

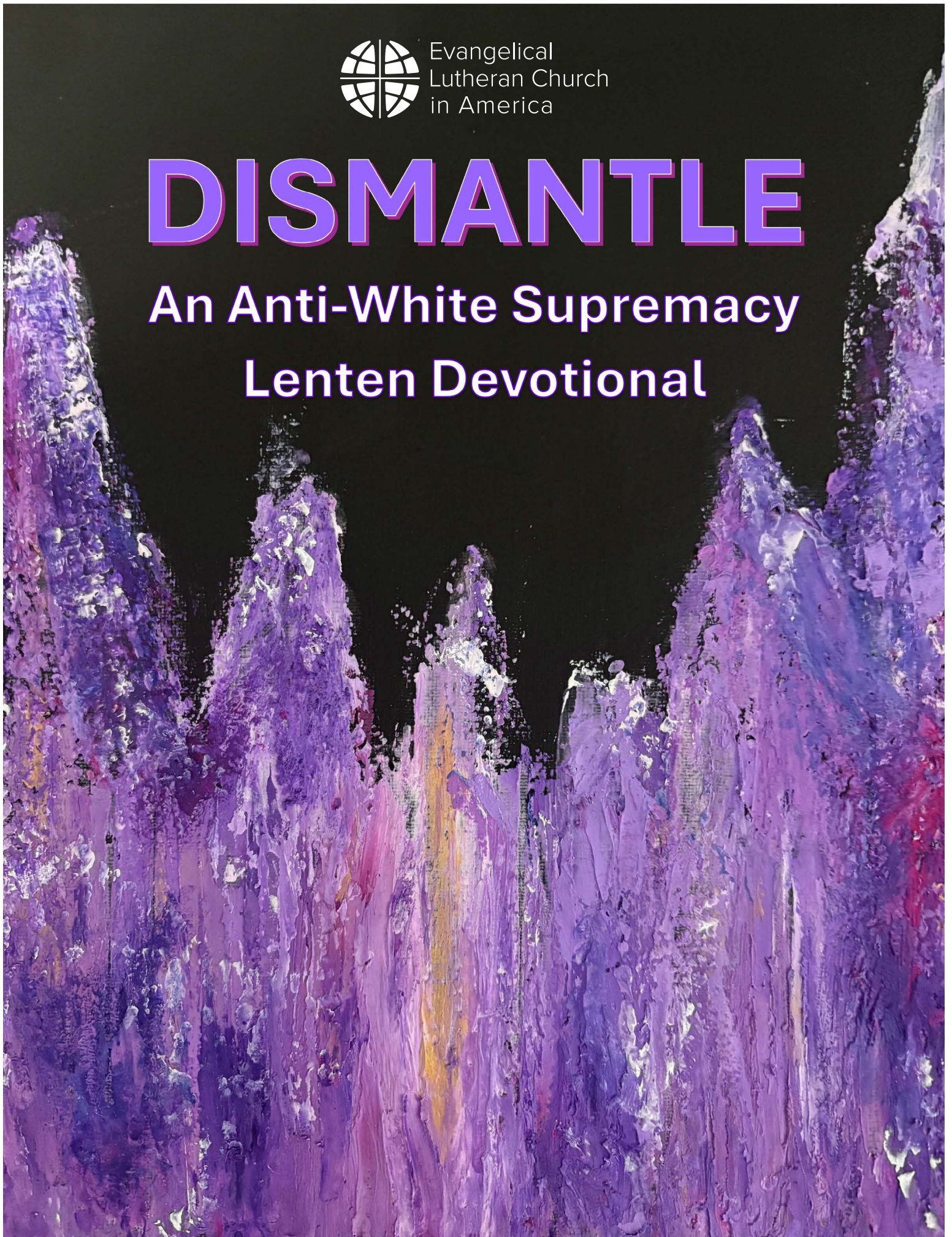


Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

DISMANTLE

An Anti-White Supremacy

Lenten Devotional



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The cover art is an original painting, entitled *Wilderness*, by Rev. Christina Marthield Montgomery.

INTRODUCTION

At the 2019 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), we humbly resolved and proclaimed that:

1. “White supremacy is racism and we condemn it; ...
3. The love of God is for all people, without exception, and we proclaim it;
4. The justice and mercy of God are for all people, without exception, and we proclaim this; ...
7. We are called by Jesus to “love our neighbors as ourselves.” As persons called to love one another as God has loved us, we therefore proclaim our commitment to speak with one voice against racism and white supremacy. ... and
8. We call all congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to engage in communal study of the structures and rhetoric that empower and fuel racism and white supremacy and to take to heart the teaching of Scriptures, so we may all be better equipped to speak boldly about the equal dignity of all persons in the eyes of God. ([Condemnation of White Supremacy and Racist Rhetoric SPR19 - ELCA Resources](#))”

This Lenten devotional has been created in response to that call.

On the following pages you will find thought-provoking, inviting, challenging and, most important, authentic reflections from 11 ELCA leaders. These contributors were chosen because of their unwavering commitment to God, God’s people, racial justice and the cause of dismantling white supremacy.

These 11 contributors are an impressive and dynamic group. The following pages are filled with the reflections and prayers of rostered leaders (both of Word and Sacrament and of Word and Service); church theologians; members of the Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) communities; members of the LGBTQIA2+ communities; a director for evangelical mission (DEM); missionaries; published authors; artists; immigrants/migrants; and chaplains.

Each of the 11 contributors was invited to reflect on the lectionary text for their assigned Sunday or holy day and to recommend a resource — for example, a book, poem, song or movie — that they believe will help readers to utilize an anti-white supremacy lens in reading, understanding and/or relating to the biblical text. Each contributor also included a prayer (or invitation) after their reflection.

We sincerely hope that this devotional will be a companion for you as you journey alongside Christ to the cross this Lenten season. May the words of these contributors both challenge you and bring you closer to the radical neighbor love that Christ demands in the Gospels.

