

# **RHYTHMS OF THE GOD-LIFE**

**THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW THROUGH  
PARAPHRASE, POETRY, AND PRAYER**



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# Rhythms of the God-Life

## General Introduction

*“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”*

*Proust*

### Encountering the Word

The little boy tugged on his father’s pant leg. The father bent down and his son whispered in his ear, “Daddy, why does Mrs. Smith carry such a big Bible everywhere?”

The father whispered back, “Why don’t you ask her.”

Summoning his courage, the boy asked Mrs. Smith about her Bible. With an immediate smile that the boy did not expect, Mrs. Smith replied, “Well I like to read it!”

“But why?” the boy blurted out, much to his father’s embarrassment.

“Because it’s the only book that reads me back,” was her reply.<sup>1</sup>

*Rhythms of the God-Life* is an invitation to dig deeper into God’s Word. *Rhythms* is an “interpretive paraphrase” (about which I will say more below) that invites readers to read with both head and heart, to ponder the ways the Word connects to who you are and whose you are, and to respond to God’s call with actions in both the private and public sphere. Both your interior life of spirit and your public living of truth will be challenged in these pages, for you will encounter Jesus in them.

It is not enough to read Scripture without engaging and encountering the Word. As John Calvin once wrote, “Let not the Word of The Truth flit about in your mind alone but allow it to seep into the deep places, into the very marrow of your soul.” The aphorism that “the Bible is the only book that we read that reads us back” is as true for an interpretive paraphrase as for a traditional translation.

I am a pastor who believes Scripture when it says the Holy Spirit lives within each one of us who calls upon

the name of God and has been baptized according to the Triune name. As such, each of us has living within us a theological seminary of sorts: the Scripture text we are reading or know by heart, the experiences of fidelity and failure with which we have sought to live the Gospel, as well as the great communion of saints we have known and know, whose voices are our companions along the Way of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit is our Counselor who takes all this source material and shapes, forms and transforms us more fully into the image of Christ Jesus.

The above paragraph sounds grandiose. Let me rephrase it in terms of educational theory. I do not believe in the “Banking Model” of education, in which an instructor opens up the student’s brain and deposits facts and information first to be memorized, then to be regurgitated, with the assumption that such methods can be called learning. What we know about the human brain tells us learning is not linear. Instead of a one-way transmission of information, true learning happens as we engage one another in dialogue: back-and-forth, forth-and-back. True learning moves beyond the informational to the transformational.

*Rhythms* seeks transformation. It is comprised of three sections for each passage: an interpretive paraphrase, a poem that interprets and applies the text, and a prayer that applies the text to one’s daily life. Each of these sections intends to engage the reader with information that leads to dialogue. I do not ask you merely to receive my interpretation of the biblical text and its implications for our daily living and life together. I ask you to engage the material with mind and heart and spirit as an active learner.

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<sup>1</sup> This story is of unknown origin. I first heard it told in the 1990’s at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in a continuing

education seminar taught by Tom Long, who at the time was a professor of homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary.

## Interpretive Paraphrase

What will it look like to be an active learner with *Rhythms*? It starts with interpretive paraphrase, which balances scrupulosity to the Greek text and creativity to modern expressions. *Rhythms* remains rooted in the text and yet gives the text wings, to convey faithfully the Greek text of the New Testament yet do so in a way that invites the reader to see beyond the familiarity of beloved words of Scripture to experience the Word more deeply. This balancing act required choices about what words give precision and clarity for textual understanding, what words invite the reader's imagination to hear the music of Scripture, and when it is necessary to expand on the Greek text in order to convey culture and customs unseen by most modern readers. I will let you, Gentle Reader, be the judge as to whether I have made wise choices.

Early readers of the pages that follow often mistook them for Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, which I took as an extreme compliment. I have endeavored to apply the same scrupulosity to my paraphrase as Dr. Peterson famously applied to *The Message*. Where we differ is that I have taken the liberty to include contextual clues not found in the original, Greek manuscripts but which would have been obvious to the original, 1st century readers and hearers of the text. These contextual clues come from citing the Hebrew Scriptures, Roman laws, and both Roman and Jewish cultural practices. Sometimes the cultural clues are embedded in the paraphrase and other times they are in a footnote.

For instance, in Volume I of the *Rhythms* series I paraphrase the familiar passage, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, offer them the left also" (Matthew 5:39). I show how this passage assumes cultural practices between Roman soldiers and the oppressed, Jewish populace as follows:

If a Roman soldier backhands you, essentially treating you like a dog, turn your other cheek to him, inviting him to treat you as his equal.

In Volume II of the *Rhythms* series, I provide context in a footnote when Paul references being in prison:

Paul is in and out of prison frequently during his ministry. In the autocratic and oppressive rule of

the Romans, Christian ethics were perceived as seditious. Roman culture was a caste system and like all dictatorships the Romans were suspicious when people from different castes gathered together. The Romans' presumption was that rebellion was being planned. The Romans did not care about Paul's preaching for its religious content (because he was Jewish or participated in a Jewish sect) but because his message led people to challenge the social and legal structures upon which Roman culture was built. Further, the early Christian confession that Jesus is Lord was in direct violation of Roman law and a contradiction to the foundational, political statement of Roman authority that said Caesar is Lord.

The purpose of these interpretive insertions into the paraphrase is to illuminate the Word more fully; however, it is the responsibility of each reader, as one in whom the Holy Spirit lives, to engage my words as an active learner and dialogue partner: Why did I phrase this as I did? What did I see that you did not or missed that you see?

## Poetry

To assist in the work of engaging and encountering the Word, each passage includes a poem and a prayer that reflects upon the passage. Emily Dickinson wrote that poetry helps us see something "slant"<sup>2</sup> and opens us to new perspectives. Dickinson invited her readers to look upon the familiar and see new creation, to move beyond our assumptions to encounter life's mysteries with wonder and awe. To tell something slant has become a metaphor that both connects with the concrete and then amplifies and moves beyond it. The poems in *Rhythms* seek to help readers see God's Word "slant" and use three poetic styles: Haiku, Cinquain, and free verse.

*Haiku* poems have three lines. The first line is five syllables. The second line is seven syllables. The third line is five syllables. Here is an example of a *Haiku* from Romans 8:1-4:

*Jesus on the Cross*  
*Battle for eternity*  
*His heart curved outward*

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<sup>2</sup> c.f. Emily Dickinson, *Tell All the Truth but Tell It Slant* (1886) and *There's a Certain Slant of Light* (1861).

*Cinquain* poems have five lines. The first line is one word, the second line two words, then three words, four words, but then the fifth line is one word. Here is an example of a *Cinquain* from 1 Corinthians 2:3-16:

Wisdom  
spiritual mystery  
wondering and wandering  
learning The Truth-rhythms anew  
wholeness

Free verse will be a more familiar form for most readers. I use free verse for the majority of passages and seek both to invite insights into the meaning of the text as well as provoke questions about the text. If the poems do not connect for you, I invite you to craft your own poetic response to the Word!

## Prayer

Praying the Word is an ancient spiritual practice combining Scripture and prayer, often called *lectio divina*, which is a Latin phrase meaning “divine reading.” Benedictine *lectio divina* invites a reader to notice where the Spirit draws one’s attention and to remain in that place in meditation on the word, phrase, or verse. Ignatian *lectio divina*, which works well for story passages, invites a reader to imagine yourself present in the event being described. For example, imagine yourself as a disciple watching four men lower their paralyzed friend down through a roof (Mark 2:3-4). What do you see, hear, smell, and notice through your Spirit-guided sacred imagination?

In Volume I, for the Gospels of Matthew and John, I pray using the format of the Prayer of St. Francis. Here is an example from Matthew 5:3:

Lord, make me poor in spirit,  
when too full, let me be poured out,  
when too proud, let me choose humility,  
when grasping for my own sake,  
let me be spent in compassion.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to live for my own gain as to love with joyful generosity,  
to trust in my strength as to accept my belovedness,  
to think I know best as to trust you know better.

For the act of *kenosis*<sup>3</sup> - of emptying - the model of  
Jesus,  
the giving of self the Way of the Cross  
that leads to eternal life.

In Mark, Luke, and Acts in Volume I, and continuing with Romans to Revelation in Volume II, the prayers begin, “God, it’s me....” Here is an example from Hebrews 8:1-13:

God, it’s me. I long for certainty: not the kind conveyed by power and privilege, nor that which comes from market success or insurance. No, I long for the certainty that my life is built on that which endures: character and hope and a love that will not let me go. I long for the certainty that my well-being depends not on human choices but upon Divine choosing: I belong to you—body and soul, in life and in death. I am humbled and grateful, that my longing is welcomed by Jesus.

In Matthew and John I chose to mirror the format of the “Prayer of St. Francis.”

Whether through direct address or formatted to mirror St. Francis (aka, my favorite saint), the prayers are written from my personal perspective, as if I am praying. If you do not connect with my personal experience, I invite you to craft your own prayer that speaks from your heart to God.

## God-Language

Writing (and reading) a paraphrase is an opportunity to challenge one’s faith or, at least, explore the spiritual life slant. Though I am absolutely committed to inclusive language when referring to humanity, when speaking of the divine I prefer personal pronouns rather than the repetition of God, as in, “God said that God would bring God’s deliverance.” For me, personal pronouns better communicate that God is relational—the Holy Trinity, Three-in-One! I am personally comfortable speaking of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as well as saying something like, “God said that he would bring his deliverance.” That’s me: my comfort zone, my customary way of speaking the faith. And that’s okay.

However, as I have participated in small groups with female colleagues and listened to their experience of

himself nothing” NIV) to describe Jesus’ emptying of his divine prerogatives to embrace the form of a servant.

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<sup>3</sup> *Kenosis* is a Greek word that means “emptying.” It is used most famously in the New Testament in Philippians 2:7 (c.f. “made

being excluded by the use of exclusively male expressions of God, I found myself wanting to experiment with the language I use. The Apostle Paul's ethical guidance in Romans 14 is germane: "charity before freedom." In *Rhythms* I chose to be cognizant that the way I speak of God may impact my beloved in Jesus in profound ways, for good or ill. Insisting on my personal comfort zone when others are negatively impacted is not okay.

I experimented with several ways to be inclusive with God-language (language about the divine) in early drafts. One experiment I found particularly meaningful personally was to speak of God as *Abba* and *Imma*, which are the Aramaic endearments for Daddy and Mommy. I wondered, as I wrote, how taking turns using *Abba* and *Imma* would affect my experience of the biblical text as Word of God. I wondered how my commitment to using personal pronouns while seeking to honor inclusive expressions of the One we worship as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier might affect me spiritually and ethically. What I discovered is a sense of community with female colleagues that felt sacred and unexpected (I am now chagrined to admit). I liked this fresh expression for speaking of God; therefore, you will find *Abba* and *Imma* but only used in one letter each.

Why only once?

In sharing *Rhythms* in written form and through teaching workshops, I discovered that some readers could not move past the prevalence of *Imma*. These readers, who were both male and female, appreciated my efforts to write a fresh expression of God's Word, but, for them, the use of *Imma* prevented them from embracing the interpretive paraphrase. Having already decided that "charity before freedom" is germane, I adapted my writing and tried another experiment in the following pages.

When using the divine name, I take the Hebrew Bible as inspiration, where God is called *El-Shaddai* (The Truth Almighty) and *El-Elyon* (Lord of Heaven and Earth). In the pages that follow, I call Yahweh by a unique characteristic connected to the theology and spirituality of the particular book or letter.

<b>Book/Letter</b>	<b>Divine Name</b>
Matthew	The Truth
Mark	The Action
Luke	The Compassion
John	The I WILL BE
Acts	The Sender
Romans	Abba

1 Corinthians	The Unity
2 Corinthians	The Reconciliation
<b>Book/Letter</b>	<b>Divine Name</b>
Galatians	The Freedom
Ephesians	The Mystery
Philippians	The Joy
Colossians	Imma
1, 2 Thessalonians	The Hope
1, 2 Timothy & Titus	The Root
Philemon	The Liberator
Hebrews	The Name
James	Sophia
1, 2, 3 Peter	The Sovereign
1, 2, 3 John	The Love
Jude	The Holy
Revelation	The Glory

I am not the first to call Yahweh by a unique characteristic by the way. In Genesis 31:42, God is called "The Fear of Isaac" (Genesis 31:42). If God can be called "The Fear," why not "The Joy" or "The Glory"? Further, I use "They," with a capital "T" as God's pronoun both to convey God's trinitarian nature and remain gender inclusive.

### Religious Speech

Writing a paraphrase is an opportunity to explore fresh means of expressing faith and life. I use "God-rhythms" and "God-life" because I feel they convey a jazz-like sense of musical harmony appropriate to life with Jesus. I have made other linguistic changes in my attempt to create an environment in which readers might hear God's Word as a fresh expression and to receive it with insight, imagination, appreciation, and affirmation. For example, the word grace, a word that I dearly love, is paraphrased as "loving-kindness." Please be assured, O Gentle Reader, that I love the word grace. Not only is it integral to my story of giving my life to Jesus, but *Amazing Grace* is my absolute favorite hymn!

One difficulty of crafting an interpretive paraphrase is that the Bible is so well-known and loved that the temptation is to use well-known and beloved phrases. However, a paraphrase, by definition, seeks to open new pathways into understanding the text by deliberately *not* using well-worn phrases, and this practice may cause readers confusion! To minimize confusion, I want to give

you a head start on some of the vocabulary I use, especially of familiar terms:

<b>Traditional Term</b>	<b>Fresh Expression</b>
Christ	the Anointed
church	gathering or the Body
demon	unholy spirit
disciple (individual)	disciplined follower, Devoted
faith	trust
grace	loving-kindness
healed	made whole
holy	set apart
kingdom of God	kin-dom, or rule of sovereign love
Lord	sovereign above Caesar, sovereign above the cosmos, or sovereign above the Body
prophets	truth-tellers
righteousness	right relationship(s)
salvation	becoming whole and complete, becoming our true self
Satan/Devil	Accuser
spirit vs. flesh	true self vs. false self

Readers will note the names of all 1st century Jewish groups have also been modified. My intent is to describe them according to how they function within 1st century Jewish culture yet point to the truth these same characters function within every 21st century Christian church.

<b>Traditional Term</b>	<b>Fresh Expression</b>
antichrists	the Opposers
apostles	sent ones
chief priests	the Rulers
deacons	the Caring
disciples (group)	the Disciplined followers
elders	the Old Ones
false teachers	the Speculators
Herodians	the Collaborators
Pharisees	the Intense
Sadducees	the Elite
Scribes	the Scrupulous

Some of my verbal experiments will work; others will not. Please don't judge the entire manuscript if one or more of these experiments fall flat for you! Instead, continue reading in search of nourishment for your heart, mind, and spirit. I hope you will take a "water off a duck's back" approach to experiments that fall flat. Many of the footnotes compare my word choice to the choices made by English translations or suggest how the Greek text might allow for such an interpretation. (I highly recommend you read the footnotes, especially if you have a question about why I have phrased something in a particular way.)

Do you agree or disagree with the choices I have made? Why or why not? Let the dialogue begin.



# Matthew

The Gospel of Matthew is an invitation to dig deeper into the Truth as a lived experience. Matthew demands ethical living; without an outward expression, no idea can be considered true according to the first-century, Hebraic worldview. “Truth” in the Hebraic culture of Jesus’ day was a lived experience that conformed to God’s will more than an abstraction or set of ideas about what form perfection takes.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, I call God “The Truth” in the pages that follow.

Similarly, as the Hebraic understanding of truth is the integration of one’s full and true self expressed as lifestyle and not just cognitive beliefs or ideas affirmed, I chose to craft all of the prayers after the model of the *Prayer of St. Francis*. Francis of Assisi, who in the 13<sup>th</sup> century founded an order of monks disciplined followers to serving the poor, was known more for his actions than his writings. Francis’ writings primarily consisted of letters to Brother Leo and the ineffable *Canticle of the Creatures*, though very little of what we could call theological writing. Francis was known for how he lived. To honor Francis’ spirit and life, my prayers are modeled after the one his own disciples wrote to honor him. In addition, I added a fourth section, “*Go into the World..*” to encourage readers to live the text in their daily lives.

Matthew the author invites readers to ponder the ways the Gospel connects to culture and to respond to The Truth’s call with actions in both the private and public sphere. Both our interior lives of spirit and our public living of truth will be challenged in these pages, for we will encounter Jesus in them.

The structure of Matthew lends itself to readers being challenged to put their beliefs into lived practice. A central theme in the Gospel is that Jesus is the “new Moses” or a fulfillment of Moses’ intentions. The Gospel is structured around five, major teaching-healing sequences to suggest the five books of Moses.<sup>5</sup> Jesus’ teaching sequences begin with his greatest ethical discourse, the Sermon on the Mount, and concludes with a string of parables that culminates with the Parable of the Sheep and

Goats: “I was hungry and you fed me...” (25:35). From first to last, ethics shape, form, and transform Matthew’s readers.

These passages, the Sermon on the Mount and the Parable of the Sheep and Goats as well as the kingdom parables in Matthew 13 (e.g. the Parable of the Sower), highlight a particular challenge and delight in crafting an interpretive paraphrase of Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew is renowned for these passages. Paraphrasing the beatitudes in Matthew 5, the Parable of the Sower, and the Parable of the Sheep and Goats were particular challenges, as all of them are beloved and well-known passages impossible to improve upon. And, in fact, I did not improve upon them! However, I crafted them with a faithful focus on the Greek New Testament text and allowed the Spirit to speak a fresh expression of their ancient truths in the hope that all who read their paraphrase will dance the God-rhythms of the God-life in ever deepening ways.

I also sought to increase readers’ cultural literacy of the first-century, which is significant for all proper interpretation of the New Testament but particularly vital in Matthew. For instance, in the genealogy (1:1-17), I highlight the unique characters included by Matthew and why they are significant in the Gospel lineage. Or again, in the familiar passage “If someone strikes you on the right cheek, offer them the left also,” I highlight how this passage assumes cultural practices between Roman soldiers and the oppressed, Jewish populace. Such culturally-sensitive paraphrases are found throughout the pages that follow.

I seek to illuminate the Gospel more fully; however, it is the responsibility of each reader, as one in whom the Holy Spirit lives, to engage my words as an active learner and dialogue partner: Why did I phrase this as I did? What did I see that you did not or miss that you saw? Even more vital is to answer this question: How will you live the Gospel as truth?

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<sup>4</sup> Western culture’s understanding of truth is influenced more by Greek culture, especially Aristotle, who taught there were certain eternal Ideas or Types—to comprehend the Idea’s form of perfection was to understand truth.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—called *Torah* (Hebrew) or *Pentateuch* (Greek).

## Matthew 1:1-17

The family line of Jesus Christ goes way back: way, way back. To David, the iconic king. To Abraham, the beginning of trusting. It includes both a cathedral of saints and a gallery of rogues; there is nothing pious or sentimental to be found in Jesus' family. Instead, what one finds is real, earthy, human.

The family of Jesus includes such luminaries as the Patriarchs – All-Stars of the Bible – Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel. But the family also includes the dastardly Judah who unknowingly rented his daughter-in-law Tamar as a prostitute. By the way, Tamar is one of the saints, whose courage to bear children for her fallen husband, as required in the Law, led to her desperate trickery with Judah. And twin boys.

The family is not altogether Jewish either but includes Ruth, the Moabitess, whose son Obed was King David's grandfather. Imagine: the Anointed One of Israel was not of pure blood, but then he really was The Truth's Anointed One, wasn't he?

The family is littered with kings. It starts with David, the iconic one, yet also the exemplar of a man's frailty, whose "seduction" of Bathsheba, the wife of another man, was more rape than consent, for how does one say no to a king? Besides, their union led David to murder.

The royal line continued with both fallen and faithful among them, both those who led the nation astray in the worship of false gods, and the reformers who led the nation back to The Truth. There were people like Bathsheba's offspring, Solomon, who was wise in his youth—but a wandering eye and greedy heart led him into an allegiance with many gods. And there was Solomon's son, Rehoboam, whose lightest burden was heavier than Solomon's greatest weight. Yet there were also those like Josiah whose Great Reform renewed the nation (and "discovered" the Book of Deuteronomy). Down through the centuries they march, this cathedral of saints and gallery of rogues. Real. Earthy. Human. The perfect family for Jesus.

*Patriarchy fractured, hegemony crumbling,  
women throwing shade  
to the applause of the angels.  
Tamar redefining purity,  
Rahab celebrated for standing for Yahweh  
rather than known for laying under Baal,  
Ruth with Gentile DNA,  
Bathsheba, name not spoken, yet cannot be silenced.  
Then twenty-four generations on and on and on –  
is time up? Really?  
Hope wanes, is waning, waning, waning. But wait...  
Mary: theotokos.<sup>6</sup>  
The Truth-bearer.  
Yes, time is up. Or at least kairos.<sup>7</sup>  
Hosanna to the son of David!  
And to the women whose names  
cast a shadow that creates light –  
Respect.  
Five women, a Pentateuch of wisdom and courage,  
through whom The Truth brings Messiah.*

Yahweh, make us instruments of truth-telling,  
where there is deceit, let us sow courage,  
where there is danger, let us seize opportunity,  
where there is bitterness, let us trust hope,  
where there is oppression, let us remain steadfast,  
where there is fear, let us step forward  
that it may be as you say,  
where you call,  
let us bear your Presence into the world.  
O Lord of the *Kairos* moment,  
may we not so much seek  
to grab hold of our blessings as to live into them,  
to avoid hardship as to live beyond it,  
to live in the shadows as to shine light upon all.  
For it is in hearing your call we learn our true name,  
it is in stepping into faith  
that we are formed into new creation,  
it is in your *kairos* that the Christ comes  
and we are a part of him.

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<sup>6</sup> *Theotokos* is a Greek word that means "God-bearer." It contrasts with the word *Christotokos* which means "Christ-bearer." A debate among the Apostolic Fathers and Mothers was whether or not Mary was *theotokos* or merely *christotokos*? The Church decided in favor of a more robust doctrine of incarnation when it affirmed Mary as God-bearer.

<sup>7</sup> *Kairos* is one of the ways the Greeks talked about time. In contrast to *chronos*, which refers to chronological time, *kairos* refers to the decisive moment in time when The Truth's actions form or transform reality. For Jesus to say, "The time is at hand, the kingdom of The Truth has come," is a *kairos* moment.

*Go into the world...* Notice your relationships with people who are different from you: male to female, young to old, named and titled to unknown and discounted. To whom do you give more credence? Whose humanity do you more readily embrace? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 1:18-19**

Do you want to know how it happened – this birth of Jesus? Jesus’ mother was a promised woman, promised to Joseph. Exclusive. While chaste, Mary was found to be with child. Exclusive? The child was allegedly caused by the Divine Spirit. Who can tell when it comes to The Truth’s mysteries? Joseph, Mary’s husband, was a righteous man, but not in the conventional sense; he did not want Mary stoned, nor humiliated, nor ostracized. Still, he was done. No more “exclusive” for Joseph. He was writing the certificate of divorce over and over and over in his mind. Sleep eluded him. What was he waiting for?

*Appearances can be deceiving;  
The Choice appears obvious:*

*Death or life? Shame or despair?  
Mary’s good name or his own?*

*In truth none of these were choices for Joseph,  
for he lived a Reformed law, living a Reforming Spirit:*

*Leviticus? So cold, so hard, so clear.<sup>8</sup>  
Flint striking granite.*

*Or Isaiah? Gentle love born of a nation’s brokenness.<sup>9</sup>  
The ambiguity of a breeze: old versus new.*

*Joseph chose new righteousness,  
becoming*

*Protector of Bruised Reeds,  
Patron saint of Smoldering Wicks,*

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<sup>8</sup> c.f. Leviticus 20:10.

<sup>9</sup> c.f. Isaiah 42:3, spoken to a nation still in Babylonian exile, in which it is said of the servant of The Truth,

*model for manliness for those who have ears to hear.  
Fresh mercy every morning for me and mine, and  
every tribe, every clan, every tongue,  
even those from “S\*\*\*hole” countries.*

*I suspect it cost Joseph dearly, among those for whom  
cold, hard, and clear appears to be the obvious choice.*

*Appearances can be deceiving.*

Lord, make me a protector of bruised reeds,  
where there is cold calculation,  
let me bring warm embrace,  
where there is hardness of heart,  
let me bring gentleness of spirit,  
where flint strikes granite,  
let me point toward mercy’s dew,  
where others cast out, let me draw in,  
where others shame and blame,  
let me name with a divine claim,  
where there is a too easy clarity,  
let me bring questions, oh, so many, many questions.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to snuff out the smoldering wick  
as to reignite the flames of justice,  
to fear brokenness as to be transformed by it,  
to shout, “Crucify!” as to pray at the foot of the Cross.  
For it is in being embraced by your mercy  
that we share it with others,  
it is in welcoming Mary into my home  
that The Truth-possibilities flourish,  
it is in singing a new song  
that the birth of Messiah Jesus comes about.

*Go into the world...* Notice the number and ways people are “broken” or “hurting.” Who are the bruised reeds among you? Whose wick is smoldering? How are *you* bruised? How are *you* smoldering? Open your heart to giving and receiving The Truth’s mercy to, for, through,

A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.  
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.

Commentators note that Isaiah seems to put forward a new version of righteousness that competes with, and some argue supersedes, the Levitical law’s rigid calculations.

and among those whom you encounter today. Notice.  
Pray. Act.

### Matthew 1:20

Finally sleep came to Joseph and with it a dream—  
a celestial messenger, who said, “Joseph, son of The  
Truth’s promise, be not afraid. Their love has  
overshadowed Mary, even as it will overshadow your fear,  
your anger and all your doubting.”

*People say fear limits the heart;  
much more does it enslave the mind.  
Hearts break and, sooner or later,  
later or sooner, heal.*

*But a mind?  
Broken minds last and last and last...  
flowing water becomes ice.  
PTSD of the soul.*

*Joseph, tempted to fear, expected to fear,  
is saved by dreaming -  
not thinking or scheming or even believing:  
dreaming.*

*Imagination’s double-helix:  
Watson and Crick for the spiritual realm.  
The spiral of growing, developing, multiplying -  
Faith. Hope. Love.*

*Hamlet asked, “To sleep, perchance to dream.”  
Joseph responds, “To dream, perchance to live.”  
Hidden awake, revealed asleep -  
The Truth’s promise and peace.*

*Have we forgotten this ancient dance?  
Neglected the dreams given to us as children?  
Deserted all the possibilities of our youth?  
Allowed them to choke us like the Sower’s third?<sup>10</sup>*

*Might, can, will, should God-dreams live again?  
And with them, Holy Spirit?  
Oh, father Joseph,  
pray for us sinners in the hours of our life!*

O Lord, make me a vessel full of dreams,  
where there are limits, let me see possibilities,  
where there are roadblocks,  
let me travel o’er mountains,  
where there are only naysayers, let me be deaf,  
where there is scarcity, let me see your abundance,  
where there is the unknown and uncertain,  
let me be known, for certain,  
where there is fear, let me dream.  
O Divine dream-giver, may I not so much seek  
to live out my own life-script  
as to embrace your Divine narrative,  
to avoid great challenge as to dream bigger dreams,  
to hear the Siren’s call of my fears  
as to listen to the whispers of the Spirit.  
For it is in heeding the Spirit’s nudge  
that sons and daughters prophesy,<sup>11</sup>  
it is in sacred whisper the young see visions  
and the old dream dreams,  
it is in Joseph’s sleep, and our own,  
that The Truth brings life among us.<sup>12</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice fear in your life and in the lives  
of others. How are your actions directed by fear in its many  
colors: embarrassment, shame, worry, doubt, and  
suspicion? Spend 20 minutes daydreaming. Listen to the  
whispers of the Spirit. What wonders make your heart  
sing? To whom is The Truth calling you to be a blessing  
today? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 1:21

Gabriel, the messenger of The Truth, told Joseph,  
“Name the boy *Yeshua* - He Who Saves - for from their  
own brokenness will The Truth heal Their people; the  
people’s darkened souls will become prisms of light.”  
*No one imagines the mirror as spiritual tool.*

<sup>10</sup> c.f. Mark 4:7.

<sup>11</sup> c.f. Acts 2:17-18, as Peter describes the day of Pentecost and  
the effect that happens when the Spirit is poured out upon  
humanity.

<sup>12</sup> This allusion to The Truth working while we are sleeping is self-  
evident in the Joseph story, but I notice its echo in the parable of  
the growing seed, Mark 4:26-29, especially verses 27-28. Calvinists  
everywhere rejoice at this notion of The Truth bringing salvation  
unbeknownst to us and without our help, even while sleeping.

*Comfort comes from the peek out the window:  
the folly of neighbors my sacred scorn.*

*More intense still is the window of oppression:  
the cruelty of enemies my holy lament.  
“How long, O Lord, ‘til you smite my enemies:?”*

*Comes the angel with disturbing news:  
“The mirror is the only way.”*

*Not Rome, nor Caesar.  
Not Herod, nor the Pharisees.*

*Neither Trump nor Biden  
nor your ex nor your boss.*

*You. You are the One who needs  
healing and wholeness, renewal and forgiveness.*

*Don't look out the window at their sins.  
Yeshua comes to save you from your sins.*

Lord, make me a mirror-looking saint,  
when tempted to peek out the window,  
place the mirror before me,  
when tempted to cast about for others' sins,  
let me confront my own,  
when tempted to name others' problems,  
let me confess my own,  
when confronted with the mirror,  
let my eyes remain open,  
when the mirror is a friend or family,  
let me receive rebuke as a gift,  
when the mirror is enemy or “other,”  
let me see your loving-kindness.  
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to look outward as to look inward,  
to blame sin on others as to claim grace for all,  
to fret about my enemies as to affirm,  
“I have met the enemy...and the enemy is me.”  
For it is in honest humility  
that we are freed through forgiveness,  
it is in humble accountability  
that we are freed for forgiveness,  
it is in, with and by grace, your grace,

the one and only grace that saves,  
that forgiveness flows through us to others,  
making enemy and stranger, friend and neighbor.

*Go into the world...* Notice those times you focus blame on others while making excuses for your own, similar behavior? Notice those times when you do actually blame yourself: Is the blame the work of the Spirit leading you to honest conviction according to The Truth's Word? Or is the blame the work of the Accuser who seeks to deflate, and even destroy, your spirit? (Hint: the Spirit's work is always life-affirming, leading to a sense of conviction and wholeness, while the Accuser's work often mires one in self-doubt or shame.) Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 1:22-23**

Gabriel continued speaking to Joseph, “Mary will be the *Theotokos*, The Truth-bearer, and you will name this child *Immanuel* - The Truth Is with Us - just as the truth-teller, Isaiah, spoke in ages past.

*With.*  
*No mere existence together: side by side,  
couch potato-ing through life.*

*Not parallel travels: separate kicks on Route 66.  
Not the quiet desperation of so many a marriage.  
Not a slow death of a church pretending to be a mime.*

*God-life in-breaking, destroying assumptions.  
God-hope shattering despair, planting seeds.  
God-love breaking down walls of hostility.  
God-whimsy in Ricky Bobby's favorite Jesus.<sup>13</sup>*

*With is sacred silliness.  
Who would - who could - have guessed?  
Immanuel - The Truth with us.  
Jesus.*

Immanuel, make me an instrument of with-ness,  
when others keep their distance, let me connect,  
when relationships rupture, let me repair,  
when the Church rejects, let me embrace,  
where God-void is encountered,

<sup>13</sup> This refers to the comedian Will Ferrell, whose character in the movie, Talladega Nights, a spoof of the NASCAR racing circuit,

says grace to “Baby Jesus” because the image of the Christ Child is his “favorite Jesus.”

let me give birth,  
where God-cloudiness envelops,  
let me serve as midwife,  
where God-cry laments,  
let me bear *theotokos* into the world.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be known as one who claims you  
as to be one who is with you,  
to claim your allegiance as to welcome your presence,  
to boast of my closeness to you  
as to rejoice in your presence with me.

For it is in being God-bearers  
that, like Mary, we bring loving-kindness into the world,  
it is in having her courage and trust  
that God-Life is birthed,  
it is in Immanuel we learn you are not against us  
and we are not alone.

*Go into the world...* Notice the moments of The Truth's perceived presence and of Their perceived absence. Are there common themes to Their presence or absence? Does your being Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired (HALT) affect your experience of The Truth? Seek to become aware of Immanuel: The Truth-with-you today. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 1:24-25**

Joseph awoke from his dream - was it only a dream? Yes, but dreams have power, and so this dream's power transformed Joseph. He embraced Mary in the covenant of love, as his wife, yet remained chaste until the boy was born. Joseph adopted the boy as his own son by asserting his right to name the child: Jesus.<sup>14</sup>

*There is power in a choice.  
"I choose family,"  
said the dad who could never be father.  
Nothing forced, coerced, required, or obligated.  
Chosen.  
Like saying yes to a cool breeze on a summer's day.  
Joy for the low, low price of  
naming a boy not technically his own.  
Yet in the naming the boy became something new:*

*shared, a part of deeper union, real consummation of  
love's covenant.*

*For in the naming the boy became  
a son.*

Lord, make me an instrument of naming,  
where anonymity cripples,  
let me seek to know another,  
where namelessness means forsaken,  
let me see, hear, and call to them,  
where society forgets, let me remember,  
where society ignores, let me notice,  
where encountered by those who are faceless,  
let me speak them into dignity.

O Truth of Joseph, may I not so much seek  
to claim parental rights  
as to embrace all children in love,  
to do what is expedient  
as to live according to what is just,  
to tolerate the kid as to embrace the child.  
For it is in union and communion  
that community is formed,  
it is in loving the single mom that boys become men,  
it is in naming Jesus as one's own  
that Jesus finds a home.

*Go into the world...* Notice the stranger. Notice the alone. Speak to them. Encounter them. What is their name? What is their story? Open yourself to the common themes in each other's narratives. Be a place of welcome. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:1**

Jesus was born in the City of David, called Bethlehem, only six miles from Jerusalem, in the region known as Judea. Herod was king - brilliant architect yet brutal dictator, murderer of his many sons to guard his only crown.

*So close Bethlehem -  
only six miles, an hour's walk, so near the throne.  
So far the City of David -  
only the promised need apply.*

---

<sup>14</sup> According to first-century Jewish custom, Joseph adopted Jesus as his own by asserting his right to name Jesus and in so doing

asserted a union and intimacy forged in the bonds both of law and love.

