection: I Have a Dream

Do you ever think about how much language shapes us? We've been told that you become what you eat, and so we think about our food diet. But what about our language diet? What are your most common ingredients? What are the words you use the most? (Maybe some four-letter ones rank high!) What about love, justice, and righteousness?

Prophets disrupt the parity of status quo. Prophets disrupt and change the power of the words we so frequently use. Amos was a prophet. But Martin Luther King, Jr. was a prophet too. Amos called a people back to what they were supposed to know: justice and righteousness. King called a people to live into who they said they were. Both were led by God—and both were rejected.

To seek justice, we must listen to our prophets and hear their wisdom because, without justice, we will not survive. What would we call the prophetic word offered today in the midst of so much death? Do we have ears to hear the new prophets in our midst and the way they keep challenging us?

Action: Read the full transcript of Martin Luther King, Jr. "I Have a Dream" speech. Could he offer the speech today?

Prayer: God who see the oppressed and set captives free—help me to join in Your life-giving work! Amen.

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Thursday, September 15, 2016

The Table of Justice

Micah 6:6–8

Submitted by Steve Willis, Bedford, Virginia

**What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?—Micah 6:8**

Reflection: Doing Justice

While driving up the gravel road to Ginny's house, I noticed a young man in the well house intently working away. Ginny was an aging widow who had lived and raised her children on a family farm. Her children now had children of their own and were spread across different cities. After visiting awhile on the porch, I asked Ginny about the young man. It turned out that Randall was a mountain neighbor still living at home and dealing with some level of autism.

Later I greeted him and he returned my greetings even as he continued working on the well pump. I asked him what he was doing, and he replied that he was "making it right." I said, "What, you mean the pump?" Randall responded, "Everything."

I still do not know what Randall had in mind with his response, but it does make me wonder just how much can be made right through one simple action of helping a neighbor.

Action: Today, what one simple action of kindness might you do to make the world right for a neighbor?

Prayer: God of justice, set the world aright with your loving kindness. Help me to be a part. Amen.

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Friday, September 16, 2016

The Table of Justice

Mark 21:12–17

Submitted by Stephanie Quintana-Martinez, Puerto Rico

Then Jesus went into the temple and threw out all those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves.—Matthew 21:12

Reflection: Turning the Table of Injustice

“Liberation not Deportation!” Community activists and church members chanted loudly while holding hands, creating a circle around the Border Patrol truck. Inside, a father and beloved member of our community, sat in the truck that will eventually transport him to a detention facility where he will risk deportation and separation from his family. Our act of civil disobedience was a statement of solidarity with this family in a moment of desperation and affliction. By holding hands and engaging in direct action against dehumanizing immigration policies, we were turning the tables of injustice.

While engaging in ministries of social justice, either through advocacy or direct action, confrontation is inescapable. Jesus turned the tables at the temple, and he was not shy or doubtful about challenging the merchants. By turning the tables of injustice, we courageously continue to embody solidarity and compassion so that all of God’s children can finally partake of the feast of justice.

Action: Don’t shy away from compassionately confronting power while engaging in the work of justice. Write letters to elected officials, chant loudly, advocate fiercely until all God’s children are free.

Prayer: Jesus, give us courage and determination to challenge power in the name of justice for our communities. Amen.

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Saturday, September 17, 2016

The Table of Justice

Mark 7:24–30

Submitted by Erin Counihan, St. Louis, Missouri

But she answered him . . .—Mark 7:28

Reflection: The Right Way

I remember the early days after the shooting: when all the respectable church folks issued statements calling for peace and for calm, when all of us pastors prayed publicly for peace and for calm, when we wanted people to settle down and do things the right way.

And then I remember the youth of our community standing in the street, facing tear gas and rubber bullets, chanting, “No justice! No peace!”

I’m embarrassed to say it, but it took walking the streets of Ferguson for me to really learn that if I am called to stand for peace, then I am first called to work for justice.