For justice,

Rev. Christina Marthield Montgomery
Racial Justice Manager
Office of the Presiding Bishop

ASH WEDNESDAY

Rev. Margarette Schwanemann Uji

Lectionary text:

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Recommended resource:

- Rudy Francisco, “Mercy” (in Helium, Button Poetry, 2017)

Reflection:

On Ash Wednesday, we are confronted with our mortality, a rare invitation on the church calendar to reflect on death. In a culture where death is often avoided or treated as a problem to solve, this day calls us to embrace our identity as resurrection people. Yet “resurrection people” can sometimes become an escape from grappling with our mortality and the emotions it stirs.

These feelings — discomfort, fear, denial — mirror what arises when we confront societal sins such as white supremacy. The phrase itself feels deeply personal, knotting our thoughts and emotions much like the unsettling realization of our own mortality. Both feel like an affront to our existence.

Bell hooks asks, “How do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?” This question is pivotal today. White supremacy pervades our nation and the corporate church. Without mercy, confronting it feels like an endless Ash Wednesday — accountability without connection, despair without hope for transformation.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus warns against performative faith and invites us into quiet, holy transformation. He appeals to us to store treasures in heaven — eternal values such as mercy, humility and love — rather than to seek worldly approval. (Easier said than done, I know.)

Ash Wednesday calls us to set aside self-centeredness, power and judgment, especially toward those still learning the work of justice, love and repair. This often requires that we surrender our own power. As an alternative, Jesus invites us into mercy: seeing one another as beloved, even in our shortcomings.

In “Mercy,” Rudy Francisco reflects on sparing a spider’s life and hopes for the same mercy in his own moments of vulnerability. It’s a simple yet profound reminder that mercy is an active choice — to soften our responses, hold space for others and offer grace even when it is undeserved.

The spider symbolizes those we fear, misunderstand or reject — sometimes even ourselves. It calls us to humility: to release judgment, blame and shame and instead embrace care, openness and mercy.

I imagine many of us may feel overwhelmed or even terrified by terms such as “white supremacy.” We might identify with the spider in the poem, feeling as though we are “caught in the wrong place / at the wrong time, just being alive / and not bothering anyone.” Yet engaging in the work of dismantling white supremacy requires us to confront our own mortality and embrace the deeper invitation of Matthew’s Gospel. This work calls us to move beyond surface-level actions and into the challenging, often unseen labor of uprooting prejudice and systemic harm.

As we surrender the false treasures that white supremacy promises some of us — power, control and privilege — we open ourselves to the enduring treasures of our Creator: equity, compassion and community. These cannot be taken from us.

Invitation:

As you receive ashes on Ash Wednesday and hear “Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return,” consider how your mortality is connected to mercy, compassion and community. Whether you see yourself as the spider, the spider-killer or the spider-liberator, there is room for you in this sacred work:

To dismantle the deadly systems that teach us to kill the spider.

To unlearn the habit of discarding people.

To extend mercy to those learning, to the weary and to yourself.

The ashes remind us of our shared fragility and hope. We all need care as we journey through this sacred and exhausting work. May God’s mercy hold you today, and may you extend that mercy to others as we build a world rooted in God’s justice and love.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

By Rev. Erin Coleman Branchaud

Lectionary text:

Deuteronomy 26:1-11
Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16
Romans 10:8b-13
Luke 4:1-13

Recommended resources:

- [“Elements of White Supremacy Culture Summary Resource”](#)
- [“Qualities of Regenerative & Liberatory Culture”](#)
- Rev. Elle Dowd, [“Memorizing Scripture: A Progressive Case,”](#)
elledowd.com

Reflection:

The first Sunday of Lent brings us the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness — our model and guide for the 40-day journey of Lent. In this season, we contend against evil in all its forms, trusting in the one who faced the devil and triumphed over death.

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’ confrontation with the devil is described in detailed dialogue. Three times, the devil offers a temptation, and three times, Jesus responds by quoting Scripture. Jesus recognizes the devil’s voice, resists the devil’s allure and responds with the word of God.

Our church is on a journey of anti-racist transformation that will bring us into dialogue with sin and evil. In this wilderness, we will encounter the demons of white supremacy, the temptations of complacency, the traps of unconscious bias and the obstacles of institutional racism. Following Jesus, we recognize, resist and respond.

RECOGNIZE: When the devil speaks to Jesus, what does it sound like? What is white supremacy saying to us, and how do we recognize it? Sometimes the voice of white supremacy is ugly and unmistakable. We see it in the news, encounter it in the actions of our neighbors or hear it coming out of our own mouths. Other times, white supremacy is more difficult to discern. It is hidden in the way the system works or disguised as the promise of safety and power. It shows up in how I think about myself and how I interact with someone different from me.

White supremacy culture is pervasive and dominant in the United States; it lives in the world around us and also within us, whatever our own racial identity might be. Take time this week to reflect: What is the voice of white supremacy saying to me? How is white supremacy operating in my community? Use “Elements of White Supremacy Culture Summary Resource” as a starting place. Journal or talk with a trusted companion on the journey.

RESIST AND RESPOND: It takes practice to recognize the voice of white supremacy. The good news is that we already know how to recognize the voice of Jesus (John 10:27). On our Lenten journey, we follow the voice of the one who calls us beloved, heals the suffering, befriends the sinner, lives among the poor, confronts the powers of oppression and sin, and offers us abundant life.

Just as Jesus talked back to the devil, it is possible for us to talk back to the demons of white supremacy. We already have all the words we need in the word of God. Dwell in Scripture this week. Gather around yourself stories and songs that remind you who God is and who you are. Be nourished by promises of freedom and liberation. Consider memorizing a verse that strengthens you on your anti-racism journey.

In the Gospel of Luke, the story of Jesus' wilderness temptation comes after his baptism and right at the outset of his public ministry. Before Jesus ventures into the wilderness, the Gospel of Luke takes the time to list all Jesus' ancestors, all the way back to Adam, son of God (Luke 3:23-38). Jesus enters the wilderness not as an isolated individual but as part of the human community and in the company of all his faithful ancestors.

This journey can be difficult. Remember that you are not alone. You carry with you the wisdom of your ancestors. You are in the company of the body of Christ, the church. You are part of an ancient story of God's salvation. Take heart. This wilderness struggle is what it means to be people of God. This resistance opens the way to the life God alone can give.