*Herod's brilliance and brutality  
side by side, hand in hand.  
Lovers on a solitary walk to destiny  
or is it infamy?*

*So far the crown  
that lay uneasy upon Herod's head.  
So close the king  
born to humility and beyond earth's bounds.*

*So close and yet so far.*

Lord, make me an instrument of Divine irony,  
where others seek power, may I let go,  
where others seek glory, may I let you,  
when I encounter greed, may I let go,  
when I encounter spite, may I let you,  
while others fret, may I let go,  
while others scheme, may I let you.

O Diving Master, may I not so much seek  
to win the gold as to leap for the sixth quad,<sup>15</sup>  
to seek acclaim as to embrace the ride,  
to know the thrill of victory  
as to celebrate our shared humanity.

For it was in a manger not a throne a king was found,  
not Herod's brilliance but Jesus' humility  
that transformed history,  
in Bethlehem, not Jerusalem, redemption began.

*Go into the world...* Notice the ways giftedness  
accompanies goofiness in yourself and others. Notice those  
of acclaim who err. Notice the ways your own spirit is  
twisted when it cannot or will not accept your blessedness  
or brokenness. Of what are you afraid? Let go, let The  
Truth. Notice. Pray. Act.

## **Matthew 2:2**

From the Arabian Desert came "wise men,"  
astrologers perhaps or scientists or sages. Whoever they

were, they did not belong to Israel. Thus, they did not  
belong in Israel. Foreigners. Gentiles. Unclean. *Goyyim!*<sup>16</sup>

*How dare you journey to the Land of the Chosen?  
Why seek a king among those who are not your own?  
You are not welcome here, O Nations!*

*The lure of the heart is a Siren,  
the call of The Truth an unquenchable thirst,  
how can we not journey, O Israel?*

*Abraham is our Father; the Land our birthright!  
Law was given; truth-tellers speak  
to us, and to us alone, Goyyim!*

*We, too, are imago dei; in the image created,<sup>17</sup>  
the Star a mother's lullaby to we, the outsiders,  
who also would wrestle with The Truth.<sup>18</sup>*

Creator, make me a destroyer of walls,  
where others build, let me destroy,  
where others prevent, let me empower,  
where others reserve rights for some,  
let me proclaim them for all,  
where others obfuscate, let me illuminate,  
where others cause to stumble, let me help to walk,  
where others oppress, let me liberate.  
O Destroyer of The Wall of Hostility,<sup>19</sup>  
let me not so much seek  
to claim my own rights as to protect others' rights,  
to divide humanity  
as to join You in making one new humanity,<sup>20</sup>  
to rejoice I am a child of the covenant  
as to invite others to the party.  
For it is a party of your invitation –  
to oneness, unity, and peace,  
it is in rejoicing in shared humanity

<sup>15</sup> In case you are wondering, this prayer was written during the Winter Olympics. The "sixth quad" refers to U.S skater Nathan Chen, who had zero chance for a gold medal but soared into our hearts for attempting six, four-rotation leaps! Sometimes it's not about winning but about letting one's heart sing for the world to hear – and embrace.

<sup>16</sup> *Goyyim* is the Hebrew word for nations or peoples.

<sup>17</sup> *Imago dei* means "image of The Truth" (c.f. Genesis 1:27).

<sup>18</sup> The name Israel means "wrestles with The Truth."

<sup>19</sup> c.f. Ephesians 2:14 – "he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...."

<sup>20</sup> c.f. Ephesians 2:15 – "His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two...."

that we express our one hope,<sup>21</sup>  
in building bridges The Truth is found in the world.<sup>22</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice distinctions that divide. Beyond the obvious – gender, race, etc. – notice the ways you divide consciously and unconsciously. Repent, O Sinner! Then, as you experience The Truth’s forgiveness, forgive yourself also, but continue to notice. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:2-3**

These wise men were searching for Israel’s new king, so of course, they went to the capital. To Jerusalem. To Herod. “Where is the newborn king of the Jews?” they asked innocently, without guile. “We saw his Star in the east and have come to worship him.” This news stirred Herod’s jealous soul, and so all Jerusalem was troubled. A Storm was brewing; the people could smell it in the wind.

*As old as Cain and Abel,<sup>23</sup>  
as petty as Donkey and Elephant,  
jealousy rears its ugly head: “So Sad!”*

*Petty playground bullying leads to  
Columbine and to Parkland  
(and too many others to count).*

*The Star still shines, darkness never defeating light.<sup>24</sup>  
Is following a Star in a world of jealousy fool’s errand or act  
of trust?*

*Ask Mother Teresa, Bonhoeffer or Bishop Romero.<sup>25</sup>  
Ask those who place water in the desert.  
Ask the ones whose lives are saved – inside and out –*

*by those who claim  
Good News  
is worth following.*

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<sup>21</sup> c.f. Ephesians 2:12 – “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without The Truth in the world.”

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> c.f. Genesis 4:1-9. The first recorded example of “jealousy rearing its ugly head.”

<sup>24</sup> c.f. John 1:5.

<sup>25</sup> Mother Teresa is the founder of the Sisters of Mercy in Calcutta, India. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who stood against Hitler. Bishop Oscar Romero stood against injustice,

Lord, make me like the Star of Bethlehem,  
in the darkness, let me shine your light,  
in the depths, let me bring your mercy,  
to the lost, let me point the way,  
to the least, let me shine your grace,  
for the lonely, let me bring your presence,  
for all who seek, let me point to the Savior.  
O Morning Star, may I not so much seek  
others’ praise as your approval,  
to control my destiny as to abide in your eternity,  
to glorify myself as to bow before your throne.  
For it is the way of humility you show,  
the path of jealousy you reject,  
it is the searchers and seekers who find,  
not the stationary,  
it is without guile that we must  
come before the One, True King.

*Go into the world...* Notice the way you compare yourself to others. When do you feel better? When do you feel lesser? When do you feel pride or shame? Notice also those moments when you are without guile – when “what they see is what they get”? Which moments feel like sacred shalom?<sup>26</sup> Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:4-6**

Herod called together his pantheon of lackeys – clerics and politicians, economists and historians – “Where is The Truth’s Anointed to be born,” he demanded?

“In Bethlehem,” they answered, “for Micah, the truth-teller from ages to ages past, has spoken:

It’s you, O Little Town, City of David,  
Though small, you are not insignificant,  
For from your fields The Truth will bring forth  
a shepherd for Israel.”<sup>27</sup>

torture and murder in El Salvador. Mother Teresa experienced the depths of grinding poverty, and both Bonhoeffer and Romero were executed; however, each left a legacy that transformed and continues to transform.

<sup>26</sup> The Hebrew word *shalom* means “peace” but conveys more than merely the absence of conflict but the positive, dynamic presence of wellness throughout the community—emotionally, physically, socially, economically, and spiritually.

<sup>27</sup> c.f. Micah 5:2.

*Big Macs and Whoppers. Hummers and Ram Tough.*  
*New York. London. Tokyo. Moscow.*  
*Where are you found, O Lord,*  
*in this world of bigger is better?*  
*Where can I hear your still, small voice*  
*in a culture of high decibel programming?*

*How long, O Lord, will you forget us forever?*  
*Will you speak again to your Body*  
*gathered in huts in el campo de Nicaragua,<sup>28</sup>*  
*joyfully singing on the African plain,*  
*slowing, aging, shrinking at the church on Main?*  
*Can your Word be once again for us?*

*Are we beyond being significant?*  
*Unable to become the womb of your creating?*  
*Wall Street and Madison Ave.*  
*tell us we no longer matter -*  
*from mainline to sidelines,*  
*our influence a desiccated, half-consumed apple*  
*thrown from the window of a speeding car.*

*How long until you have a Word for the likes of us?*

Lord, mold me as a jar of clay,  
where others see dust,  
let me become New Adam or New Eve,  
where others see dry bones, let me hear Ezekiel's call,<sup>29</sup>  
when the sun withers,  
let me find shade beneath your wings,  
when thorns choke, let me let go the worries of this life,  
amidst bigger is better,  
let me have faith like the mustard seed,  
amidst high volume ranting,  
let me listen for the still, small voice.  
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to be known by many as to be approved by you,  
to be lauded and applauded  
as to allow your Spirit to blow where it will,  
to glean the fruit of my own labor  
as to bear fruit for your Harvest.  
For it is in planting seeds of faith  
that sprouts the nurture of justice,  
it is in nurturing seeds of hope  
that grows the fruit of kindness,

it is in the harvest of love  
that we walk humbly before you, our The Truth.

*Go into the world...* Notice small things. Notice the seemingly insignificant. How many times during the day do you encounter quiet grace? Simple goodness? The gift of another? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:7-8**

Herod, a wily politician if ever there was one, secretly consorted with the wise ones, inquiring of them when the Star had appeared in the east. Herod sent the wise ones to Bethlehem, saying, "Scour the households; sweep the streets; find the child that I, too, may worship my new king."

*So subtle the sin that entwines by inviting us to dance,*  
*manipulating our courtesy with its pernicious intent,*  
*entangling our soul*

*because we do not have*  
*eyes to see or ears to hear that some mirth is malice.*  
*Yet the invitation comes, and we are to call it what it is:*

*"Keep your hands to yourself, please."*  
*"I prefer you not use that word in my presence."*  
*"I stand with my sister, my brother - for we are one."*

*The Accuser sounds so cherubic*  
*until we call it by name*  
*and finally have ears to hear and eyes to see.*

Lord make me an instrument of moral courage,  
where others oppress "just joking,"  
may I not laugh,  
where others oppress "no offense intended,"  
may I be firm,  
when others injure without malice,  
may I rebuke without malice,  
but when others injure "my hand slipped,"  
may I be willing to report,  
and where I'm the one who oppresses,  
may I receive rebuke with grace,  
and when I'm the one who injures,

<sup>28</sup> *El campo de Nicaragua* means "the countryside of Nicaragua."

<sup>29</sup> c.f. Ezekiel 37:1-14 where the prophet sees a valley of dry bones, which The Truth calls back to life.

may chagrin, regret, and confession be my path.

O Divine Healer, may I not so much seek  
to oppress as to liberate,  
to injure as to heal,  
to justify my prejudice  
as to proclaim the Year of Jubilee.<sup>30</sup>

For it is in seeking justice that we share your mind,  
it is in loving mercy that we share your heart,  
it is in walking humbly that we share your life  
in Jesus, your Son.

*Go into the world...* Notice yourself obscuring truth: saying one thing but meaning another. Notice when you understate or overstate your thoughts, your feelings, or your intentions. How do you respond to an encounter with malice – with silence or violence? What might it look like for you to speak the truth in love? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:9-11**

The wise ones journeyed from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, only six miles but a soul's eternity away. The Star led them to the Child, and they were flush with joy. As they entered the home, they beheld the Child and The Truth-bearer and fell to their knees. After they worshipped the Child, the wise ones presented to him gifts of gold, incense and myrrh. These gifts were earthly treasures, to be sure, but they also foreshadowed the Storm: royalty, sanctity, Death.

*Humble the beauty that brings redemption;  
earthen the glory that saves.*

*Long the journey of the wise who seek;  
subtle the Star that leads.*

*Majestic The Truth-bearer;  
even more the Child.*

*And the gratitude we bring seeks a truth that is  
our joy to proclaim:*

*That in body and in soul,  
in life and in death and in life beyond death,*

*He does not belong to us;  
we belong to him.*

O Lord, make me an instrument of gratitude,  
when confronted with cruelty, let me show kindness,  
when encountering suffering, let me show solidarity,  
to the grinch, let me speak grace,  
to the grumpy, let me live as gracious,  
where fear overwhelms, let me pray without ceasing,  
where darkness eclipses, let me shine your light.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to get for my own sake as to give for your sake,  
to expect the World as to live content in your will,  
to demand abundance as lament others' scarcity.

For it is a grateful heart that sings your joy,  
it is the giving heart that writes new lyrics,  
it is the life of gratitude  
that opens the melody of the Christ Child.

*Go into the world...* Notice your expectations. Are others to serve you? Is traffic to clear for you? Do your daily encounters tend toward the transactional? Or do you live and move and have your being with an openness to each moment? Are you quick to joy? How often do you express thanks? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:12-13**

The wise ones were warned in a dream not to return to Herod the Great, so they scampered off, returning to their foreign homes by an unusual route. Once the wise ones had left, yet another dream was given in which The Truth's messenger played travel agent, This dream went to Joseph: "Hurry along with the Child and the The Truth-bearer and flee to Egypt, for Herod is going to do what Herod the Great does: murder, mayhem, tragedy. Live in Egypt but do not plant roots, for I will call you home."

*Exile.*

*Familiar home to The Truth's people  
in Israel and around the world.*

*Wandering but not alone,  
rootless but not bereft,  
community the soil beneath one's feet,  
hope known only as promise.*

---

<sup>30</sup> c.f. Leviticus 25:8-13, in which the Israelites are commanded to proclaim freedom from debts throughout the land.

*Jesus began life in exile  
wandering but loved,  
rootless but learning the rhythms  
of The Truth's provision,  
his community the welcome of the world's great power,  
promise fulfilled through parents' fidelity.*

*Today we are surrounded by exiles  
for whom Rwanda or Honduras or Liberia  
will never again be seen or heard or felt,  
concussive drums never beating,  
mountain vistas only on the internet,  
Mother's soil never again sticking between toes.*

*"Flee!" their families warned,  
and so they fled,  
for murder, mayhem, and tragedy  
still stalk the vulnerable.  
Jesus knows their lament:  
"Come, Lord Jesus! Bring us home!"*

Lord, make me an instrument of hospitality,  
beyond mere welcome, let me provide warmth,  
beyond a quick hello, let me provide a long embrace,  
beyond a place to stay, let me provide a home,  
in the midst of terror, let me be safe haven,  
in the loss of community, let me be friend,  
in the building of a new life, let me be guide.  
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to be welcomed as to offer hospitality,  
to be always secure as to create safe places,  
to remember me and mine  
as to see the stranger as brother or sister.  
For it was into exile  
the Patriarchs were called and Israel was forced,  
it was into same Jesus was taken,  
it is now our privilege to honor those  
who walk in His steps.

*Go into the world...* Notice the strangers you encounter.  
How many of them "aren't from these parts"? How often  
do you encounter the refugee, the immigrant, the asylee?  
Imagine their hardships and their hearts - what

circumstances would you need to encounter to flee your  
home forever? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:14-15**

Joseph acted on The Truth's Word to him. He  
took the Child and The Truth-bearer in the dark of night  
and scuttled off to Egypt. To Egypt - land of Pharaoh,  
heritage of oppression, yet, in this moment, refuge. The  
Holy Family abided in this sacred irony until Herod's  
death, which fulfilled what The Truth had spoken from  
ages-to-ages past through his truth-teller: "From Egypt,  
Womb of Oppression, I will bring forth my Son - New  
Birth of Freedom."

*Dark nights can be scary things.  
Conjuring ghosts and ghouls,  
strangers lurking around corners or behind bushes.*

*But dark nights can be good for the soul.  
Teresa of Avila knew it.  
As did John of the Cross.<sup>31</sup>*

*Oppression can breed despair or hope, futility or faith,  
the absence of The Truth an invitation to trust.*

*Was Jesus aware he lived among ancient oppressor?  
Or did he only sense his parents' apprehension?*

*From the womb of darkness  
comes life and light -*

*goodness and mercies band together with  
holy crying and sacred lament.*

Lord, make me an instrument worthy of sacred lament,  
where there is darkness, let me embrace it,  
where death is found, let me not look away,  
where wounds harm the body, let me persevere,  
where gashes grieve the soul, let me be at prayer,  
where wonders the heart, let me await your stillness,  
where found is your absence,  
let me await your presence.

---

<sup>31</sup> Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross are two 16<sup>th</sup> century  
Spanish mystics and authors, respectively, of *The Interior Castle* and  
*Dark Night of the Soul*.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to expect spiritual ecstasy as to offer my own constancy,  
to seek bigger and better  
as to seek faith and faithfulness,  
to avoid all pain as to carry my cross.  
For it is the life of Jesus which guides my path,  
it is his cross that shows me the way,  
it is his death - and my own - that leads to eternal life.

*Go into the world...* Notice the moments when The Truth seems absent. How do you encounter such moments? As sign of Their faithlessness? As holy terror? Or as invitation to trust? Notice your interior rhythms, the dance of your soul, when The Truth seems absent. What messages do you tell yourself in these moments? When encountered, breathe deeply and exhale - then trust The Truth to show up in Their time. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:16-18**

Herod the Great was fuming; the Storm was about to be unleashed. Realizing the wise ones had played him for the fool, Herod orchestrated murder, mayhem, tragedy: "Kill. Slaughter. No mercy." Herod the Great's unholy symphony targeted the least powerful, the most vulnerable - children all - the Boys of Bethlehem who were two years old and younger, who matched what the wise ones had told Herod the Great regarding the time the Star had appeared in the east. Thus was cast the shadow of Jeremiah, truth-teller from ages to ages past:

Rachel's heart allows only the communion of  
Her Beloved,  
for a mother's heart shall not be healed.  
Sacred the emptiness, even The Truth will not fill,  
for her heart's desolation has a name:  
My Beloved.

*Dreams of Hope,  
Nightmares of Sorrow,  
of both is the Gospel borne.  
To highest heights, to deepest depths,  
journeys the soul who seeks The Truth.*

*And into this journey travels the Dark Night:  
Inescapable, unavoidable, overwhelming,  
teaching muted dance, quiet spirit and whispers of love.  
For Gospel borne is womb made new,  
awakened for hope and for sorrow.*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy lament,  
where there are wounds in self or others,  
let me feel the depths,  
where injustice reigns,  
let me stand angry and observant,  
where raw is the soul of complaint,  
let me speak fury into the world,  
when others mourn, let me cry also,  
when death overwhelms, let me refuse to look away,  
when Herod commits cruelty, let me be as Rachel.  
Anointed One, may I not so much seek  
to see only the manger  
as to allow Herod, too, to be in the Story,  
to celebrate the Cradle  
as to remember it leads to your Cross,  
to turn a deaf ear to Rachel's cry  
as to weep when she weeps.  
For the journey to Easter is the path of suffering,  
the wounded healer whose balm is in Golgotha,  
cruciform discipleship<sup>32</sup> the Way of Jesus.

*Go into the world...* Notice the presence of suffering in the world and your response to it. Do you avoid its lament? Steel yourself against it? Embrace it for a time only, eventually to look away? Experiment with adding your voice to Rachel's voice - to cry out against injustice and suffering in the world - through your prayers. What impact does such prayer have upon your soul? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:19-21**

Herod the Great was dead and the Storm eased for the moment. The Truth's celestial messenger appeared once again to Joseph, directing him, "Journey back with the Child and the God-bearer to the Land of Promise, Israel, for Herod's mayhem died with him." Joseph once again acted upon the Truth's Word to him.

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<sup>32</sup> Cruciform is a theological way to say, "formed by the cross," or "being shaped and guided by the cross." Often our modern discipleship ignores, evades, and even rejects "cruciform

discipleship" (e.g. the prosperity gospel), but living a cruciform spirituality and ethics is, historically, the Way of Jesus for the majority of Christians.

*The Truth's mercy the eye of the storm;  
 eternal love the peace that passes understanding.  
 Yet knowing what awaits beyond the storm's eye,  
 Archelaus who will replace Herod,  
 death that stalks our communities,  
 loud voices – indeed, the mounting cacophony of  
 blame, defensiveness, and irresponsibility  
 flowing like lava over our airwaves,  
 around our family tables, and  
 even from our pulpits,  
 the eye of the storm is welcome:  
 a breath, a sigh, thanksgiving enough to venture  
 back into the storm.*

Lord, make me an instrument of calm,  
 where there is blame, let me take responsibility,  
 where there is defensiveness, let me listen carefully,  
 where there is irresponsibility, let me model integrity,  
 where cloudiness confuses, let me speak with clarity,  
 where storm waters rise,  
 let me listen with consideration,  
 where chaos reigns, let me act with conviction.  
 O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
 to flee into exile  
 as to know when to leave and to return,  
 to avoid all chaos as to be intentional in Sabbath,  
 to desire only the calm  
 as to know when to encounter the storm.  
 For there's a time and a season  
 for all things under the sun,  
 a time for exile and a time to return,  
 a time to stand and a time to engage,  
 a time to bear my cross, for all times if necessary.

*Go into the world...* Notice the moments when “the Storm” seems to close upon you. What are the symptoms of its coming? What signs direct you to having become distracted, fatigued, or overwhelmed? Give yourself permission to live in The Truth's presence in the eye of the Storm. Having done so, what are the symptoms and signs They are calling you back into the fray? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 2:22-23**

Joseph returned to the Land of Promise with the Child and the God-bearer, but they did not return to Judea, in the shadow of Jerusalem, for Herod the Great's only-slightly-less-maniacal son, Archelaus, had replaced his

father. But The Truth was faithful to guide and direct: “Go to the region of Galilee, to the village of Nazareth, that the words of the truth-teller from ages-to-ages past might be fulfilled: “The Anointed will be called a Nazarene.” All this was spoken, of course, in a dream.

*Blessed are those who dream dreams,  
 whose visions lurch them forward toward hope –  
 they shall never be bored.*

*For with blessing comes detours and discernment,  
 upon the chosen is found  
 the sure and certain sign of that one is a beloved child:*

*something new rises before them,  
 (surrounding them from all sides),*

*something they did not see and could not envision,  
 (or at least didn't),*

*something only The Truth could create,  
 (as it were – ex nihilo – out of nothing):*

*a life of call and challenge: their destiny.*

Lord, make me an instrument of calling,  
 where others settle for the status quo,  
 let me remain open to the Spirit's call,  
 where others walk their own path,  
 let me walk the Way,  
 where others sleep the sleep of the dead,  
 let me sleep the restlessness of the dreamer,  
 where others desire certainty,  
 let me seek discernment,  
 where others settle for the shadow of Archelaus,  
 let me be willing to heed the dream planted within me,  
 where others return to Judea,  
 let me be open to Nazareth.

O Divine Dream Weaver, let me not so much seek  
 to mold my destiny as to be molded by your Word,  
 to plan my next move as to follow the Spirit's moving,  
 to believe I know what's best  
 as to be surprised by all gifts of loving-kindness.

For it is in opening oneself to the dream  
 that we are guided,  
 it is in following the call that we are led,  
 it is the journey to Nazareth that ultimately leads  
 to both Cross and Empty Tomb.

*Go into the world...* Notice the way you respond to unexpected things. Are you pleasantly surprised or do you feel it is a disruption? Do you dig in your heels or open your heart? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 3:1-6**

At The Truth's appointed time, at the same place the Israelites of old crossed into the Land of Promise, east of the Jordan River, John the Baptizer appeared as The Compassion's truth-teller. John proclaimed a new beginning: "About face! Turn Around! Change your ways and allow The Truth to change you, for heaven is near, the rule of Sovereign love swirls in the wind." John was the one that Isaiah, the truth-teller from ages-to-ages past, spoke about when he said:

A Voice. A Message. The Call.  
In the wilderness of old, prepare anew  
a way for The Truth,  
Straight lines, pure hearts, right relations.

John was a sight to behold: camel's hair overcoat with a leather belt; his food was what swarmed on the ground and within the hive. People swarmed from miles around for they wondered openly, "Could John be the One, the Anointed? Could The Truth be ready to restore Israel, to vanquish the Romans? Is the Revolution at hand?" So eager were the people for freedom from their outward enemy, they were willing to be honest about their inward adversaries: their fragmented hearts, the divided loyalties of their minds, their sin-tinged spirits. John honored their honesty with a sign: baptism in the Jordan river, where their forbearers had entered the Land in ages past. With this sign, John announced the people's readiness for He Who Is to Come.

*Hope clothed in wildness;  
desperation birthing openness.*

*Political oppression eliminating choices;  
desire crushed at every turn.  
The Enemy is not who they think it is:*

*"Turn around!" comes the command -  
"Change and be changed!"*

*Not outward obsession but inward gaze:  
"From fragmented hearts and divided loyalties flee."  
"Your sin-tinged spirits release into my care."*

*And with the command a promise:  
fresh and exhilarating and brisk.*

*Promise becoming immersion—a life of  
straight lines, pure hearts, right relations.  
All we have to do is wait.*

Lord, make me an instrument of immersion,  
when others tip toe upon the surface,  
let me plunge to the depths,  
when others merely offer loving words,  
let me match words with deeds,  
when there is need for knowledge,  
let me also seek wisdom,  
when there is need for compassion,  
let me also pursue justice,  
when others merely tolerate friends,  
let me also love enemies,  
when others stroll the shallow lanes of this world,  
let me harvest the deep places.  
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to tweak my plans  
as to open myself to your life-changing plan,  
to want change as to want to be changed,  
to seek a new place to live  
as to seek the kin-dom on earth as in heaven.  
For it is inward honesty  
that ignites the spark of renewal,  
it is obedience to the word of rebuke  
that flames the fire of restoration,  
it is from the wilderness of old that new life comes.

*Go into the world...* Notice the ways you embrace repentance or resist it. How open are you to hear the kind word from a friend? How welcome is the word of rebuke spoken in love? Do you tend toward defensiveness or toward a too quick embracing of others' critique (for both are problematic responses)? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 3:7-12**

But then John saw others coming to the place - leaders of Israel all, the self-proclaimed Intense and Elite of the Temple. John was incensed! "Snakes! Scorpions!

Crawling away from The Truth's wrath are you? Make your lives a vineyard; ferment the wine of purity, harvest the abundance of justice! Do not claim bloodlines as your holiness; your DNA does not approve you. From simple stones The Truth can create Abraham's true children. Indeed, the Vineyard keeper is ready to prune! All that is not of Them will be burned away, for only what is worthy will remain. I baptize you with water, as a sign that one is sorry, as a symbol that one seeks to turn away from evil and turn toward The Truth, but He Who Is to Come will follow soon and more powerful is He; (I am not worthy to bow before him). He will baptize you with the Divine Spirit, a sign that The Truth-Life is upon you, a seal of The Truth's promised *shalom*. He Who Is to Come will purge away all that is not of The Truth - gathering compassion by the heap and justice by the hoard but tossing cruelty and injustice into a fire whose thirst for such things cannot be quenched.

*From the prison of despair lifts the song of hope,  
from the place of desolation wings the dove of peace.  
Yet the song sounds a discordant note,  
the dove's wings pierce as the falcon's.*

*Turn around! Turn Away! Turn Inside-Out!  
Discover Life! Invite Love!  
Seek Justice! Honor Shalom!  
Purge your corruption in the flames of holy passion!*

*For gone shall be the ways of cruelty,  
over shall be the paths of inequity,  
burned in unquenchable fire shall be  
the prison of despair and desolation.*

Lord, make me an instrument of purgation,  
where greed lives, let me seek generosity,  
where malice thrives, let me find mercy,  
where control is an obsession, let me learn to let go,  
where ego drives, let me learn to let The Truth,  
where envy clouds, let me find thanksgiving,  
where lust distorts, let me seek wholeness.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to judge others as to accept the gift of your judgment,  
to avoid the fires of Hell  
as to accept the cleansing fires of your purgation,  
to rest on my laurels as to rest in Thee.

For it is in losing my life that I will find it,  
it is in letting go of grasping that I open to receiving,  
it is in giving up my false self  
that I become the beloved child you created me to be.

*Go into the world...* Notice what you "feed." Do you feed the list of honorable things (c.f. Philippians 4:8), or do you feed greed, malice, et. al.? Notice the sense of balance, wholeness, and peace that comes when you feast on honorable things. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 3:13-17**

The Child grew into a man, Jesus, who came to John the Baptizer from the fertile, agricultural region of Galilee in the northwest. Jesus came to the arid desert in the east through which flowed the Jordan river. Jesus presented himself to be baptized by John. John was appalled: "Never! You should baptize me!"

Jesus responded, "John, it is the right thing for me to do. If I am going to be the leader of this new beginning, the restoration of Israel, I need to be a part of everything, and that includes every form of right relations - with The Truth, with you, with all these who have come to the desert seeking a new beginning." John agreed to Jesus' request.

The moment Jesus was baptized, as he rose from the water, in that singular instant, eternity burst forth. Jesus looked upon his true home and saw The Truth-Life - the Holy Spirit - winging toward him as a dove, sign of peace and of The Truth's favor, symbol of renewal and of The Truth's faithfulness. The whisper of heaven thundered, "This is my Son, my Beloved, and joy fills my heart."

*Into the waters, descending to depth,  
darkness of abyss, death meeting Death.  
Purgation. Release. Deliverance.*

*And then...*

*Liberty. Expectation. Hope.  
life meets Life, light bursting, brazen in clarity.  
Ascending Jacob's ladder from the waters.<sup>33</sup>*

Lord, make me a vessel of grace  
formed by baptismal waters,  
when walking away, let me relinquish my sin,

<sup>33</sup> c.f. Genesis 28:12.

when walking toward, let me seek right relationships,  
when letting go, let me find release,  
when grabbing hold, let it be The Truth's work,  
when dying, let me descend ever deeper,  
when living, let me arise ever higher.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
the freedom to be me as to become my true self,  
to affirm my good works as to trust in your goodness,  
to look for a sign as to grow into an awareness  
that, in baptism, I bear the sign of your love.  
For it is in the baptismal waters that I am named,  
with the name given from before creation  
that remains after the end of all things,  
the name of your beloved:  
Child of the Holy, Eternal One.

*Go into the world...* Notice the ways you talk about yourself. Does your "self-talk" express your belovedness? Does the way you describe yourself, your actions, your intentions, etc., convey a sense that you are formed by loving-kindness for a purpose? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 4:1-3**

Jesus was drawn to journey deeper into the desert, compelled to face his fears, to confront light and shadow. The Tempter was waiting. For ages and eons (or so it seemed), Jesus did not eat, and in the midst of this emptiness, the Tempter invited Jesus to betray his ideals.

*A simple thing, only a trifle, no one even noticing,  
fill the emptiness with  
noise and sex and work and drink,  
anything to help forget, something to numb the truth:  
Compromise.*

*A cozy thing, like snuggling in front of a warm fire,  
protective, secure, a life not threatened,  
anything that keeps others far away,  
that helps us live in ignorant bliss:  
Compromise.*

*A thing beyond noticing,  
beyond sight and sound,  
small, little, even tiny, a sliver of a splinter of a speck,  
yet warps identity and bends integrity:  
Compromise.*

Lord, make me steadfast,  
in the face of temptation, choosing righteousness,  
in the face of trial, choosing honor,  
in the face of tragedy, choosing compassion.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to get my way as to know your will,  
to get what I want as to do your will,  
to get ahead as to make your will my own.  
For easy is the path of compromise,  
but life-giving the way of integrity,  
which embraces the right thing  
at the right time in the right way.

*Go into the world...* Notice the temptation to compromise. When do you choose the easy path rather than the best way? Choose the popular choice rather than the right choice? Choose to go along to get along? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 4:4-11**

The Tempter whispered to Jesus, "If you are The Truth's Son, fill your emptiness by any means necessary; do not accept even a moment when your desires are not quenched. Make bread from stone!"

Jesus replied, "The Truth says that our humanity is not defined by desire, nor is deep emptiness filled from without, but from within is our humanity nurtured, from every truth the Word speaks."

Then the Tempter took Jesus to Jerusalem, to the highest, steepest, most prominent place of the Temple. "If you are The Truth's Son, retreat into the cocoon of safety and security above all, for is not The Truth your shelter and your shield? Or does the Word lie when it says, 'The Truth will command legions of celestial messengers to safeguard you; not a splinter will pierce your hands nor a stone cover your feet.'"

Jesus replied, "The Word declares truth when it says, 'Don't try to fool the Holy One'; the test is for the student not the Master."

A third time the Tempter tried to weaken Jesus' resolve to live according to the purity of purpose for which he was born. The Tempter took Jesus to spiritual heights beyond imagining and showed him kingdoms that sparkled like a waterfall of diamonds. "All this I will give you if you but deny your true self even in the smallest measure; compromise your identity, your integrity, just a little. What I ask takes only a moment: bow your knee to me!"

Jesus rebuked the Tempter, "Away, Devil! Leave, Satan! Never will I bend the knee but to The Truth, for the Word rightly declares, 'Worship The Truth only! Find your fullness in serving the Eternal One.'" Then the Tempter fled from Jesus and The Truth's messengers flocked to him.

*Three temptations, one challenge:*

*Who am I?*

*Filling my emptiness with toys or treasure or your truth:*

*Who am I?*

*Filling my insecurity with walls or wealth or your will:*

*Who am I?*

*Filling my lust for position or power or your purpose:*

*Who am I?*

*I must choose this day whom I will serve:*

*The Truth or my favorite "ism"?*

*It should be easy to choose,*

*to make the right choice,*

*to answer the only question that matters:*

*Who am I?*

Lord, make me an instrument of integrity,  
in the face of temptation, knowing my identity,  
in the face of trial, claiming my identity,  
in the face of tragedy, living into my identity.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
the easy path as your divine purpose,  
the safest route as the servant's routine,  
the world's wealth as the wild, whimsy of your will.

For we are created as your beloved,  
free to wonder and to wander, to know and be known,  
until we discover ourselves in seeing you face-to-face.

*Go into the world...* Notice temptation's many faces. To what is it easy to say no? To what is it (too) easy to say yes? Where are you vulnerable and in need of a friend for support, encouragement and accountability? Notice. Pray. Act.

## **Matthew 4:12-17**

Jesus returned to Galilee when he heard that the authorities had thrown his cousin, John the Baptizer, into prison in the vain attempt to silence his message of warning and hope. Jesus settled not in his home village of Nazareth, in the foothills, but in the larger, lakeside town of Capernaum, with its thriving fishing economy. Capernaum was settled in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, which fulfilled what was spoken by the truth-teller Isaiah from ages to ages past:

Zebulun and Naphtali,  
the way to the sea along the Jordan -  
Galilee! Border with the Nations,  
in the shadow of foreign lands:  
Light and Dawn, bursting upon you!  
From death's shadows  
will shine the light of a new beginning.

Jesus began to preach and did not stop: "Look above and look within! Turn away, turn around and turn toward the Holy One, for you walk amidst the rule of The Truth's sovereign love."

*Prophets always seem to be done dirty.*

*Makes me think:*

*about Martin King and Malcolm X,  
about Caesar Chavez and Delores Huerta.*

*Makes me wonder:*

*is Jim Acosta a prophet or just an a\*\*hole?  
is Christine Blasey Ford a prophet or a dupe?*

*Makes me ache and yearn and long:*

*when will the prophets speak again?  
why aren't prophets speaking?*

*Or is it that I'm not listening?*

Lord, make me an instrument of the prophetic Word,  
where there is danger, offering warning,  
where there is despair, offering hope,  
where there is darkness,  
pointing to light and life and love.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to play it safe as to play the Spirit's tune,  
to go along to get along as to stand on principle,  
to curse the darkness as to light a candle.  
For we all - each and every one of us -

have the need to turn away and turn around  
and turn toward the Holy One,  
to walk amidst the rule of The Truth's sovereign love.