Action: Consider where your heart yearns for peace. Research what injustice is blocking that peace. Find one way to engage in the work of addressing that injustice in your community.

Prayer: O Holy One, open my eyes to the injustices which block peace’s path. Amen.

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Sunday, September 18, 2016

The Table of Reconciliation

Ephesians 2:11–20

Submitted by Matt Gaventa, Amherst, Virginia

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.—Ephesians 2:19

Reflection: Strangers and Aliens

One of the worst-kept secrets in Cape Town is that Desmond Tutu himself leads morning prayer on Fridays in the side chapel of St. George's Cathedral, and so we went. I expected a crowd of hundreds, but it was something much more intimate: maybe 60 people, many of them from groups like ours, visiting from all around the world. Tutu had us introduce ourselves: a youth group from Norway, a sailing team from California, a group of African American women from all over the Gulf Coast. And us, members of the PC(USA) Peacemaking Program Study/Travel Seminar. We were strangers and aliens indeed, met at this shared table halfway around the world, and his words felt like grace itself.

One of the African American women was from Waco, Texas, and I have family in Waco, so I sought her out right after the dismissal. Surely, connected at this table, we would now find all the other things we shared! But reconciliation isn't that easy. We couldn't find common landmarks; we couldn't find common threads. I don't know the city well, but even so, we both knew that the white church my family attends could be right next door to hers and still be across a dozen invisible barriers. We both knew that a moment's reconciliation on the far side of the world was no substitute for the real work of going home and finding each other again.

Action: Every community has invisible barriers. Reach out to a church on the other side of yours.

Prayer: Almighty God, as we are reconciled at the table, help us be reconciled in all the world. Amen.

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Monday, September 19, 2016

The Table of Reconciliation

Genesis 33:1–4

Submitted by Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.—Genesis 33:4

Reflection: Sibling Rivalry

I have always loved the story of Esau and Jacob because, even though they are twins, they are such different people. It speaks to what I think is the true dynamic of sibling rivalry, whether it's created by favoritism—perceived or real—from one parent or the other, or created by a situation involving trickery and shenanigans.

I hear stories of broken relationships among siblings all the time, and I think the task of reconciling those broken relationships can sometimes be the most difficult, because, like the story of Jacob and Esau, when we are wronged by someone we love and know so well, the anger we feel in the moment can run very deep. But if we allow the love to re-emerge, the reconciliation that can spring forth brings about a willingness to move forward . . . sometimes in a way we didn't think possible.

Action: Read through the full story of Jacob and Esau. In what ways does this reconciliation story touch your own?

Prayer: Holy One, help us to remember that with reconciliation of any kind, we also continue to reconcile ourselves to you. Amen.

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Tuesday, September 20, 2016

The Table of Reconciliation

Genesis 45:4–15

Submitted by Abby Mohaupt, El Granada, California

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.”—Genesis 45:4

Reflection: Deciding to Stay

We were supposed to be on opposite sides of the debate, enemies. Mike Cole was anti-divestment, and I wanted divestment to be part of our denomination’s response. But Mike and I wanted the conversation about the PC(USA)’s response to climate change at the 222nd General Assembly in Portland to be bigger than our individual opinions.

At General Assembly, we *worked together* to make conversations happen in civil and loving ways. In some ways it would have been easier to walk away from building a friendship, but deciding to stay meant that we each got a new friend.

Action: What is an issue that is close to your heart? Who disagrees with you about the issue, and how can you make that person a colleague and friend?

Prayer: God, you call us to care for creation. Help us to do that together and to build bridges, not divisions.

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Wednesday, September 21, 2016

The Table of Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:16–21

Submitted by Sabrina Slater, Spokane, Washington

**So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God
is making his appeal through us . . .—2 Corinthians 5:21**

Reflections: Ambassadors in Training

Have you ever met an ambassador? They live in the places they are sent to serve, representatives of their home—and they are trained in many ways. It sounds like a fabulously exciting life—but it takes the right preparation and the right set of tools.