Prayer for the Day:

Lord God, you led your people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide us now so that, following your Child Jesus, we may walk safely through the wilderness of this world toward the life you alone can give, through the same Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

By Rev. Ian Coen-Frei

Lectionary text:

Luke 13:31-35

Recommended resource:

- Chris Furr, *Straight White Male: A Faith-based Guide to Deconstructing Your Privilege and Living With Integrity* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2022)

Reflection:

When the Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod wants him dead, Jesus' response is startling: "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work'" (Luke 13:32). It's not that Jesus is ever hesitant to be bold. Throughout his ministry, he takes courageous and sometimes surprising action. In John 2, he makes a whip and drives the money changers and animal sellers out of the temple — a public, fearless display of anger over injustice. Later, in the upper room, he washes his disciples' feet, modeling radical humility and service. Jesus does not avoid taking unexpected or bold steps, and his actions often seem especially direct when it involves those around him.

But here, Jesus' bold words are directed not at those in his immediate presence but at someone beyond — Herod, ruler of Galilee, a man with the authority and a reputation for violence. Herod has already demonstrated his power to kill by having John the Baptist, Jesus' relative, arrested and executed. So when the Pharisees tell Jesus that Herod wants him dead, everyone understands that this isn't an empty threat. The danger is real, and for Jesus to resist Herod he risks death. Yet Jesus turns to the Pharisees and calls Herod a "fox." He dismisses this ruler, known for ruthless violence, with a term suggesting cunning yet petty craftiness. Jesus refuses to be intimidated.

But he doesn't stop there. He tells the Pharisees exactly why he won't heed their warning. "I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow," he says. Jesus has work to do, work that brings healing and life into the world. While Herod may hold the power of death, Jesus has already shown that he wields the power of life. By this point in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has healed the sick and freed people from demonic oppression — 13 times so far, with four more healings to come. Just as Herod has chosen to lean into his identity as one who can kill, Jesus lives fully into his identity as one who heals. Jesus could take the safer route, escaping from the threat Herod poses. He has the privilege of that choice. But he stays.

In this choice, Jesus shows that he will not use his privilege to avoid danger or to protect himself when there is work that needs to be done. He chooses to stay, to remain in the face of risk, committed to the mission God has called him to. The Pharisees have offered him an out, a chance to escape and live safely (if but for a time). But Jesus acknowledges this option only to refuse it. His decision is a powerful example of resisting the temptation to use privilege to escape uncomfortable or even dangerous work.

This example of Jesus resonates with the call to confront the deep, systemic issues of our own time. Naming and confronting white supremacy requires hard work, time and energy. For white-bodied people, who benefit from these structures, it can be tempting to "get away from here" — to avoid engaging with the systems that privilege white-bodied folks at the expense of others. These systems may seem comfortable for some, but they come at the cost of oppression and pain for others. And just as Herod's power was dangerous, these systems are harmful. They harm those they oppress, but they also harm those who benefit from them, spiritually and morally. White supremacy, like all sin, poisons everyone it touches.

In his 2022 book *Straight White Male: A Faith-based Guide to Deconstructing Your Privilege and Living With Integrity*, Chris Furr writes, “There is a path to a redemptive life lived out in white skin. The question is whether we will lean into the hard work that life requires or retreat into the same patterns of white supremacy that mean physical and spiritual violence for ourselves and our neighbors” (126). Following Jesus means choosing the hard path, one that calls white-bodied people to resist the privileges offered by white supremacy and to work instead for life — for themselves and for others.

Jesus shows us how to lean into the hard work of confronting oppressive systems that deal in death. It’s easy to be frozen by the fear of making mistakes or the need to act perfectly. Yet this demand for perfection can be part of white supremacy itself, discouraging engagement unless it’s flawless. Faith can free us from this. We are freed by God’s grace to serve imperfectly but meaningfully. As Martin Luther wrote in *The Freedom of a Christian*, “The Christian individual is a completely free lord of all, subject to none. The Christian individual is a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all” (*The Annotated Luther* 1:488). Here, in this tension, is a kind of freedom from white supremacy that white-bodied people can find — the freedom to reject a system that holds others down and to act on behalf of their neighbors, both near and far.

In following Jesus’ example — calling out the death-dealing forces of the world, rejecting privilege that protects some while harming others, and leaning into the uncomfortable work of resisting these systems — white-bodied people can follow the call of God to bring life, healing and abundance into a broken world. Jesus faced the powers of death and didn’t recoil; empowered by his example, we too can face the powers of oppression, trusting that the good, hard work of dismantling white supremacy can lead us toward greater life for all creation.

Prayer for the Day:

God of the cross, in the words and deeds of Jesus, we witness one who boldly resisted the powers of death in the world with the gift of life. Empower all people to experience freedom from being frozen in fear, and free us to do the work of dismantling white supremacy throughout our lives. Make us bold in our proclamation of your good news. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

By Sharei Green

Lectionary text:

Luke 13:1-9

Recommended resources:

- Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)
- “Hamba Nathi (Come, Walk With Us)” in *Global Songs 2* (Augsburg Fortress, 1997)

Reflection:

I’m not a garden girlie. I don’t like the way dirt feels on my hands or when it gets under my fingernails. I also have no houseplants unless you count the faux string of pearls plant that sits in my living room. I have a friend with a green thumb, like Stanley, the troll from Don Bluth’s feature-length animation *A Troll in Central Park*. It seems as if things bloom wherever she goes. I don’t have that. I’m more like the movie’s Queen Gnorga, minus the evil vibes that turn everything to stone. Because of this, I tend to stay away from houseplants and gardens, for their sake and mine.

Recently I was at my mama’s house, wanting my mama’s collard greens and cornbread. The last few times I had made greens, they were OK, but they hadn’t hit the spot because they didn’t taste like my mom’s. I asked her if I could make them while she supervised, so that I could refresh my memory of the recipe. I got up, planning to go to the store and get all the things I needed. She stopped me and directed me toward the garden, explaining that there were collards out there and I should just pick them. I quickly agreed, excited to have fresh greens straight from the garden.