*Go into the world...* Notice the prophets in your midst.  
Who are the prophets who use words? Art? Actions?  
When do you encounter moments when you are invited,  
called, needed to be prophetic? When such a moment  
comes, do you shudder, retreat or speak the truth in love?  
Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 4:18-25**

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee  
(also called the Sea of Tiberius and Lake Gennesaret but  
the same body of water), he saw two brothers, both  
fishermen, Simon whose nickname was Rocky and  
Andrew. The two fishermen were pitching their net into  
the water when Jesus made a pitch they could not refuse:  
"Follow me," Jesus said, "and I will teach you how to fish  
for human lives. Calling people to justice and joy shall be  
your new life's work."<sup>34</sup> The two left their old life behind,  
nets and all. They followed Jesus.

Moving along, Jesus saw two more brothers, also  
fishermen, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. James  
and John were preparing their nets. For reasons we can  
only imagine but are surely known by The Truth, Jesus  
called out to James and John. They, too, left their old life  
behind, including their father who was standing right there,  
and the boat in which they had been working. They  
followed Jesus.

Jesus walked throughout the region of the Galilee,  
teaching and telling, helping and healing, letting anyone  
willing to listen know that they were walking amidst the rule  
of The Truth's sovereign love. Jesus told the people and  
showed the people what it means to bind one's life to The  
Truth, and the result was so amazing that word spread like  
wildfire, among Jew and Gentile alike, and those who  
suffered, those who were broken in body, mind or soul,  
those who had forgotten hope but were intimate with  
despair, all of them came to Jesus. Jesus showed them what  
it means to say that his name is Immanuel: The Truth is  
with us. Many, both Jew and Gentile alike, followed Jesus.

*Following, following, following, following, following...*  
*Following toward what purpose?*  
*Following to benefit of body?*  
*Following to profit in one's person?*  
*Following to what end?*  
*Is "fire insurance" all that Jesus means to us?*

*Following, following, following, following, following...*  
*Following because this one is different!*  
*Following because this one may be "the One."*  
*Following because sovereign love is in our midst.*  
*Following because we are lured, seduced, drawn.*  
*I am compelled by a longing only You can quench.*

Lord, make me an instrument of faithful following,  
when given the chance, taking the road less traveled,  
when the choice is the wide path or narrow way,  
to travel with the few,  
when I do not know and cannot choose,  
let me listen for your whisper.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to want to lead as to be willing to follow,  
to need to be in charge as to listen for your Word,  
to presume I know best as to model my life after Jesus.  
For so common and so easy it is to believe the lie,  
that happiness is a by-product of self-determination,  
when joy is found through  
humility, servanthood, and obedience.

*Go into the world...* Notice cooperation and collaboration.  
How are you a good team player? How do you feel  
following a good idea that comes from someone else?  
Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:1-2**

Jesus' greatest ethical teaching began with seeing.  
Jesus saw the crowds - for who they were and what they  
were, in their beauty and blessing as well as their longing  
and need and fallen humanity. So Jesus went up on a  
mountainside, where The Truth-events happen. Jesus sat,  
taking the posture assumed by a rabbi. Jesus' disciplined  
followers came to him, and Jesus began to instruct them  
about living toward a sacred openness before The Truth.

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<sup>34</sup> c.f. Amos 4:2 where the reference to fishhooks "catching"  
people links to Amos' prophetic word against Israel.

*How I long to live into a sacred openness before You!  
How wondrous it would be to dance God-rhythms;  
how sublime to experience immersion into God-life.  
And yet how rare.*

*For too prone I am to the loud gong of social media;  
distracted by the clanging cymbals of my own busyness.  
I long to invest in that which is life giving!  
So why do I resist?*

*Give me ears to hear what you have to teach, O Truth.  
Give me eyes to see as Jesus saw.  
Give me a love for fallen humanity in their beauty.  
Give me a heart opening to You in each breath.*

Lord, make me a vessel  
crafted to hold sacred openness,  
where fallen humanity is found, let me forgive,  
where broken humanity is encountered, let me heal,  
where I am the fallen and the broken,  
let me cry out to you.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
my own wisdom as your ways,  
my own knowledge as your guidance,  
my own direction as your discernment.  
For it is in accepting wisdom from above  
that we live as blessed below,  
it is in offering my life to others  
that I find your life within,  
it is in living the Way of Jesus  
that sacred openness is discovered.

*Go into the world...* Notice your receptivity to others. Are you available to listen, to hear, to respond in ways that connect? Or are you focused inward, shut off from listening, ready to interrupt? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:3**

Jesus continued, "Sacred openness is given as a gift to the poor in spirit, not full of themselves but longing for that which is from above; the way of deep immersion into the God-life will be embodied in them."

*Open yourself to fresh desire.  
See the beauty from above  
that lives within and without,  
before and behind and between.*

*The beauty whispers for you to come, to receive  
a gift intended for you before Creation saw its first light,  
a gift so precious it can belong to no other:  
your name written upon The Truth's heart.*

*Now be assured; indeed, be quite clear:  
There are other gifts and other names  
written on The Truth's heart.  
Do not begin to imagine you are the only one!*

*Rather open yourself to the delight  
that your lack of uniqueness makes you much more—  
sharing in a humanity of The Truth's naming.  
Now descend into the eternal embrace of love.*

Lord, make me poor in spirit,  
when too full, let me be poured out,  
when too proud, let me choose humility,  
when grasping for my own sake,  
let me be spent in compassion.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to live for my gain as to love with joyful generosity,  
to trust in my strength as to accept my belovedness,  
to think I know best as to trust you know better.  
For the act of *kenosis* - of emptying -  
is the model of Jesus,  
the giving of self the Way of the Cross  
that leads to eternal life.

*Go into the world...* Notice your willingness to accept others' influence. When do you welcome help or advice? How easily do you acknowledge and affirm others' knowledge and expertise? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:4**

Jesus continued, "Sacred joy is given as a gift to those who lament life's cruelty, suffering and tragedy; The Truth's presence will shine upon them."

*Brokenness can be a gift.  
Opening the soul,  
brokenness becomes the sign of understanding,  
comprehension that mourning and lament  
embrace reality -there is  
darkness in this world.*

*The cry of a heart longing for The Truth,  
lament transforms the suffering of this world  
into a window that looks outward,  
toward the horizon of shalom.  
Those who lament see reality as it is:  
in need of the Refiner's Fire.*

*Lament names as heresy  
"Goodness + Riches = Blessing,"  
Mourning embraces beauty, wholeness, and joy  
more fully than does empty blessing -  
and the divine presence  
shines upon the cry of the heart.*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy lament,  
where there are wounds, let me feel their depths, where  
injustice reigns, let me stand and observe,  
where raw is the soul, let me speak sacred fury.  
O Truth shown in the Cross, may I not so much seek  
to avoid pain as to embrace its reality,  
to affirm life as to mourn death in all its forms,  
to silence lament as to join my voice  
with the great company of saints.  
For the wounded healer's balm is in Golgotha,  
and cruciform discipleship the Way of Jesus.

*Go into the world...* Notice the presence of suffering and  
your response to it. Do you avoid its lament? Steel yourself  
against it? Embrace it for a time only, eventually to look  
away? Experiment with crying out against injustice and  
suffering through your prayers and the impact upon your  
soul? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:5**

Jesus continued, "Sacred hope is given as a gift to  
those able to let go and let The Truth; in refusing to grasp  
they are able to receive, and the earth itself receives them."

*Like grasping smoke is my folly  
that I own, manipulate, control  
history and people.*

*Society and culture whisper contempt at the notion history  
and people are not for sale,  
yet we cannot escape the truth -*

*we are not able, we do not, cannot  
control, manipulate, own anything but  
our own willingness and openness -*

*the Wind of The Truth blowing through our soul  
whispering affirmation:  
we are Beloved.*

*All is gift for those ready to receive.  
Grasp smoke or grasp the gift -  
I cannot do both.*

Lord, make me an instrument of acceptance,  
when tempted to reach and grab, let me breathe in,  
when tempted to take for myself, let me breathe out,  
when tempted to claim what's rightfully mine,  
let me shrug a holy shrug  
(and keep breathing, always breathing).  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be aware of what belongs to me  
as that it all belongs to you,  
to fight for my rights as to lift up human rights,  
to fulfill my personal destiny  
as to be open to your eternity.  
For in body and in soul,  
in life and in death and in life beyond death,  
I belong not to myself but to you, my faithful savior,<sup>35</sup>  
and in this truth, I find peace.

*Go into the world...* Notice your desire to control people  
and circumstances. How often do you excuse yourself  
when interrupting another? How comfortable are you  
when not in charge? Notice one opportunity today to let go  
and let another step forward. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:6**

Jesus continued, "Sacred purpose is given as a gift  
to those who hunger for justice and thirst for shalom; they  
will be sated by The Truth's goodness."

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<sup>35</sup> These lines are taken from the Heidelberg Catechism: question  
and answer #1.

*Palpable yearning, pain no balm can salve,  
 only the emptiness  
 of longing for justice too long denied,  
 only the bitter weeping  
 of shalom shattered  
 like a broken mirror  
 that once reflected intended humanity.  
 So is the longing of my heart.  
 The moral arc of history may bend toward justice,  
 but the arc is too long,  
 too filled with despair and unrequited hope.  
 "How long, O Lord, shall you forget us forever?"  
 Yet to the justice-starved soul and  
 the shalom-parched spirit is fed  
 that which alone sustains:  
 The Truth's goodness.  
 "Taste and see, The Truth is good."<sup>36</sup>  
 Feeding the soul for perseverance,  
 quenching the spirit beyond filling,  
 reviving hope among the dead,  
 calling into being that which is not but will be.*

Lord, make me and instrument hungry for justice,  
 when justice is delayed, may it cause me pain,  
 when justice is denied, may it feed my sacred anger,  
 wherever injustice lurks, may I speak truth to power.  
 O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to care about me and mine as to care about all,  
 to elevate my clan as to claim we are all one humanity,  
 to rise above others as to lower myself,  
 and, like Jesus, wash their feet.  
 For the life of the Jesus follower is a plural reality -  
 together, not alone,  
 learning the depth to which  
 we all share the same planet,  
 and you the Sovereign of all.

*Go into the world...* Notice those whom Jesus called "the least of these." How often during your day do you encounter these children of The Truth? How well do you notice and see them? Notice and hear them? Notice they share with you a common humanity? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 5:7

Jesus continued, "Sacred openness is given as a gift to those who respond with compassion to the deep brokenness of humanity; as they offer renewal of friendship to others - mercy - so they open themselves to receiving the same."

*"Mercy! Mercy!" cried the old, Southern grandmother,  
 as she looked upon a child without guile,  
 a lost innocent in need of a shepherd.*

*Mercy, to this grandmother, is invitation  
 to care, to love, to protect, to endure,  
 to remain open in heart and mind, spirit and soul  
 to the gift of the child before her.  
 So is The Truth's mercy toward us gift and invitation.*

*How blessed are those whose hearts can remain open  
 when media pulse invites anger, hatred, and despair,  
 when civility and kindness are laid to rest  
 by a world that knows not The Truth, and  
 by a Church that knows yet acts in the same ways.*

*Lord, have mercy upon us!  
 Christ, have mercy upon us!  
 Lord, have mercy upon us!*

Lord, make me an instrument of mercy,  
 where there is brokenness, let me tend to wounds,  
 where there is rupture, let me envelop with love,  
 whenever needed, let me offer your kindness.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to claim my goodness as to offer your grace,  
 to play the "gotcha" game, as to learn a new game,  
 to have to be right as to want to be in right relations.

For it is your mercy that touches the soul,  
 it is your compassion that transforms the spirit,  
 it is your love, at work through us,  
 that mends broken hearts.

*Go into the world...* Notice hurt in self and others. Notice ways we hide and are dishonest about our hurt. Does your hurt lead you to greater honesty and integrity or detour you toward destructive responses? Notice. Pray. Act.

<sup>36</sup> c.f. Psalm 34:8.

## Matthew 5:8

Jesus continued, "Sacred joy is given as a gift to those whose longing is for The Truth; their eyes will see all things, including The Truth and their own, true self, through the lens of faith."

*Vision can be a tricky thing.*

*What we see is not always what we get:*

*affluenza an illusion,*

*control an absurdity,*

*sex appeal a funhouse mirror.*

*Too easily does our vision distort, our vision blind.*

*Yet to those with eyes willing to look upon the  
broken and see the scars, look upon the  
hungry and see the longing eyes, look upon the  
thirsty and see the blood shed for all,*

*to them is given vision transcendent,  
longing of mystics and comfort of the oppressed,  
a vision of home.*

Lord, make me an instrument of divine vision,  
when tempted to see only the surface,  
focus my gaze upon the depths,  
when tempted with the flesh,  
oblige me to listen for Spirit whisper,  
when tempted with only here and only now,  
lift my eyes to the hills.<sup>37</sup>

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to languish in deadening activities  
as to learn the ways of your life anew,  
to long for the things of this world  
as to live your life abundant,  
to look for what might be  
as to be loved unto eternal life.

For in the Creator's love I am chosen,  
in the Son's love I am redeemed,  
through the Spirit's transformation  
I am being molded into the image of a holy life.

*Go into the world...* Notice the opportunities to focus deeper during your day. How often do you grasp opportunities to look at people and situations through the lens of faith? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 5:9

Jesus continued, "Sacred hope is given as a gift to those whose methods conform to The Truth's Way - making peace; they will be known as children after The Truth's own heart."

*There is madness in The Truth's method,  
for crazy is the one*

*who loves an enemy and prays for one's own persecutors;  
who forgives seven times 70 and again from the Cross;  
who pays the last as if they were first.*

*The poet was right, "You shall know the truth  
and the truth shall make you odd."<sup>38</sup>*

*Better a child in the way of shalom  
than a gigolo for Power, Arrogance, and Control.*

*Better to grasp less and give more  
than lose one's soul in a game we cannot win.*

*Better to limp in the way of peace  
than to sprint into the arms of Death.*

*O Truth, may I learn to limp until  
I dance to the madness of your method?*

Lord, make me an instrument of the ol' switcharoo,  
where others bow to power, may I lift up the weak,  
where others let money talk,  
may I know the true value of a soul,  
where others judge on merit,  
may I shower others with grace.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to hold power over others as to share privilege with all,  
to control the process as to create fair means,  
to be the alpha  
as to bow before the One who is Alpha and Omega.

For the message of the cross is foolishness,

<sup>37</sup> c.f. Psalm 121:1-2: "I lift my eyes to the hills; from whence comes my help? My help comes from The Truth, maker of heaven and earth."

<sup>38</sup> This quote is attributed to the writer Flannery O'Connor, citation unknown.

but to we who are being saved  
it is The Truth's power.<sup>39</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice the peacemakers in your life. Who creates peace? What attitudes and actions lead to their ability to create peace? How might you adopt one of these attitudes or actions in your own life? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 5:10

Jesus continued, "Sacred purpose is given as a gift to those who suffer at the hands of others in their pursuit of right relationships among all people; the way of deep immersion into God-life will be embodied in them."

*Life is a contact sport.  
Bumps and bruises come with caring to dance with  
truth and joy and love and justice.*

*Wrinkles and scars come to all,  
beautiful are they who earned them  
by loving without measure.*

*The Truth is in them in ways that  
whisper of glory and challenge our assumptions  
of the good life.*

*Swan dive into the God-life, O Seeker,  
by living in the direction of shalom but beware  
not everyone will applaud you.*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy connection,  
when others shy away, let me gently pursue,  
when others shout aloud,  
let me hear what is behind their words,  
when others build walls, let me build bridges.

O Divine Master may I not so much seek  
to divide as to unite,  
to reject as to embrace,  
to wound as to heal.

For divisiveness is the way of the world  
and division its unholy fruit,  
but you, O Lord, call us to  
a different Way, a common Truth,  
and a shared Life in Jesus.

*Go into the world...* Notice being open to - or closed off from - connection with others. What leads you toward openness? When do you close yourself to others? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 5:11-12

Jesus continued, "Sacred openness is given as a gift to you when others abuse, berate and censure you because you belong to me. Abusing, Berating and Censure are the ABCs of evil - power wielded to control. Great joy and gladness should be yours when this happens, for it means you are walking the way of truth-tellers from ages-to-ages past. When this happens, know that you are immersed deeply in the rule of The Truth's sovereign love."

*Stiff the wind that slays the mighty oak  
yet spares the willow.*

*It matters not the fierceness of evil  
to the one that endures.*

*Joy comes not in the absence of evil  
but in its overcoming.*

*The way of believing is the path of walking,  
always walking,  
in the direction of shalom,*

*ignoring the powers,  
standing against the principalities,  
inspired only by the call to*

*live into the rule of the love that forms  
the core of the universe and  
guides its every breath.*

Lord, make me a resilient vessel,  
when provoked, let me persevere,  
when tested, let me triumph o'er my enemies,  
when others go low, let me go high.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to grow immediately as to grow steadily,  
to never break as to be open to repair,  
to avoid evil as to outlast it.  
For it is patient faith that endures,

<sup>39</sup> c.f. 1 Corinthians 1:18.

it is humble faith that ambles toward holiness,  
it is the persistent widow  
who convinces the dishonest Judge.<sup>40</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice temptations to shrink, invitations to shrivel, the many, varied, and ever-evolving ways others seek to stifle your living with integrity. Whose voice is most powerful in your ear? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:13-16**

Jesus continued, “You are salt: preserving good and even intensifying it. Do not lose your saltiness, for nothing tastes worse than bland faith. You are light: like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden, you shine The Truth’s love into darkness, illuminating the Way to live immersed in the rule of Their sovereign love. Do not hide your light; a burned-out candle helps no one. Instead, let your light shine before others that your very life – your courage and compassion, your commitment to justice and unconquerable joy – may lead others to sing the Holy One’s praise.”

*LET.*  
*Not try, not struggle, not work at –*  
*“If at first you don’t succeed...”*

*LET.*  
*Breathe with Jesus.*  
*Notice and follow the Spirit-led urges.*

*LET.*  
*Nothing heroic, nothing miraculous –*  
*“If you REALLY loved Jesus, then...”*

*LET.*  
*Already present.*  
*Dawning from within (and above).*

*LET.*  
*Simply be.*  
*Be who you are.*

*LET.*  
*Others are waiting,*  
*waiting for us to salt the steps along the Way.*

*LET.*  
*Others are longing,*  
*longing for us to shine the light of sovereign love.*

*LET.*

Lord, make me salt and light,  
when invited to live a bland faith, let me choose zest,  
when invited to hide in darkness, let me choose light,  
when invited to avoid, let me choose to act.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to live a safe life as a sacred faith,  
to live always happy as to live always holy,<sup>41</sup>  
to live for gratification but so you are well-pleased.<sup>42</sup>  
For this world is in need of courage and compassion  
from those committed to lives of  
justice and unconquerable joy  
that leads all creation to sing your praise.

*Go into the world...* Notice resistance. Notice the subtle, internal, almost imperceptible resistance that prevents you from being salt and light. What holds you back from being what – and who – you are? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:17-20**

Jesus continued, “I have not come to release others from the crook of Law or the cord of Prophet truth; I have come to embody them in myself. Truth I speak: even after the end of all things, the tiniest dot of the “i” and cross of the “t” will remain in the Law until its fullness is embodied in me. Indeed, even the tiniest fracture with the least of the Law is like a complete break; to teach others to allow even a fracture is to volunteer for the last seat among the rule of The Truth’s sovereign love. But to obey step by step, modest intent upon meager act, to follow ever deeper into the God-life is to be called a hero among those who live within the rule of The Truth’s sovereign love. Truth I speak: you must move beyond image to character, beyond

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<sup>40</sup> c.f. Luke 18:1-5.

<sup>41</sup> Holy is defined as “set apart” for The Truth and The Truth’s purposes.

<sup>42</sup> c.f. Matthew 25:21.

style to substance, beyond talk to living into the fullness of the Way.”

*Hard, cold, distant,  
without mercy, without nuance, without a soul,  
the Law - from the outside looking in.*

*Full, warm, cherished,  
loving-kindness, mysterious complexity, healing touch,  
the Law -from the inside looking out.*

*Regal, intimate, incarnate,  
embodied heart, living soul, filled with sorrow and joy,  
Jesus -Torah Fulfilled.<sup>43</sup>*

Lord, make me an instrument of Torah fulfilled,  
in its following, may I find both dread and delight,<sup>44</sup>  
in its statutes, may I see my true self as in a mirror,  
in its following, may I discover the path  
of The Truth’s guidance for my life.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to skirt around the Law as to discern its heart,  
to blindly obey as to discover its joy,  
to obey from guilt as to obey from gladness,

For the obedience of faith is a path of transformation  
measured by eternity and leading one to be like Jesus,  
for then we see Him as He really is.<sup>45</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice your resistance to - and acceptance of - The Truth’s Law. Is there a pattern to your easy obedience or to your difficult duty? When is Law easy? When is Law hard? Is it about the Law - or you? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:21-26**

Jesus continued, “From age to age it has been taught, ‘Murder someone and you will be judged.’ But I take it further: even anger is a kind of murder; to degrade another a form of killing. To call your beloved a ‘Fool!’ is

to invite the fires of purification, for surely you are missing the grace of offering life to one another. Life shared in friendship is among the greatest gifts we can give. Indeed, if you are giving a gift to The Truth but remember someone whom you have injured, set aside the gift until you get right with your beloved. The Truth will still be there to receive your gift. Even treat the civil courts as a motive for reconciliation; get straight early, before matters get out of hand, before just judgment is placed upon you. Truth I speak: human judgment has not the mercy of The Truth’s loving-kindness.”

*The Dance of Trinity love,  
fellowship of the Divine Communion,  
created in this image are we!*

*Yet broken, too,  
refusing community, turning from compassion,  
needing redemption and refusing reconciliation.*

*Releasing anger we open ourselves to renewal,  
freely offering loving-kindness,  
we live into our becoming:*

*The Truth restoring imago dei  
within and between, to and for,  
self, others, creation.*

Lord, make me an instrument of love,  
where there is hatred, let me sow healing,  
where there is division, let me restore friendship,  
where there is betrayal, let me build trust.  
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to live the ways of the world  
as to follow the Way of Jesus,  
to act in the same kind as to choose to act in kindness,  
to want to get even as to desire, eventually,  
to get right with others.

For the Way of Jesus is counter-cultural  
and I am constantly tempted to ignore its beauty,

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<sup>43</sup> *Torah* is the Hebrew word translated as “Law” and means both the rules of the Law as well as the narrative proclamation of The Truth’s love.

<sup>44</sup> This opening triplet is taken from John Calvin’s “Three Uses of the Law,” in which Calvin argued the Law’s purpose was to lead one toward repentance, to lead one toward a true understanding of oneself (as if looking into a mirror), and to lead one toward

holiness. My use of “dread and delight” in the first of the three lines is an expansion upon Calvin, as the Law does more than merely show us our sin, (poetically described as “dread”), but also, as Jewish spirituality argues, can itself be a delight.

<sup>45</sup> c.f. 1 John 3:2. The verse does not connect perfectly, but there is a sense in which obedience to Christ’s Law is one means of discerning and discovering, of “seeing,” the face of Jesus.

but with your help I am  
living toward my own becoming.

*Go into the world...* Notice micro-aggressions<sup>46</sup> today. How many do you inflict upon others? How often do others inflict them upon you? And when so inflicted – by self or other – what is your response to them? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:27-30**

Jesus continued, “From age to age it has been taught, ‘Be faithful to one’s spouse; no hanky-panky of thought, word or deed.’ But I take it further: to lust after a woman is to seek to degrade her, to diminish the God-light within her, to treat her as nothing more than a toy for your pleasure. This distorts your heart and is not worth the heartache it brings. If anything causes brokenness or corrupts your true self – your eye or your hand, for example, the winsome sparkle of things or your desire to possess them – clean house! Control your environment, if you must; protect yourself from those things that cause you to fall. It is better to limit a part of your life than to let your whole person be distorted into something gruesome; in the great purification, only your true self will remain.”

*Beauty?*  
*So fragile and fleeting,*  
*the wind stirs and it fades.*

*Beauty?*  
*Distorting, perverting, caricature of blessing,*  
*as purpose, end, or aim.*

*Beauty.*  
*Created, given, envisioned for sharing.*  
*Beloved gift.*

Lord, make me an instrument of sacred beauty,  
where others’ dignity is distorted,  
let me claim their sacredness,  
where others’ worth is devalued,  
let me honor their giftedness,

where others are valued only for what  
they can give or do or buy,  
let me esteem them for who they are and that they are.  
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to claim as to appreciate,  
to control as to respect,  
to possess as to relate.  
For it is in relationship with The Truth  
that we discover our true name,<sup>47</sup>  
it is in relationship with another  
that we discover our true humanity,  
it is in relationship with all  
that we discover our true beauty.

*Go into the world...* Notice the moments you treat others in *transactional* ways versus *relational* ways.<sup>48</sup> How does it feel when you or others relate in these ways? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:31-32**

Jesus continued, “From age to age it has been taught, ‘Be kind and just when you divorce your wife; give her a fighting chance in this tough, patriarchal world.’ But I take it further: you are not fooling heaven with this divorce gambit. You say to yourself, ‘If I commit adultery – a capital offense – I can be killed, so I will divorce my wife and then can take the woman of my lust; it is perfectly legal.’ Legal is not always moral. If you divorce with such trickery your sophistry convinces no one but yourself – certainly not the Eternal One! The only reason for divorce is marriage unfaithfulness; otherwise, adultery wins and everyone is stained with sin.”

*Long are the lies we tell ourselves*  
*and The Truth.*

*Convincing no one, really, especially*  
*not The Truth.*

*Still we persist, believing #MeToo doesn’t apply to us,*  
*yet The Truth*

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<sup>46</sup> Micro-aggressions are slights or snubs, verbal or non-verbal, intentional or unintentional, that communicate one person is less valuable than another.

<sup>47</sup> From before the beginning of time, we have been known, chosen, and called by name: the beloved of The Truth!

<sup>48</sup> Transactional refers to “what can you give me?” while relational appreciates others as they are rather than “How can you benefit me?”

*is not fooled and will not play the fool.*

*For The Truth,*

*fidelity is a gift to be cherished.*

*In The Truth,*

*love nurtured deepens over time.*

*With The Truth,*

*all things are possible – even this.*

*That's the truth.*

Lord, make me an instrument of faithful loving,  
when love requires endurance, let me persevere,  
when love requires new insight,  
let me seek your wisdom,  
when love stands before me,  
let me not look to another.

O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to maximize pleasure as to be pleasing to one another,  
to make sex an idol  
as to enjoy it within its proper bounds,  
to seek new partners  
as to strengthen the connection I already have.

For love deepens over time,  
offering a more profound truth,  
just as beautiful, if different,  
and whispering hints of eternity  
for those who have ears to hear.

*Go into the world...* Notice faithfulness in yourself and others. What does it feel like when you relate faithfully toward others, not just in marriage but in all relationships? How are you tempted to “little acts of infidelity” in your day-to-day relationships? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:33-37**

Jesus continued, “Again, from age to age it has been taught: ‘Keep your word, especially any promises you make to The Truth.’ But I take it further: Do not make ‘promises’ or say, ‘Cross my heart and hope to die.’ Heaven is not impressed, and the earth does not care. If you say, ‘Stick a needle in my eye,’ do you think that makes

your word trustworthy? Speak simple truth: humble, unvarnished, spoken in love. If others cannot trust your ‘Yes’ to mean ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ to mean ‘No,’ then you are playing the kind of games the Accuser plays.”

*The world is filled with the wonder of words,*

*yet too often and too easily do they lose meaning.*

*Where are the words that love, that care, that bless?*

*Playing head games and pontificating,  
drawing distinctions and building barriers,  
words become the Accuser's playground.*

*Into my angst it is spoken:*

*a simple yes, a clear no,*

*like the air in Spring, my heart is cleansed.*

*There is hope for the world yet.*

Lord, make me an instrument of truth,  
where there are falsehoods, let me be honest,  
where there is evasion, let me be direct,  
where I find duplicity, let me give the charity of clarity.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to win all arguments as to always say what I mean,  
to avoid all “drama” as to always mean what I say,  
to “get over” on others as to be who I am – always.

For with the tongue we both bless and curse,  
yet the wisdom that comes from heaven is pure.<sup>49</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice the temptation to prevaricate.<sup>50</sup> What tempts you to beat around the bush, to hedge, to waffle? What liberates you speak the truth in love?<sup>51</sup> Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:38-42**

Jesus continued, “From age to age it has been taught, ‘Fair is Square,’ ‘Even Steven,’ ‘You take mine, I take yours.’ But I take it further: Do not meet power with force or treachery with manipulation. If a Roman soldier backhands you, essentially treating you like a dog, turn your other cheek to him, inviting him to treat you as his equal. If he demands your shirt, which is his right under Roman

<sup>49</sup> c.f. James 3, especially verses 9-10 and 17.

<sup>50</sup> Prevaricate (verb): “to speak or act in an evasive way.”  
Synonyms: “beat around the bush, hedge, waffle.”

<sup>51</sup> c.f. Ephesians 4:15.

law, give up your coat as well, which is illegal for him to take but will place you eye to eye as persons made in The Truth's image. Don't allow others to dictate your dignity, for such is theirs only if you give it to them. And if that same Roman soldier forces you to carry his load for one mile, as is his right under Roman law, demand to take it two miles, where that same Roman law will require him to give you just pay for fair work. Share and care, lend and send: your 'stuff' does not define your 'self,' but your choices do."

*Gandi: kneeling down he stood tall.*

*Martin Luther King:  
the greatest blow struck through not striking a blow.*

*A lone student in Tiananmen Square:  
cannot be erased from history.*

*Dignity cannot be taken, only surrendered.*

*To the cruel we preach compassion,  
before the haughty we live humbly,*

*Though we lose the "battle,"  
we shall always win the "war,"*

*on earth as it is in heaven.*

Lord, make me an instrument of dignity,  
when others are judged, let me extend grace,  
when others are devalued, let me extend honor,  
when others are told they do not matter,  
let me listen to their story.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be first as to be last,  
to assert my privilege as to share it with all,  
to be served as to serve.<sup>52</sup>  
For it is for communion with The Truth  
that we were created,  
for community with others we were created,  
for compassion for all  
we are New Creation in Jesus.<sup>53</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice the pecking orders around you. Who is elevated? Who is put down? Do you humble yourself or seek primacy? Affirm someone's dignity today in the way you treat them. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 5:43-45**

Jesus continued, "From age to age it has been taught, 'Love those close to you and hate those who mistreat you.' But I take it further: Love those who mistreat you - the hostile colleague and haughty neighbor, the bitter foe and broken soul. Pray for anyone who seeks your harm; blessing is the Eternal One's game, and you will want to be a part of his team. The Holy One brings blessing to good and evil alike, to both the just and unjust the Eternal and Holy One sends rain in the desert and sun amidst the snow."

*August comes in the desert:  
parched soil gulps loudly, greedily,  
as monsoons overwhelm.  
No one is spared.  
No one desires to be spared this beneficence,  
for the desert in August is  
brutal, lethal, soul-withering heat,  
and the violent rains a welcome distraction.  
Or are they a reminder?  
Love pouring down upon just and unjust alike.  
Upon me and you and them until there is only  
...us.*

Lord, make me an instrument of blessing,  
where others hate, let me love,  
where others harm, let me heal,  
where others divide and conquer,  
let me unite and make peace.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to get even with others as to get right with them,  
to take an eye for an eye as to offer my heart,  
to win at all costs  
as walk the way of costly discipleship.<sup>54</sup>  
For The Truth's sovereign love  
is not written by Jim Crow  
but by Dr. King's double victory,

<sup>52</sup> c.f. Mark 10:45.

<sup>53</sup> c.f. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>54</sup> In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously wrote that "When Christ calls a [person], he bids [them] come and die." *The Cost of Discipleship*. (Scribner: New York, 1963).

when both laws and hearts are turned toward  
The Truth, who is found in Jesus.<sup>55</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice being transactional rather than relational. When is it easy to live with *quid pro quo* versus to see each person and every person, as worthy of dignity, love, and respect? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 5:46-48

Jesus continued, “If you love only to get love, your soul will wither. Love is not a business transaction but a leap into the unknown, an invitation to surprise, a radical mystery worthy of full exploration. Be like the Eternal and Holy One, who is whole and complete in one’s self, yet relishes every chance to be with others.”

*How does “whole and complete in one’s self” feel?  
So needy am I,  
so prone to worry about others’ reactions I am.  
I cannot begin to imagine what it’s like,  
even as I fantasize being whole and complete at all.*

*Open to all is the gift of  
learning, growing, becoming.  
So simple the curriculum:  
straight-forward, no nonsense:  
all of me for all of you.*

*My soul so parched and so ready;  
my hesitancy kisses my hope  
to conceive within something beyond me.  
Will I love you,  
whole and complete in yourself?*

Lord, make me an instrument of wholeness,  
where others grab, let me give,  
where others fear, let me risk,  
where others withhold, let me explore.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to possess as to participate,  
to be seen as better as to become my true self,  
to gain an advantage as to gain a friend.  
For it is not the “me” I want you to see

that is my truest self,  
but the mystery found in Jesus  
from before the beginning of time,  
revealed through his Breath as a gift from above,  
beloved child of The Truth.

*Go into the world...* Notice your interactions with others. How many of them are “utilitarian” versus authentic sharing of yourself with another? Seek to remain open to others in the moment of your encounter of them. Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 6:1

Jesus continued, “Public righteousness is a burden: it looks great to others, but it cripples motives, taints the soul and makes one’s relationships a commodity; nothing more than a business transaction of the Spirit. The Eternal One is not fooled.”

*How easy to look good: busy and productive and fair!  
I am all of these things -  
don’t you see?*

*And if you do not see me in these ways  
I know how to make you look  
at all the things I do for others - what a saint I am!!!*

*In the stillness and silence of night the Spirit whispers—  
prodding, loving, convicting, compelling, asking:  
“Who are you trying to deceive?”*

*O Gentle Spirit, so delicate of touch to cut so deep,  
teach me anew my righteousness is as filthy rags,  
my goodness not a glimpse of the gift that alone heals.*

*And which will never, ever, come from me.*

Lord, make me an instrument of authenticity,  
when falsity beckons, let me be my true self,  
when my words ring hollow, let truth be my companion,  
when my voice silenced, let me grow a prophet’s courage.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to project an image as to be who I am,

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<sup>55</sup> Regarding his non-violent opposition to the Jim Crow laws in the southern states, Dr. King famously wrote, “We will match their ability to hate with our ability to love so that when we win

we shall win a double victory, for we will not only have achieved our political aims but will have won their hearts as well.” Citation unknown.

to look good as to be genuine,  
to seek acclaim as to live the Way.