We too are ambassadors—ambassadors for Christ, as Paul says. As ambassadors we are sent, sent into places needing reconciliation, and there are many! Scripture teaches us to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world! But we are not sent without preparation, because God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

As we approach World Communion Sunday, as we approach this table of reconciliation, the one only Christ could set and invite us to enjoy, remember: God cared so much about reconciliation that God came to earth, put on flesh, and walked with us. Being baptized into that same body of Christ, where are we being called to reconcile today?

Action: Have a conversation with your neighbor today. Look and listen closely to see what God will reveal to you through them.

Prayer: God give us hearts for peace, for justice, for reconciliation. Help us to see Your face in the face of our neighbor. Guide us in how to carry Your message of reconciliation. Amen.

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Thursday, September 22, 2016

The Table of Reconciliation

Luke 15:11–32

Submitted by Steve Willis, Bedford, Virginia

You are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.—Luke 15:31

Reflection: Belonging to God

It was welcome news in our little mountain town when we heard that Denise was moving back home with her family from Chicago. She was the bright shooting star in high school, then college and law school. When her youngest, Benny, turned three, she decided to leave her corporate job, start a modest elder-law practice, and simplify her life.

The only problem was that she and her mother had been arguing for years. Denise's return was not quite the scene of hospitality from the parable of the prodigal son/father. But what was once separated had now been reunited. Denise's homecoming, and Jesus' parable all assume that people belong. The God of Jesus Christ has brought us near, giving you, me, and all our neighbors a place to belong.

Action: As you think about your day, who is it in your life that needs a word of encouragement as a tangible reminder that they belong?

Prayer: Welcoming God, we are no longer a stranger, or a guest but we are like a child at home. Thank you! Amen.

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Friday, September 23, 2016

The Table of Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:16–21

Submitted by Stephanie Quintana-Martinez, Puerto Rico

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.—2 Corinthians 5:18

Reflection: Embodied Repentance

While on a walk around our neighborhood, a friend and I noticed how often we heard the phrase: “I am sorry.” My friend observed, “Everyone says they are sorry, but are they really?” Although I was shaken by her skepticism, her question invites a reflection about how we live into repentance.

At the 222nd General Assembly this past June, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) expressed regret for the ecclesiastical violence perpetuated against members of the LGBTQ community. In so doing, the church acknowledged that reconciliation cannot exist without repentance. This decision is a step towards deeper reflection and reconciliation with all children of God who have been abandoned, neglected, or brutalized by our religious institutions.

But, as we respond to our call to a ministry of reconciliation, it is vital to reflect on how we can *embody* repentance. Repentance means not only saying “I am sorry.” It means inviting practices that will serve as testimony to our repentance. Above all, it means coming to the table of reconciliation with healing as our top priority.

Action: Ask questions. How do we engage in reconciliation with those who have suffered injustice at the hands of the church itself?

Prayer: Jesus, give us boldness to truthfully apologize and embody a spirit of repentance. Allow us to create safe spaces so we can all heal. Amen.

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Saturday, September 24, 2016

The Table of Reconciliation

Luke 24:1–35

Submitted by Erin Counihan, St. Louis, Missouri

**While they were talking and discussing,
Jesus himself came near and went with them . . .—Luke 24:15**

Reflection: You Just Do it

I didn't believe her when she said it.

I looked around the room twice, three times to be sure.

It was Bible study at the small church in Baltimore where the grand matriarchs of the congregation regularly schooled me in the ways of true faith lived out. One day, as we worked our way through a lesson on reconciliation, I'd worked up the courage to ask, "So, really, how do you do it? How do you forgive someone?" And I absolutely did not believe she was serious when Miss Lynn simply and clearly replied, "You just do it."

After he had risen, the very first thing Jesus did was show up and let his people, the people who had rejected, betrayed, and abandoned him, know that it was okay. Over and over again he showed up to tell them he'd be with them, and all would be okay.