Then I remembered, I am not a garden girlie. I felt nervous about the task. Why was I so nervous? I was just going to pick greens from the garden. But if you’ve never done something, or it’s something you might not be good at, some anxiety is natural. I wanted to just go to the store. It would be easier that way. But instead of giving up, I asked my dad to help me, to show me how to do it so I could pick the greens but leave the plant intact for them to grow back. I imagine he laughed at my nerves, but he happily came out to instruct me. I picked the greens, washed them and prepared them. It took hours, yet in the end, I had a finished product that I was proud of.

In the Parable of the Fig Tree, the best course of action isn’t clear. The owner of the vineyard comes out looking for fruit and finds none. “See here!” he says. “For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?” (Luke 13:7). The gardener tending the vineyard argues, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down” (8-9).

In the lack of clear direction and/or unresolved ending, I can’t help but think that this parable teaches us to (1) actively discern the best course of action with community, (2) ask for help and (3) recognize that the journey is long.

In this country, white supremacy and anti-Blackness are woven into the fabric of who we are. People try to be anti-racist and become frustrated that mistakes persist and people continue to be hurt. This is hard work, and it takes a long time. It often bruises the ego. So people give up, paralyzed by the fear of messing up, of saying the wrong thing or, if they are white, of being called racist.

Often we lean on our own understanding to get things done, looking to what is “true” or “factual.” This is fair. Most of us are socialized into hyperindependence and intellectualism, yet this doesn’t give us a full picture. Let us remember that history is written by the victors. The experiences and wisdom of the oppressed are documented mainly through memory and shared story.

What if we were to actively reject the singular truth of the victors and lean more into God’s abundant gifts, present in community? We might just get everything we need if we are willing to make ourselves vulnerable and ask for it. If we are willing to try. If we are willing to say or do the wrong thing and be corrected, or even to fail. Instead of giving up, put down some manure and give yourself more time. Just as creation is complex and diverse yet still manages to function, so too can we work together in community.

Love and accountability can coexist when we admit that something is wrong and try to overcome it by insisting on the love, grace and goodness of God. Maybe, with care and attention to the specific needs of a person, community, nation or world, the broken things — people, governments, schools, churches — might bear fruit again. Or not. God has something to say about that too.

Friends, I pray that we all will discern, together with God and community, what the necessary work is. Whether it is tending to the soil or digging up the roots (a little of both, I suspect), I pray that we will fully commit to the work, whatever that is and for however long it takes, so that we might bring about the liberation of all people and realize God’s vision for us, here and now.

Prayer for the Day:

Holy One, may we embrace the truth of your abundance and know that the gifts of community are bountiful. Help us to make ourselves vulnerable in the presence of our kin as we work toward the flourishing of all your creation. Help us to sustain our hope, for the journey is long. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

By Desta Goehner

Lectionary text:

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Recommended resource:

- Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Vintage, 2011)

Reflection:

Whenever I read the Parable of the Prodigal Son, I try to find myself in a different character. Lately I recognize myself in the elder sibling — the one who thought he understood righteousness, who believed he knew exactly how things should be. As a white woman engaged in racial justice work, I have had to confront my own elder-brother tendencies: the many ways I have (and still) unconsciously uphold systems that harm my siblings of color and their cultures, the times I have centered my own understanding of “right” over the lived experiences of others.

The father in this parable does something radical — he runs. In that culture, running would have been undignified, shocking even. Still, he races toward his lost child with open arms, modeling a love that breaks social conventions. Many years ago, I read Isabel Wilkerson’s *The Warmth of Other Suns*. I was struck by how the Great Migration parallels this kind of boundary-breaking love. Millions of Black Americans fled north and west, running toward the promise of dignity and safety, while too many white communities, including churches such as ours, stood with arms crossed like the elder sibling in this parable.

I confess and lament that I still catch myself wanting to stay in comfortable spaces, to move at a careful pace that protects my white comfort. Our siblings of color and their cultures don’t have the luxury of slow change. As deportations increase and policies continue to threaten Black and brown lives, I am learning that my discomfort is a small price to pay for showing up in solidarity. The father in the parable didn’t wait to consider his dignity — he ran.

As president of the [ELCA Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice](#), I have witnessed how hard it is for our predominantly white church to acknowledge its complicity in systems of white supremacy. We want to skip to the celebration, to the reconciliation, without doing the difficult work of confronting our elder-sibling righteousness. We put out statements of intention but don’t shift our money and resources to leaders, congregations and communities of color. Jesus tells his parable to the Pharisees and scribes who are grumbling about his welcome of tax collectors and sinners. He is speaking to those of us who think we know how God’s grace should work, who believe we can put boundaries around God’s welcome.

Like the elder sibling in the parable, white supremacy traps white people such as me in a prison of false superiority and fear. White supremacy is a myth. It distorts our humanity, teaching us to view relationships and community through the warped lens of hierarchy and control rather than the liberating truth of God’s abundant love. It cuts us off from authentic connection with our siblings of color and from parts of ourselves, leaving us spiritually impoverished even as we cling to material privilege. Yet the cost to white people pales in comparison to the devastating physical, emotional and economic violence inflicted on communities of color. Our liberation is bound together, but the stakes are not the same.

In this Lenten season, as we face a political climate that not only threatens to further marginalize our siblings of color but also threatens their lives and livelihoods, we are called to be like the father who runs. This means:

- Listening with an open heart when people of color tell us about their experiences, especially when they challenge our perceptions.
- Allowing space to let those stories and truths change us. This will be uncomfortable, but we can do it when we are in community together.
- Being open to feedback and accountability to raise our resilience.
- Showing up physically when policies threaten our immigrant neighbors (we must be ready to use our bodies against the white supremacy that is growing).
- Using our voices and privileges to challenge unjust systems.
- Building authentic relationships across race and culture, even when we fear making mistakes.
- Taking action even before we feel fully ready or comfortable.
- Following the lead of people of color who have already been showing us the way, and being willing to take the lead if necessary.

We are “marked with the cross of Christ forever,” not for our own comfort but to be sent for the sake of the world. This mark compels us to move beyond theological discussion into embodied solidarity with those who suffer under white supremacy.