For the Way of Jesus builds a firm foundation,  
the Truth of Jesus builds a house worthy of home,  
the Life of Jesus fills my home with love.

*Go into the world...* Notice the temptation to look good, to project an image, to seek acclaim. How often during a day does the Tempter come to you? Are there certain situations in which you want to shine, or certain people you want to impress more than others? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 6:2-5**

Jesus continued, "Search your soul when you perform righteous acts before others. If your motive is to be seen by others, lauded and applauded, your reward is not from The Truth but already given among women and men. Search your hidden motives whenever you share The Truth's good gifts with others. Self-acclaim is no acclaim in the eyes of The Truth. What sounds to you like a trumpet, sounds to The Truth like a kazoo and 'Holy Hypocrite' will be your name. Instead, when you share blessing be so secretive you surprise yourself. Know this: The Truth won't be surprised, and what is shared in human shadows will be rewarded in Their light."

*I am so precise, so detailed, so thorough -  
every jot and tittle of my own goodness  
noted, honored, cherished.  
Aren't you fortunate to know me!*

*Friend, must I speak to you as Nathan to David,<sup>56</sup>  
Jeremiah in rebuke of Israel,<sup>57</sup>  
you are not as righteous as you imagine!*

*I love myself like the books tell me to - and why not?  
Generous to a fault I am, up to 3.2% of my net income!  
I even gave the bum on the corner my half-eaten lunch.*

*Pilgrim, your left hand knows too well your right.  
I fear what sounds to your ear as "Reveille"  
sounds to The Truth as "Taps."*

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<sup>56</sup> 2 Samuel 12:1-7.

<sup>57</sup> c.f. Jeremiah 2:20 among dozens if not hundreds.

Lord, make me an instrument of humility,  
where others self-promote,  
let me promote the common good,  
where others put down, let me build up,  
where others claim for themselves,  
let me give credit to all.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
others' praise as others' participation,  
credit from others as their cooperation,  
to be thought of as good as to be worthy of grace.  
For it is not my righteousness that saves,  
neither are my thoughts your thoughts,  
but I can do all things  
through Jesus who strengthens me.<sup>58</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice your tendency to claim too much or too little for yourself. How and when do you overestimate or underestimate your contributions? Both are dishonest so stop it! Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 6:6-8**

Jesus continued, "Prayer is an act of intimacy with The Truth, so don't parade your devotion like a lovesick teen on a first date. And prayer is not a contest; there are no prizes to those who flaunt their devotion best and brightest, longest and loudest. Trying to convince others of your devotion through long-winded prayers that micromanage The Truth's response is the act of a rookie, or a hypocrite. Prayer is intended for intimacy: private is usually best, personal is an absolute must. Nothing fancy is needed but honesty is always required, honesty and authenticity. And trust. You see, The Truth knows our needs before we do and invites us to join the conversation."

*Teach me, O Truth, the gift of silence before You;  
instruct my heart toward patience and stillness.  
And into the stillness, the stillness, the stillness  
speak Your Word to my heart.*

*Fill the abyss of my mind  
with thoughts beyond my imagining, that  
overwhelmed with your glory my lips might tremble;  
that simple praise might be my grand overture.*

<sup>58</sup> c.f. Philippians 4:13.

*I pray to You, O Truth;  
prayer to you is for me a gasping for breath,  
greedy desire to fulfill an eternal longing,  
the completeness of my joy.*

Lord, make me a vessel of prayer,  
empty, yet filled with your presence,  
silent, yet filled with your Word,  
joining the song being sung for eternity.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek for prayer  
to meet my needs as to express them,  
to make me feel good  
as to mold me into the image of Jesus,  
to be about me as to be about You, always You.  
For it is the dry root that needs water,  
it is the ripening fruit that bathes in the sun,  
it is in the intimate moment that love blooms.

*Go into the world...* Notice your anxious, worried, ever-revolving thoughts when you first sit to pray. Or kneel. Or walk. Or however it is that you pray. Allow yourself to move beyond this initial swirl of the mind to a place of stillness: "Be still and know The Truth is the Holy, Eternal One."<sup>59</sup> Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 6:9-15**

Jesus continued, "Here is how to pray: begin with 'Our' - as in community, you are not alone in the God-life but walk together with others; always remember the gift of others. Pray to The Truth as 'Abba' or 'Imma'<sup>60</sup> - as in family, caring and compassionate, yet One to whom you are accountable. Continue praying with blessing and praise - 'Our Abba in heaven, holy and sacred your very Name' - yet keep grounded, remembering prayer is earthy and real, rooting one in the promises of The Truth for the sake of a world in need. So say something like, 'your rule come, your reign show up,' call it a 'kin-dom' if you wish, always longing for The Truth's reign 'on earth as it is in heaven.'

"Pray for 'daily bread,' the provision of enough, remembering once again that all true prayer is about 'we' not 'me' - the prayer for daily bread is for 'our' daily bread, as in all The Truth's children deserve sustenance. Pray, too, for the spiritual food of forgiveness - ask The Truth

to forgive you, your debts, your sins, your trespasses, your weakness and your brokenness, just as you forgive others. You see, forgiveness is a two-way street; it's a necessary part of living together without which God-community cannot flourish. Pray, also, for protection, especially spiritual protection, that when you encounter temptation or evil, and you *will* encounter them, probably daily, The Truth will show you the way forward. Pray, finally, remembering what I said about the importance of forgiveness in building God-community. Too easily do we neglect the gift of forgiveness. If we do not, will not, or cannot let go of sins, we remain shackled to them. In clutching *others'* sins, we remain chained to our own."

*Reaching stars when our knees hit the ground as one;  
Discovering the fullness of God-life only in community.*

*So easy the rote words, yet so needful—  
setting the rhythm for God-community;  
their premise our emptiness;  
their foundation the provision that comes from above.*

*Abba and Imma, are more than words to us: they are  
promise of love,  
assurance of care,  
invitation to God-community,  
adoption as God-family.*

*O Jesus, teach us to pray...together.*

Lord, make me a vessel of the holy,  
when closed, preparing to open,  
when overwhelmed, preparing to seek,  
when dead, preparing to live.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to see only what is before me  
as always who is before me,  
to notice only beauty

as to be moved also by the broken,  
to give into despair as to kneel in defiance, in prayer.

For the race is won by perseverance not power,  
healing found in the gentle whisper not the loud voice,  
change coming to those who act and who also pray.

<sup>59</sup> c.f. Psalm 46:10.

<sup>60</sup> *Abba and Imma* mean "Daddy" and "Mommy" in Aramaic and are roughly equivalent to how a child might have spoken of a parent.

*Go into the world...* Notice the Spirit's whispers to you. Live in such a rhythm that you notice the Spirit nudging you in the direction of compassion or conviction. As practice, try listening during your times of prayer. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 6:16-18**

Jesus continued, "It's so easy to look good for others but holiness as a circus act or stage play leads not to The Truth. Do you want others to know you are fasting? Good for you - you have your reward in full. Anyone can look good but being good is what matters; not your face but your heart, not your outward style but your inward substance leads to blessing. When you fast and pray, don't make a fuss. Keep efforts low-key, known only to The Truth. Know that The Truth sees you; They *see* and They *know*. Any reward will come from Them."

*The rumble grumble of my tummy reminds me:  
it's been almost two hours since I last ate something.  
How sad I am when I miss a meal:  
grumpy when my tummy grumbles.*

*What must it be like to go without food?  
Fasting must be something only saints do.  
I'm not a saint!  
(I don't want to be a saint if I can't have food.)*

*As I look around my 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom I wonder:  
is the boy daydreaming in the back row a saint?  
Is the girl in the third row talking to her friend a saint?  
If not saints, why do their tummies rumble grumble?*

*And so loud, too.*

Lord, make me an instrument of integrity,  
when tempted by the noise of the world,  
may I live Gospel values,  
when tempted by reputation, may I seek character,  
when tempted to talk the talk,  
may I already be walking the walk.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be super smart as to have the mind of Christ,  
to be someone everyone "loves"  
as to share the heart of Christ,  
to do what others want from me  
as to do the will of Christ.

For the world is filled with more sound and fury  
than compassion and conviction,  
and the Way of Jesus is clearly  
more the latter than the former:  
may it be so in my life.

*Go into the world...* Notice your motivations. Who are your audiences throughout the day? Is The Truth one of them? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 6:19-21**

Jesus continued, "Seek riches, desire wealth, pray for prosperity - but only the kind that endures. Riches that rot are folly. If a rat can eat it, it's not worth pursuing. If thieves can steal it, you're a fool to worry about it. True prosperity is found in The Truth's presence. Wealth worthy of the name is found in The Truth's purpose. The riches that matter come from The Truth and lead back to Them. All riches lure the heart so be sure it is The Truth's riches whose call you answer."

*My heart longs for so much:  
that which fills my stomach but not my soul, and  
that which brings a joy I could not imagine;*

*that which fashions me into the image of culture, and  
that which shapes and forms the divine image within;*

*for I was created,  
known before the beginning of time,*

*for I was chosen in lovingkindness,  
to live into the image that alone invites unity and peace.*

*My heart longs for so much:  
may my heart be restless until it rests in Thee.*

Lord, make me an instrument of enduring values,  
where riches rot, let me sow eternal seeds,  
where wealth wilts, let me harvest the horizon,  
where prosperity is a mirage,  
let me welcome perseverance.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to live the world's values as Gospel values,  
to pursue the American Dream as to dream your dreams,  
to have visions of glory  
as to have confidence in my eternity.

For the heart submitted to You lives beyond today  
to that Day when we shall know even as we are known,  
for we shall see you face to face.<sup>61</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice your desires. Catalog them but do not judge them. Notice what draws you and contemplate the attraction. How is it worthy of eternity? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 6:22-23**

Jesus continued, “Some people say, ‘Seeing is believing,’ but at what are you looking? If you look for that which is just and true, beauty that sprouts from goodness and leads toward wholeness, then your eyes are like a lamp that enlightens your entire person. But if you focus only on hate, bigotry, greed, and division, your seeing is a form of blindness, an unholy cataract that distorts your very soul.”

*Angry the news - fake and real -  
that ushers bitterness into my home. Beware!  
Is that Death whose visage I hold in my hand?*

*War and Disease and Famine, welcome to my home!  
Addicted to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse<sup>62</sup>  
I have become.*

*Where, O my Soul, is beauty that leads to goodness?  
How, O my Spirit, can I find the true light,  
whose soft glow suggests a gentle warmth,  
life-giving in justice, mercy, and truth?*

*May my believing influence my seeing  
that light might shine  
above and below, around and within,  
through you to me to all.*

Lord, make me an instrument of seeing,  
where there is beauty, let me notice,  
where there is goodness, let me wonder,  
Where truth bears fruit, let me express awe.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek

to look with the eyes of the world as to see the least,  
to look through the lens of power as to see the last,  
to look for my own causes as to see the lost.  
For with eyes open to the Way we heal,  
with eyes focused on the Truth we hope,  
with eyes filled with light we find Life.

*Go into the world...* Notice what you notice. Where do you look? What do you read, watch, discuss? Does your thought-life reflect the beauty of The Truth? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 6:24**

Jesus continued, “You can only serve one Master. Multi-tasking is a myth, a way to describe chronic distraction. In reality, loyalty is a marriage of integrity and passion and can only be expressed one commitment at a time. Divided loyalties lead to love and hate, especially when the choice is between The Truth and money.”

*The ship of my heart  
sails between Scylla and Charybdis,<sup>63</sup>  
ever lured to Power and Prosperity.*

*These ancient foes wield daily influence,  
barking commands at my soul;  
they belch false promises.*

*My will is slowly decaying,  
spirit denervating into numbness.  
There must be a better way.*

*O Soul, don't listen to these Sirens!  
Their song rings false even in beauty.  
Listen, instead, to the call of your heart,*

*to the thirst that causes the deer to pant for water,<sup>64</sup>  
to that which the Refiner's fire<sup>65</sup> cannot destroy,  
to the One who alone is worthy to be called Sovereign.*

<sup>61</sup> c.f. 1 Corinthians 13:12 and 1 John 3:2.

<sup>62</sup> c.f. Revelation 6.

<sup>63</sup> Scylla and Charybdis were two immortal dangers through which Ulysses sailed in Homer's *The Odyssey*. It roughly means “between a rock and a hard place.”

<sup>64</sup> c.f. Psalm 42:1.

<sup>65</sup> c.f. Malachi 3:2.

Lord, make me an instrument of holy desire,  
where some grip, grab and grasp, let me let go,  
where others crave prosperity, let me let God,  
where material things bark my name,  
let me be blessedly deaf.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to gain the world as to grow my soul,  
to wield power as to pursue love,

to be all things as to become my truest self.  
For the gift of clarity leads to the God-life,  
uniting vision and values, soul and service,  
into a beautiful life.

*Go into the world...* Notice the meaning of money in your life. Is it security? Personal value? What meaning do you assign to things and stuff in your life? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 6:25-27**

Jesus continued, "You have heard it said, 'Let go and let The Truth envelop you,' and I say unto you, 'Amen and amen.' Again you have heard it said, 'Don't worry. Be happy,' but I say unto you, 'Don't worry. Trust The Truth.' Trust The Truth for the food on your plate and the clothes on your back. Fine dining and fancy clothing do not define you and will not create lasting happiness. Simplicity is blessing. Look to nature where birds fly and crops grow, and the Holy One watches over them in their joy. You are worth much more than even the birds of the air or the crops in the ground, for you are created in The Truth's image. Will you deny this truth by worrying? How is that working for you?"

*Breathe.*

*Releasing the tightness  
in your neck, your chest, and your lower back;  
letting go of idolatry to calendar and watch;  
relaxing into the freedom of being  
beloved of the Holy One.*

*Breathe.*

*Acknowledging the temptation to hold your breath;  
accepting all the imperfect ways  
you seek to find happiness;  
confessing to The Truth and yourself  
these cul-de-sacs are not the way of Jesus.*

*Breathe.*

*Into becoming the image of The Truth  
in freedom and love;  
toward opening oneself to the God-life;  
finding flight as you plant deep roots in The Truth's  
loving-kindness, mercy and peace.*

*Breathe.*

Lord, make me an instrument of living trust,  
when tense, let me offer my anxiety to You,  
when tempted, let me offer my desire to You,  
when tested, let me offer my brokenness to You,

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
the world's routines as to live God-rhythms,  
the illusion of control as to learn God-confidence,  
the happiness of having as to love what you love.

For every good gift descends from above,<sup>66</sup>  
to invite wholeness and shalom,

The Truth's justice and joy that cannot be taken away.

*Go into the world...* Notice your natural tendency toward worry. Are you a worrywart, or fairly *chillaxed*? For the worriers among us, learn to breathe, to appreciate the moment, to accept joy. For those who are more naturally *tranquilo*, speak your thanksgiving in the moment of blessing. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 6:28-30**

Jesus continued, "Oh, Pilgrim, why do you obsess about your outward appearance to the neglect of your inward beauty? Look! See! Notice! Wildflowers grow, and their beauty is gift rather than toil. Even Solomon, clothed in the best of human glory, was not dressed like the flowers of the field. If The Truth dresses the flowers in beauty, how much more will The Truth clothe you in dignity. Your imagination is too small! Grass withers and flowers fade; all transient beauty is consumed, but your true self, the beautiful part of you, is an everlasting gift from The Truth."

*To those who obsess about outward appearance,*

*"Look! See! Notice!"*

*Your stomach consumes and is consumed."*

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<sup>66</sup> c.f. James 1:17.

*To those who neglect inward beauty,  
“Look! See! Notice!  
A gift that cannot be stolen, nor returned.”*

*To those whose imagination is too small,  
“Look! See! Notice!  
I am doing a new thing.”*

*Creating, always creating, never ending  
“Look! See! Notice!”  
The beauty, the majesty, the gift of you, me, us.*

Lord, make me one who notices wonder,  
not as the world seeks, but as you give,  
not of human creation, but of divine grace,  
not that which withers, but all that is eternal.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to look a certain way as to be who I am,  
to possess abundance as to fulfill my calling,  
to judge based on circumstance  
as to call all others your beloved.

For the winds of Spirit blow through our midst,  
inviting us to embrace a joy gifted only  
to those who don't expect it,  
yet who receive it as longing,  
deep longing, and home.

*Go into the world...* Notice how affected you are by appearance. Do you judge others by their outward cover or the pages within? By their early chapters or the full narrative The Truth is writing of their life? How do you judge yourself? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 6:31-34**

Jesus continued, “Fret not about fine food! Fuss not about lavish drinks! Don't be vexed by fancy clothes! Silly poodles chase these things. The Eternal One knows human need, knows your needs. Choose to allow The Truth's rule of Sovereign love to guide your life; sway to God-rhythms and God-love in all you do. Food and drink and clothes are built into The Truth's plan for creation, so don't worry about your tomorrows. Focus on today. Each day, including this day, has enough trouble all on its very own.”

*Life is complicated.  
Fretting and fussing, vexing and being vexed,  
the tidal rhythms of humanity.*

*Yet present each day, in each moment, the choice:  
The God-life leading to belonging  
or self-control meandering toward anxious longing?*

*Love is yesterday, today, and into all tomorrows:  
choose each moment in each day to accept  
the ebb and flow of human existence, and in so doing,*

*not to vex nor to be vexed;  
not to fuss nor to fret.  
It's not all that complicated.*

Lord, make me an instrument of tranquility,  
where others fret and fuss, let me immerse into faith,  
where others are vexed,  
let me cling to the cross of your victory,  
where others choose self-determination,  
let me choose your Sovereignty.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to live a life without problems  
as to live life in your presence,  
to be devoid of challenges as to bring them to you,  
to never stumble as to learn to walk again by your side.  
For the journey is long that leads to eternity,  
and your grace accompanies each step,  
even those when we sprain our ankles or fall off a cliff.

*Go into the world...* Notice the distinction between “need” and “want” in your life. Is the boundary between them clear for you or blurred? Has entitlement blurred the boundaries between the two, or does an attitude of gratitude permeate your moment-by-moment awareness? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 7:1-2**

Jesus continued, “Stop judging others! The critic is criticized; the blamer is blamed; harshness begets harshness; and the circle never ends. The measure you use with others bounces back toward you.”

*Haters gonna hate!  
Polarized politics, social media trolls,  
church gossips in every age.*

*Worse still your own inner critic –  
the Accuser who appears all-knowing and all-powerful,  
whose truth kills when it is embraced.*

*Are we condemned to a world, a life,  
an endless cycle that repels respect, and  
rejoices in an ever-swirling journey toward the sewer?*

*There is a better way, of allowing others to be blessed.  
A way of seeing others according to their imago dei.  
A way of inviting gentle, humble, life-giving humanity.*

*The Way of Jesus.*

Lord, make me an instrument of the Way,  
when afraid, choosing trust,  
when wounded, choosing compassion,  
when dying, committing my spirit into your hands.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be forgiven as to forgive,  
to receive mercy as to offer mercy,  
to expect of others as to ask of myself.  
For in you, with you, through you  
we are blessed to be a blessing.

*Go into the world...* Notice your inner critic. At whom are  
barbs targeted? You? Others? The helpless and  
defenseless? Choose to bless – find a way to bless whoever  
is targeted by your inner critic. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 7:3-5**

Jesus continued, “It is so much easier to look out  
the window at a friend’s sin than in the mirror at your own.  
Or again, it’s easier to criticize another for the dollop of  
mustard on the side of their mouth than to be aware of your  
own status as a complete, utter, and disheveled mess.  
Hypocrite! Deal with your own brokenness before  
worrying about another’s bruise. Clean up your own act  
first and then you’ll be able to help others.”

*I love to mansplain.  
If only my wife and co-workers would listen to me!  
If only the government would listen to me!  
If only I could solve all the problems of the world!*

*I love to live in my own, little, life-bubble,  
where no one ever criticizes me,  
where I never have to look inward nor upward,  
where I worry not at all about growing, changing, living.*

*O what a happy, happy life I live! Or is it sad?*

Lord, make me a vessel of self-awareness,  
when blind to my brokenness,  
let me see the path to love,  
when deaf to desperate cries,  
let me hear whispers of hope,  
when mute before evils, let me discover my voice.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to correct others as to be honest about myself,  
to prevent others’ sins as to own up to my own sinfulness,  
to judge as to confess.  
For the way of freedom is found in the truth that  
I am not OK and you are not OK,  
but we are all alright in Jesus.

*Go into the world...* Notice the *location* of your focus. Are  
you merely seeking to look good or actually be good – who,  
really, are you trying to fool? Give yourself permission to  
choose freedom by owning up to your own brokenness and  
then live according to holy values. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 7:6**

Jesus continued, “Guard the holy. Protect the  
sacred. Don’t let rabid dogs bury the sacred like a bone.  
Do you see pigs rolling in the mud? Don’t join them in the  
pit to dirty what is clean. The first victims will be the holy  
and the sacred, and you’ll be close to follow.”

*Holy the bread of heaven, sacred the cup of salvation  
poured out into the life of the world though  
when the cup leaks, and it will leak,  
what drips is not beauty but simply Welch’s,  
staining the shroud that covers the table  
intended to lead to mystery,  
but which too often is just a table and, too easily,  
moments intended to lead beyond the veil become  
moments that pass, are missed, or worse:  
distorted into hate through ignorance or indolence –  
I’m looking at you, Charlottesville.  
I’m looking at you, Argument about the Carpet.  
I’m looking at me: too often and too easily.*

Lord, make me a vessel of the sacred,  
 where others forget,  
 let me remember there is mystery beyond,  
 where others neglect,  
 let me treat with honor and tenderness,  
 where others scoff,  
 let me bend my knees and become whole again.  
 O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to walk to world-rhythms as to dance The Truth-rhythms,  
 to take the road more traveled  
 as to journey where I am called,  
 to look good to others  
 as to immerse into the depths of your goodness.  
 For deep is the mystery of faith:  
 Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again,  
 and in Christ all things hold together,  
 including you and including me but also “the Other,”  
 for whom the sacred is not yet a living Word.

*Go into the world...* Notice where The Truth shows up. Assume, perhaps only for this day but at least for this entire day, that Christian theology portrays reality accurately: The Truth is all around. Where do you hear The Truth-whispers? When do you see The Truth-hints? Wherever and whenever you see or hear, be thankful, for you are standing on holy ground. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 7:7-8**

Jesus continued, “Ask and keep on asking - you’ll get what The Truth intends for you. Search and seek, seek and search—The Truth will show you what you need to find. Knock and keep on knocking—don’t stop knocking. Ever. The door to Sovereign love will be opened for you. Everyone who asks for what is in The Truth’s set resolve and determination will receive. You who search and seek for that which is pleasing and just before The Truth, will find exactly what They intend for you to discover. The door marked ‘The Truth’s loving-kindness is found here’ will be opened to anyone who knocks.”

*Heart longing, pounding, yearning, pleading.  
 I have come to understand  
 that most King Jamesian of words: beseech.  
 My soul thirsts for thee—and yet.*

*O that I longed for others what I desire for myself.  
 O that my heart pounded, yearned, pleaded  
 for the least and the last and the lost.  
 O that I would beseech you, O Lord,  
 when the kin-dom does not come,  
 when your will is not done,  
 when earth is not like in heaven - not even close.*

*Help me long,  
 keep longing, and expand the breadth of my longing.*

*Help me yearn,  
 keep yearning, and expand the depth of my yearning.*

*Help me beseech you, O Truth,  
 not only for me and mine but for the kin-dom -*

*not only in the depths of my own despair  
 but as lament and longing for others,*

*not only to better my life  
 but that heaven and earth may be one.*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy yearning,  
 when faith gasps may I breathe and breathe again,  
 when hope shrivels,  
 may the winds of your will swell in my soul,  
 when love suffers loss, may your Spirit make it gain.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to find my own gain as to learn of your good,  
 to demand what is rightly mine  
 as to discover what is of your justice,  
 to always seek pleasure  
 as to be sated by that which is pleasing to you.<sup>67</sup>

For your divine will is *shalom*:  
 more than an absence of conflict,  
 the active presence of wholeness, harmony, and peace.

*Go into the world...* Notice your yearnings. Are your desires triggered by simple biology or savvy marketing? By cultural expectation or deep, spiritual longing? What helps you recognize God-yearnings when they appear? Notice. Pray. Act.

<sup>67</sup> c.f. Romans 12:2 where The Truth’s will is described as “good, pleasing and just.”

## Matthew 7:9-12

Jesus continued, "Suppose one of your children is hungry. If she asks for an apple, do you give the fake, plastic apple from the table centerpiece, or the farmer's market red you bought that morning? If he asks for salmon do you serve ten-day old, leftover chicken nuggets? Compared to The Truth your heart is filled with deception and darkness, and yet you desire to shine light upon your children and share your love with them. If you, broken vessel though you are, desire to give good gifts to your children, how much more will The Truth lavish loving-kindness, mercy and peace upon The Truth's beloved? This is the Golden Rule: do to others what you would have them do to you - this is the fulfillment, the completion, the wholeness of the Law and all the truth-tellers."

*How precious it was to hold  
my daughter, my son, newborns in arms;  
what would I not give to protect and provide for them?*

*How desperate the worry when  
injury or illness would come;  
what fear in a world of drugs, mental illness, suicide.*

*How much more...  
The Truth's love, The Truth's loving-kindness?*

*How much more...  
The Truth's mercy, The Truth's forbearance?*

*How much more...lavish the love that  
overflows the banks, flooding hearts, fueling imaginations,  
filling minds with wonder?*

Lord, make me an instrument of the golden rule,  
when confronting injustice, let me act with integrity,  
when challenged by bias, let me respond with equity,  
when provoked to arms, let me offer a path to peace.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to trust my own abilities as to entrust myself to you,  
to rest on my laurels as to dive head-long into your grace,  
to respond in kind as to live a cruciform life.  
For The Truth-life lives beyond mere transaction  
to become open to a holy transformation  
that alone is worthy of the name golden.

*Go into the world...* Notice your interactions. Do you give or take, expect more and offer less or see each encounter as open to wonder and blessing? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 7:13-14

Jesus continued, "The rule of Sovereign love is not for the faint of heart! The crowds are loud and stampede their way down the highway to ruin. Smaller and more discreet, almost unseen, is the path that leads to the God-life: few are willing to seek it and fewer still are willing to walk it."

*Media shouts and Twitter storms abound.  
Rheostat of chaos surging past my ears.  
Glitz, glamour and gore invade my eyes.*

*Winners and losers vie for  
bandwidth in a zero-sum game.  
Might makes right and to the Victors go the spoils!*

*Who has ears to hear the whisper of the Way?  
Peace to one's enemies:  
radical and open and vulnerable.*

*Forgiveness that renounces retribution.  
Humility that relinquishes rights and renounces power.  
What kind of fool would sign up for this?*

*Only a fool for Christ!*

Lord, make me a holy fool,  
when invited to power,  
willing to hold less that we all may gain more,  
when enticed by control,  
able to share with others in mutual submission,  
when wooed by the world's glory and renown,  
shunning its allure.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to walk the wide path  
as to discover the narrow Way,  
to travel with multitudes  
as to journey with pilgrims,  
to accept the "way things are"  
as to work for how they should be.

For the serpent is ever-present,  
pointing toward the easy path that denies the Cross,  
that sees failure and not the power of The Truth.<sup>68</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice power, control and decision-making. Who has it (and who does not)? How do you seek it (and shun it)? Are you using your power, control and decision-making as a weapon to get your way (and how would those around you answer this question)? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 7:15-20

Jesus continued, “Beware fake news! Religious garb is no guarantor of truth. Many smile only to hide a mouth full of malice and a heart hardened by hate. Do you want to know what’s in another’s heart? Look at their fruit. A cactus is prickly, and a great oak provides shade. Expect flavorful oranges from trees in Florida not North Dakota. Likewise, rich, maple syrup comes from the tree in Vermont not Arizona. A tree’s bark may look fine but if the wood within is infested with beetles, the tree is as good as dead – cut it down and use it to keep warm in the winter. Good or bad, ripe or rotten, you can tell a tree by its fruit.”

*Ravenous the wolf that devours the sheep,  
Guile feasting on goodness,  
preying on innocence,  
manipulating virtue for its own narcissism.  
Beware, beware, again I say beware.*

*Humility and gentleness are difficult to fake;  
vulnerability and authenticity harder still.  
When encountered in another, I sense shalom.  
It’s hard to fake shalom.  
Welcome that one to your table.*

Lord, make me a vessel full of good fruit,  
where wolves feast, let me protect the sheep,  
where preachers lie, let me prophesy destruction,  
where religion becomes the opiate,  
let me invoke redemptive judgment.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be liked as to be found living your truth,  
to be lauded as to be found living your justice,

to gather crowds as to spread faith, hope, and love.  
For bigger is not necessarily better, yet deeper always  
finds beauty and mystery and truth  
leading to communion, community, and compassion.

*Go into the world...* Notice your fruit. Assume your intentions are pure and notice the fruit of your attitudes and actions. Does your life produce sweetness and joy in those around you? If not, your assumption may need to be reexamined. Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 7:21-23

Jesus continued, “Talk’s cheap! Calling yourself a Christian is not the same as living according to the rule of The Truth’s sovereign love. Only those who let their lives do the talking are true followers. Many will say on the Day, ‘Hey, Jesus, get a load of me! I claimed the right to judge others in your name. I protected my own self-interest and alleged I was doing your will. I had both power and privilege and gave you credit for both.’ I will look these people in the eye when I say, ‘I don’t know you. Never did. You need to go your own way now, do your own thing, just like you’ve always done.’”

*Lover of words that I am, what will become of me?  
Reading and writing, speaking and (at times) listening,  
I make my living with words.*

*So easy it is to say, “Lord, Lord!”  
But Gospel calls to a deeper Way,  
beyond the wordiness that clutters my soul.*

*Jesus calls me beyond my words, beyond even doing,  
toward immersion into being, becoming, breathing  
toward Spirit’s call to long, to love, to live*

*according to the rule of The Truth’s sovereign love,  
toward encountering and being encountered,  
toward knowing and being known, until  
“It is not I who lives but Jesus who lives in me.”<sup>69</sup>*

Lord, make me an instrument of right relationships,  
while talking the talk, let me walk the walk,  
while owning my actions, let me also examine them,

<sup>68</sup> c.f. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25: “For the Cross is the power of The Truth unto salvation.”

<sup>69</sup> c.f. Galatians 2:20.

while believing, let me become.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to revel in a title as to be found living in Jesus,  
to look the part as to live the path,  
to say, "Lord, Lord"  
as to hear my name be called, "Beloved child."

For easily flow the words of faith,  
but I aspire to live the deeper God-rhythms  
where salt preserves and light shines,  
and the truth of my being is revealed to all.

*Go into the world...* Notice your "God-talk." Does what you say about yourself conform to how you act toward others? Toward the values you live and the goals you pursue? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 7:24-27**

Jesus continued, "Wise folk practice what I preach, for they are people of obedient faith. The wise are like those who build toward the horizon, toward that which endures, upon solid foundations, deep into the bedrock. When trouble comes, and trouble always comes, the wise are confident their house will remain upright, whole and complete. Not so the fool. The fool hears my commands and considers them suggestions; thinks my teaching is an invitation to a debate. The fool is like those who slap a shed together with a few 2 x 4's and a tarp. When the storm comes that shed never lasts. All that is left are splinters and regret."

*A long obedience in a common direction,  
the journey of the faithful.*

*Measured in character not material,  
each action the result of a decision,  
each decision the result of a choice,  
each choice an opportunity to proclaim,  
"Jesus is Lord."*

*Difficult work making Jesus Sovereign—  
difficult but valuable, and worth  
every scar,  
every wrinkle,  
every tear  
shed in laughter or in sorrow.*

*Foolish the focus on immediacy (a capricious tyrant),  
reveling in success that cannot last,  
unconcerned about character,  
oblivious to the beauty  
of a life shaped by holy devotion,  
as if the Grand Canyon was formed in a day.*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy obedience,  
where I delight in small acts of devotion or service,  
where I find meaning in a life given for others,  
where I discover joy in our shared humanity with all.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to create the American Dream as to live your calling,  
to build a better life as to build a more honest one,  
to worship the here-and-now  
as to journey toward a holy horizon.  
For too easily is my faith shaped by political values,  
too often is my faith formed by economic interests,  
but you call me to live the Way of Jesus:  
daily, hourly, breath by breath.

*Go into the world...* Notice your acceptance or resistance to Jesus' calling and commandments. When do you delight in obedience? Wrestle with The Truth about your resistance through prayer. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 7:28-29**

Jesus' teaching was whole and complete, and the people were in awe at what they heard. Jesus spoke like one who is Sovereign over the Law, as if the Law itself belonged to him. No quotations of others. No cross-references. No lawyerly manipulation. Jesus spoke not as one who served the Law but as one for whom the Law was servant.

*Imagine the moment:  
clarity spoken with love to a motley crew.  
Turning upside-down and inside-out  
the meaning of blessing,  
never again assuming our own purity,  
justice reaching across cultures,  
beyond personal benefit,  
warnings of our own hypocrisy before all else,  
actions speaking louder than words.*

*Imagine the moment:  
revolution in the whisper heard round the world.  
Work just beginning, lepers to touch, Nations to bless.*

*Imagine the moment:  
powers to confront and principalities to overcome,  
a Cross to bear and an Empty Tomb to unveil.*

*Imagine the moment:  
You. Me. Us.  
We better get moving.*

Lord, make me an instrument of this sermon,  
when tempted to forget, let me remember its teaching,  
when discouraged, let me recall its power,  
when fearing it asks too much,  
let me pray to the One who gave it.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be blessed as to be a blessing,  
to live for self  
as to live with sacred openness before you and all,  
to long for the good life as to long for eternal life,  
freely given through Jesus Christ.

*Go into the world...* Notice opportunities to speak truth in love. Speak with integrity and authenticity, with simplicity to the extent possible, and always with love. How does it feel? Do you resist or are you motivated by speaking? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 8:1-4**

After finishing his teaching, Jesus descended the mountain. Crowds stalked him while a leper approached Jesus and knelt before him. The leper's behavior was scandalous, for the law did not allow lepers to be within close proximity of anyone except other lepers, for all lepers were considered impure. Indeed, lepers were the most excluded class of people in Israel, for they were prohibited from even being within Jerusalem's city limits.