May we be so bold as to follow his example.

Action: Just do it. Take that first step. Whoever it is, however long you've been holding on to it, whether or not you are ready to tell them or show them or admit it—just do it. Forgive someone today.

Prayer: God, help me to follow Christ's example to show up, forgive, and let my dear ones know that it's going to be okay.

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Sunday, September 25, 2016

The Table of Transformation

Matthew 13:24–33

Submitted by Matt Gaventa, Amherst, Virginia

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.—Matthew 13:33

Reflection: Leavening Church

The chaplain at a local college wanted to bring a group of students to our church for a daylong retreat. There wasn't anything special about our church, or about our relationship to the school. They just needed space and a kitchen: they were going to make bread together, and have their retreat while it rose. And they asked me to come and join them at the end, and to take their bread and break it, and to share a bit of communion with them to close their time together—and so I did. An elder and I led them into the sanctuary, and we all sat on the floor around the communion table, and I poured the cup and broke the unscored loaf, and there were crumbs flying everywhere.

What I didn't know was that, for some of the students in that group, our small service was drastically different than anything they'd experienced before. "I've never seen a pastor just rip the bread with their bare hands," one said. "I've never seen communion without the little wafers," another replied. Others commented that they'd never seen it when it wasn't "stiff" and "stuffy" and "formal." And so perhaps, around that table, in their eyes, the church itself was transformed. Perhaps we mixed a little yeast into the flour. And now we wait.

Action: Consider the small details of how your church breaks bread together. How can the liturgy of our table be as welcoming as possible?

Prayer: God of welcome, help us to welcome another, and, in so doing, be transformed. Amen.

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Monday, September 26, 2016

The Table of Transformation

Psalm 51

Submitted by Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

**Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.—Psalm 51:10**

Reflection: Caterpillar Soup

Everyone loves the story of how a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. I remember as a child in the classroom watching a caterpillar get fatter as it ate through leaves, watching it spin itself into a chrysalis. What was happening inside? What would be the outcome of this transformation? And then that amazing day when a beautiful butterfly emerged always amazed me. Something new was born.

I recently learned about what actually happens inside a chrysalis during that in-between time. It becomes caterpillar soup! The caterpillar actually digests itself and becomes an oozing mess as the transformation begins. The group of cells that survive the digestive process are the ones that form into the butterfly. I realized that true transformation is actually that gross and that difficult, even for humans. It's messy and wild, but what survives can emerge into something beautiful and brand new.

Action: Think of a time when you went through a transformation. How can you use that experience to help someone who is going through it now?

Prayer: Dear God, we know transformation is not easy. Give us the grace to get through the different transformations into which you call us. Amen.

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Tuesday, September 27, 2016

The Table of Transformation

Matthew 18:1–5

Submitted by Abby Mohaupt, El Granada, California

Unless you change and become like children . . .—Matthew 18:3

Reflection: When Can We Read?

She started in our reading club afraid of even holding a book. We would ask her if she wanted to read and she would burst into tears. One of our volunteers took her to the books once a week, and they would hold the books together.

Eventually, over time, she wanted to read, until soon she was asking me “When can we read?” Now she wants to pick out the books we read as a group together, and she’s happy to sit with someone over a book. There are no more tears, only smiles.

A community coming together to nurture a child transforms her, just as Christ makes us new.

Action: What are children in your community of faith afraid of? What are their growing edges? How can you support them?

Prayer: God, you call us to care for the children in our community. Help us help them grow into who they call them to be. Amen.

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Wednesday, September 28, 2016

The Table of Transformation

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3

Submitted by Sabrina Slater, Spokane, Washington

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.—2 Corinthians 3:18

Reflection: What We Are Worshiping

Earlier this year, I discovered this quote and posted it on Facebook. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, "A person will worship something . . . That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore . . . be careful . . . for what we are worshipping we are becoming."