Prayer for the Day:

Merciful God, we confess the times we have stood like the elder sibling, arms crossed, judging from a distance. Give us the courage of the father who runs, who chooses love over dignity and welcome over judgment. As policies threaten our siblings of color, help us put our faith into action. When we are tempted to stay silent, remind us of your love that crosses every boundary. Grant us the humility to listen, the courage to act and the wisdom to follow the leadership of those most impacted by injustice. Strengthen our communities for the work ahead, that we might truly be your hands and feet in a world crying out for justice. May we have the strength and courage to get into good and necessary trouble. In Jesus' name, amen.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

By Rev. Alejandro Mejia

Lectionary text:

Isaiah 43:16-21

Recommended resource:

- Julissa Arce, [*You Sound Like a White Girl: The Case for Rejecting Assimilation*](#) (Flatiron Books, 2022)

Reflection:

Dear friend, stop fixating on the past, whatever it looks like — because God’s future is immanent. That is Isaiah’s invitation to the people of Israel as part of a vision in which God announces that he is making things new (43:18-19).

Those words were written thousands of years ago to a nation that, at some point, wanted to return to being under the thumb of a tyrant instead of walking toward a new beginning. Yet these words speak also to our times.

Beloved, if you know our nation’s history of mistreating our siblings in Christ, why would you want to repeat it? We need only look at that history to know that returning to the past is not the answer. There are countless news articles, court cases, pictures, diary entries, books, videos, etc. showing that any person who wasn’t white, male and heterosexual was ostracized and oppressed. You have heard it before: white supremacy was — and still is — the sin of our society.

This sin, perpetuated by our society, has caused great pain and harm in the lives of God’s people. Decades and centuries have been filled with actions that particularly affected minorities or people on the margins such as the BIPOC and LGBTQIA2+ communities, immigrants, people with mental or physical disabilities, women (particularly women of color) and people with broken English or who did not know English at all.

In recent years, we have witnessed the desire of some to take the country back to what it was earlier. We have even heard people yelling, “America is for Americans.” Anti-immigrant and anti-migrant attitudes are not new for our nation. Just a few decades ago, concentration camps for Japanese Americans existed in the U.S., though an overwhelming percentage of those encamped were U.S. citizens. These struggles continue. In her book *You Sound Like a White Girl: The Case for Rejecting Assimilation*, Julissa Arce shares the struggles she faced as an immigrant. Her story can help us to better understand what it means to be a nonwhite, hardworking immigrant with no English.

Yearning for the “golden years” is a desire to remain in the past that ignores the pain and trauma inflicted on marginalized peoples, and God’s intention for all people and creation to flourish. It is a desire to remain captive to the past, a desire that affects our present and compromises our future. It is proof that white supremacy still exists.

How can we stop being stuck in the past? In my opinion, repentance is the way. Repentance has been denoted as something heavy that includes punishment. I don’t agree. The root of the word “repentance” invites us to identify negative and harmful actions (sins) — whether inflicted on ourselves, our neighbor or both — that happened in the past, that affect the present and that compromise the future. Repentance is the path to transformation and new life. When we remember that God is making things new, we cannot discard history, but neither should we romanticize it.

God has something in store for us as God's people. Why keep ourselves, our youth and our children captive to actions that delay our arrival at the place where God wants us to be? Let's break those chains. For us, for our people, for our future.

You and I might not be able to change the world on our own, but we can change our own actions and set an example for those around us. It is possible to be part of the change. To experience transformation. To practice repentance.

Finally, dear friend, what is the past that still affects your present? I pray that you will trust that forgiveness and new life are possible. Take the time remaining in Lent to make this happen. We are close to celebrating the miracle of Jesus' resurrection, the fulfillment of that promise from Isaiah. Stop fixating on returning to the past. You can step out of your own tomb and experience the things God is making new.

Prayer for the Day:

Dear Creator, give us the courage to acknowledge our mistakes and shortcomings — what we have done or left undone — which have affected our lives and the lives of others. Help us to make amends, thus liberating ourselves from the past, living in the present and trusting in the future.

We also pray for our nation and elected leaders so that, inspired by your wisdom, they will promote policies that break the chains of the past, chains that have kept our nation hostage to racism, injustice, prejudice, poverty and all other manifestations of white supremacy.

Assist us in embracing diversity as one of your most precious gifts to all creation and in believing that, as your people and as a nation, we are already being made new for the glory of your name and the sake of your children. In Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.

SUNDAY OF THE PASSION/PALM SUNDAY

By Rev. Veronica John Mwakasungura

Lectionary text:

Luke 22:14–23:56

Recommended resources:

- *Rustin* (Netflix, 2023)

Reflection:

Most people know about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech during the 1963 March on Washington, a central moment in the history of the Black community and the civil rights movement. King is widely recognized as the movement's leader, yet the biographical drama *Rustin* profiles the unsung hero Bayard Rustin, one of King's closest advisers and the key organizer of that peaceful protest for jobs and freedom.

Rustin was an openly gay black man, but despite the strong anti-gay and anti-Black sentiments of his day, he was one of the movement's most influential and effective organizers. As an activist, he advocated socialism, nonviolence and gay rights.

In the movie, *Rustin*, played by Colman Domingo, faces racism and homophobia, which are dangerous for him and the work he believes in. He faces rejection and racial injustice, but that doesn't stop him, because he believes in the importance of his work.

In the Gospel of Luke 22:14–23:56, Jesus talks about the betrayal and pain he is about to face. Even though his disciples surround him and he has the power to cause chaos, Jesus chooses a peaceful stance toward those who come to hurt him.

The theology of the cross is well understood in the African American community because people can relate to and connect with the suffering Christ. Black people in this country have struggled while white churches and denominations continue to look the other way or even participate in their oppression.

The only way Black people in this country were able to survive their struggles spiritually, physically and even emotionally was because they had faith. They believed that because God stood by Jesus even on the cross, then God would stand by them as well because they were also on the cross. Black people used their faith to survive and resist, even when their white neighbors used that faith to terrorize them. The cross of Christ opens a new way forward for all of us.