From his position of servitude, kneeling before Jesus, the leper spoke, "Sovereign," he confessed, "if you are willing, you can make me pure." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the leper, thereby joining himself in the leper's state of being "impure" in the eyes of the law. Jesus stated his intentions plainly, "I am willing," then joined

intent with power, "Be clean—made pure and whole—able to join in the new community of people following the rule of The Truth's sovereign love." In that instant, the leper was made pure.

Jesus said to the leper, "Don't tell anyone I did this for you, but do go show yourself to the priest. Express your gratitude in obedience to the law that directs you give a gift as a witness to The Truth's goodness."<sup>70</sup>

*I saw a leper today,  
walking toward me in the grocery aisle.  
He greeted me by name, for we are work colleagues,  
but no one likes him. His name I could not remember,  
his cutting words I will never forget.*

*I saw a leper today,  
standing on a street corner with a cardboard sign.  
Her greasy hair and leathered skin  
an embarrassment to our community.  
I bet she smells, too.*

*I saw a leper today,  
She was crossing the desert with four children—  
they looked tired and thirsty and despairing.  
I called Border Patrol.  
They don't belong here.*

*I wish I knew  
what this Bible story means.  
It seems Jesus has power to clear up skin diseases.  
I'm going to pray for Jesus to take away my wrinkles.  
He'll do that for me, right?*

Lord, make me an instrument of compassion,  
when stirred, let me act,  
When my heart is touched, let it remain open,  
when I see, let me do.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to avoid as to connect,  
to hide as to seek,  
to judge as to cleanse.  
For our shared humanity is a gift  
that soars upon broken wings,  
and blessed is the one who helps another fly.

<sup>70</sup> c.f. Leviticus 14:2 ff.

*Go into the world...* Notice your sense of being attracted to or repelled by others. Are there some folks with whom you cannot connect? If so, be open to Spirit nudges that invite chagrin, regret, and confession. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 8:5-13**

After healing the most excluded kind of person in ancient Israel, a leper, Jesus went to Capernaum, a Jewish city on the Sea of Galilee, where he was confronted by the second most excluded kind of person: a Gentile. Gentiles were allowed within Jerusalem's city limits, unlike lepers, but not allowed within the Temple.

The Gentile who confronted Jesus was a Roman soldier, one of Israel's oppressors, and he asked Jesus for help. "Sovereign," he confessed, "my house servant is paralyzed and suffers terribly."

"Shall I come to your house and heal him?" Jesus asked, which was scandalous, for good Jewish folk like Jesus were not supposed to taint themselves by entering a Gentile home.

The Centurion, whose rank was akin to a Master Sergeant in the army, replied, "Sir, I am unworthy of the honor of your presence in my home, but just say the word and my servant will be made whole. I know how this works, for I, too, am a man of authority. I say 'jump,' and my men ask, 'How high?'"

Jesus was amazed. He looked around at his disciplined followers and said, "Do you see this? This is the way of trust. Let me lay some truth on you: folks are going to come from the four corners of the earth, from north and south and from east and west, to join in the Great Feast when the fullness of the rule of Sovereign love appears. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be there sitting at the head table, and this guy, this Gentile, will be right there with them, but those who most think they *should* be there, those who claim a kinship with The Truth, are going to be left outside. The doors will be locked, and when they look in the windows while standing in the moonlight, their only option will be to say, "Aaargh!"

Jesus looked at the Gentile, the soldier, Israel's oppressor, and said, "Go home. Your servant is whole." And the servant was - in that very instant.

*The man was enormous.  
Adam was his name, but not like the biblical one,  
Adam played football - in the NFL no less!*

*Enormous Adam walked the hallway of my church,  
filling virtually the entire hallway,  
Why invite this guy to come talk to my youth group?*

*Have I mentioned Adam was enormous?  
He showed us his Super Bowl ring, told funny stories.  
The youth loved him.*

*Then Adam told the kids about Jesus,  
wept as he told of his brother with Downs Syndrome.  
He talked about prayer and meeting his future wife.*

*None of us cared Adam was enormous.*

Lord, make me one who looks beyond rank,  
where others see position, let me see a person,  
where others put people in a box,  
let me see them in their belovedness,  
where others seek glory,  
let me seek where I am needed.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to see the shell as to look for the soul,  
to engage the personality as to encounter the person,  
to judge as to accept.  
For it is not our tribe or clan or race that matters most  
but that we are beloved of The Truth,  
who declares who is welcome here.

*Go into the world...* Notice surprises. Who looks sketchy but is deeper, more loving, and more wondrous upon your second or third look? Be open to being surprised by others this week. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 8:14-15**

A third time Jesus encountered one of the "excluded." First the leper - not allowed within Jerusalem - then the Gentile - not allowed within the Temple - and then a woman - not allowed in the Temple's inner sanctum in Israel. The woman was Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick with fever, confined to her bed. Jesus extended himself and touched her hand: the fever fled, and Peter's mother-in-law got out of bed and began to serve Jesus.

*Trembling voice, like a scared bird,  
she spoke her truth.  
As we listened, she unleashed an ocean of pain.*

*Will we hear the cries of Tamar?<sup>71</sup>  
Will Amnon always have his way?<sup>72</sup>  
All powerful, without consequence,*

*He spewed self-righteous impunity.  
A cocktail of impunity, garnished with self-pity,  
is a cocktail I do not think I can bear  
to drink again and again and again.*

*Again.*

Lord, make me a vessel of empowerment,  
when others doubt, let me believe,  
when the powerful throw shade, let me shine light,  
when voices are silenced,  
let me create space into which they may speak.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to protect the powerful,  
as to guard the least, the lost, and the last,  
to affirm might makes right, as to declare  
justice without shalom is a perverse mirage,  
to ensure my voice is heard,  
as to allow all voices to be heard.

For the dignity we desire is the measure we must offer,  
for we are all The Truth's children -  
each broken in unique ways,  
but all made whole by the same loving-kindness.

*Go into the world...* Notice how you notice gender—as objects or as *imago dei*—created in the image of The Truth? How do you share space, voice, authority, and respect? Especially in your encounters with women, do your actions express and attitudes reflect gender justice? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 8:16-17**

The response to Jesus' healing touch was predictable: as evening approached Jesus was inundated with requests, with cries for help, with pleas by those who had given up hope. Those with mental affliction were given clarity. Those with spiritual affliction were given purity. Those with bodily affliction were made whole. All this happened to fulfill what the truth-teller Isaiah, had spoken:

The Suffering One embraced our brokenness  
and carried our affliction into his own self.

*The mother leans over, cries out, agony upon her face.  
Yet also the intuition that this suffering is for joy,  
and the child who will be borne is already of her,  
and always will be.*

*The father wakes from slumber,  
heart pounding, mind clearing,  
A sound in the night has roused him,  
and he will not sleep again until his family is safe.*

*Theologians call it "cruciform life,"  
a fancy phrase for  
caring so deeply that  
"I" and "Thee" are inextricably "We."*

Lord, make me a vessel able to hold suffering,  
the pain of others, may it open me,  
the cries of the innocent, may they enflame me,  
the laments of the oppressed, may they haunt me.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to avoid all suffering as to bear it with integrity,  
to seek the easy way as to live the blessed life,  
to turn away from pain  
as to bring it into the light of your love.  
For it is the way of the Cross to care deeply,  
to train the heart to love without abandon,  
and as Jesus has done for me,  
so may I walk in his steps.

*Go into the world...* Notice pain - your own pain and that of others. Notice your response to pain. Do you avoid it? Does it make you uncomfortable, tempt you to an unhelpful co-dependency? How does pain lead you toward a deeper community that invites hope? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 8:18-22**

Jesus looked at the crowd that surrounded him and still gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake - to move from Jewish territory to Gentile land. A scholar of Torah, the Law, approached Jesus and said, "Rabbi, I will

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<sup>71</sup> c.f. 2 Samuel 13:7-15, in which one of David's sons, Amnon, rapes his sister, Tamar.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

follow you wherever you go, even into lands that will make me impure.”

Jesus replied, “To follow me will take you beyond impure and into places of suffering. Foxes are cared for and birds are nurtured but the Son of Humanity is homeless, a vagabond with no pillow beneath his head.”

Another wannabe follower said to Jesus, “Sovereign, I’m down with the notion of following you but I’ve got responsibilities. At some point in the future my dad will die, and it will be on me to honor him with a proper burial. Once I get this part of my life sorted out, I’m all in.”

Jesus replied, “What part of ‘follow me’ is unclear or ambiguous? There will always be future responsibilities – now is the time to follow, so let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead.”

*Now not later.*

*“On my deathbed, I’ll...”*

*Now not later.*

*“I’m too busy with career, but in the future...”*

*Now not later.*

*“Between job and kids, who has time? Perhaps...”*

*Now not later.*

*“I just want to sow a few oats.”*

*Now not later.*

*“Jesus, bless mommy and daddy and all my family.”*

*Now and later.*

*“Child of the Covenant, I baptize you in the Name...”*

*Always.*

Lord, make me a disciple for right now,  
where others say no, let me say yes,  
where others delay, let me leap,  
when tempted to digress, let me keep to the Way.  
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
an easy claiming as a life-forming identity,  
a breezy following as an eternal destiny,  
a convenient walk as true obedience that gives life.  
For the Way of Jesus is a difficult and costly grace,  
it is costly because it costs us our life,  
it is grace because it gives us the only true life:  
the life of Jesus.<sup>73</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice your desire for ease and comfort. When does your desire for ease interfere with your willingness to do the work of costly discipleship? When does comfort keep you from being the blessing for others to which The Truth has called you? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 8:23-27**

Jesus boarded a boat, and his disciplined followers followed him. While on the lake, a furious wind arose suddenly, waves sweeping over the rails, rocking the boat and the disciplined followers, yet Jesus slept. Now the place where one could sleep on a boat was in the back, which was also the place from which the boat was guided. The disciplined followers, seeing Jesus in the way, woke him, shouting, “Don’t just lie there – Save us, Lord, or we’ll all drown!”

Jesus replied, “Y’all have such little trust – bless your hearts! Why the worry? Why the anxiety? Why so afraid?” Then Jesus stood, but he did not concern himself with guiding the boat but rather spoke to Creation, to the winds and to the waves, “Be still,” and Creation obeyed its Creator.

Awe and wonder consumed the disciplined followers. “What kind of man commands the wind? Who is he that waves obey his voice?” And the storm was no more, only stillness.

*In the shadow of Syria’s civil war, a bird sings.*

*Media circus fills my newsfeed, and my child naps.*

*Office politics dominate my day, as stars shine at night.*

*Awake I am asleep.*

*Asleep Jesus is more awake than I will ever be.*

*I pray that Jesus will direct the events of my life:*

*cure the cancer, get me the job, protect our soldiers.*

*Instead, he speaks truths much deeper,*

*impacting the primordial waters of my living,*

*moving the tectonic plates of my being.*

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<sup>73</sup> The last couplet is a paraphrase from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s seminal work, *The Cost of Discipleship*, in which he distinguishes between cheap grace and costly grace, saying only costly grace,

which asks much and indeed everything from those who would follow Jesus, is worthy of the name discipleship, *ibid*.

*“Stop,” he commands,  
“being afraid,  
“running so hard and going nowhere,  
“setting your sights on lesser things.”*

*“Learn,” he invites,  
“the gift of stillness,  
“the gentle rhythms of the lilies of the field,  
“the sated appetites of the birds.”*

*“Remember,” he reminds,  
“I got this.”*

Lord, make me an instrument of stillness,  
when rushed, let me calm,  
when myopic, let me look above,  
when fear grips my heart, let me trust in you.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to do everything as to do the right things,  
to be a world champion as to be my truest self,  
to have everything figured out  
as to be assured I am in your hands.  
For resurrection only comes through death,  
and none of us get out of this life alive,  
so teach me to live fully. Here. Now. For you.

*Go into the world...* Notice your rhythms. When are you harried and distracted? When do you need more focus or urgency? How does your daily rhythm encourage *shalom*? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 8:28-34**

A Gentile village was on the other side of the lake. When Jesus arrived on its outskirts, he was accosted by two men who had been twisted inside-out by unholy forces so violent no one journeyed that way. “What have you to do with us, Son of the Most High?” they shouted. “Your time will arrive in its fulness when all darkness will be burned away. We know this, so why are you here now? Do you want to get started early?”

In the distance was a large herd of pigs, attended by pig herders. The twisted souls within the men knew Jesus had authority over them and that Jesus willed that the men be restored to wholeness. The unholy spirits begged Jesus from within the men in whom they resided, “Please don’t unchain us from these bodies, but, if you do, send us into the pigs!”

Jesus said to the malevolent forces within the men, “Out!” And out they rushed, straight into the pigs. The entire herd was in a frenzy, and the pigs stampeded down a steep bank into the lake and drowned. The pig herders, knowing their jobs and perhaps their lives would be in jeopardy when news about the pigs spread, ran into town to tell the news themselves. They also mentioned what happened to the two men, that they had been freed from their bondage to the unholy forces.

The town was in an uproar! Ignoring the good news about the men, they lamented their economic loss – those pigs had been their livelihood! They looked at Jesus, saw him, and asked him to leave them alone, which he did.

*The storm surges within my heart.  
Fury too easily tempted has overwhelmed.  
Fire rages in my soul.  
Why can I not know peace?*

*Do not ask me to remain where I reside,  
to embrace the twisted values of those who  
exile the broken and desire profit over well-being –  
over my well-being!*

*I would journey with you,  
return from the wilderness of corruption to  
embrace your compassion that chooses  
human community over pigs.*

*I am a deer panting for water and live in a desert.  
Help me, Son of The Truth!*

Lord, make me an instrument of freedom,  
from twisted values, give me charity of vision,  
from dehumanizing systems,  
give me the power to confront,  
from being my own worst enemy,  
give me ears to hear and  
a heart to believe all your Spirit speaks.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to control as to embrace,  
to argue as to listen,  
to fear as to love.

For the demonic confronts me every day,  
each a temptation for me to lose my humanity,  
and the conviction that I am  
Beloved of The Truth.

*Go into the world...* Notice priorities. How do you value social vs. spiritual, economic vs. political, or physical vs. emotional needs? When do you balance needs? When do you ignore certain needs at the expense of your own wellness? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 9:1-8**

Jesus again entered a boat and crossed back to the Jewish side of the lake, to the village of Capernaum. Men brought a paralyzed man strapped to a mat before Jesus. Jesus looked at the men's trust but said to the paralyzed man, "May God-courage fill your heart, son. You are free from your sins."

Hearing Jesus, some of the Scrupulous thought to themselves, "What? He can't do that! Only The Truth can forgive sins. This man is disrespecting The Truth!"<sup>74</sup> Jesus did not need to be a mind reader to guess what they were thinking - he could see it on their faces, and it was the conventional wisdom of the day.

Jesus asked the scholars, "Why dance with darkness? Don't let the Accuser twist your heart! Which is easier: to proclaim forgiveness or practice healing? I want you to know the Son of Humanity has authority - authority and power - to forgive sin. Jesus then addressed the paralyzed man, "Stand. Take. Go. Walk home." The man obeyed: he stood, took, went, and walked home. The crowd was awed when they saw this - they flipped out! Praising The Truth, marveling, they wondered how Jesus had been given such authority.

*The first glimmer of orange appears over the horizon -  
behind me black is giving way to purple and blue,  
before me my heart is giving way to hope.*

*Past need not be prelude.  
History is not destiny.  
A new day dawns.*

*I look around and see the dew on cactus -  
prickly yet life-giving, both mean and beautiful,  
they will endure long after I am gone.*

*Like the mercies I see in this new day,  
as night gives way to light.*

Lord, make me an instrument of mercy,  
to the paralyzed, let me give God-courage,  
to the incredulous, let me bring scandal,  
to all, let me guide them toward home.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to enforce rules as to invite wonder,  
to tell others what they cannot do  
as to marvel at all they can,  
to tell others what they must do  
as to remind them they are beloved.

For your mercy is for blessing to both self and other,  
to free one from a past that cannot be changed,  
and walk into a future that is already new.

*Go into the world...* Notice mercy. How often and in what ways do you offer it? How often and in what ways is it offered to you? When offered mercy, for goodness' sake accept it. Be thankful - always thankful. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 9:9-13**

Jesus journeyed forward, always forward, and as he went encountered Matthew, whose name in Hebrew means "gift of The Truth," sitting at the tax collector's booth. Tax collectors were despised, for though Israelites themselves, they worked for the Romans, Israel's oppressors. Jesus eyed Matthew and then spoke, "Follow me," he told him. And Matthew did just that. He followed Jesus.

One of Matthew's first acts of following was to invite Jesus into his home, along with Jesus' disciplined followers and many of his own friends - a rowdy bunch of sinners all. Into this mix of sinners and disciplined followers came the Intense, who considered the mixing of righteous and rowdy unseemly, especially if it included sharing a meal, which implied true kinship. "Why does your rabbi eat with tax collectors and sinners?" asked the Intense.

On hearing the Intense' question, Jesus responded, "The broken and wounded need the doctor, not the healthy and whole. Remember the Scripture: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I have not come to invite the righteous but the rowdy and the rogues."

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<sup>74</sup> c.f. Isaiah 45:20-22.

*The Truth's gifts are sometimes broken:  
twisted thinking borne of cultural bias,  
pain skewered hearts the result of trauma,  
good people doing bad things – cogs in the system.*

*The world would have us sacrifice people –  
the broken, the twisted, the skewered,  
those who are cogs –  
on the altar of religified judgment.*

*Their blood cries out, as Abel before Cain,<sup>75</sup>  
Uriah before David,<sup>76</sup> Elijah before Ahab,<sup>77</sup>  
Jesus silent before the Religious.  
And The Truth answers: “You are Gift.”*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy desire,  
not sacrifice, but mercy,  
not perfection, but journey,  
not checking boxes, but inviting fellowship.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to always be right as to always be growing,  
to surround myself with goodness  
as to go forth offering grace,  
to avoid the rogue as to welcome their fellowship.  
For it is not the whole that need the doctor  
but the broken,  
not the righteous that need mercy but the rogue,  
not my public self but my true self  
that needs Jesus most.

*Go into the world...* Notice brokenness with an accepting heart and gentle spirit. How many people do you encounter who are “putting on a good face” to hide their pain? When you see such a person, say an “arrow prayer”<sup>78</sup> for them – “Lord, be with....” Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 9:14- 17**

The disciples of John the Baptizer approached Jesus to ask a question. “We need some perspective: we and the Intense fast as part of our regular, disciplined practice, but your disciples don’t. What’s up with that?” (John’s followers were looking at Jesus as if he was an ordinary rabbi.)

Jesus responded as the Anointed One, “Fasting is a spiritual discipline for perceiving The Truth’s presence. The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from my disciplined followers, then they will seek and pray and, yes, fast in the hope of perceiving. For now, the bridegroom is among them, and they need only open their eyes and ears and hearts.

“One doesn’t slap a new paint job on an old jalopy and expect the car to win a race against a Ferrari. Neither does one use new words to express the same tired ideas and expect a ‘Eureka!’ moment – that will just give you a headache. The new wine of God-love requires a new wine bottle for the God-life.”

*I confess to preferring a bold red:  
Chianti or Burberry or Old Vine Zinfandel.  
I cannot taste the “nutty aroma,” or “hint of berries,”  
but my lips revel in the boldness,  
the lingering zest upon my tongue an invitation to joy.*

*I confess, too: once I dropped six bottles.  
Crossing a bridge in Venice – yes, Venice, Italy!  
Spillage upon the brick and stone matched by the  
sour expression upon my wife’s face –  
“Why didn’t you hold the box from beneath?”*

*I confess again: I don’t know why.  
It was obvious after the fact.  
The box so weak, unsupported, a preventable accident.  
So zesty the wine! Big and bold! Ready to delight!  
A gift from The Truth!*

*Destroyed through ignorance and indolence.*

Lord, make me a vessel full of zest,  
when prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
when inclined to ignorance,  
it bites me in the backside,  
when tempted to coast,  
help me attend to your Spirit’s nudge.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to go with the flow as to commit to bold loving,  
to go along to get along as to practice courageous faith,  
to get with the program as to follow wherever you lead.

<sup>75</sup> c.f. Genesis 4:10.

<sup>76</sup> c.f. 2 Samuel 11:6-17.

<sup>77</sup> c.f. 1 Kings 21:17-19.

<sup>78</sup> An arrow prayer is a brief prayer that lifts up a person to The Truth: “O Truth, be strength for...,” or, “O Truth, comfort...”

For as Abram was called from Ur<sup>79</sup>  
and Jesus from your right hand,  
so may I be willing to journey to places unknown,  
especially the depths of your heart.

*Go into the world...* Notice zest. Who has it? Who invites it? What inspires it in you? What would happen if you committed to a day of all-zest, all-the-time? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 9:18-26**

While Jesus was speaking about new wine, a religious leader—one of the Elite—approached him and dropped to his knees before Jesus. Prone, practically groveling, and desperate, the father said, “My heart has died, but enter my home and place your hand upon my daughter, and she will live again.” Jesus stood with the man, as did his disciplined followers, and together they walked – the whole lot of them.

As this gaggle of folks began to walk, a woman snuck up behind Jesus. She had a mysterious illness that made her bleed, which according to the Law also made her unclean. Her illness had lasted for 12 years, which is as long or longer than the religious leader’s daughter had been alive! The woman grasped the hem of Jesus’ robe, her embrace making Jesus unclean also. The desperate thought of her mind was, “If only I brush the merest thread of his hem, even this small act will bring me wholeness.”

Jesus turned toward her. Jesus saw the woman. “My dearest beloved, courage and hope and love remain: and your trusting has made you whole.” The woman was healed in the instant.

A noisy throng was present when Jesus entered the Elite’s home. They were mourning according to the customs of the day: wailing and crying and playing flutes, a sacred racket intended to comfort. Jesus ordered them to leave. “Get out. The beloved daughter is not dead but sleeping.” Even the ancients knew the difference between death and sleep, so they laughed at Jesus, mocking his ignorance of the ways of Death. Jesus sent them out. Once the crowds were cleansed from the home, Jesus entered. He grasped the beloved daughter’s hand, and just as Elisha the prophet had healed the Shunamite woman’s son,<sup>80</sup> so Jesus the Anointed healed the religious leader’s daughter. And good news of this event spread like wildfire.

*Death and Desperation – such common playmates.  
From playground to courting, lovers growing closer  
until their marriage is consummated in grief.*

*Death and Desperation – ornery lovers,  
bearing quite different children,  
each with their own unique character.*

*Despair and Bitterness – whose legacies linger.  
Questions – is there really only one such child?  
(There seem to be so many.)*

*Faith and Hope – twins whose energy is contagious.  
Love – the “golden child” who can do no wrong.  
Trust – who places the parents into The Truth’s hands.*

Lord, make me an instrument of comfort,  
where there is mourning, let me abide in silence,  
where there is grieving, let me remain in prayer,  
where the weight is too heavy, let me share its burden.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to avoid the pain of others as to sit with it,  
to ignore the pain of others as to share it,  
to take away the pain of others as to embrace it.

For the Way of Jesus is the way of the Cross,  
cruciform spirituality embracing suffering in this world,  
sitting with, not avoiding,  
embracing what cannot be taken away.

*Go into the world...* Notice discomfort. Is it in yourself or others? Is it physical or social or emotional? Perhaps it is spiritual? Name the discomfort you notice and bring it to The Truth in prayer. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 9:27-34**

As Jesus walked throughout Galilee, in northern Israel, two blind men sought him out. Hearing that Jesus was near, they called to him, crying out for mercy, using a political title with spiritual connotations, the title associated with The Truth’s Anointed: Son of David! Jesus continued walking and the blind men followed. Upon entering a home, the blind men followed Jesus into it. He asked them, “Do you trust that I am able to show you mercy?”

“Yes!” they exclaimed.

<sup>79</sup> c.f. Genesis 12:1.

<sup>80</sup> c.f. 2 Kings 4:32-37.

Jesus reached out to them. He touched their eyes marrying words with actions, “As you have trusted, so may it be fulfilled in you.” Their eyes saw again and anew, reawakened. Jesus warned them, using his serious, teacher voice, “Don’t say anything to anyone!” And Good News about Jesus spread like wildfire.

As the sighted men left, a man entered in whom much evil thrived. This man was mute, as if the Accuser had stolen his voice. As Jesus gave sight to the man, so he gave voice to the man—again and anew the man spoke, his voice reawakened. The gathered watchers were amazed! “Did you see that? We’ve never seen anything like this in Israel, not ever!” But the Elite, like hall monitors in a school, objected. “He must be a friend of evil to command it so.”

*Soft rain drops upon the desert,  
sound like crackling fire,  
my heart begins to sing - again and anew,  
reawakened to possibility.*

*Cactus blooming,  
again and anew, reawakened,  
invite my spirit to dance the rhythms of the  
song my heart sings.*

*I begin to imagine  
the Accuser shall not always hold sway  
over airwaves and coffee tables and pillows -  
all the places where conversation is used as a weapon.*

*No.  
It shall not always be.  
The rain has stopped now - the desert in stillness waits.  
My heart bursts forth in song anew, reawakened.*

*“Son of David! Have mercy upon us all!”*

Lord, make me an instrument of reawakening,  
when distracted, let me find focus,  
when over-burdened, let me find release,  
when asleep, let me be roused.  
O Divine Master may I not so much  
tolerate sleepwalking through life as to find my path,  
accept being silenced by crowds

as to insist my voice be heard,  
insist mine is the only voice  
as to listen to the experiences of others.  
For life is brief - as Summer turns to Autumn,  
and your Spirit is waiting,  
inviting me to participate fully  
in the one life you have gifted to me.

*Go into the world...* Notice being present. Notice others who seem unusually present in the moment. What gifts come to you when you are mindful? Name the presents in being present? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 9:35-38**

Jesus journeyed to and through towns and villages, nowhere too small, teaching the religious, restoring to wholeness the broken and bruised, sharing, always sharing, that the God-life is Good News. When Jesus saw the gathered crowds, and actually see them he did, his guts spilled out upon the ground,<sup>81</sup> heart burning with desire on behalf of the people, who were harassed and helpless, beleaguered and abandoned - imagine a flock of sheep surrounded by wolves, with no shepherd to protect them. In dismay Jesus said to his disciplined followers, “Lots of work out there, not a lot of workers. Fruitful labor awaits, if we could just find folks willing to harvest what The Truth has nurtured. Pray harvest workers will be sent.”

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.  
Harassed and helpless....  
Prone to leave the God I love.  
Beleaguered and abandoned....  
Take my heart, Lord, take and seal it,  
Be Thou, my shepherd....  
for Thy courts, Lord, up above.  
Be Lord of the Harvest in and through my life.*

Lord, make me an instrument of harvest,  
when harassed, be my protection,  
when helpless, be my strength,  
when beleaguered, be my peace,  
when feeling abandoned, show me your presence.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
ease as purpose,

<sup>81</sup> This verse is usually translated “compassion” and “...guts spilled out upon the ground” is, literally, the definition of

compassion in the first-century Greek context, a visceral image to be sure.

pleasing distractions as meaningful work,  
my abundance as your harvest.  
For the harvest is plentiful,  
ripe and ready and right next door,  
waiting, waiting, waiting for someone, anyone, please!  
to tell them Good News.

*Go into the world...* Notice the symptoms of being harried. What does it look like when you see someone who appears hassled or harassed? Who are they? Notice the person(s) and pray for them in the moment of your noticing. Notice. Pray. Act.

#### Matthew 10:1-4

In those days, students approached a rabbi and humbly asked to become a “disciple,” a disciplined follower of all the rabbi’s teachings. disciplined followers were expected to memorize everything their rabbi said, so only the best and brightest applied.<sup>82</sup> Jesus was different. Jesus’ disciplined followers did not choose him but rather Jesus chose those who would be his disciplined followers—twelve of them. Indeed, he called them—part invitation, part command, full freedom yet compelling in a way that prevented them from saying no. Jesus not only called twelve disciplined followers but gave them authority to cleanse and restore, to build up and make whole, body and soul, people and communities.

These disciplined followers, disciplined followers all, became the “sent ones.”<sup>83</sup> Their lot include sets of brothers, fishermen and doubters, and both a tax collector (who worked for and with the Romans to oppress Israelites) and a zealot (who worked against the Romans as an agitator, a part of the armed Resistance), and even Judas Iscariot who later betrayed Jesus and helped the Elite arrest him to be handed over to the Roman political leaders. Jesus’ disciplined followers were a motley crew indeed.

*The playground never really leaves us.  
I remember the pride and the shame,  
giddy joy or cheeks burning -  
blotchy red creeping up my cheeks.  
Chosen (or not).*

*Playgrounds give way to school dances:  
pulse pounding,  
awkward hyperventilating,  
I’m so glad the gym was dimly lit!  
Chosen (or not).*

*Dances give way to jobs and careers and proposals:  
the child within never really leaving,  
only the stakes are higher -  
personal, family and community well-being  
is what matters, we tell ourselves.  
And, still, Chosen (or not).*

*Is there ever a moment when the choosing stops?  
When worry, doubt and anxiety are shown the door?  
When I can rest assured,  
my shortness, my fatness, my stutter, my baldness, my hips,  
my nose, my curly hair, my straight hair, my laugh, my  
sneeze, my driving, my Facebook posts, my hobbies, my  
political party, my race, my country of origin, my opinion  
on “the most urgent issue ever, my wandering eye, my  
loose tongue, my uncontrolled temper, my cynicism, my  
despair, my, my, my—no longer matters?”*

*Am I really one of the Chosen?*

Lord, make me an instrument of following,  
when called, let me respond,  
when challenged, let me accept,  
when absolutely and utterly freaked out, let me trust.  
O Divine Master, let me not so much seek  
to have a plan as to walk the Path,  
to have life all figured out as to find life along the Way,  
to be working on my American Dream  
as to seek first your Kin-dom.  
For when Christ calls one, he bids them come and die,  
this is costly, for it costs one their life,  
it is grace for it gives the only true life -  
the life found in Jesus Christ.<sup>84</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice the followers of Jesus. Without judgment, notice how they live: in words and deeds,

<sup>82</sup> It is said that some disciples even followed their rabbi into the lavatory in case the rabbi said something while relieving themselves.

<sup>83</sup> The Greek word *apostoleos* is the noun form of the verb “to send,” and from *apostoleos* we get “apostle,” which literally means “sent one.”

<sup>84</sup> Bonhoeffer, *ibid.*

through tone and attitude. What do you learn about living with Jesus from observing his followers? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 10:5-8

Jesus commanded the sent ones to go and show the Good News. “For now,” he said, “stick to Israel – avoid both the Samaritans and the Gentiles while you’re still wearing training wheels. Going to Israel is hard enough, for they are like sheep wandering and alone.

“As you go, speak Good News to those you encounter: ‘The Truth is here! Closer than our own breath, knowing our thoughts before we think them, our needs before we ask for them.’ Bring wholeness to the broken, bring life to the dead. Care for both outer shell and inner spirit. As you have been filled with loving-kindness, let it overflow the brim of your being: be poured out into the life of the world. As you receive, give, give, give!”

*Tolkien wrote, “Not all who wander are lost.”<sup>85</sup>  
But some who wander are  
in need of Jesus, for they are alone,  
in need of God-life.*

*Who is this One closer than my own breath?  
Who knows my thoughts before I think them?  
Who knows my needs before I ask for them?*

*From whom the far side of the sea is not too far away:<sup>86</sup>  
For whom a Cross was not too much to bear?*

*I need this God-life, for I live in community,  
have been found by Jesus,  
and only go where I definitely know the directions.*

*Maybe that’s why I’m lost.  
Maybe I need to wander.*

Lord, make me an instrument of generosity,  
when receiving, let me give,  
when receiving freely, let me freely give,  
when receiving generously, let me generously give.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to hoard stuff as to share from what you have given,  
to share only in deeds of compassion  
as to share also in words of life,

to share about The Truth as to share The Truth-life.  
For we all wander through this life, alone and together,  
and upon both you and me the journey takes its toll,  
but for us and for all,  
our wandering need not take our soul.

*Go into the world...* Notice being sent. How has The Truth sent you from one thing to another, to a new place, people, or thing? How are you “sent” daily? Notice the Spirit nudges when you are invited to act, to love, to care, or to speak. Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 10:9-15

Jesus continued, “Ministry is not about having the best resources: gold plated pulpits and silver communion ware don’t matter. Showing up in a fancy car, with a huge cross hanging round your neck, carrying a large-print Bible doesn’t cut it. The Truth’s worker should be given what she or he needs: food and shelter – enough.

“When you enter a village look for hospitality – welcome is a sign of a heart belonging to The Truth. Don’t bounce from home to home, looking for bigger or better. No couch surfing allowed for The Truth-work is about the people not the bricks.

“When you enter a home, shower it with loving-kindness. If those in the home welcome you, shower them with *shalom*. If they reject you, don’t grovel. Some folks do not, will not or cannot listen to words of peace; trying to argue someone into *shalom* is silly. As you leave, return to them all you have received, even the dust from your feet, so they cannot say you have taken advantage of them. I tell you truth: on the Last Day it will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that village.”

*Bling, big hair, and a tie that says you love Jesus  
may draw crowds but does not heal hearts nor  
mend the brokenness within one’s soul.*

*Only grace and peace do that – heal and mend.  
Only holy hospitality – the welcome of another.  
Only an open heart kissing a broken soul.*

Lord, make me an instrument of welcome,  
welcome for the random dude with bad-breath,  
welcome for the tattooed Zillennial with a nose ring,

<sup>85</sup> Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*, (1987).

<sup>86</sup> c.f. Psalm 139:9-10.

welcome for the silver-haired with the hearing aid.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be noticed by others, as to look for the lonely,  
to be greeted by friends, as to search for the shy,  
to be the center of attention, as to wander the margins.

For the Gospel compels with a centrifugal force,  
until inside and outside no longer exist,  
but only wider and wider circles of grace.

*Go into the world...* Notice the ill at ease. Are they “misfits” or merely shy? How might you show welcome and hospitality to them? What might invite them toward a sense of belonging? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 10:16-20**

Jesus continued, “I am sending you out innocent in the midst of terror, sheep among wolves. It’s okay to be shrewd but not deceitful, wily but not manipulative, wise as snakes but harmless like doves. And for goodness’ sake be careful! Know going in you will be arrested, even beaten, and will be made to stand before the full weight of government because you speak truth to power in my name. You will suffer but your suffering with conscience will be its own message, first to the religious and also to those who could care less. So when the powers arrest you, don’t have a speech written out and don’t worry that your words won’t sound eloquent. Speak from the heart. Let the Spirit do the heavy lifting and The Truth’s message will resound because of you.”