A few days later, after the death of another young black man, I wrote, "Are we becoming those who see? Those who are awake (woke)? Or are we asleep? Have we stopped up our ears? Another early death . . . are we numb or do we see? Choosing love is resistance. Naming death is resistance. Prayer is resistance. Another day has begun—but not for all of us. I've named #BlackLivesMatter in the preaching moment . . . truth be told, I imagine we'd rather be alive than have the movement (and the hashtag)."

We all worship something, and what we worship transforms us. The question is: can we faithfully focus on Jesus? Can we worship the one who calls us to walk across the waters of turbulent race relations, to see through the storms of fear, politics, denominational differences, and internal biases? Can we worship the one who might transform us into a new degree of glory?

Action: Priorities often can be seen in how someone spends their money and time. Can you spend some time today reflecting on scriptural ideas about transformation like Romans 12 and 2 Corinthians 3?

Prayer: God, you have begun a good work in us and you promise to keep working on us! Thank You! Please help our love to be genuine and give us the desire to spend more time with you so that every day it becomes easier for the world to look at us and see you! Amen.

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Thursday, September 29, 2016

The Table of Transformation

Romans 12:1–2

Submitted by Steve Willis, Bedford, Virginia

**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed
by the renewing of your minds.—Romans 12:2**

Reflection: Being Transformed

Years ago I remember visiting neighboring rural churches at times of conflict and being led by a sage and seasoned pastor from the presbytery. Each time before we met with the session, he would offer a prayer and then look up at me and say, "Let's do no harm." At the time it struck me as a wise and humble way of caring for and attending to others. Now as I remember it, I think he knew just how hard genuine change really is.

The Greek word for transformation is used a mere three times in the Scriptures, always by the Apostle Paul and always in the passive mood. In other words, God is the one doing the transforming. My guess is that Paul knew as well as anyone just how difficult real change can be: sometimes it takes a blinding and disorienting blow from God.

Action: Reflect upon the important experiences or seasons of change in your life. What led up to the change? How was God present with you?

Prayer: Powerful God, keep us from worldly ways of controlling others for our own interests. Give us minds that seek the giving ways of Jesus Christ.

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Friday, September 30, 2016

The Table of Transformation

2 Corinthians 5:16–21

Submitted by Stephanie Quintana-Martinez, Puerto Rico

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!—2 Corinthians 5:17

Reflection: Daring to Be New Creations

I was taught not to cry in public. No matter how heartbroken, sad, disappointed, angry, or afflicted I felt, it was not acceptable to show my feelings. This was a lesson I had to unlearn in order to truthfully engage in the work of social justice.

As activists and advocates, we hear stories of devastation, destruction, pain, and loss. We often neglect our natural human reaction of feeling emotions. Particularly when we are working directly with our brothers and sisters affected by injustice, it is important that we engage authentically as who we are. Often that means letting our feelings inform, but not control, how we process the injustices around us.

By being authentic and vulnerable, we open the door of genuine relationship, and that's where God invites us to be new people. Solidarity, relationship, and many new things can be born between shared tears. By engaging authentically in the work of justice, we help create spaces of struggle where transformation is ultimately liberation.

Action: Take time in your community to share and listen to feelings and emotions. Lead by example, practice vulnerability, and honor your truths.

Prayer: Jesus, help us embrace transition and transformation resting in the promise that God is making us new. Amen.

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Saturday, October 1, 2016

The Table of Transformation

John 4:1–42

Submitted by Erin Counihan, St. Louis, Missouri

**Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony,
“He told me everything I have ever done.”—John 4:39**

Reflection: Everyday Choices

I was raised in the church. Baptized as a little kid, attended Sunday school faithfully, and made all those lovely dried-macaroni Bible story dioramas. I never had a big born-again conversion experience. Sure I’ve flirted my way in and out of this belief and that understanding, but I never had the voice speaking to me in the night, the tap on the shoulder when no person was there, the overwhelming presence of the Spirit that knocked me to my knees.