Prayer for the Day:

God of compassion, you are the voice of those rendered voiceless. You bring peace in war and difficult places. You have created this beautiful world and the beautiful people in it. You continue to reveal yourself through the works and ministries of Black people and people of color. May you, O God, guide and strengthen those who have dedicated their lives to justice, give them faith to serve you, and hold them in your love as they fight for justice and anti-racist transformation. We thank you for your Holy Spirit, which empowers your church and servants in their calling and their ministry of building up the body of Christ so that, together in faith, they can serve those in despair. Amen.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

By Taína Diaz-Reyes

Lectionary text:

John 13:1-17, 31-35

Recommended resource:

- Terry M. Wildman, *[First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament](#)* (InterVarsity Press, 2021)

Reflection:

The prologue of the First Nations Version of the New Testament begins with the goal of the new translation: “We pray the First Nations Version will bring healing to those who have suffered under the dominance of colonial governments who, with the help of churches and missionary organizations, often took our land, our languages, our cultures, and even our children. As our Tribal Nations work hard to reclaim what has been stolen, it is our hope that the colonial language that was forced upon us can now serve our people in a good way, by presenting Jesus (Creator Sets Free) in a more culturally relevant context... Our priority has been to maintain the accuracy of the translation and its faithfulness to the intended meaning of the biblical writers within the First Nations context. It is not a word-for-word translation, but rather it is a thought-for-thought translation, sometimes referred to as dynamic equivalence,” or offering a translation that is close to how original hearers and readers would have received the text. Cultural context is of the utmost importance for understanding Scripture, both the context of life in the time of Creator Sets Free and the context of those receiving the word today.

In many Indigenous communities, to share a meal is a significant event that holds an abundance of meaning. You are building bonds, celebrating harvest, honoring ancestors and often teaching and reinforcing the structure of relationships within society. For example, an elder may eat first as a way of honoring their status within the community.

At this meal with his disciples, where the dynamics of power and culture are well known by the disciples as students of their honored rabbi, Creator Sets Free challenges the structural norms of society by taking a position of servitude.

Many of my white friends, and others who consider themselves allies, ask: What can I do? How can I be a better ally to Indigenous peoples, to BIPOC peoples? What practical action can I take?

A commitment to dismantling the colonial legacy of white supremacy means that those who live in whiteness will face experiences that do not make sense to them. They will be *challenged*. They will be made *uncomfortable*. They will be presented with an opportunity to commit to a life of confronting inequality and injustice — to demonstrate to Indigenous communities a commitment to show their faith by their deeds. For we are reminded in Scripture that faith, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

The First Nations translation of John 13:34-35 reads: “‘I am giving you a new road to walk,’ he said. ‘In the same way I have loved you, you are to love each other. This kind of love will be the sign for all people that **you are walking the road with me.**’”

What greater accountability is there than to walk the road of Creator Sets Free — to call out hypocrisy, denounce the actions of those who exploit the vulnerable, and renounce the social norms that place some on the margins of community?

By washing the disciples' feet, Creator Sets Free shifts the balance of power and defies cultural norms. This is not to say that the power of whiteness should be identified with the power of the Lord, for that is not the takeaway. With whiteness comes power. By whiteness, I do not refer to pigmentation, for pale skin is not the determinant of power. Whiteness is living into the lie that belonging to a particular race gives one the divine right to subjugate, minoritize, marginalize and oppress others. It means benefiting from the harm done to those who have been categorized as powerless. It means refusing to accept that one in fact benefits from the systemic oppression of others.

Creator Sets Free has power, and he knows it. He can call down the angels, make any request of the Father in Heaven, and perform miracles beyond the imagination of those who witness them. With such power, he could do wonderful or terrible things. Yet he chooses to heal, to restore relationships, to break bread together, and to perform an act typical of servants and slaves.

Creator Sets Free calls those who live in whiteness to follow his good road of love and service. Do not deny that you have power. Do not deny that your ancestors may have misused that power (and certainly benefited from it). Instead, be accountable for it.

Creator Sets Free's new commandment is to love. To dismantle white supremacy is to create a world where justice, equity and solidarity are to be our foremost goals in word and deed, for the purpose of ousting hate from our hearts and our communities.

Creator Sets Free denies the norms of his cultural community, displaying to the disciples that holding a position of power means denying oneself and serving others. Washing the disciples' feet, he demonstrates that holding power should involve humility. Look — see what it requires of you.

Why is the First Nations Version of the New Testament an important contribution to Christian literature, hermeneutics and source material for devotions such as this one?

Just as correcting BIPOC people's grammar — “speak proper English” — is white supremacy in action, so is trying to hold the “accuracy” of biblical translation. The heart of the message is to love God and other people above all else. This message is preserved in this translation in a way that is profound and culturally relevant. Just as in the days of Luther, people today continue the scandalous tradition of making the Bible accessible to more communities.

Creator Sets Free gives us our instruction: love one another. Fiercely. Completely. So whatever you do, do it in love. Choose to do things in love. If the action does not feel as if it was done out of love, for the perpetuation of love, for the expression of love, for the glory and honor of a God who loves us, then it is not in pursuit of the commandment Creator Sets Free has given us.

Your task is simple — follow the love. Where there is love, pursue it. Where love is lacking, supply it. Let love guide you to appropriate action. Sometimes that action will be listening. Sometimes it will be protest. Sometimes it will be setting aside your own experience to make room for dynamic equivalence rather than literal, Western, Eurocentric stringency about how to translate the commandment. The commandment to love God and love one another in service is, as a white pastor friend of mine says, Creator Sets Free providing his followers an opportunity “to engage ... not think about, not consider, not have the intention to, but enact selfless love for each other.”

Dismantling white supremacy means decentering whiteness from the narrative about the person and power of Creator Sets Free; not just making room for but replacing narratives of whiteness with narratives appropriate and meaningful for communities that uplift the story.

Creator Sets Free holds as much meaning as the original translation of Creator Sets Free's name: "Jesus" ("Yehoshua" in Hebrew), meaning God is salvation or deliverance. It provides cultural context and theological perspective with just three words. We lose so much when assigning a universalized assumption of power to the Anglicized name of our Lord without spending any real time explaining why that name has power. By imposing the power of whiteness, we lose the power of the name itself. By culturally contextualizing the story of Creator Sets Free, demonstrating his own cultural context and its relevance to Indigenous ways of being and knowing, we disrupt white supremacy and a legacy of colonial violence through the theft of the liberating language of Scripture.