*Truth to power:  
from synagogues in Pittsburgh let it ring,  
from pulpits in Puerto Rico without power let it ring,  
from city streets and coffee shop counters,  
from FB to Tik-Tok and voting booths everywhere,  
let it ring, let it ring, let it ring.*

*Let every voice speak Truth. To. Power.  
And when suffering comes, and it will come,  
pray the God-life may so abide in  
my heart, your heart, our hearts,  
the long arc of the moral universe  
may bend toward justice<sup>87</sup> just a bit more.*

*May the arc  
bend sharply,  
bend shrewdly,  
bend with wily intent so that  
love will win the day  
while victory coos like a dove.*

Lord, make me an instrument of shrewdness,  
when tempted to forget my values,  
let me shout yes to truth,  
when invited to forgo my morality,  
let me speak yes to truth,  
when eager to win at all costs,  
let me whisper yes to truth.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to adopt the ways of the world as to overcome them,  
to be a pawn for power as to submit to your authority,  
to walk the way of the wolf  
as to lie down with the lion and the lamb.<sup>88</sup>

For even when I only say yes to truth in a whisper,  
the thunder of The Truth’s passion is unveiled  
for justice to live in the Land.

*Go into the world...* Notice power dynamics. Who has power and who doesn’t? What are the power dynamics you observe between different races, genders, and ages? Who wields power with compassion and who wields it as a weapon? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 10:21-25**

Jesus continued, “Brother will rise up against brother, sister will hand sister over for slaughter, fathers and mothers against sons and daughters, children rising up to slay their parents. When like a fog evil descends, no one sees truly, and you are more than likely to be hated because you belong to me. Living gospel values will not make you popular. They will only make you whole. When people attack, you need not remain still and accept abuse: move on, run if you must, flee to the hills, but escape. The sorry truth is that you will not even finish sharing gospel values in the villages of Israel before the Son of Humanity is revealed in Golgotha. What’s more, the student is not above the Master. As the teacher, so the student; as the

<sup>87</sup> This is a paraphrase of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s quote that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

<sup>88</sup> c.f. Isaiah 11:6-9.

Master, so the servant. If they call me 'Devil' just imagine what they'll do to you?"

*Surely Jesus was talking about ancient times:  
Rome or Jerusalem or the Mongol hordes?  
Caesar and Herod and Atila?*

*Surely Jesus was talking about other places:  
Nazi Germany or genocidal Rwanda or Afghanistan?  
Hitler and Kagame and the Taliban?*

*Surely Jesus wasn't talking about us:  
Charlottesville or Parkland or Las Vegas  
or my own Thanksgiving Day table?*

*Surely Jesus wasn't talking about  
marching in streets or refusing to accept exclusion,  
welcoming migrant caravans or feeding hungry people,  
changing laws to reflect The Truth's light and love?*

*Surely.*

Lord, make me an instrument of willingness,  
willing to stand and be counted,  
willing to speak the truth in love,  
willing even to be persecuted, if such is needed.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
the path of comfort as the Way of conscience,  
the path of ease as the Way of engagement,  
the path of status as the Way of the Prince of Peace.  
You never promised living the Gospel would be easy,  
just that it would lead to into your presence,  
and to a life worthy of your Name,  
so I await the next chapter of this grand adventure.

*Go into the world...* Notice your willingness. Are you willing to live Gospel values always? When are the times and what are the circumstances that lead you to resist, to push back a bit, to want to rebel? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 10:26-31**

Jesus continued, "Fear not your enemies. All secrets will be unsealed. All that is hidden will be unveiled. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. What I whisper in your ear, shout from the housetops.

"I say again: fear not. Fear not those who can kill the body but cannot touch the soul. If you must fear, fear

the One with authority to destroy both body and soul, with power to dispose of your whole being as though taking out the trash. And yet, it is the Eternal One who knows the value of a sparrow and that you are more valuable than a flock of them. It is the Holy One who sees when the sparrow rises and falls and ensures they are cared for with love, who even counts the very hairs on your head - yes, each one! - so be not afraid, be not afraid."

*Fear is jack-hammered into our consciousness  
with every word spoken:  
we cannot run, we cannot hide, there is no escape.*

*Cold comfort knowing  
secrets will be revealed...  
"someday."*

*Someday the truth will be unveiled.  
Someday darkness will turn to light.  
When, precisely, will this someday come?*

*Until that day, I must choose.  
Faith or fear? Hope or despair?  
Turning inward or standing with one's beloved?*

*I choose...*

Lord, make me an instrument of enduring faith,  
when tempted to turn away, let me stand,  
when overwhelmed, let me sink to my knees,  
when fear cripples my heart,  
may I cry out confident you will hear.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to avoid hardship, as to engage it,  
to worry about myself  
as to live with a glad and generous heart,  
to fear my enemies as to love them.  
For so easy is the way of surrender,  
so tempting the invitation to live afraid,  
but Gospel truth lays a claim upon my life,  
a claim that cannot be denied.

*Go into the world...* Notice the many ways you are invited to embrace trust? (It would have been sooooo easy to ask you to notice the ways you are invited to fear, but we all know these too well! They are obvious in our world.) More subtle and nuanced are the invitations to embrace trust - and harder work to notice. Get to it. Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 10:32-33

Jesus continued, “Know and be known, and be open about it. Brothers vouch for brothers, and sisters vouch for sisters, and I will vouch before my Abba all who admit to knowing me. But if someone is embarrassed to say they belong to me and I to them? What will I say then? To be open in community, whether on earth or in heaven, is the only true freedom.”

*I was not Presbyterian.*

*Why on earth be that?*

*Nice enough people, perhaps,*

*but stodgy prayers, funereal hymns: the frozen chosen.*

*I went to his Presbyterian church as a college freshman,  
a friend invited me,*

*it had not a rock band or lights or anything else.*

*I didn't go back.*

*Weeks later I saw him—the Presbyterian pastor!*

*I had gone to his church and not gone back!*

*(Unaware of the holy custom of “church shopping.”)*

*Would he think I blew him off? That I didn't like him?*

*I was comforted: he wouldn't remember me!*

*“Hey, Brad,” he said, “how's it going?”*

*We talked. It was awkward, (at least for me).*

*That was the day I became Presbyterian.*

Lord, make me an instrument of knowing,  
where others forget, let me remember,

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<sup>89</sup> Jesus quoted Micah 7:6, which in its larger context discusses the perversion of Israel,

The faithful have disappeared from the land,  
and there is no one left who is upright;  
they all lie in wait for blood,  
and they hunt each other with nets.  
Their hands are skilled to do evil;  
the official and the judge ask for a bribe,  
and the powerful dictate what they desire;  
thus they pervert justice. (7:1-3)

The turmoil in Israel forced one to choose whom to trust. Even neighbor and family are untrustworthy when justice is perverted. Only The Truth can be trusted,

where others pretend, let me be honest,

where others don't care,

let me see the person in front of me.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to impress others as to have them know I see them,  
to cajole others as to have them know I accept them,  
to condemn as to connect in sacred community.

For the life of the Triune The Truth

is a dance of holy fellowship,

into which we are each invited -

to know and be known,

and it is the only dance that leads to eternal life.

*Go into the world...* Notice those who appear to be strangers in your midst. Who does not seem to belong...yet? Who has not been welcomed...yet? With whom is The Truth calling you to connect...now? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 10:34-39

Jesus continued, “Think not that I have come to make nice, to help you ignore real problems and sweep injustice under the rug. As a soldier at the point of the sword must choose an allegiance, so I have come to force a choice. As Micah, the truth-teller from ages past, has written,

Rebellious sons and disobedient daughters -  
enemies within one's own home.

Perverting justice a family pastime -  
parents betraying their offspring for a price.<sup>89</sup>

Put no trust in a friend,  
have no confidence in a loved one;  
guard the doors of your mouth  
from her who lies in your embrace;  
for the son treats the father with contempt,  
the daughter rises up against her mother,  
the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
your enemies are members of your own household.  
But as for me, I will look to The Truth,  
I will wait for the Source of my salvation;  
The Truth will hear me. (7:5-7)

“If you love this kind of father or that kind of mother more than me, choosing their broken values above the rule of The Truth’s sovereign love, you deceive yourself and have chosen the lesser path. My path is the Way of the Cross, the way of self-emptying sacrifice – only then can you belong to me. Whoever fashions their own ‘lifestyle brand’ will ultimately find it lacking. Whoever lets go and lets me give you life will find the life worth living.

*Politicians are shouting, “Peace! Peace!”  
when there is no peace.  
There is no peace without justice.*

*“Just shut up and let us have our way,”  
the powerful tell us.  
There is no peace without justice.*

*“We are oppressed,”  
claim billionaires with private jets.  
There is no peace without justice.*

*Why fear the tired, the poor, huddled masses  
yearning to breathe free?<sup>90</sup>*

*Why reject the wretched refuse of  
other teeming shores?<sup>2</sup>*

*Why send these, the homeless,  
tempest-tossed away?<sup>2</sup>*

*Soldiers no longer force a choice  
but ballot box beckons, where I will say,  
“There is no peace without justice.”*

Lord, make me an instrument of justice,  
choosing the huddled masses,  
choosing the wretched refuse,  
choosing the tempest-tossed.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to make nice as to do justice,  
to ignore real problems as to love kindness,  
to sweep injustice under the rug

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<sup>90</sup> This line and the next two lines are taken from the inscription on the Statue of Liberty.

<sup>91</sup> The New Testament has different words for different kinds of love, including: *agape*, *eros* which is “sexual love,” *phelos* which is “deep friendship or brotherly/sisterly love,” (thus the reason

as to walk humbly with You.

For comes a time when silence is complicity,  
when the cruciform life is no longer a choice,  
when the only “brand” I need is to belong to Jesus.

*Go into the world...* Notice your ability to choose: little things, big decisions, when to speak and when to remain silent, how to engage, when to remain aloof? The list goes on and choices are always before you. What are your choices saying about your allegiance? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 10:40-42**

Jesus continued, “Welcome is a spiritual act. Whoever welcomes you welcomes me and welcomes the One who sent me. To welcome another as a truth-teller is to receive a truth-teller’s reward. To welcome another as The Truth-lover is to receive The Truth-lover’s reward. And if one offers even a cup of cold water to a little one who follows me, I tell you the truth, that person’s reward will be even greater when the rule of The Truth’s sovereign love is revealed in its fullness.”

*Welcome is a spiritual act:  
mercy in disguise,  
agape<sup>91</sup> broken into its core elements.*

*So easy to welcome pastor and president:  
lauded and applauded,  
expected and respected.*

*More difficult to welcome colleague or competitor:  
uncertain of protocols,  
unclear they can be trusted.*

*Harder still to welcome stranger and foreigner:  
such folk are not like me,  
they are Other.*

*Though I like many others,  
I do not know Other,  
I do not like Other.*

*I don’t care if welcome is mercy in disguise:  
I do not trust Other.  
I will not welcome Other.*

*And some say churches aren’t welcoming?<sup>2</sup>*

Philadelphia is The City of Brotherly Love), and *storge* which is “empathy or a close bond.” There are seven Greek words for love, of which the New Testament uses four.

Lord, make me an instrument of welcome,  
 when encountering a friend, opening my home,  
 when meeting a stranger, opening my heart,  
 when confronted by an Other, opening my very soul.  
 O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to be noticed as to observe,  
 to be received as to open myself to others,  
 to be welcomed as to shower with hospitality.  
 For welcome is a spiritual act that began in Creation,  
 and is confirmed both by Covenants and the Cross,  
 Your divine “Yes” to our broken humanity,  
 the source of all blessing.

*Go into the world...* Notice those in need of being greeted, received, and made to feel as if they belong. Where do you encounter them? How often do you notice them in your church? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 11:1-6**

After Jesus finished teaching the disciplined followers, he journeyed about showing and sharing the message of the rule of sovereign love. When John the Baptizer heard what Jesus was doing, he wondered about Jesus being Messiah, for Jesus’ works were the same as those the truth-tellers from ages past had associated with the Anointed One.

John sent some of his own followers to Jesus with the question, “Are you the Promised One? Or is The Truth’s Anointed still to come?”

Jesus did not answer with a simple yes or no but with his resume: “Tell John what you hear with your own ears and see with your own eyes: the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, lepers being cleansed, the deaf hearing again, and the dead being raised. Even the poor – those who are last and least in the eyes of the world – have Good News showing up on their doorsteps.<sup>92</sup> Sacred openness belongs to the one who laughs instead of laments at this great reversal.”

*I’m from Missouri, you see.*

*“What does that matter,?” you ask.*

*You have to show me before I’ll believe.*

*“But I know the right lingo!”*

*Are the hungry fed and homeless housed?  
 “I know the Four Spiritual Laws!”  
 Are children being loved, nurtured, and educated?  
 “I know “Great is Thy Faithfulness” by heart!”  
 Are laws crafted giving the poor their first, best chance?  
 “I know the political party who loves Jesus!”  
 Are you advocating, praying, and working for equality?  
 “I know I’m not part of the problem!”  
 Are you showing up for those who need Good News?  
 “I...I...”*

Lord, make me someone that  
 even a skeptic from Missouri might love,  
 ready to get my hands dirty,  
 willing to risk embarrassment,  
 able to speak for your rule of Sovereign love.  
 O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to speak the faith as to live the faith,  
 to talk the talk as to walk the walk,  
 to say I love Jesus  
 as to demonstrate my love in service to others.  
 For Messiah came to show us love in human flesh,  
 the Anointed One of The Truth  
 touching, healing, moving among us,  
 whose actions show the Eternal heart of our Creator.

*Go into the world...* Notice your actions. We tend to excuse our own misbehavior while attributing dark motives to others.<sup>93</sup> Stop giving yourself the benefit of the doubt and start noticing what you actually do. How do you actually relate to others, interact with, speak to, serve, and bless them? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 11:7-19**

As John the Baptizer’s disciplined followers returned to share Jesus’ answer to the question about being the Anointed One, Jesus addressed the crowds. “When you journeyed to the desert to see John, what were you hoping for? A fragile flower fluttering in the wind? A comfy, cozy, cherubim waiting for others to serve him? If you wanted that, you would have looked in the king’s suite. Were you looking for vigor? For intensity? For a commitment to the truth at all costs? Of course you were! And that’s precisely what you got with John and then some.

<sup>92</sup> c.f. Isaiah 35:5-6, 61:1-2.

<sup>93</sup> This common phenomenon is called “the Fundamental Attribution Error.”

John is the one about whom the truth-teller from ages past wrote,

Look! Watch! See!

I will send a forerunner, a herald to warn one and all that you are coming. He will till the soil and plant the seeds for your harvest.<sup>94</sup>

“I tell you the truth, in all of human history there is no more important work than the work John has done in preparing others for the Way, yet even the last and the least who live according to the rule of sovereign love are greater than John. John’s work was not for fragile flowers. Calling others to live obedient to The Truth is not the work for those who love comfy and cozy. The rule of sovereign love is always a target: argued against and attacked. The whole of Torah speaks with force and is itself forcibly opposed, so it was with John. Believe it or not, accept it or not, but John was the new Elijah come to prepare the Way. If you have ears, listen!

“You say you love John? Hardly! You are like children on the playground who claim to be bored or listening to music but refusing to dance. There’s no pleasing you. John was austere and severe, and you called him harsh. The Son of Humanity eats, drinks and is merry, and you call him a partier, ‘Look, a drunk! He hangs out with a bad crowd! Booooo!’ Say what you want, but the proof is in the pudding. Wisdom wins the day.”

*Ministry is a contact sport, like football or rugby.  
Expect to be tackled, occasionally, especially leaders,  
for a bright, red, bullseye is painted on their clothing,  
the target for everyone’s anxious thoughts.*

*Ministry is a contact sport, as in a neo-natal unit.  
Connecting with another, touching with tender care,  
wholeness expressed as the love of One  
who touched the leper and whose hem was touched.*

*Ministry is a contact sport.  
Beware entering the ring, but  
know a ring is a thing of beauty.*

*It is a place ...  
where fragile flowers fail  
yet smell of incense and prayer,*

*where the path to comfy and cozy is  
littered with broken glass,*

*where the path to The Truth, though narrow,  
leads to eternal life.*

Lord, make me an instrument of preparation,  
for the barren, tilling the soil of faith,  
for the beleaguered, planting seeds of hope,  
for the bereft, harvesting your eternal love.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to coax as to invite,  
to cajole as to encourage,  
to compel as to inspire.

For the harvest begins long before the ripening,  
hours of prayer and years of compassion  
planted before you reap the longing heart at long last.

*Go into the world...* Notice not the moment, not the event, not the pay-off. Notice all that leads up to the moment. What is required to be prepared for the event, to get to the pay-off? How willing are you to till the soil, plant the seeds, and weed the garden? Or are you only interested in the harvest? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 11:20-24**

Jesus criticized those villages in which his works and wonders had been on full display and yet the wonders touched not their hearts, the works made not a dent in their minds, and they remained steadfast in continuing on their destructive paths. To Chorazin, just north of Capernaum near the Sea of Galilee, and to Bethsaida, just east of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, he said, “Grief! Distress! If Tyre had witnessed my works, they would have turned away from their broken habits. If Sidon had witnessed my wonders, they would have turned toward the Living One.” (Tyre and Sidon were Gentile villages on the Mediterranean coast.) “I tell you truth: Judgment Day will be more pleasant for these outsiders than for you, Chorazin, or for you, Bethsaida.

“And you, Capernaum, home to some of my own disciplined followers, your town motto proclaims you will be ‘lifted high to heaven,’ but I tell you that even you will be tossed in the garbage dump outside Jerusalem. Town mottos are no substitute for faithful obedience to the rule

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<sup>94</sup> c.f. Isaiah 40:3.

of sovereign love. In fact, if Sodom itself had seen what you've seen, heard what you've heard, they would have turned away from their sin and still be around today. But not you! Indeed, Sodom will be better off than you on the Day of Judgment."

*The Scripture says The Truth alone is the Judge.  
I agree, but only to a point, for I find it rather easy*

*to harden my heart toward neighbor, stranger or Other,  
(just like Chorazin),*

*to ignore the beauty and wonder all around me,  
(just like Bethsaida),*

*to presume with holy arrogance my own assumptions,  
(just like Capernaum),*

*and it occurs to me The Truth need not judge,  
for I'm doing a fine job already.*

*And then The Truth, the Almighty,  
Creator of all that is seen and unseen,  
looks upon my puny, petty, inconsequential judgments,  
"Do you really think you know how to judge?"*

*With a wink to the angels, The Truth, the Almighty,  
Creator of all that is seen and unseen says,  
"Hold my beer."*

*And I am left speechless.*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy wonder,  
in the midst of busyness,  
slowing down to notice where you show up,  
in the midst of owning my responsibility,  
recognizing I'm not in charge,  
in the midst of burdens,  
seeing your grace that changes everything.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to define you in small ways,  
as to bathe in your Mystery,  
to direct how you act,  
as to sit in awe while I watch you work,  
to be in control, as to be amazed.

For your role as Judge is as large and wondrous  
as the sun and the stars that extend billions of years,  
a role we do not and cannot comprehend,  
and about which we should stop trying.

*Go into the world...* Notice judgment. Though tempting to notice when others' judge, don't start there. Start with yourself. When do you judge? Who do you judge? How does it make you feel? What are the various manifestations your judgment of others takes? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 11:25-30**

Standing between those who think they are good and just and true and those aware they are not, Jesus prayed, "Thank you, Eternal One, Sovereign in love, for the way you turn wisdom upside-down and intelligence inside-out and whisper mysteries to babes! Yes, this has always been your Plan, from before the beginning of time, your way of bringing wholeness. All things - spiritual and physical, past, present and future - belong to You, and You have shared them with the Son. Only The Truth knows the Son and only the Son knows The Truth; and those to whom the Son chooses to unveil Their Mystery rejoice.

"Come, Tired! Come, Troubled! Let me give all y'all Rest! Accept my teaching - a rabbi's yoke<sup>95</sup> - wrap my teaching around your neck. Learn life from me: gentleness and humility from the center of your being that enlivens your souls. My teaching is a yoke you can wear every day."

*The Truth's mysteries  
a meal as zesty as they are refreshing,  
leaving an after taste of light and wonder,  
filling the soul with joy and delight.*

*The Truth's mysteries  
cannot be bought or sold,  
they do not roam the corridors of power or privilege,  
their best friends are vulnerability and awareness.*

*The Truth's mysteries  
come as a friend, sharing trouble in the dead of night,  
waiting for you to accept their call,  
day or night, yesterday, today or into all tomorrows.*

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<sup>95</sup> In the first century, a rabbi's teaching was known as the rabbi's yoke.

Lord, make me an instrument of the easy yoke,  
when others invoke the letter, let me offer the spirit,  
when others burden, let me carry,  
when others confuse and complicate,  
let me keep it simple, saints.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to sound clever as to guide toward gentleness,  
to enforce rules as to open the way of humility,  
to play the sophisticate as to unclutter the soul.

For the yoke that brings life  
sees us in our full humanity,  
broken yet beloved,  
in need of the God-life only Jesus gives.

*Go into the world..* Notice yokes. If a “yoke” is a rabbi’s teaching, what yokes do you encounter in your daily existence? What is the yoke of Madison Avenue? Wall Street? Facebook? Netflix? Church? How are you being molded, shaped, formed and transformed by the teachings – the yokes -- with which you are daily bombarded? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 12:1-8

Jesus left the village square and strolled through local farmland—and this was done on the Sabbath! Jesus’ disciplined followers scavenged kernels of grain from the field, for they were hungry. And, of course, the disciplined followers ate what they plucked. Again, this was done on the Sabbath. The Intense, who were hyper about matters of Law, saw what the disciplined followers did and called 911, for they were breaking the Law by “working” on the Sabbath. “Look,” they exclaimed to Jesus, “your followers are breaking the Law by harvesting their food on the Sabbath!”

Jesus, bemused, exasperated, and irritated, replied, “You think that’s bad? Have you read what David and his friends did when they were hungry?”<sup>96</sup> (Of course, Jesus knew the Intense knew that David and his men ate bread from the Table in the Tabernacle that was allowed only to priests; indeed, the bread was given to David by the priests!) “They ate the Bread of Presence, which is only

lawful for the priests to eat! Or what about the priests in the Temple – by definition they work on the Sabbath and yet are as innocent as a sleeping baby.

“Let me lay some truth on you: the Temple is sacred because it is home to The Truth’s presence. The full *shekinah*<sup>97</sup> lives there, and yet something even greater than the Temple stands before you, in whom the fullness of The Truth’s person is found. If David could eat bread in the presence of the Tabernacle, how much more can my disciplined followers eat grain in the presence of One who is greater than the Temple? If you understood the truth-teller from ages past, ‘I desire kindness of heart more than scrupulosity to edicts,’<sup>98</sup> you would not judge the hungry. The Son of Humanity is Sovereign over the Sabbath.”

*I lay exhausted, less tired from my physical labor—  
more emotionally tired from laboring  
to deal with those who specialize in  
missing the point.*

*Whatever happened to  
“spirit of the law over letter of the law”?  
“Walk a mile in another person’s shoes”?  
Kindness, dignity, and respect as human values?*

*Missing the point,  
some cause others to labor emotionally and physically,  
until, demeaned and spent, they lay exhausted.  
It need not be this way.*

Lord, make me an instrument of Sabbath rest,  
from work, replenished,  
from burdens, renewed,  
from intolerance, restored.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to prove my worth as to rest in you,  
to work harder than all others  
as to live with sacred balance,  
to be defined by accomplishments  
as to be fulfilled by your presence.

For the rule-givers of this world  
skew regulations in their own favor,

before The Truth’s presence. The Jerusalem Temple was said to be the one place on earth where The Truth’s *shekinah glory* was found in its fullness.

<sup>98</sup> c.f. Hosea 6:6.

<sup>96</sup> c.f. 1 Samuel 21:6.

<sup>97</sup> The Hebrew word *shekinah* refers to the fullness of The Truth’s presence and is often associated with the light and life associated with The Truth’s presence. The word “glory” is often coupled with it, *shekinah glory*, to convey full weight and measure of awe

and then condemn all who fail to measure up,  
but not you, O Holy One of Israel,  
for you nailed all human regulations  
on the cross with Jesus,<sup>99</sup>  
and then love all of us – we who fail to measure up.

*Go into the world...* Notice your work-life balance. How much Sabbath do you observe? What is the rhythm of your Sabbath rest? Is holy rest a burden to be fulfilled or a gift to be welcomed? Ponder how your answer to this last question reflects upon your relationship with The Truth – your sense of identity before the One we confess is Sovereign in love? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 12:9-14**

Jesus went from farmland into the synagogue where he found a man with a deformity – a crippled hand. The Intense knew about Jesus' ability to heal and wondered about his willingness to heal on the Sabbath, which, according to their overly scrupulous (some would say legalistic) interpretation, was against the Law. Would Jesus break the Law? The Scrupulous asked Jesus, "Is it legal to heal on the Sabbath?" They were not idly curious or actually interested in gaining wisdom but wanted to be able to accuse Jesus as a lawbreaker, a criminal, a rogue.

Jesus answered their question slant, like a poet, "Imagine one of you has one and only one sheep, a perfect lamb whose wool you shear to make the coat that keeps your child warm. You love that lamb, but it falls into a pit on the Sabbath. What will you do? Will you climb into the pit, lift it upon your shoulders, and lovingly bear it to safety? To do so is a form of work according to your interpretation of Sabbath. How much more cherished and valuable is one of The Truth's children? So you tell me: is it legal to do good only at certain times or all the time? Is goodness reserved only for special days or is the Sabbath included as part of The Truth's blessing?"

To this point Jesus had not really answered their question but only asked his own, rhetorical questions. He still did not answer the Intense with words but instead chose to express his conviction with actions. "Extend your hand," Jesus invited the man with the crippled hand. The man reached out and was restored, his hand made whole and complete, new, just like his other hand. The

Scrupulous were furious! From that moment, they began plotting how to destroy Jesus.

*Do good to one another –  
so simple, so basic: Humanity 101.*

*It shouldn't be so hard to understand.  
Do good to one another.*

*In the sandbox our mothers called out, "Play nice!"  
Do good to one another.*

*My coach chided, "Don't be a d... to your teammate."  
Do good to one another.*

*"For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer."  
Do good to one another.*

*So when mothers and children  
approach a line illegal for them to cross, why, oh why,  
do men with guns and armor shoot tear gas at them?  
At mothers! At children!*

*Is this what Jesus meant when he told us to  
do good to one another?*

Lord, make me an instrument of the good,  
today and tomorrow,  
choosing to see those who go unnoticed,  
on days ending in "y,"  
choosing to extend myself to others,  
even on the Sabbath,  
choosing to heal a fellow human being.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to obey the letter as to fulfill the spirit,  
to choose the expedient  
as to follow right where it leads,  
to avoid trouble  
as to be honorable, virtuous, and compassionate.  
For if I cannot affirm  
the dignity of fellow human beings,  
the implicit dignity of all things and your Creation,  
my religion is only an exercise in missing the point.  
Lord, have mercy, and may it never be.

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<sup>99</sup> c.f. Colossians 2:14.

*Go into the world...* Notice opportunities to connect in positive, healthy ways. Who do you encounter for whom you can bless their humanity? Speak a word of dignity? Offer a word or a touch of compassion? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 12:15-21**

When Jesus became aware of the plot to destroy him – did this mean to kill or merely to discredit him?<sup>100</sup> – he left the synagogue. Crowds stalked Jesus, and he spread wholeness to everyone but commanded them to keep quiet about him, not to reveal his true identity as The Truth’s Anointed. This was to fulfill what Isaiah, the truth teller from ages-to-ages past, spoke:

My servant, chosen and beloved,  
joy of my soul.  
I will energize his proclamation  
with my own Spirit.  
Justice will he speak to the Nations:  
neither loud nor ornery,  
breaking not a bruised reed,  
snuffing not a smoldering wick,  
never ceasing until justice is victorious –  
The Truth’s win for all creation.  
In my servant’s name,  
even outsiders have hope.<sup>101</sup>

*In a world of shouting,  
where anger is the order of the day,  
outrage having replaced Walter Cronkite’s  
“and that’s the way it is,”*

*whispers have power,  
kindness becomes a sword,  
humility a futuristic laser ray with magical powers,  
gentleness the balm of Gilead.*

*While I respect those voices that shall not be denied,  
raised to the level of a movement,  
whose longing cry provokes passion,  
I hesitate.*

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<sup>100</sup> This parenthetical is not in the original text but is inserted as a cautionary word to the reader. It is too easy to assume that “destroy” means “kill” because we know the end of the story: arrest, trial, cross, etc. However, at this juncture in the Gospel, it remains unclear what the Pharisees, (who I have paraphrased as the Intense) intend.

*Is my hesitancy a sign of cowardice?  
Or do I walk a different path?  
Can we both care about  
bruised reeds and smoldering wicks.*

Lord, make me a servant,  
in a loud world, prone to whisper,  
in an angry world, extending kindness,  
in the midst of colliding passions, steadfast and gentle.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to harvest reeds as to heal their brokenness,  
to collect all the candles  
as to light at least one against the darkness,  
to be in charge as to practice servant leadership.  
For the Way of the Cross rejects the path of power,  
and all our titles – CEO, the Big Kahuna, Jefe –  
remind us we have a ways to go  
before we live like Jesus.

*Go into the world...* Notice your willingness to serve. Is your instinct to serve yourself and your desires first? When is there freedom and joy when you help another and when does it feel as a burden? Be intentional this week to serve one person you ordinarily would not serve. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 12:22-32**

The crowds, still stalking Jesus with a hunger and longing to experience the rule of The Truth’s sovereign love, brought to Jesus one in whom an unholy spirit resided – broken humanity expressed as blindness and an inability to speak. Jesus vanquished the unholy spirit, restoring to the child his voice and his ability to see. The crowds rejoiced, hugged and high fived. They wondered aloud, “Could Jesus be the Anointed?” (The term they used was “the Son of David,” which was the customary nickname for Messiah and had political connotations, for many believed Messiah would lead the armed rebellion against Rome.)

The Intense were not amused, nor did they rejoice, because Jesus did not fit the criteria for what they

<sup>101</sup> c.f. Isaiah 42:1-7. What I paraphrase as “outsiders” is literally “Gentiles” (Hebrew: *goyyim*) and what Matthew speaks of as “hope” is generalized from Isaiah, which is far more specific. The hope in Isaiah 42:7 is “to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”

thought Messiah ought to look, sound and act like. So the Intense asserted, “He did it with the Accuser’s help! How else could he command an unholy spirit?”

Jesus knew the thoughts of their hearts and their disordered thinking; (after all, he wasn’t an idiot). He challenged the Intense, “Unity is not division, and divided hearts are not united. Hearts and minds, as households and nations, cannot stand divided. If the Accuser defeats its minions, it works against its own purpose and will fall into complete ruin. As you, so I: we each heal and make whole by the power of The Truth; both I and you cleanse and restore to make known the rule of The Truth’s sovereign love. Indeed, I tell you the truth: the unholy spirits I have defeated will be your judges, for they know we share the same purpose and walk in harmony toward the same end, even if you cannot see it. I heal and make whole by commanding unholy spirits to leave, and so the rule of sovereign love is restored. I could not do anything if I did not first deal with the one who stands against me – even the Accuser. But I have indeed defeated it already, and so I plunder its stolen treasure.

“Be with me not against me. Either you are part of the solution or you are the problem. Listen! I understand that I seem different from what you expected of the Anointed, so if you bad mouth me you will be forgiven. However, if you cannot see that healing and making whole, that the work of healing and restoring, that rescuing a beloved child from the clutches of evil is the work of the Divine Spirit in our midst, I can’t help you. There is no forgiveness for a mind so warped, a heart so frozen, and a spirit so perverse that you cannot see the work of The Truth in what is before you – not now and not ever.”

*Clash. Cacophony. Clutter.*

*Discord, Dissonance. Destruction.*

*Jesus, is this your heart, your will, your Spirit at work?*

*“Unity. Harmony. Wholeness.*

*Bringing shalom and restoring justice are my heart, my intention, my Spirit at work!”*

*How can we be certain? Discern right from wrong?*

*What are the signs? Will you not show us the way?*

*Jesus, why do you make it so hard to know what to do?*

*“Must I spell it out? B-r-e-a-t-h-e. P-r-a-y. You got this. I have shown you, am showing you, and will show you. I am the Way. I am the Truth. I am the Life.”*

Lord, make me an instrument of restoration,  
making whole what is broken,  
making clear what is confused,  
making one we who are in discord.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to defeat my opponent, as to find common ground,  
to gloat over the fallen, as to help them to stand again,  
to claim credit, as to share purpose.

For restoration is a team sport,  
and “I” cannot win the game alone,  
only “we” can know victory, and then only together.

*Go into the world... Notice others who are willing to help. Who shares your purpose and passion? Who is willing, able and available to join in common cause? Which of these friends is one you expected and which of them is a surprise you did not imagine? Notice. Pray. Act.*

### **Matthew 12:33-37**

Jesus continued, “Good tree, good wood, good fruit. Evil tree, evil wood, evil fruit. You are like the Garden’s serpent only en masse—an entire brood of vipers able only to speak evil. How can you do otherwise? From the abundance of the heart one speaks, and your hearts know only scarcity. The good person looks within to find justice and joy, and it shows, expressing themselves through words that create, words that heal, words that bind people together in love. The evil person looks into their heart shocked to experience a barren wasteland – the truth barely a shrub, justice like scrub grass, but their own self-interest a giant sequoia. Listen! When the Day comes to give account, and it will come, your words that planted seeds of love, nurtured truth, and bore the fruit of justice will be evident to all, and so will your words that delayed, deprived, and denied these things to others.”

*Our nation was transformed by a King’s Dream, not,*

*“I have a personal preference today!”<sup>102</sup>*

*Words matter.*

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<sup>102</sup> Quoted in *Reading for Preaching*, Cornelius Plantinga. (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan), 2013, p. 63.

*“Here I stand I can do no other,”  
said another saint with the first name of Martin.  
Words matter.*

*“Preach the Gospel always and, if necessary,  
use words,” spoke a saint named Francis.  
Words matter.*

*“A little bit of mercy makes the world  
less cold, more just,” spoke a pope named Francis.  
Words matter.*

*“I love you.”  
“I am listening.”  
Words matter.*

*The Truth said, “This is my Son, my beloved,  
in whom I am well pleased.”<sup>103</sup>  
Words matter.*

*Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock.  
If anyone opens the door.”<sup>104</sup>  
Words matter.*

*The Spirit says, “To the one who is victorious,  
I will give the right to eat from the tree of life.”<sup>105</sup>  
Words matter.*

*Choose your words well today.*

Lord, make me an instrument of peace,  
When others are careless,  
let me choose my words well,  
When others are thoughtless,  
let me still choose to bless with my words,  
When others are hateful,  
let me choose to speak the truth in love.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to win arguments, as to express integrity,  
to condescend, as to connect,  
to belittle or berate, as to bless – always bless.  
For words matter, and our words matter.  
With our tongues we both bless and curse.<sup>106</sup>  
Eternal Word, may I choose blessing today.