But one day, I made the decision to forgive someone and, through a power that couldn’t have come from my own heart, I was able to actually do so. Another day, when I was really tired and wanted to go to sleep, from somewhere else I was able to find the energy to help a friend. And then of course there was the day that I allowed myself, just for a moment, in just the smallest of ways, for the tiniest bit, I allowed myself to feel truly and unconditionally loved by the God I study and worship and proclaim.

Transformation doesn’t always come in big cloud-covered, sparkly-faced, tingly-feeling moments. Sometimes it’s out doing our day’s work. Sometimes it’s in the everyday choices we make. And sometimes it’s when we realize that somehow this time, through Christ, we chose differently.

Action: When making a choice or a decision today, ask yourself, how does my faith factor into this decision?

Prayer: O Christ, keep turning us, in tiny moments, in everyday ways, and the smallest of increments, always toward you. Amen.

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World Communion Sunday, October 2, 2016

The Table of Grace

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

Submitted by Matt Gaventa, Amherst, Virginia

**The Lord Jesus on the night when he was
betrayed took a loaf of bread . . .—1 Corinthians 11:23**

Reflection: Unlikeliness

The problem, as John understood it, was that communion wine was getting all over the carpet at the front of the church. The session had decided, several months earlier, to change their style of communion, and now, instead of passing cups along the pews, they would all come forward for intinction—dip the bread in the cup and then eat together. Unfortunately, there was some spillage, drips from the soaked bread leaving this dark splatter-pattern radiating out from the table. But this was a solvable problem, John thought. No need to change the style or educate the communicants. Instead, he went out to the side entrance of the church, grabbed the large vinyl Welcome mat, and laid it right on top of the spill zone.

Perhaps it would be unsightly, this large doormat lying on the floor right where communion was served. But how could anybody complain if their approach to the table was now greeted, in large, bold, friendly letters, with the word “WELCOME?” How could anybody complain if something so ordinary was thereby transformed into the very site of hospitality? At the communion table, the unlikeliest elements of our daily lives are made sacred as reminders of our unlikeliness in the household of God. So how could anybody complain if a doormat became a symbol of grace? As far as I know, it’s still there. I hope it is.

Action: Volunteer to prepare the elements of communion one Sunday in your church. Pay attention to how unremarkable they are, and yet, by God’s grace, transformed.

Prayer: God of grace, thank you for inviting us to the feast. May our communion glorify you. Amen.

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Writers of the 2016 Path of Peace daily devotions

Matt Gaventa is the Pastor at Amherst Presbyterian Church in Amherst, Virginia, and Chaplain at Sweet Briar College.

Irene Pak Lee serves as the Associate Pastor at the Stone Church of Willow Glen in San Jose, California. She loves good food, good company, and good books, and resides in California with her partner and husband, Marion.

Abby Mohaupt is a teaching elder in the PC(USA). She likes long distance running, making art from trash, and Jesus.

Sabrina Slater is from Spokane, WA and ready to serve as a Pastor. After a career in higher education Slater graduated Princeton Theological Seminary and received the Parish Pulpit Fellowship. With a deep interest in loving God and others well Slater is honored to help represent PC(USA) at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland during fall 2016. Her pra is to see with God's eyes, to hear with God's ears, and to have a heart broken where God's heart is broken.

Steve Willis lives with his family in Bedford, Virginia, in the shadow of the Blue Ride Mountains. He is often found doing interim ministry with mountain and valley churches and also hiking the Appalachian Trail. Bedford, VA

Stephanie Quintana-Martinez is an ordeined ruling elder born and raised in Añasco, Puerto Rico. When she is not busy studying Divinity at Union Theological Seminary in NYC, she is working for immigration justice, promoting radical self-care and eating chocolate.

Erin Counihan serves as pastor of Oak Hill Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, MO.