**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer for March 7, 2021**

**Third Sunday of Lent**

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

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

**WELCOME and Settling In (Suzie)**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* Anne Regan, Bill Fanelli, Betty Thompson and I prepared today’s communal prayer.
* Thanks to Reggie Ott, Stu Sklamm, Linda Donaldson, Marilyn Voigt, and Pat Campbell for leading our music.
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today: Anne and Bill, Greg Campbell, Denise Heckman, Jim De Quattro, Bill Beard, Sister Marie McCarthy, Joan Sklamm, Mary Dolmage, and Cecilia Estrada.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please put a note in Chat or email later.
* And we ask you to use Chat only after the service so we can listen to each person without distractions. We are happy to continue to share reflections after the service.

And now we move from getting here to being here. Let’s take 3 deep breaths. One to let go of tensions and distractions we may be carrying with us. One for being together though in separate places. And one to make space for the light of God.

**OPENING RITUAL**  **(Anne and Bill and Linda Donaldson)**

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

All: O God, we hear you calling.

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

All: O God, we hear you calling.

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

All: O God, we hear you calling.

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

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

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

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

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

Leader: Let us pray together:

All (muted):

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

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

Linda (and all, muted):

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

**CALL TO WORSHIP / GATHERING PRAYER** **(Anne or Bill)**

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

Amen. [Brief pause]

Suzie De Quattro will now introduce us to today’s theme.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Suzie De Quattro)**

Each Sunday in Lent we meet God differently and we are challenged to change our mindset and put on the mind of God. We began Lent in the desert, with Jesus vulnerable and depleted. Focusing on God’s love fortified Jesus to withstand the temptations intended to obscure God’s light. Last week we saw Jesus radiantly transfigured by God’s love. This week we will hear the familiar readings of the Ten Commandments and the cleansing of the Temple. Through the lens of metanoia, we can see that these readings are not primarily about rules and anger, but also about LOVE. Both stories express divine hope that we will live in friendship with God and in harmony with other people and all of creation.

In Exodus God gives us a list of basic rules to help us with this. Pope Benedict XVI said the Ten Commandments are not a pack of prohibitions, of ‘noes,’ but actually present a great vision for living. They are a yes to a God who gives meaning to creation, a yes to life and love, a yes to solidarity, to social responsibility, to justice, to truth, and to respect for others. Looking at it this way, we can see the Ten Commandments not as restrictions, but as an avenue to freedom.

In John’s Gospel we hear about the temple cleansing, one of the few stories that are found in all four gospels. Jerusalem was full of people from many regions who came to celebrate Passover. In the temple court, foreign money was exchanged for Jewish currency so that foreigners could buy an animal for the priests to sacrifice for them. An expensive ox was seen as a greater act of worship than the dove a poor person could afford. Jesus denounced practices that concentrated power in those who were privileged and excluded or marginalized others. With that mindset we can see Jesus’ action not as anger toward some particular people but as his clearing away an obstacle to universal access to God. Jesus recalled the words of Isaiah: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." Jesus said again and again that his mission was to fulfill the law – a law whose deepest meaning is to put on the mindset of God and love the way God loves.

Denise Heckman will read from Exodus, followed by questions and silence for reflection. Feel free to stay with whatever question calls you.

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

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

Marilyn sings (and all, muted): [The music is at the end of this file.]

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

Lead us from darkness, lead us from darkness,

Lead us from darkness to light.

**READING 1 from Exodus 20** **(Denise Heckman)**

And God spoke all these words.

“I am your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you lived as slaves.

You shall not have other gods besides me.

You shall not misuse the name of your God.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Honor your father and your mother.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house.

You shall not set your heart upon your neighbor’s spouse, nor crave any of your neighbor’s possessions.”

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim De Quattro)**

What commandment would you add to help yourself love what God loves?

When has a prohibition turned out to be helpful to you?

What commandments do we, as members of this community, help each other to follow?

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

Betty: Next, Bill Beard will read today’s gospel.

**READING 2** John 2: 13-25  **(Bill Beard)**

Since the Passover of the Jews was near,

Jesus went to Jerusalem.  
He found in the temple courts those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves.

There were others sitting at tables exchanging foreign money

for Jewish coins to purchase these sacrificial animals.  
Jesus made a whip out of cords  
and drove all from the temple courtyard, both sheep and oxen.   
He scattered the coins of the money-changers  
and overturned their tables.   
To those who sold doves he said,  
“Get these out of here!   
How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market?”  
Then the Jews demand of him “What miraculous sign can you show us

as your authority to do all this?” Jesus answered them,   
“Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.”  
The Jews replied, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years,   
and you will raise it up in three days?”  
But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body.  
After Jesus was raised from the dead,   
his disciples recalled what he had said.   
Then they believed the Scripture   
and the words Jesus had spoken.

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim De Quattro)**

What “signs” give you confidence that Jesus speaks with divine authority?

What ancient and newer ways of worship have deep meaning for you?

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

**READING 3 (Betty Thompson)**

Last week we heard the story of Abraham and Isaac – another story where human belief in blood sacrifice encounters the God of love.

In today’s gospel Jesus enters the temple courtyard. He sees pilgrims, money-changers, animals, and those who sell them. Inside the temple, priests are killing animals as offerings to God. Jesus also sees all the assumptions behind this form of prayer. Jesus “made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area.”

Two big questions are how he did what he did it, and why.

First, the how. All of the art about the cleansing of the Temple shows us Jesus whipping people with a fury that farmers wouldn’t use on their animals. But is this familiar image credible? Violent rage is inconsistent with the Jesus we know. And no Temple guards or legionnaires intervened. Could Jesus have felt anger yet acted without violence? Is it possible Jesus made that whip to herd the sheep and oxen, knowing that their owners and the crowd would follow? Pope Francis sees the cleansing of the temple not as a violent protest against doing business in the Temple, but rather as a prophetic reminder that God wants a different kind of worship. That day, Jesus drew on the energy of anger in order to act and speak with the authority of the God of love.