*Go into the world...* Notice how *your* words bless or curse.  
How do you unveil truth or obscure it? How do your words  
encourage or discourage? Notice. Pray. Act.

## **Matthew 12:38-42**

Some of the Intense and Scrupulous said to Jesus,  
“Rabbi, delight us with your razzle, dazzle us with wonder.”

Jesus answered, “Twisted hearts seek razzle-dazzle.  
Your wishes betray you, saying all I need to know  
about what really matters to you. The only razzle-dazzle  
you will get is the example of Jonah, the truth-teller from  
ages past. Like Jonah, so Jesus. As one was in the belly of  
the great fish, so the other will be in the belly of the earth.  
As one was spewed on to dry land, so the other will walk  
the earth anew.

“The people of Nineveh, ancient enemies of the  
Israelites who repented when confronted with the truth,  
will rise up on the Day, rise up and rebuke, rise up and  
speak truth to power, for they bowed down before the  
truth, bowed down before The Truth’s servant. One  
greater than Jonah stands before you – do you think being  
spewed out by a great fish is anything special? You haven’t  
seen anything yet!

“The queen of the South will rise up on the Day,  
rise up and speak truth to power, for she lived to listen,  
lived to hear The Truth’s wisdom from Solomon, and you  
do not notice, you cannot see – one greater than Solomon  
stands before you!”

*Spewed.*

*Interesting word.  
I do not think first about Jonah,  
my mind goes to opinions and social media and  
NOISE!  
Too much spewing these days (for my taste).*

*Yet the spewed we should notice is Jonah –  
reluctant spirit of judgment,  
unlikely vessel of mercy,  
grumpy instrument of loving-kindness,  
lesser servant of the one to come.*

<sup>103</sup> c.f. Matthew 3:17.

<sup>104</sup> c.f. Revelation 3:20.

<sup>105</sup> c.f. Revelation 2:7.

<sup>106</sup> c.f. James 3:1-12.

*Who gives not razzle – but offers wholeness.  
Who disdains dazzle – but longs to share joy.  
Who, like the lesser servant, will redefine*

*Spewed.*

Lord, make me an instrument of acceptance,  
pleased with the loving-kindness I have received,  
open to sharing what gifts have been given me,  
knowing that The Truth's person,  
even as shadow, is enough.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to find glitz and glamour as to share in loving  
friend and neighbor, stranger and enemy,  
to marvel at miracles  
as to find joy in the work of ministry,  
to need a sign from above  
as to relish the way of the servant.  
For new life is hidden in the womb,  
knit together of desire and love,  
brought forth by The Truth as gift –  
foreshadow of eternity –  
so are all The Truth's blessings hidden  
until revealed in the *kairos* moment.

*Go into the world...* Notice wanting to be impressed. How often at work or church, at home or school, do you desire razzle-dazzle? How do you find joy in “lesser offerings” faithfully given? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 12:43-45**

“The unholy may leave for a time, even travel the earth, wandering hither and yon, yet will long for home. Finding no home in its travels the unholy will return looking for the familiar rhythms of destruction, the sharp tones of anger, the bright colors of self-absorption. It will recognize you. And upon finding its old haunt ready to move back in, the unholy says, ‘Ah, yes, here it is. I recognize this place. But a house is not a home all alone, so let me invite my seven friends over, too. We’ll have a party!’ And the person goes from bad to worse. Do you not see this pattern all around you today?”

In that moment, while Jesus spoke to a throng of people, his mother and brothers stood outside, desiring to speak to him. Someone shouted, “Jesus! Your family is standing there, outside. They want to speak to you.”

And to the one who spoke of his family Jesus said, “I’ll tell you who my mother is, my brothers, my sisters, my family.” And Jesus pointed to his followers, saying, “Here. All around you are my mother, my brothers and sisters, my family. Anyone and everyone who shares a passion for The Truth’s will, who longs to live on earth as it is in heaven, that person is kin, and together we form a kin-dom of sacred hearts.”

*Kin-dom looks beyond dogma,  
sees beyond denomination,  
to the heart of a life being lived,  
to the rhythm of a life seeking blessing*

*for neighbor and stranger, enemies and “frenemies,”  
everyone who longs for a kin-dred spirit born of  
love amidst the noise,  
justice amidst sorrow,*

*connection with The Truth,  
connection with self and others,  
connection with creation:  
I to Thou as all in all.*

*You see, the unholy can’t return to its former home if  
Kin-dom fills the empty spaces.*

Lord, make me a vessel filled to the brim,  
full of Spirit nudges,  
Spirit calling overflowing,  
Spirit rhythms the dance of my life.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to wallow in my emptiness  
as to rejoice in your fullness,  
to fret about what other folks say  
as to delight in your words,  
to make a home for the demonic  
as to be at home in you.  
For your kin-dom makes of me a part  
of something greater than I can imagine,  
where the first are last and the last are first,  
where powerful are brought low  
and humble lifted up,  
where kin are found when and where  
I least expect them,  
the only place worthy of calling home.

*Go into the world...* Notice when you feel empty (as in depleted, unfulfilled, longing for something and you don't know what). When these moments come, do they occur in a particular setting or occasion, around certain persons or tasks? Take note of your emptiness and choose what you will do to fill it in a healthy, positive way. Whatever you choose, do so with intention. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 13:1-9**

Jesus left the crowded house and went to sit by the sea, but his solitude did not last long. Crowds surrounded Jesus, pressing upon him, so he got into a boat while the crowd packed the beach. Jesus told them stories.

“Hear! Listen! Understand! A farmer threw seed upon the land—all over and everywhere. Some seed fell on the walking path, and birds quickly pecked the seeds up. Other seed fell amidst rocks, where soil is shallow, thus the plant had no deep roots and was scorched by the sun. Other seed fell among abundant but unruly growth without space to breath or to flourish and therefore gagged upon its own excess. Still other seed fell into the rich, dark soil of Mother Earth. This seed flourished and flowered and bore fruit—abundant fruit to feed a community. If you have ears, hear! Listen! Understand!”

*Throwing seed that leads to abundant fruit.*

*Fruit to feed a family, and, even more,  
a village.*

*Fruit of love, laughter and lessons on simplicity.*

*Fruit of care, compassion and sorrowing together.*

*Fruit of mercy, forgiveness and learning to live together*

*as the reconciled and the reconcilers,*

*as those so profoundly holy they are always humble,*

*as ones in whom sacred doesn't lead to sanctimonious.*

*A village*

*needs such fruit, and, even more,*

*those who dare to throw the seed.*

Lord, make me like a basket of fruit,  
with the sweet taste of love and joy,  
sliced into pieces of peace and patience,  
filling a pie with kindness and generosity,

faithfulness and gentleness sprinkled on top,  
and baked to perfection with self-control.<sup>107</sup>

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to choose the soil in which I am sown  
as to grow where I am planted,  
to worry about sun and water  
as to trust your harvest will be plentiful.

For I am yours, O Sovereign Lover of all Creation,  
and my life finds meaning as I bear the fruit of love:  
in ways small, medium and large—30, 60, 100-fold—  
but always for your glory, honor and praise.

*Go into the world...* Notice the fruit of the Spirit in yourself and others. Affirm without arrogance what you do well. Appreciate with gratitude what others do well. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 13:10-17**

Those closest to Jesus, his disciplined followers, wondered aloud, “Why do you speak like you do? Your teaching sounds like riddles.”

Jesus replied, “I speak thus because The Truth's mysteries are fathomed as intimacy—one must be known to know—and accepted as a gift. Those who grasp and grab lose what little they try to hold, but those who receive a gift with open hearts and open hands will be given more than they can imagine. What you call riddles, I call Stories about the God-rhythms, as Isaiah, the truth-teller from ages past, said:<sup>108</sup>

They see yet are blind; they hear yet are deaf.

You say you see but do you understand?

You say you hear but do you perceive?

O my people, whose hearts have become stone,

if you plug your ears, if you shut your eyes,

how can you expect to understand?

How will you ever turn to me that I may heal you?

But you who are my disciplined followers, blessed are your eyes that see and blessed are your ears that hear. I tell you the truth, truth-tellers and justice-seekers have longed to see what you see and did not see it; hear what you hear and did not hear it.”

*The act of looking is different from seeing,  
the act of hearing different from listening.*

<sup>107</sup> c.f. Galatians 5:22-23 for the list of the fruit of the Spirit.

<sup>108</sup> c.f. Isaiah 6:9-10.

*My wife calls from the bedroom closet  
while I am in the kitchen.  
Does she not get it that  
I cannot understand what she says?*

*And yet, because I love her,  
I stop what I am doing and  
walk to the bedroom and say,  
“Did you say something, dear?”*

*I want to do more than look—I want to see.  
I want to do more than hear—I want to listen.  
I want more than riddles—I want understanding,  
I long for the gift of intimacy—to know as I am known.*

Lord, make me an instrument of holy listening:  
to my beloved,  
to my kinfolk,  
to the gathering of saints,  
to the hurting among us,  
to the least, the last and the lost,  
to those without voice.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to insist my own voice is heard  
as to listen to your Word,  
to tune into the world’s NOISE!  
as to listen for your Spirit’s whisper,  
to learn the ways of Empire  
as to apprentice in your reign.  
For your realm is the path of mystery  
only embraced as a gift,  
that leads to a holy intimacy  
for those with ears to hear and eyes to see.

*Go into the world...* Notice what draws your attention. When are you focused, tuned in, fully present? When are you distant, distracted, there but not there? Covenant to the practice of being present for 5-20 minutes today. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 13:18-23**

Jesus continued, “Listen! Here is the meaning of the story of the seeds and dirt and the farmer with a better plan and not just a bad arm or bad aim. When someone hears the Story of sovereign love but doesn’t get it, can’t comprehend the how or why, it’s like the Accuser has snatched away the Word from their heart. This is the seed

on the walking path. The seed amidst the rocks is like someone who gets jazzed when hearing the Word but has no rhythm, and the music quickly fades. When a discordant note sounds—trouble or tribulation because of the Word—the music stops altogether. The seed that fell among the abundant but unruly growth had no space, couldn’t slow down enough even to take a breath, and choked on its own schedule. There was life for a time but no fruit—it’s hard to bear fruit when you can’t breathe. But the seed thrown into the rich, dark soil of Mother Earth is like someone who looks and sees, who hears and listens, who gets it—gets the Word!—and their abundance comes from The Truth, not just to them but through them to those close and far, to their family and neighbors and the entire village.”

*The Sower, knows about land:  
hard path, rocky soil, parcel overrun with thorns,  
not all is the good soil of Mother Earth.*

*Amazing the gift from a The Truth who has neither  
a bad arm nor bad aim but a better plan  
than I could ever imagine.*

*The Truth sows the seed  
anyway, anyhow, all the time,  
so we might hear the Word, know and trust the Word,*

*bump into love by accident or happenstance or design,  
stumble across loving-kindness,  
tumble down the stairs that lead to Hell only to find*

*a sign that says, “Next stop Heaven,  
if you can only trust The Truth has  
a better plan than you can ever imagine.”*

*The Sower, knows about you (and wants to be known.*

Lord, make me a thrower of seed,  
not just to those who want to hear the Word,  
not just to those willing to hear the Word,  
not even to those who only tolerate the Word,  
but also to the closed-minded,  
and the hard-hearted,  
and the clenched-fisted.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to compel as to suggest,  
to argue as to wonder,

to persuade as to live a winsome life.

For it is the nature of your gifts not to draw lines  
with which to define who is in and who is out,  
but to hope—always hope—that those out in the cold  
will one day enter the warm embrace of your love.

*Go into the world...* Notice when and to whom you are  
willing to speak of the God-life. What seems to give you  
“permission” to speak? What holds you back? Covenant  
to inquire (not make a statement!) about the God-life with  
someone. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 13:24-30**

Jesus told the disciplined followers yet another  
story: “The rule of sovereign love is like a farmer throwing  
good seed in his field. At night while the farmer slept, the  
farmer’s enemy came and tossed weed seeds all over the  
same ground and then snuck away. The good seeds  
sprouted wheat and at the same time the weed seeds  
sprouted and looked quite similar to the wheat.

“The farmer’s hired hands approached and said,  
‘I thought you threw good seed. Where did these weeds  
come from? Do you want us to go pull the weeds?’

“The farmer responded, ‘No, don’t pull the weeds  
because you might harm the wheat. My enemy did this. It’s  
not your problem to worry about—leave the weeds. Good  
wheat needs to be nurtured even if it means letting some  
weeds grow alongside it. When the harvest comes, we’ll  
sort the wheat and the weeds. That which is weeds will be  
burned like garbage and that which is wheat will be part of  
my celebration.’”

*In one and the same soul.*

*The dividing line between good and evil.*

*Living side by side.*

*Breathing the same air.*

*Seeing the same face in the mirror.*

*One nurtures the eternal, while the other becomes fuel.*

*One feeds the soul, while the other spreads like a virus.*

*One remains, while the other is consumed.*

*What of my today is wheat?*

*What is weeds?*

*Do I recognize the difference?*

Lord, make me a farmer of wheat,  
throwing seeds of compassion,  
watering the growth of justice,  
nurturing a land that leads to *shalom*,  
enduring the indignity of waiting to judge,  
accepting it is not my job,  
rejecting the temptation to pull others’ weeds.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to stand in judgment as to kneel before your Cross,  
to look for the speck as to remove the log,<sup>109</sup>  
to decide who’s in and out as to live as if  
the rule of your Sovereign love guides all that I do.

For only that which belongs to you will endure,  
the weedy part of me will become fuel for eternal fire,  
and the part of me that belongs to you  
will sit around the Table of your Harvest Celebration.

*Go into the world...* Notice your intentions. What  
motivates you? How conscious are you, in the moment, of  
your intentions and motivations? As you examine yourself,  
are you kidding yourself or being honest? Are you living  
toward your true self, your best you? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 13:31-32**

Jesus told yet another story: “The rule of sovereign  
love is like a strand of DNA—invisible to the eye yet  
containing all that is necessary to grow life, and when fully  
grown becomes the tree of life upon which the birds of the  
air find their home.”

*Bigger is better—*

*more, More, MORE!*

*Go viral!! My tweets rock 1.2 million followers!!!*

*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.<sup>110</sup>*

*Unobserved, we make a difference*

*one small act of love at a time.*

*Our service “rocks” no one but is part of a larger plan  
of One who came not to be served but to serve.<sup>111</sup>*

<sup>109</sup> c.f. Matthew 7:3.

<sup>110</sup> c.f. Ecclesiastes 1:2.

<sup>111</sup> c.f. Mark 10:43.

*Lord, take all that we are and have to offer,  
little though it be,  
and use it for love's sake.  
And The Truth will add 30, 60 and 100-fold.<sup>112</sup>*

Lord, make me like the mustard seed,  
    though small, mighty,  
    though scraggly, life giving,  
    though like a bush, called a tree,  
with growth encoded into my being,  
    living beyond others' expectations,  
providing a home for the birds of the air  
    whom you cause to nest within me.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
    to go viral as to live with virtue,  
    to believe the hype as to trust the holy,  
to make the big splash as to be the pebble in the pond.  
For mustard seeds do not grow quickly  
    into that which is your design,  
but, over time, become that which, by your design,  
    nurtures life and provide *shalom*.

*Go into the world...* Notice small acts of kindness. From you, toward you, and around you. Notice their impact and influence. Notice the moments that lead to these small acts of kindness. What is your state of mind or heart that you offer or recognize them? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 13:33-35**

Jesus told yet another story: "The rule of sovereign love is like the yeast a woman hides in flour. Though small and hidden, the yeast is at work, leavening the entire loaf, the hidden revealed in taste and texture."

Jesus taught the gathered about the rule of sovereign love in stories. Jesus seemed to say everything through tales and anecdotes. He did this to complete the word spoken by the truth-teller from ages past:

I will open my mouth;  
stories I will tell.  
I will proclaim hidden truth;  
revealing mysteries from creation's foundation.

*I never actually saw Ms. Virginia be divine.  
I sw her smile at children and laugh with friends,  
I saw her hold the hands of the dying,  
but play the role of The Truth?  
No, not Ms. Virginia.*

*And Ms. Maria?  
Did she ever even once create the cosmos?  
No, but she kneaded the bread of hospitality and  
baked marvelous loaves of community.  
I can still smell the aroma of her goodness.*

*Do you know Ms. Virginia or Ms. Maria?  
Probably not. My guess is that  
their lives are hidden to you,  
but the yeast of their faith I cannot forget,  
for I have feasted at the Table through them.*

Lord, make me like a woman baking bread,  
not in a sexist way as "That's women's work,"  
    but in the way of a gifted chef  
    as "Wow! That's amazing!"  
Not to bake Wonder Bread for mass production,  
but to bake something worthy of a community feast!  
    Not to bring myself praise,  
    but to provide, to delight, and  
    to nurture those whom you love.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
    acclaim as influence,  
    approval as impact,  
to make an impression as to make a difference.  
For hidden acts of love are not veiled from your sight,  
    but are held in the courts of heaven  
as a foreshadowing of that which is to come on earth.

*Go into the world...* Notice hidden things that you cannot see except for their effect in the world, except for the loving-kindness that is birthed because someone chose to live according to God-rhythms. Is there something you do that no one else sees but which is your gift to the world? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 13:36-43**

Jesus left the gathered and went into a house. His disciplined followers approached him concerned about his

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<sup>112</sup> c.f. Matthew 13:8.

story of the weeds. Jesus replied, “I will tell you about both the wheat and the weeds. The one who throws the good seed is the Son of Humanity. The field is the world—all culture and all society, presidents and prime ministers, all families and all faiths. The good seed that grows wheat is the offspring of the God-rhythms. The bad seed that grows weeds is the offspring of the Accuser, who threw the bad seed into the world. The Harvest of Celebration at the culmination of time will be fulfilled by celestial messengers. At that time, the Son of Humanity will send these messengers to sort the weeds from the wheat, to purify The Truth’s storehouses of the all brokenness that destroys and to consume with fire all that is weedy.<sup>113</sup> There will be sorrow and dismay on that Day. But those who seek right relationships with The Truth and others will shine bright like the sun according to the rule of sovereign love. Let those with ears, listen!”

*At the funeral I speak the good word.<sup>114</sup>  
On and on I prattle, all sunny and nice. I wonder,  
“Am I telling the truth about this person?”  
At times I am but usually not the whole truth.*

*What happens when speaking only good  
obscures, confuses, or adds to victimization?  
Some weeds must be pulled publicly (and truth told)  
if only to protect family traumatized by private abuse.*

*Sometimes speaking the good is more than spin.  
It is foreshadowing of that time  
when the weeds will have been pulled  
and only wheat remains—humble grain for holy Table.*

*Around that Table saints and messengers will gather  
in joyous celebration that all trauma has been healed,  
all our weediness burned away,  
and what remains of us will feast.*

Lord, help me speak the truth of others’ goodness,  
seeing the wheat, not the weeds,  
honoring the holy, not the broken,

rejoicing in all right relationship, thin though it may be,  
even speaking goodness into being,  
if such a thing is possible.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to blame as to name the good, just and true,  
to call out wrong as to call forth compassion,  
to weed the garden as to plant seeds of justice.

For you are the One who calls things  
that are not as if they are,<sup>115</sup>  
and will at the culmination of all things  
harvest seeds of justice and joy,  
that are planted within us,  
waiting to be nurtured,  
seeking to be fruit,  
ready to live  
according to your grace, mercy, and peace.

*Go into the world...* Notice opportunities to resist judgment. Instead of lamenting the loss of civility, practice the presence of kindness. Notice sacred gifts in yourself and similar gifts in others. Name them—speak blessing into the world! Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 13:44-53**

Jesus told a series of three quick stories about the rhythm of the God-life. “The rule of sovereign love is like treasure hiding in a field, which someone found and hid even better. In their joy they sold everything they owned to buy the field.

“Or again: the rule of sovereign love is like a treasure hunter; on finding the perfect pearl, the treasure hunter sold everything they owned to buy it.

“Or again: the rule of sovereign love is like the best fishing expedition ever! When the net was pulled up, every kind of fish imaginable was found in the net—seahorses and whales, eels and trout, sharks and lobster. When the net was finally dragged to shore, the good fish were gathered for the feast but the bad were tossed aside. So will it be at the culmination of the age: the celestial messengers will separate good from bad, throwing broken relationships,

<sup>113</sup> Commentators interpret the parable of the wheat and weeds in two directions: both as referring to two sets of people and as referring to two ethical and spiritual natures within one individual. The first interpretive lens leads to divisions between “just” and “unjust” or “good” and “bad.” The second interpretive lens recognizes the internal struggle within each soul. Although the

interpretation found here focuses on the second interpretation, I recognize both interpretations have merit.

<sup>114</sup> Eulogy comes from the Greek *logos*, meaning word, and prefix *eu*, meaning good.

<sup>115</sup> c.f. Romans 4:17.

deceptive words, and oppressive acts into a fire that will consume all within it, and evil will sorrow and lament.”

“Do you understand?” Jesus asked the disciplined followers.

“Yes!” they answered.

“Then you are like the rabbi trained for heaven, blending old and new, revealing treasures, becoming leader of the household for the sake of the The Truth-life of those who live there.” And Jesus left that place and returned to his hometown.

*Meeting your best friend forever in third grade—  
would you give it up?*

*Heart’s leap the first time you saw your beloved—  
give it up?*

*Sex the first time—  
give it up?*

*Holding your child for the first time—  
give it up?*

*Having that child finally sleep—  
give it up?*

*The promotion, finally, into your dream job—  
give it up?*

*Knowing you are eternally beloved by the Creator—  
give it up?*

*Being a part of bringing good into the world—  
give it up?*

*Rejoicing as the arc of history bends toward justice—  
give it up?*

*An answered prayer—  
give it up?*

*A word of hope at your parent’s funeral—  
give it up?*

*What would you give to know perfect love?*

*I am grateful  
I have not been asked to choose today  
between The Truth and these things,  
rather these things are a part of  
the joy I know,  
the treasure I have found,  
the right relationships that express  
the rule of sovereign love  
forever.*

Lord, make me an instrument of gladness,  
rejoicing in the hidden treasure of your gifts,  
delighting in the found treasure of your mercy,  
elated by the pearl of your peace.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
treasure that is temporary as to live a better Way,  
to have more stuff as to share a deeper Truth,  
to live the American Dream  
as to welcome an eternal Life.

For it is in the rule of your Sovereign love  
that can be found

a joy for which all other things might be forfeit  
for a goodness and gift to be gained forever.

*Go into the world..* Notice your moods. When are you a  
“Little Mr./Ms. Grumpy Pants” and when are you a “Little  
Mr./Ms. Sunshine”? What focus helps you be open to joy?  
What helps you embrace thanksgiving? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 13:54-58**

In his hometown Jesus started teaching his neighbors, formally and officially, with great learning. His neighbors were amazed with his wisdom and the news of his authority. “How can this be?” they wondered. “Don’t we know him and his family? The carpenter’s son, right? And Mary is his mother and James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas his brothers. His sisters are right here, for goodness’ sake! How can this man have gained all this wisdom growing up in this family, in one of our families?” They were offended by Jesus’ presumption.

Jesus responded, “Truth is received at a distance but rejected up close; truth-tellers welcomed by strangers but not in their own home.” And Jesus only showed them a smidge of what he could do and what he was about—a smidge of the God-life was all they could handle.

*I am the brother  
told not to talk of the God-life at the wedding.*

*I am the sister  
asked to do Mom’s service without an opinion.*

*I am the child  
welcomed to pray at the family reunion so long as  
I don’t reflect the God-life in any meaningful way  
(and certainly forbidden to dance the God-rhythms)!*

*We are the seminary-trained pastors  
whose vocation is clouded in mystery from our families.  
It can feel like willful ignorance,  
and certainly condescending, yet is merely an expression of  
Jesus' ancient wisdom: those closest don't have a clue.  
And so we do what the Master did:  
we do the best we can—we share and share and share...  
a smidge.*

Lord, make me a purveyor of the smidge,  
knowing I'll be dismissed yet showing up,  
comfortable on the sidelines yet ready when needed,  
possessing depths yet swimming in the shallows,  
able to soar yet staying grounded,  
trusting another will give, will share, will express  
what must, of necessity, remain hidden within me.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be the next St. Francis  
as to express simple compassion,  
to write like John Calvin  
as to perform miracles with a brief note,  
to preach like MLK  
as to be able to pray a prayer at Thanksgiving  
that is neither trite nor demeaning  
but conveys the deep love I have  
for those who only want a smidge.

For ministry is not about me and my feelings,  
never has been, never will be,  
but about meeting people where they are,  
giving them what they can handle—no more, no less,  
and being okay with that, even if it's only  
a smidge.

*Go into the world...* Notice who around you is able to receive and who is not. Notice your own bruised ego or acceptance, hurt feelings or humility, when you encounter those who only want a smidge. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 14:1-12**

As Jesus' fame grew, he came to the attention of Herod the tetrarch who ruled Galilee. (This Herod is not the Herod the Great who ruled when Jesus was born but one of his sons, who was called "tetrarch" because Herod the Great's lands were divided into quarters and tetrarch means "quarter.") Herod said to his servants, "This Jesus must be John the Baptizer risen from the dead! He has John's spirit inside him, which gives him miraculous

powers!" (Herod had a fascination with John, perhaps even an obsession.)

Herod also hated John and had him arrested because John had accused him publicly, "It is not lawful that you have taken Herodias, your brother Philip's wife, as your own." Herod wanted to strangle John with his own hands but feared the people, who considered John a truth-teller.

On Herod's birthday, he threw himself a party, a large party, with much food and drink. Herod's stepdaughter danced for him and pleased Herod and his guests so much that, in his drunken state, Herod promised an oath to give her whatever she asked. Everyone present heard the oath. The stepdaughter went to her mom and asked what she should do. Herodias, the mother, told her to ask for the head of John the Baptizer on a platter.

Herod was distressed and disturbed. He feared John's popularity with the people but feared more looking the fool in front of his friends; after all, he had made an oath. Preferring murder to embarrassment, Herod ordered John beheaded in prison. John's head was brought to his stepdaughter on a platter, who carried it to her mother. John's disciples fetched his headless body and buried it. Then they went to find Jesus, to tell him what had happened.

*Woe to those  
who only seek to look good without being good.  
who seek first and seek most the esteem of friends.  
who betray one's values when surrounded by peers.*

*"You voted for who?"  
"You did what?"  
"You're such a..."*

*We turn away  
from truths that shape and form character  
toward lies that will quiet others' laughter  
betraying ourselves and The Truth.*

*This dance  
makes stepdaughters an object for men's pleasure.  
makes promises a platform for deceit.  
makes embarrassment the greatest sin.*

*No, I do not want to dance with you.*

Lord, make me able to sorrow,  
 for the lost girls stolen from families for the sex trade,  
 for the lost boys stolen from families to carry a rifle,  
 for children who die for lack of clean water,  
 and for their mothers who cry silently,  
 and for their fathers who feel powerless,  
 and for a world where  
 Jesus' resurrection seems far away.  
 O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to look good as to be good,  
 to speak truth when convenient  
 as to speak truth to power,  
 to walk away from the unjust  
 as to stay and stand and act and pray.  
 For though Herod needs your salvation,  
 so, too, do stepdaughters willing to  
 debase themselves for "daddy" -  
 Oh, if only they knew  
 the love of their Heavenly Father.<sup>116</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice those who follow others: children their parents, teens their peers, friends their favorite actor, author or politician. Notice the power these authority figures have over the followers—is it for good or ill, for health and well-being or toxicity? Now notice those to whom you gravitate. Who are you following? Who is in your ear? Who has power over you? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 14:13-21

Jesus was told what had happened to John, and it compelled him to seek solace in a lonely place. He took a boat in search of solitude, but the crowds would have none of it. People came and came, by foot, from towns, until the lonely place was teeming with humanity. When Jesus came ashore, he looked upon the crowd, compassion spilling out of him, and he healed the sick among them.

As twilight descended, Jesus' disciplined followers approached him, "This is a lonely place and it is late. Send the crowd away; make them go so they can buy their own food in whatever village they can find."

Jesus responded, "You feed them."

"What?!" the disciplined followers shrieked with incredulity, "We don't have enough. Our food is scarce, only five loaves of bread and two measly fish."

"Bring the people to me," Jesus commanded, as he guided the people to sit upon grass even though they were in the desert, (which the truth-teller Isaiah said would be a sign of Messiah).<sup>117</sup> Taking the meager portions of loaves and fish, Jesus looked to heaven, gave thanks to The Truth, and broke the loaves. He gave the feast to the disciplined followers to share with the people. Everyone ate; all were satisfied.

When the disciplined followers gathered the food that remained, they collected twelve baskets of broken pieces. Twelve! The number of the tribes in Israel! All the people fed counted up to 5,000 men plus women and children, perhaps as many as 12,000 souls—all fed, each satisfied.

*Is solitude a gift for the privileged—  
 for those able to get away, even jet away,  
 to beautiful places filled with beautiful people  
 to buffets that delight the eye and stuff the belly?*

*Is solitude a different rhythm—  
 intended for the hurting,  
 who have heard news of a cousin's death  
 or are following a Light into a desolate place?*

*Is solitude a different place—  
 where life blossoms amidst the barren,  
 where green erupts amidst the sand,  
 where compassion spills out and community grows?*

*Is solitude that place—  
 where the race that matters is the human race,  
 each one learning the rhythm of abundance though  
 drumbeats of scarcity seek to drown one's hope?*

*Is solitude the lonely place, filled with 12,000 souls,  
 where all are fed and each is satisfied,  
 for I call them sisters and brothers,  
 and I am lonely no more?*

<sup>116</sup> I acknowledge the problematic nature of using gender exclusive language but feel it is appropriate in this instance. I hope to convey the notion that The Truth's nature can heal broken relationships: in this instance an abusive father relationship. I do not wish to convey the notion that The Truth must be viewed

only or especially as a male figure—the proverbial, old man with a long, white beard—for The Truth is spirit, beyond male and female.

<sup>117</sup> c.f. Isaiah 35:7.

Lord, make me an instrument of sharing,  
 bread and fish, sustenance for the body,  
 bread and cup, sustenance for the spirit,  
     bread—symbol of community,  
     fish—symbol of sharing faith,  
 to men, to women, to children,  
 to all who hunger and thirst to be with Jesus.  
 O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to send away as to feed and serve and offer,  
     to despair meager portions  
 as to give thanks for the divine enough,  
     to stuff my face as to fill my heart.  
 For we are called to live beyond our nativism  
 to become a community of abundance  
 where broken loaves become living blessing.

*Go into the world...* Notice how solitude feeds your soul?  
 How does it prepare you to serve and to share? If solitude  
 is difficult for you, seek to accept it as a gift, if only for a  
 moment. Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 14:22-36**

Immediately Jesus sent the disciplined followers  
 by boat to the other side of the lake, from Gentile territory  
 back to Jewish land. Jesus remained behind to dismiss the  
 crowd. After Jesus had sent the crowds back to their  
 homes, he ascended the mountain all alone, to pray in  
 solitude. In the dark of that night Jesus was in solitude,  
 alone but not lonely, while the disciplined followers were  
 far from land. Their boat was rocked and battered by the  
 wind.

As the light of dawn approached, Jesus went to the  
 disciplined followers, walking upon the lake. When the  
 disciplined followers saw Jesus, they were terrified—fear  
 gripped their souls, for they thought Jesus was a ghost!

Jesus encouraged them, “Heart I give you—take it!  
 Be not afraid, friends. It is I.”

Peter replied, “Lord, if it is you, won’t you  
 command me to come to you on the water?”

“Come,” Jesus invited.

Peter then stepped over the rail of the boat and  
 began walking on the water toward Jesus. But Peter felt the  
 spray upon his cheek and heard the rush of the wind in his  
 ears, and he took his eyes off of Jesus. Immediately Peter  
 began to sink, crying out, “Sovereign, save me!”

Just as immediately Jesus reached out his hand to  
 Peter, saying, “O you little faith, why did your trust falter?”

And when Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat, the wind  
 calmed. All who were present worshiped Jesus, saying, “Oh  
 my! This is real! You are The Truth’s Son.”

When the disciplined followers reached the shore,  
 they landed at Gennesaret, between Capernaum and  
 Magdala on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. The  
 townspeople recognized Jesus and sent word all around,  
 “The healer is here.” People brought all their ill to Jesus,  
 begging him to allow the sick to touch the merest hem of  
 his cloak. All who did so were made whole.

*Peace inevitably gives way to the battering of winds  
 too fierce and too powerful,  
 rocking our world, making us dizzy, afraid,  
 and fear gives way to terror.*

*We have lost both a sense of balance and our hearts.  
 But neither COVID-19 nor markets crashing truly  
 steal away our hearts, for hearts cannot be stolen,  
 only given away.*

*Why do I,  
 why do you,  
 why do we  
 gift our hearts to such unworthy foes?*

*En-couraged, In-spired, En-lightened,  
 we are given new hearts  
 to know the winds are not too fierce nor too powerful,  
 for One whom the winds obey.*

Lord, make me a carrier of heart,  
 Encouraging the despairing,  
 In-spiring the dejected,  
 En-lightening the wandering soul,  
 Enthusing the powerless,  
 Arousing the restless,  
 Up-lifting the oppressed.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to fear the long journey as be filled with great courage,  
 to fear the fierce winds as to keep my eyes upon you,  
 to fear what can be taken from me  
 as to trust what you alone give me.

For I falter when I seek, of my own strength,  
     to be all-sufficient,  
 but discover I can do all things,  
     or at least try some things,  
 through Jesus who gives me heart.

*Go into the world...* Notice your heart. Throughout the day, do you tend toward fear or trust, toward unrest or calm, toward worry or wonder? When you notice the state of your heart, no matter what it is, give thanks to The Truth and turn your eyes to Jesus. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 15:1-9**

The Intense and Scrupulous from Jerusalem confronted Jesus, “Why do your disciplined followers despise the old ways? They have no respect for tradition, for they don’t even wash their hands before eating!”