This Maundy Thursday, reflect on the power and privilege you have in your community and larger society. Where are there opportunities to walk the good road of love set before us by Creator Sets Free? We have been provided an example. How will we pursue it?

Prayer for the Day

Creator Sets Free, help me to honestly discern the power I hold in my community, to renounce it when it benefits me but to wield it when my privilege can bring justice to situations where those subjugated to systems of power are experiencing the consequences of its structure. Guide my heart toward service in love, as you did when you washed the disciples' feet. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY

By Deacon Adrainne Gray

Lectionary text:

Psalm 22

Recommended resource:

- Dinner Party (featuring Phoelix and Cordae), “Freeze Tag (Clean)” (Empire Distribution, 2020), youtu.be/_HtDvWGb5ak?feature=shared

Reflection:

My uncle, my father’s younger brother, is only 10 years older than I am, so in my infancy, his role was to be a watchful playmate for me. Then, as he moved into his teenage years, my role was to be an annoying little niece who interrupted his adolescent mating explorations.

Now, as aging adults, we serve as each other’s confidant and spiritual guide, and with age, we have found much to lament. Mainly we lament the struggles we endure as Black people in a world not designed for us. Like the musicians of “Freeze Tag,” we find ourselves fed up.

At least twice a week, I talk to my uncle on the phone, and in these lengthy sessions, we grapple with the disproportionate, inequitable access to wealth for people of color. He is weary of what seems like a lifelong effort to expunge his past legal infractions, and we are both saddened by the disregard for Black folks in the medical complex. Our bones seem to be on display for doctors to “stare and gloat over,” refusing to heal us mere “worms.”

It all seems like a constant struggle — “sick and tired of runnin’.”

In these marathon laments, we wonder aloud where God is and why it seems so hard for Black folks to find his deliverance from the sword.

Often, exhausted by trying to make sense of Black folks’ double portion of “despise, scorn and suffering,” we sigh and recite together, “Mom always said, just live long enough, baby, just live long enough.”

This was the response of my grandmother, his mother, to our complaints and questions of theodicy (why God, being good, allows bad things to happen) when we were young. Her answer was merely to keep living; she had no solutions. Today we rest in her words, which give us permission to keep living in an unjust world just as we are. She wouldn’t rally us to fix it. Her approach was to keep living in sorrow, like the writer of Psalm 22 or the musical artist Dinner Party.

“The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever!” — Psalm 22:26

“I been waitin’ on the summer.” —“Freeze Tag”

In the tradition of Good Friday, it is too soon to rejoice, too soon to mobilize resistance when Jesus’ murdered body still lies stiff in the tomb. We will live seeking the Lord, waitin’ on summer with unresolvable lament, waiting on the Risen One.

Prayer for the Day:

We call upon you in our weariness, fed up with the cries and pain of this world, with hands raised not in surrender to injustice but in desperate pleas to you. We confess our exhaustion, running from fear, searching for love that seems lost, waiting for a summer that feels distant.

It feels as though brown and Black people are left to bear the weight of centuries of suffering and scorn. We see our bones on display, laid bare before systems that refuse to heal us. Yet we recall the wisdom of our ancestors, who called out to you.

Grant us strength to keep on livin', O God, even in this unjust world, and let us trust in the Risen One, who will overcome the grave. Amen.

EASTER VIGIL

By Rev. Tuhina Verma Rasche

Lectionary text:

John 20:1-18

Recommended resource:

- *Son of Man* (Lorber Films, 2006)

Reflection:

The Easter Vigil is a hinge. On one side of the hinge, it is a somber time when we feel the sting of death, the grief of loss, and a multitude of emotions. The other side of the hinge is the complete opposite; stings are soothed by a balm, and there is hope for renewed life and resurrection.

On this vigil, the hinge holds together both new life and the awareness of the death-dealing powers of this world. Dismantling white supremacy has taken a toll on the bodies and spirits of too many BIPOC beloveds. The sting of death and the overwhelming emotions of grief can be all-consuming, like the grief that consumes Mary Magdalene, weeping alone just outside Jesus' tomb. Yet there is a different reality, the other side of the hinge, when she looks into the tomb. The reality that she knew, of death and finiteness, is radically altered. She encounters God's messengers, telling her that there is a new and radical way to be in the world.

There are vastly different experiences and perspectives where Mary stands outside the tomb and the angels sit inside. Mary moves from the entrance of the tomb to find Jesus, yet she doesn't know it's Jesus. Her reality includes Jesus' death by crucifixion and being placed in the tomb. Yet here is a new reality in front of her, Jesus resurrected. Mary Magdalene is at the hinge between realities: she knows that Jesus has died, and she has wept at the entrance to his tomb ... yet she sees the risen Christ in front of her. Mary Magdalene's reality shifts, and she finds a new way to interpret and experience the world.

Watching the 2006 South African film *Son of Man* is a way to reframe the telling of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. Too often, Jesus has been associated with whiteness, power and a theology of glory. *Son of Man* tells the story of Jesus in a different way: Jesus is a Black man in an African country torn apart by war, reflecting a theology of the cross where God comes to meet us in our vulnerabilities. Our imaginations can be opened, as a hinged door can swing open to create a new point of entry. Death and destruction continue to surround us in this present day. Black communities around the world know this too well because the death-dealing ills of white supremacy and its siblings, colonialism and patriarchy, have wrought generations of trauma. Simultaneously, we know that through baptism and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are bound to Christ's death and resurrection. The old world exists, and a new way is possible.

White supremacy must be dismantled. It is a legion of demons, destructive and invasive. Yet Jesus reframes Mary Magdalene's reality and our own. The white Jesus who has infiltrated our worship spaces is a false idol, not the Brown Palestinian Jewish carpenter who is also the Son of God. Many have given up so much to dismantle white supremacy, even their own lives. Even though this Lenten devotional focuses on what it means to dismantle white supremacy, we must also turn outward to what brings life abundant to all of us, and focus on the flourishing of BIPOC individuals and communities. Death-dealing powers try to limit our imaginations so we can fixate solely upon idols (often idols of our own making). The Holy Spirit calls for an abundance of imagination, the belief that resurrection defies death, and that multiple ways to live into life abundant are simultaneously possible. The old world exists, and the door to a new way swings open.