Jesus had to know that challenging this ancient system of sacrifice would enrage the Jewish authorities and could have grave consequences. So we ask ourselves - Why did Jesus risk so much that day in Jerusalem?

Remember that Jesus prayed by talking directly to Abba – or in English, Dad. Jesus spends his last evening showing his disciples how to love and care for each other and telling them how much Abba loves them. Jesus wants an end to Temple sacrifice in order to make room for this kind of loving relationship with God and with each other. No need to buy an animal and have it killed. Give God **yourself**, full of life.

Today we don’t require animal sacrifice, but do we have unspoken qualifications for who is welcome? Jesus tells us that rich and poor of all races and places and genders pray as equals before God. This is the beloved community that we want to be, seeking truth and justice and acting with love.

Jesus risked a lot to cleanse the Temple. This gospel challenges us to consider what sacrifices we might risk for justice and love. Do we love those on the margins enough to turn over the tables we see in our communities? Do we love our Church enough to expect its authorities to open the doors with the unrestricted love of our God?

*[Slight pause]*

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS (Jim De Quattro)**

Imagine your life as a temple. What needs to be cleaned out?

How do you feel about the risks you are asked to take for the sake of justice?

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

**SHARING TIME (Sister Marie McCarthy)**

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

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

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

[Sharing]

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

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

[Stop by about 11:20.]

Thank you.

*[Slight pause]*

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

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

Our response today will be:

Singer: Hold us in your mercy.

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

In solidarity with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious as they work to root out racism in their hearts and their systems, we pray.

Leader (and all, muted) sing: Hold us in your mercy. (one time)

For all who are treated as lesser and whose prayers are not heard by us, we pray. R. Hold us in your mercy.

For justice and welcome for those who all who do not feel welcome in the church, we pray. R. Hold us in your mercy.

For wisdom and courage to speak about the church that we want to be, to the church that is, we pray. R. Hold us in your mercy.

For all of us – when we are angry, that we may be wise in our actions and express our anger without violence, we pray

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

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

**OFFERTORY (Joan and Stu Sklamm)**

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

Stu plays: “Take, O Take Me As I Am” by John Bell [Repeat as needed for about a minute.)

(**Betty:** Start slide in Joan’s final sentence.

Stop slide after Stu plays, before Joan speaks.)

**Joan:** Let us pray. God of abundance, we commit to sharing our time, talents, and treasures so we that we may be a light and a witness to the transforming love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Mary Dolmage)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

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

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

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

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

We remember the night before Jesus died.

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

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

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet.

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

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

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

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

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

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

May we nourish others with your presence.

Amen.

**OUR FATHER (Cecilia Estrada)**

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

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

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

Give us this day our daily bread

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

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

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

**FINAL BLESSING (Anne Regan)**

“To Come Home to Yourself” by John O’Donoghue

May all that is unforgiven in you

Be released.

May your fears yield

Their deepest tranquilities.

May all that is unlived in you

Blossom into a future

Graced with love.

Amen.

**CLOSING SONG The River Will Rise by Tom Conry (Reggie Ott)**

1. God of our living and our light, are we not precious in your sight? –

Born of your spirit, born of your breath.

Who set the sun and moon and stars, who sets us dreaming from afar? –

Greater than grieving, more than our death.

Within our hearts, within ourselves, echoes the nameless voice that cries:

This world will hear, deep in the night, when the river will rise.

**Refrain:**  And the river will rise deep and free.

We ourselves, we shall see.

On the day when the Lord will wipe away

All of the tears from the people's eyes

Then peace will flow like a river and the river will rise!

1. Hearing the crying of your own, who call your name so far from home,

Lord of the lightning, God of the poor,

Who counts their tears from day to day, who knows our wand’rings and our ways,

God of the desert, Lord of the shore.

You in your distance, you in our midst, you of the nameless voice that cries:

This world will hear, deep in the night, when the river will rise. **Refrain**

1. Ev’ry mountain, ev’ry plain, ev’ry valley shall proclaim,

Tell of the justice God may begin. Then let your name at last be known,

That name that no one calls alone, breaking the silence, burning within.

Laden with laughter, burdened with tears, Name of the nameless voice that cries:

This world will hear, deep in the night, when the river will rise. **Refrain**

**Resources**

* Opening Ritual – “Lent is a call…” quote from Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister: <http://rosemarieberger.com/2011/03/15/joan-chittister-lent-is-a-chance-to-grieve/>
* Opening Ritual – image from “Dawn: A Time-Lapse Photography Experiment” by John Davenport: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xF49lnywnAE>
* Reflection resources:

Pope Francis: <https://popefrancisdaily.com/angelus-address-jesus-cleanses-the-temple-of-jerusalem/>

Elaina Jo Polovick: <https://www.newwaysministry.org/2018/03/04/turning-tables-jesus/>

Sr. Mary McGlone, CSJ: <https://www.ncronline.org/sunday-resource/march-7-2021-third-sunday-lent>

Michael B. Heinlein: <https://www.osvnews.com/2017/03/16/the-ten-commandments/>

* Offertory image, 3rd Sunday: Set your seal upon my heart, image "Where the light begins" by Jan Richardson. Used with permission. <https://janrichardsonimages.com/gallery.php?gid=62>
* Final blessing – John O’Donohue, “Come Home to Yourself” <https://improvisedlife.com/2014/07/07/come-home-john-odonohues-blessing/>