Prayer for the Day:

God of all time, of all place and of all space, we are a forgetful people within your realm. Even in your promise of everlasting love, we have repeatedly turned away from you, taken by the idols of white supremacy and the effects of colonialism and patriarchy. God, even when we have fallen short of your glory as this broken, old world exists, you show us that a new way is possible. You show us this through the crucifixion and resurrection of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. God, you have never failed us, and you have shown us that the temporary comforts can descend to hell as we rise with your Son in eternal life. Amen.

RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD, EASTER DAY

By Rev. Dr. Andrea L. Walker

Lectionary text:

Luke 24:1-12

Recommended resources:

- Sharei Green and Beckah Selnick, *God's Holy Darkness* (Beaming Books, 2022)
- Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter* (Orbis, 2021)

Reflection:

Resurrection begins in the dark. In the early hours of morning, the women approach the tomb. This dark moment is a time not of despair but of potential — a space where new life is about to emerge. They carry their grief and questions, not fully aware that they are about to witness God's work in human history.

This story resonates as we confront the ongoing realities of systemic injustice. Some would say that darkness here symbolizes the hidden structures and biases that persist in society. Yet can we imagine it representing the fertile ground from which new understanding and change can spring? Just as the women move through the darkness toward the tomb, we too can move courageously into our world, seeking to transform those areas that have long been shrouded in ignorance or prejudice.

The women see the stone rolled away and hear two angels proclaim, “He is not here but has risen” (Luke 24:5). This proclamation is a message of hope, a radical disruption of the status quo, a bold statement against the powers of death.

The angels' invitation to the women — “Remember how he told you ...” (6) — reminds us of Jesus' teachings, grounded in love and justice. Jesus challenged societal norms that uphold oppression. As we reflect on Jesus' teachings, we draw strength and inspiration for our efforts to confront racism and systemic injustice. We envision a world rooted in love and equality. In the same way, our work to dismantle white supremacy moves us to envision a society where we value and celebrate all people.

Yet the response of the disciples to the women's testimony is telling: “These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (11). This skepticism highlights a reality we face today: a resistance to differing ideas and perspectives that challenge the established order. In our efforts to cement change, we may encounter disbelief or indifference from those who are comfortable in their privilege. Yet, like the women at the tomb, we remain steadfast in our truth-telling and advocacy for what we know to be just.

Peter, intrigued by the women's account, runs to the tomb. His willingness to engage with the unknown is an example for us. As we seek to root out systemic injustice, curiosity with a desire to understand is vital. We can be willing to explore the uncomfortable truths about our society, to listen and to seek ways to uplift the voices of those who suffer. This willingness is essential; it allows us to recognize our own biases while cultivating a deeper awareness of the experiences of others.

The resurrection story is about more than just the triumph over death; it symbolizes the promise of new life, new beginnings. The difficulties we encounter in the fight against inequality may become spaces of renewal. They compel us to dig deeper, to educate ourselves, to act.

Reflecting on the resurrection, we pray that it offers us hope for healing and reconciliation. The work of dismantling white supremacy is not just about identifying injustices; it is about seeing a future where all people thrive. This seeing requires us to cultivate relationships rooted in empathy, understanding and solidarity. Just as the women at the tomb become messengers of resurrection, we are messengers and agents of change, proclaiming hope and advocating for a just society.

Resurrection invites us to be part of the healing process, acknowledging the wounds inflicted by systemic injustice while actively working toward restoration. This process involves listening to the stories of those affected, acknowledging pain and committing to action that fosters equity. We engage in conversations that challenge our assumptions, that lead to a deeper understanding of the impact of white supremacy.

Most of all, as we stand in the early dawn of the resurrection, let us remember that our work is love — love that seeks justice for all, love that compels us to action.

Resurrection begins in God's holy darkness — not as a symbol of despair but as a liminal space of possibility and transformation. Stepping boldly into this space, let us dismantle white supremacy, taking part in the ongoing work of restoration. Let us together walk the path toward justice, compassion and hope for all people, ushering in a world that truly reflects the love and equality embodied in the life, and particularly the resurrection, of Jesus.

Prayer for the Day:

We give you thanks, gracious God, for the gift of Jesus, who lived, died and was resurrected to show us your love, grace and forgiveness for all. We thank you that He has risen indeed. Now, great God, give us the strength to be your instruments in a world that does not yet reflect you. Give us the confidence to know you are always with us so that we may do the work of dismantling systemic injustice and seeking peace. Give us the ability to see your face in all our siblings, and help us to treat them with dignity and respect. Give us the wisdom to remember the example set for us and the knowledge to understand when to use your holy darkness to rest, to plan or to run on. We thank you for being a just God and for all your good gifts, in Jesus' name, amen.

CONTRIBUTORS



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Desta Goehner (she/her), born and raised in the Los Angeles area, is a trauma-informed spiritual director, a professional Enneagram coach (individuals and teams), a movement and trauma healing chaplain and a lay leader with over 27 years of service to the ELCA. As president of the Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice and as a member of both the Southwest California Synod's anti-racism team and her congregation's authentic diversity team, she focuses on dismantling structural racism within faith communities and creating spaces for white people to recognize, challenge and heal from the myth of white supremacy. As director of the Thriving Leadership Formation, she supports church leaders while incorporating analysis of structural racism. In examining the impact of race and caste on daily life and faith, Desta is guided by her expertise in spiritual formation, conflict mediation and nonviolent communication. For more about her work, visit DestaGoehner.com



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Rev. Tuhina Verma Rasche is a South Asian American trying to figure out the beauties and complexities within the multitudes of life. She is a pastor and creator whose life's work is exploring identities, cultures and ways of belonging, often drawing on embodied and lived experiences. Tuhina currently serves as a digital curator and pastor of the Anam Cara Community, a digital-first mission start of the North Carolina Synod.



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