Jesus pushed back, “And why do you shatter the laws and love of The Truth just so you can say you ‘Respect the old ways’? The Truth declared, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘speaking evil of your parents is worthy of death.’ And yet you hide your wealth behind a ‘pledge to The Truth to be given in the future’ to prevent your money from being spent on their care today, in the here and now, when it is needed. For the sake of your pledge—a part of your beloved ‘tradition’—you avoid the purpose of the commandment: showing respect for the elders by how you care for them in their dotage. You use tradition to avoid the heart of the Law. Hypocrites! Isaiah, the truth-teller from ages past, told all about you:

People talk a good game,  
but their hearts are darkened;  
worthless is their worship;  
empty is their trust!”<sup>118</sup>

*Some used to laugh at those who washed their hands.  
“Pharisees,” they were called and, “Out of touch,”  
arrogance like drool ran down the chin.  
Who’s laughing now?*

*In the age of COVID-19, the old ways are returning:  
washing hands and honoring the letter of the law—  
“shelter in place” means you, too,  
“six feet between I and Thou,” the New Sabbath.*

*And in the midst of following the letter  
we are discovering anew the meaning of the spirit:  
that “we” is more meaningful than “I” and  
honor is for EVERYONE,*

*especially those over 60 or immuno-compromised,  
not just my father and my mother but  
ALL fathers and all mothers:  
such is a worship worthy of The Truth.*

Lord, make me a vessel of the New Sabbath,  
honoring both letter and spirit,  
washing hands for the sake of a clean heart,  
returning to traditions long forgotten now made new:  
respect for our elders, who need us to obey,  
pledges in word becoming actions in deed,  
allowing our walk to match our talk.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be consumed by my own needs  
as to hear the cries of the sick,  
to wallow in worry  
as to tend to the pleas of the fearful,  
to long for yesterday  
as to trust our new tomorrow is in your hands.

For sovereign in love is your watch-care over Creation,  
and though crises may make me question  
“how” and “how long,”  
so does trust lead to holy action for  
“now” and “as long as it takes.”

*Go into the world...* Notice traditions. Notice those “routines” you do without thinking: are they worth continuing? Is there a valid reason for them? Do they serve to love and to care, to honor and to bless? Or do they obstruct love, respect, care (and, therefore, The Truth’s commandment)? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 15:10-20**

After his confrontation with the Intense and Scrupulous, Jesus gathered the crowds to himself and said, “Listen up! I need you to get this straight: It’s not what goes in the mouth that defiles and makes you dirty but what comes out of it, which is from the heart.”

The disciplined followers scurried around him, worrying, “You do know the Intense are upset with you, right? They didn’t like what you just said.”

Jesus answered, “Should I care? And why do you? Let them be upset, for it has nothing to do with you or me. The cactus The Truth plants will have thorns and the willow the Spirit plants will blow in the wind, for such is the

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<sup>118</sup> c.f. Isaiah 29:13.

nature of each. And blind guides lead the blind into the pit.”

But Peter, frustrated, asked Jesus, “What do you mean? I don’t get it!”

“Don’t you? Are you also blind? I need you to see: What goes into the mouth goes through and out the body—nothing more, nothing special. It is called dung for a reason. But what comes out of the mouth originates in the heart. Dung from the heart is what defiles and makes dirty; there’s no getting clean from that! For from the dung-filled heart comes humanity’s brokenness: killings of body and spirit, distorting physical image and spiritual health, undermining truth through lies, greed, and slander. These things are what defile and make us dirty and have nothing to do with what you eat. What you eat may make you sick, but there is a far worse illness than comes from food.”

*I wrestled with Jesus,  
as one with an eating disorder.*

*Food can kill.  
Food was killing me, until my eyes were open:  
Food, Inc. manipulating me with addiction triggers,  
I, blinded by them, chose to betray my own body.*

*Was it the food I was eating or  
the emptiness of my heart?  
Yes, food can kill, but so, too, can  
overwork, stress, anxiety—the disease called modernity.*

*As one with a (spiritual) heart disorder,  
I need to wrestle with Jesus.*

Give me a pure heart, O Truth,  
devoted to you and seeking Jesus,  
caring for others to discover Jesus as the Way,  
honoring what is right, just and good  
to experience Jesus as the Truth,  
less concerned about what I eat and more focused on  
living the Jesus Life.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to fill the belly as to cleanse the spirit,

to sate the tongue as to tame it,  
to fear what may defile as to welcome what is pure.  
For lies and greed and slander destroy far deeper  
than anything and everything I put into my body,  
and purity comes from the heart made whole by you.

*Go into the world...* Notice your intentions and actions. Do your actions match your intentions? Do the results of your actions match the goals of your intentions? What needs to change for your intentions, actions, goals and results to live in harmony? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 15:21-28**

Jesus left and went north into Gentile territory, to Tyre and Sidon.<sup>119</sup> Suddenly a woman, who was a Canaanite, ancient foes of the Israelites, approached and started shouting, referring to Jesus with a Jewish term to connote Messiah, “O Sovereign, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is tortured by an unholy spirit.” Jesus did not respond. The disciplined followers approached Jesus and advised him to send her away, for they were irritated by her incessant shouting and pleas. Jesus looked at his disciplined followers and then at the woman.<sup>120</sup> While watching the disciplined followers, Jesus spoke to the woman, “I was sent for The Truth’s people in the House of Israel.”

The woman, desperate, knelt before Jesus, saying, “Son of David, help me.”

Jesus again spoke to the woman while eyeing his disciplined followers, “Is it fair to take food from the children of the household and give it to dogs?”

The woman hearing invitation in his tone, volleyed back, “Ah, yet even the smallest puppy licks the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table.”

Looking at the woman for the first time, Jesus said to her, “Woman, your trust is great! May it be so.” And the woman’s daughter, also a Canaanite, also ancient enemy, was made whole in the very moment.

between Jesus and the disciples as a kind of test: would they understand the Gospel is also for those we cannot imagine being a part of The Truth’s rule of love? For the record, I am familiar with feminist critiques of Jesus in this passage and so offer this interpretive paraphrase with both humility and trepidation.

<sup>119</sup> Modern Lebanon.

<sup>120</sup> I am using my sacred imagination to add context to this passage not found in the original manuscripts. The interpretive slant is taken from a sermon Dr. Kenneth Bailey preached in Pueblo, Colorado in 1998, where Dr. Bailey imagined the interplay

*So blind I am until I am not.*

*As a teen I objectified girls,  
I am embarrassed to admit.  
In college I lived on the streets to see what it was like,  
though it was really about appearing “spiritual.”  
I’ve wondered why some don’t just take their medicine  
I grieve to confess.*

*Until I met...*

*women who taught me about imago dei  
and I learned new ways of relating.  
families with challenges my privilege could not grasp  
and my heart grew more spacious.  
a loved one who landed in the hospital with Bi-polar  
and my fear flung me to the foot of the Cross.*

*So blind I was until I met a Canaanite woman.*

Lord, make me an instrument open to “the Other,”  
when confronted by ancient foe,  
learning the ways of peace,  
when meeting an outsider,  
seeing our common humanity,  
when realizing that I am the old dog,  
learning new tricks.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to know I am right as to be open to explore,  
to define “good” from “bad”  
as to be open to the way of Jesus,  
to declare who is “in” and who is “out”  
as to welcome the Canaanite woman.

For the rule of your Sovereign love should lead us  
to wonder about faith and hope and love,  
and prepare us for lives of grand surprise!

*Go into the world...* Notice how you respond to those who are different from you: economically, socially, religiously or racially. What is your “knee jerk” response? Do you hide it well? How might your response change if you welcomed them as ancient foe transformed into sibling in Christ Jesus? Notice. Pray. Act.

**Matthew 15:29-31**

Leaving the Gentile territory of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus journeyed back to the Sea of Galilee, where he ascended one of the hills overlooking the sea. There he sat down, assuming the position of a rabbi. Large crowds thronged to Jesus, bringing with them an assortment of the broken, including those Torah commanded not enter the Temple: the lame and maimed, the blind and mute, and many others as well.<sup>121</sup> They could not offer sacrifices in the Temple, but they could come before Jesus. And when Jesus made them whole, folks were beyond amazed: they praised the Holy One of Israel.

*Brad Pitt is too good looking...  
let him not approach.  
Elizabeth Warren is too smart...  
let her not approach.  
Lebron James is too athletic...  
let him not approach.  
Oprah Winfrey is too famous...  
let her not approach.  
Ridiculous! Absurd! Preposterous!  
Indeed...  
So why don't we let “those people” approach?*

Lord, make us instruments of welcome,  
both far and near,  
both she who smells of perfume  
and he of the back alley,  
both our IT help (who we need)  
and the Luddite (who needs help),  
both he who needs and she who gives,  
both she who has and he who has not.  
O Divine Master, may we not so much seek  
to limit access to your Spirit  
as to pray at the foot of your Cross,  
to deny access to blessing as to offer it to all,  
to find reasons to look away, stay away, keep away  
as to search for those with whom you keep company.  
For the Cross is your true throne,  
and your blessing intended to be shared,  
that by grace we are saved, through faith,  
and this not of ourselves:  
it is—all of it—the gift of The Truth.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>121</sup> c.f. Deuteronomy 15:21, Leviticus 21:18, and 22:22.

<sup>122</sup> c.f. Ephesians 2:8.

*Go into the world...* Notice welcome. Notice when you are welcomed and how it makes you feel. Notice when you are not welcomed and how it makes you feel. Notice how, when and why you welcome others? Are there hints of bias, privilege, or—dare you ask yourself—prejudice in your welcome? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 15:32-38**

Having cared for the whole host of broken folk, Jesus gathered his disciplined followers to himself and told them, “My gizzard spills out for these people.<sup>123</sup> They have been hanging on for three days, emptiness their dinner and sand their dessert. I don’t want to send them out like this, for the state they’re in they might just drop like flies along the way.”

The disciplined followers were flabbergasted, “Where in this dry, desolate place do you think we have enough bread to feed this crowd?”

Jesus asked them, “How much is enough?”

The disciplined followers answered, “Not what we have! Seven loaves and a few fish; surely that’s not enough?”

Commanding the crowd to sit, Jesus took the seven loaves of bread and the few fish, and, after giving thanks to The Truth, he broke them and gave all to the disciplined followers, who in turn shared all with the crowd.

When the disciplined followers harvested the leftovers, there were seven baskets full, and there were four-thousand men present. Adding in the women and children, there must have been nine or ten-thousand souls. All of them ate; each was satisfied.

And Jesus sent the crowds upon the Way, got into a boat, and journeyed south along the shore to the village of Magdala.

*Enough.*

*Enough bread for the body,  
enough prayer for the soul.*

*Enough love to build community,  
enough tenderness to discover sacred communion.*

*Enough for the spirit filled with loving-kindness  
that cannot be relinquished, for it is a gift from above.*

*Ignored? Yes.*

*Doubted? All the time.*

*Forgotten? Sad but too often true.*

*Relinquished? No!*

*To our proud, “Not yet,”*

*The Truth says, “Not ever!”*

*O Child, for you there will always be love  
enough.*

Lord, make us vessels of enough,  
enough to share with the food bank  
whose surplus no longer exists,  
enough to open our hearts to  
the worry and anxiousness of the unemployed,  
enough to welcome the stranger  
whose complexion is different from our own,  
enough to forgive the political opponent  
who sits across us at Thanksgiving,  
enough to accept your guts and gizzard spill out for us,  
enough to trust amidst a global, frickin’ meltdown!  
O Divine Master, may we not so much seek  
to hoard our “rolls”<sup>124</sup>  
as to purchase only what we need,  
to hoard our rolls  
as to break bread with strangers,  
to hoard anything as to share everything  
trusting you provide enough.  
For it is right that we pray  
give us this day our daily bread,  
even better to share with others who may not have  
enough.

*Go into the world...* Notice when enough is enough. Not in the sense of being outraged and ready to put your foot down, but in the sense of being filled, being complete, having received, knowing joy or calm or peace. How are you at accepting that enough *is* enough? Notice. Pray. Act.

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<sup>123</sup> This is the literal translation of the Greek word for “compassion.”

<sup>124</sup> This prayer was written during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic when people were hoarding rolls of toilet paper.

## Matthew 16:1-4

The Intense and the Elite slithered up to Jesus asking him for a sign from heaven. Jesus responded, “Like those upon the sea you know ‘Red sky at night, sailors’ delight’ and ‘Red sky in the morning sailors’ forewarning.’ Amazing! You read the signs in the sky like a textbook yet cannot understand simple sentences written by the Spirit about today. Unholy and unfaithful are those who ask for help reading what is so plainly before them. The only sign you will be given is Jonah being spewed upon the shore.” And Jesus turned from them and walked away.

*As easy as saying my A-B-C’s is understanding The Truth when you write your own version of the story—spiritual fanfic unconcerned with canon.<sup>125</sup>*

*Much more difficult is it to be still, to pray, to discern, and listen for the wind to blow—*

*The Truth breathing new life and new hope, calling to the easy yoke of transformation of self and culture,*

*writing a story that belongs to The Truth and requires learning the new genre of trust, hope and love that, eventually, becomes as easy as saying my A-B-C’s.*

Lord, make me an instrument of discernment,  
asking the right questions,  
listening to the right people,  
considering many voices  
yet listening always for your own,  
able to hear and to see,  
empowered to trust and to hope,  
yet always acting in love.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to think I know it all as to know I do not,  
to mansplain your ways as to listen for Spirit’s whisper,  
to ask for a sign as to read the ones already given.  
For Jesus’ wisdom and life are present for all to hear,  
the Empty Tomb still empty for all to see,  
give me ears to hear and eyes to see, O Truth,  
that I may learn anew to believe.

*Go into the world...* Notice the Spirit’s nudge. To whom does the Spirit lead you? How does the Spirit nudge you to bless others? What can you do to increase your adeptness at noticing the Spirit’s nudge? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 16:5-12

When the disciplined followers reached the other side of the Sea of Galilee they realized they had neglected to bring bread. Jesus seized upon their neglect to warn them, “Watch! See! Beware the yeast of the Intense and the Elite!”

The disciplined followers, as clueless as they were chagrined, said to one another, “It’s because we forgot the bread.”

Jesus shook his head at his disciplined followers, “Are you really talking about not having bread? You still don’t get it, do you? Do you at least remember the five loaves for the five-thousand, the seven loaves for the four-thousand, and that you gathered twelve baskets of ‘remnant’ pieces leftover? Five, seven, and twelve, these aren’t just numbers, but signs of Israel being renewed—The Law reformed, and the tribes made into a holy nation. And yeast influences more than bread! I say again, Watch! See! Beware the yeast of the Intense and Elite!” Finally, the disciplined followers understood.

*I’ve been chagrined—Often.  
I’ve let my wife think baby pooped after the Hand-Off.  
I’ve jested with kids to discover I crushed their spirit.  
I’ve driven past the homeless guy without a glance.*

*I’ve been clueless—Routine.  
Thinking Jesus cared for thoughts more than my heart.  
Believing a parishioner who told me, “Nice sermon.”  
Certain hubris was for other preachers, not me.*

*The yeast of my cluelessness and chagrin  
infect my soul—its influence profound,  
(though neither felt nor seen, like a virus)  
experienced as sin by those who expected much more.*

*Finally, I understand.*

<sup>125</sup> “Fanfic” refers to online literature created by fans and posted to online discussion groups (e.g. stories about Luke Skywalker and

Star Wars) that extend the literary universe of a book or movie series.

Lord, make me like the yeast that blesses:  
 influencing children to learn and laugh and love,  
 inspiring youth to discover their true self,  
 modeling the God-Life to friend and family,  
 showing up for neighbor and stranger.  
 O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to learn the lessons of a broken culture  
 as to share a life of Good News,  
 to allow others to tell me how to think, feel, (and vote)  
 as to follow Word and Spirit into light, life and love,  
 to be formed by the mold of this world  
 as to be transformed by the renewing of my mind.<sup>126</sup>  
 For God-life seeps into every pore  
 and winds its way into the marrow of our souls:  
 we cannot stop it—I wouldn't want to try.

*Go into the world...* Notice influence. Who are the “Influencers” in your life? What is the nature of the effect(s) they have on you? For whom are you an Influencer, and what is *your* influence upon them? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus entered Caesarea Philippi, at the outer edge of Israel, bounded by the Greek world to its north, and known for its Temple to the Greek god *Pan*. Pan's Temple was nicknamed “The Gates of Hell.” Jesus asked his disciplined followers, “What do folks say about the Son of Humanity? Who do they think I am?”

His followers answered, “Some say he's John the Baptizer returned to life. Others say he's the truth-teller Elijah come back. Still others think he's Jeremiah or one of the other truth-tellers from ages past. Whoever they think he is, they believe him to be a great man.”

Jesus countered, “And you? Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter lurched forward, “You are the Anointed, Messiah, the Christ, the Son of The Truth!”

Jesus responded, “Well done, Simon son of Jonah! You are blessed because it was not you who answered that question—not really—but the answer was given to you by Divine Spirit. Let me tell you, Peter, your

name sounds like the word ‘rock’ in the language of the Gentiles, right? So, Rocky, I will build the gathering<sup>127</sup> of my people upon your profession. Such trust and confidence will be the foundation stone upon which all gatherings in my name are built, and not even ‘The Gates of Hell’ can compete. Trust and confidence in me are the keys that unlock The Gates of Heaven. You will be sacred key masters: locking what is locked in heaven, unlocking what is unlocked in heaven. And so it will be said of your gathering ‘On Earth as it is in Heaven.’ But for now, tell no one of your revelation that I am the Anointed!”

*Blessed I am,  
 not because of brilliance or good looks,  
 not because of my white, male, privilege!  
 not because my health and marriage!*

*Blessed we are, because it has been given to us  
 to be loved and named and chosen,  
 to have revealed to us in ways that we can understand,  
 to have been nurtured in a love that will not let us go.*

*Blessed we are, because it has been given to us  
 to reject those things Heaven despises,  
 to affirm all things that cause rejoicing above,  
 to be a sacred community of saints and sinners,*

*blessed to be a blessing.*

Lord,  
 make us key masters  
 for The Gates of Heaven,  
 affirming justice and joy,  
 rejoicing in salvation and shalom,  
 rejecting the despoiling of Creation,  
 lamenting the despair of her children.  
 O Divine Master, may we not so much seek  
 to be a proud Church as to be a spent one,  
 to be a beautiful sanctuary as to be a living one,  
 to love a parking spot as to practice loving-kindness.  
 For your Church is the gathering of saints and sinners,  
 and each of us are both,  
 our only hope a trust and confidence in you.

<sup>126</sup> c.f. Romans 12:1-2.

<sup>127</sup> There are several word-plays in these verses. Peter, in Greek, is *petra*, which also means “rock,” the foundation upon which a “church” is built, yet the word church, in Greek, is *ecclesia* which

literally means “gathering.” I chose not to have Jesus say, “I will build my church” because of its building connotations; instead choosing to use gathering language to convey the sense of the text's meaning.

*Go into the world...* Notice what you affirm: consciously, explicitly, and intentionally? What do you affirm by voice? What do you affirm by your actions? Are all your affirmations consistent and congruent? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 16:21-23**

Assured that the disciplined followers understood the basics about his calling as the Anointed, the Messiah, Jesus began to show them the depth of what that meant, the divine necessity<sup>128</sup> of his journey to Jerusalem, his submission to suffering at the hands of the Elite and the Scrupulous, his death by murder, but also the hope of defeating Death.

Peter heard Jesus' words but missed the message. Taking Jesus aside, Peter rebuked him, "Get a grip, man! The Truth would never, and I mean NEVER, allow it. This cannot and must not happen to you."

Jesus turned to face Peter: "Behind me, Devil! Tempter! Accuser before The Truth! Your self-important piety causes me to stumble. You are thinking about human power and control; manipulation and intrigue dominate your mind. You need to see from divine perspective—there is a larger purpose I must fulfill."

*Peter gets a bad rap.*

*So he wanted to avoid suffering...Hello?!*

*He wasn't keen on his Master dying...Duh?*

*I would have been on Peter's side.*

*For 2,000 years we've known there's more to the Story:  
an immersion into brokenness and brutality,  
an embrace of all the world's injustice,  
even a welcome party in Hell.*

*Seems a brutal way to go.*

*I'm still trying to understand...Really?*

*Becoming sin so we might be right...<sup>129</sup> What?*

*I'm glad I wasn't Peter.*

Lord, make me an instrument of the Cross,  
cruciform in life that I may be victorious in death,  
emptying myself that I may be full of Holy Spirit,  
letting go of self-reliance  
to discover true freedom in You.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to fear suffering as to walk roads where it may come,  
to prioritize pleasure above all else  
as to seek first your kin-dom,  
to run from darkness  
as to move through it to encounter the rising Son.  
For the path to the Empty Tomb  
runs through Pilate's Court,  
through soldiers, crowds and between two thieves,  
to a Story I'm still learning to believe.

*Go into the world...* Notice suffering in yourself and others. What is the nature and quality of the suffering? When you suffer, in what ways does your heart turn inward, outward or upward? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 16:24-28**

After rebuking Peter, Jesus told all his disciplined followers, "My followers empty themselves of presumptions about power and privilege and sacred prerogative. My followers let go of their false Self to learn the way of the cross: a life of service and sacrifice that leads to significance, a life of humility that gives honor, a life worthy of respect that riches cannot buy. What good is it to own everything if you possess nothing? What good is it to buy the whole world when you cannot even afford your own life? When the Son of Humanity comes, it will be glorious—the heavenly realm bursting into earthly reality, and he will reward everyone for the living of their lives. Indeed, that heavenly realm is close. Some of you hearing me now will live to see the day when the Son of Humanity reveals the heavenly realm."

*I close my eyes after looking at the sun.*

*Starburst upon the back of my eyelids.*

*Explosion of light in the midst of darkness.*

*Does starburst flourish in the dark?*

*Is darkness the absence of light*

*or conduit to the God-Life,*

*path taken by cruciform living to learn God-Rhythms?*

*I close my eyes searching for the Son.*

*Will I see him in the dark?*

<sup>128</sup> The Greek word is *dei*, which means "it is necessary, divinely appointed."

<sup>129</sup> c.f. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Lord, make me an ambassador  
to those found in darkness,  
willing to enter into their suffering,  
able to embrace them in their questioning,  
holding space for their pain.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to avoid all pain as to bring healing to it,  
to answer all questions  
as to be present as they are voiced,  
to flee suffering  
as to walk alongside the one who suffers.

For the heavenly realm was revealed on the Cross,  
the depth of your agony the height of your glory,  
which gives life to those  
who freely give themselves to it.

*Go into the world...* Notice those in discomfort, pain, or even suffering. What is your intuitive, sub-conscious response to them? Are you willing to embrace them, walk alongside them, nurture them? Or do you want to fix them, avoid them, or reject them? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 17:1-13**

Six days had passed since Jesus' pronouncement about his suffering and murder; another week of creation had passed. As the new Sabbath arose, so did Jesus ascend a high mountain, where The Truth-Revelations often occur. Jesus led Peter, James and John up the mountain with him. There Jesus transformed into radiant glory, his face brilliant with light, even his clothes dazzling with brightness. In the next moment, Moses and Elijah, giver of Torah and truth-teller who stood against Baal's servants—the Law and the Prophets—were revealed to Peter, James and John, who saw them speaking with Jesus.

Peter lurched forward with an exclamation and an offer, "Blessed we are to witness this event! If you desire, I will construct three shrines in which your presence may live: a dwelling for you, a memorial for Moses, and a memorial for Elijah."<sup>130</sup>

Peter's babbling was interrupted by radiant glory, a cloud overwhelmed them, brightness engulfing them, and

then a Voice: "This is my Son, the Beloved, who pleases me: listen to him!" Immediately Peter, James and John dropped to their knees and then lay prostrate upon the ground, overwhelmed with fear-tinged awe. Jesus came to them and touched them, a very human gesture, grounding them to the here and now. The gesture conveyed physically what his words conveyed emotionally: "Be not afraid. Arise." When the three disciplined followers looked up, they saw only Jesus; Jesus only, no one but Jesus.

As the four of them descended the mountain where the God-Revelation had happened, Jesus commanded them, "Keep this to yourselves for now. Tell no one about this vision until after the Son of Humanity has defeated Death."

The disciplined followers, still trying to wrap their minds around what they had witnessed, asked Jesus, "Why do the Scrupulous say Elijah comes before Messiah? Is this what just happened? Is this the appearance of Elijah before Messiah is revealed?"

Jesus responded, "Elijah is coming and has already come. Elijah came to prepare the path, and when he did the Scrupulous did not recognize him but used and abused him according to their every whim and desire. In the same way, the Son of Humanity will be used and abused and be at the mercy of their whims." Hearing Jesus talk this way, the disciplined followers suddenly understood that when he talked of Elijah, Jesus was referring to John the Baptizer.

*Mystical visions, like the Lottery, are a common desire.*

*Who doesn't want a mystical vision?*

*Seeing behind the veil,*

*glimpsing the glory that fueled creation's burst!*

*Then I read of the lives of those who received this gift:*

*Francis' call to poverty and service,*

*Joan's call to a life of war that ended in fire.*

*Seems the gift has a cost: the Cross its ultimate sight.*

*I suppose I don't really NEED to win the Lottery.*

*I may have spoken too soon about a divine face-to-face.*

*I think I'll take a pass on the mystic vision.*

*I know I'm not prepared to pay the cost.*

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<sup>130</sup> Greek manuscripts use the word for "tent" or "dwelling" which refers back to the Tabernacle in the desert in Exodus, in which The Truth's presence was revealed to Moses. Peter seems to believe he can bottle the presence of these patriarchs of Law, Prophets, and Gospel in a physical structure (c.f. Exodus 33:7-10,

34:33-35; John 1:14 and 2 Corinthians 3:7, 13). In John 1:14, the Greek conveys that the Word became flesh and "dwelled" among us. Some translations translate as "lived," which conforms to contemporary usage but misses the rich, biblical referent.

Lord, make me a vessel being transformed,  
from who I am to who I am becoming in you,  
from empty to being filled with Christ's love,  
from being filled to becoming full in your Spirit,  
from being full to being poured out for your kin-dom.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to seek a vision of your Light  
as to shine light into dark corners,  
to be best and brightest as to love least and lost,  
to stay on the mountain  
as to walk back (with you) to the valley.

For the vision is needed  
only for the sake of the service,  
the God-rhythm of fullness  
for the sake of being poured out,  
the God-Life never held, always shared,  
(or it's not the God-Life).

*Go into the world...* Notice the "little visions" in your day. What refreshes and renews your spirit? Who encourages you? Become more fully aware and intentional about noticing those things that give you courage and perseverance for a life of compassion. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 17:14-23**

Jesus and the disciplined followers descended the mountain and were now back on the plain of Megiddo.<sup>131</sup> A man approached, dropped to his knees, and pleaded with Jesus, "Master, show mercy to my son, who suffers terribly with seizures. His disease causes him to fall into fire and water. I brought him to your disciplined followers, but they were powerless against so powerful an enemy."

Jesus responded, "How long, O Lord, must I continue with this depraved generation, who distorts goodness and knows not how to trust? Bring your son to me." Jesus scolded the unholy power within the boy and commanded it to leave immediately. Just as immediately, the boy was made whole.

The disciplined followers approached Jesus later, privately, and asked, "How is it that you have power over unholy spirits, but we do not? We said all the words you have taught us about these things."

"Yes," Jesus answered, "but you lack trust. The rule of sovereign love is not about mere words but about connection and communion, it's about trusting The Truth is with you and at work through you. Saying words without connection is empty blessing. Listen, here's the deal: you don't need a lot of trust, the smallest bit will do, because The Truth will use it. The power is not in you; it's in The Truth. The trust you need is not about whether you can confront darkness but whether you trust The Truth can, and will, confront darkness. Just a little trust, even like a tiny mustard seed, is enough for The Truth to act. In fact, if you trust The Truth to move a mountain, just say to the mountain, 'Move!' and it will move. Trusting The Truth, nothing is impossible."

Later, together in Galilee, Jesus reminded the disciplined followers, "The Son of Humanity will be betrayed—given over by human brokenness into hands that will break him, break and then murder him. But, on the third day, he will defeat Death." The disciplined followers were troubled by Jesus' words. Why must this be so if nothing was impossible if the disciplined followers just trusted The Truth?

*Faith is easy to shatter,  
like a window with a bunch of kids playing ball nearby.*

*Easy to think of faith as an intellectual exercise,  
feel faith is about me, for me, from me,  
believe the power at work belongs to me.*

*How nice if faith were really about me. But it's not.  
Faith centered on me showers glass everywhere,  
its shards cutting feet, causing others to bleed.*

*People get hurt when  
love fails, hope hides, faith shatters.*

*O Truth, teach me a faith that heals, not hurts,  
that shines light into deepest darkness,  
freeing people from ancient foe.*

*Grow within me a faith  
born of connection and communion,  
You living in me and me living in You.*

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<sup>131</sup> The Hebrew name for the location in which this passage occurs is 'Armegiddo from which we get the English "Armageddon," literally a militarily strategic valley overlooked by Solomon's

fortress in Megiddo. That Jesus encounters the demonic here in the place of many historical battles is symbolic.

*Not just me working but You at work through me.  
Me letting go and letting You—  
shine light through a new window, that will not break.*

Lord, make me an instrument of trust,  
learning the rules of a new kind of game,  
learning to dance to God-rhythms,  
learning power comes from above and then within,  
you in me, me in you, us together,  
but always for your purpose,  
always to your glory.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be in control as to be guided,  
to know what to do as to discern the Spirit's nudge,  
to trust "I can do it" as to trust "We can do it."  
For by faith we are saved through grace,  
and this faith is not of ourselves,  
it is the gift of The Truth,  
that no one, not even me, can boast.<sup>132</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice where you focus when making decisions. When are you more self-motivated and when more other motivated (friends or family, colleagues or boss)? What is your The Truth-consciousness in the moments leading up to choosing a path? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 17:24-27**

Back in the fishing village of Capernaum, tax gatherers for the Elite, who collect monies to operate and maintain the Temple, questioned Peter, "Does your Rabbi pay the Temple tax?"

Peter replied, "Yes, yes he does." Then Peter returned to his home, for he lived in Capernaum.

When Peter got home, Jesus asked Peter, "So, Simon, what's your take on paying taxes? From whom do the rulers of the earth collect taxes: from their own children or from those not of their household?"

Peter answered, "Not from their own children!"

Then Jesus said, "Which means the children are free from the obligation. But free to say no means the children are also free to say yes, so here is what I want you to do. Head down to the water and cast a hook. Don't worry about a big catch, just take the first fish. When you

open its mouth, the fish will have a coin. Use the coin provided by The Truth to pay our fair share."

*I like smooth roads.*

*I don't like taxes.*

*I cherish the work of all first responders.*

*I don't like taxes.*

*I appreciate every schoolteacher and their difficult job.*

*I don't like taxes.*

*I respect the work of our soldiers and sailors.*

*I don't like taxes.*

*I honor that I am my neighbor's keeper.*

*My taxes feed hungry children.*

*I am called to love my neighbor as I love myself.*

*My taxes support unemployed.*

*We are never an island,  
for we live interconnected lives,  
better together as community.*

*I may need to rethink my aversion to taxes,  
for I am free...I AM FREE!!!...  
to say yes.*

Lord, make me an instrument of generosity,  
rather than hoarding toilet paper,  
buying a normal amount,  
rather than bemoaning "stay at home,"  
aware others don't have a home,  
rather than focus on my own interests,  
looking to the interests of others,<sup>133</sup>  
emptying myself of prerogative and privilege,  
learning to take on the nature of a servant.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be fearful as to be generous,  
to receive as to give,  
to be served as to serve.  
For the One who gave his life for me  
shows me the way to live,  
and it is not for me, myself and I, alone,  
but as community: we, us, all, together. In him.

<sup>132</sup> c.f. Ephesians 2:8-9.

<sup>133</sup> This prayer was written during the COVID-19 crisis when hoarding toilet paper was a thing. It reflects upon the early Christian hymn in Philippians 2:5-11.

*Go into the world...* Notice generosity. Notice it in others and, as well, notice it in yourself. Notice both when generosity is present and when you withhold it from others. Become aware of the limits of your heart. Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 18:1-11

While in Capernaum the disciplined followers approached Jesus with a question, “Who is the greatest person ever in the realm of The Truth’s sovereign love? What does it take to stand-out, to be great, to be the best?”

Jesus called to a child, “Come here, little one.” Looking at his disciplined followers, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth: all y’all need to change. Each and every one of you need to learn the joy of wondering and playing, the gifts of curiosity and humility, the acceptance that you need others and others need you. If you don’t learn to be childlike, none of you can enter the playground of sovereign love. The greatest in the realm of sovereign love is like this child: humble, open, trusting.

“If you welcome this child, you welcome me. Cause this child to fall and skin a knee, it would be better you had not been born. Throw an anchor around your neck and jump into the ocean, but don’t cause harm to this child. People all around will falter and fall. Just don’t be the cause of it. Don’t cause someone else to fall, especially not a little one like this child.

“Whatever causes you to betray your ideals—to falter and fall—whether it’s your hand or your foot, cut it off! Better to limp in the fields of The Truth than sprint into a burning garbage dump. Likewise, if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out! Better to have one eye and live than have both eyes consumed by the refiner’s fire.<sup>134</sup> Be wary! Beware! Be aware that you don’t hate the little ones, for each of them has a celestial guardian who continually looks upon The Truth’s face. Do not harm one who gazes eternally upon The Truth!”

*Wonder-full, whimsy and winsome,  
puddles to splash through and boredom, too,  
on a rainy summer’s day,  
what delicious nostalgia I consume  
as I remember childhood.*

*Less delicious was the fear of an open closet door  
while I lay in bed:  
is that a shirt or a person  
in the shadowed enclave of my toys and clothes?  
And did I just hear something under the bed?*

*Learning, growing, crying,  
laughing, loving, trusting,  
cuddling, skipping, seeking,  
hiding, being found, being hugged:  
full of wonder those days when love lived in the heart.*

*As on a distant shore live these memories,  
they can feel like an imaginary friend  
who beckons me come out to play.*

Lord, make me a winsome witness,  
childlike in my faith,  
where trusting is like breathing,  
where loving is open and without agenda,  
where celebration and lament feels so natural:  
“Hooray!” and “It’s not fair!” the prayers of my heart.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to live childish ways as to live childlike in my trust,  
to worry about all tomorrows  
as to celebrate and lament the here and now,  
to act like I’m in charge  
as to follow as you lead me to where I need to go.  
For the childlike faith is absurd to those who idolize  
competence, competition, and coming in first...always,  
yet absurdity is the Gospel’s middle name:  
“The Word became flesh and dwelled among us.”<sup>135</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice your ability to wonder. What helps you be and abide in an open and trusting stance toward people, situations and events? What gifts present themselves to you when you are wonder-full? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 18:12-14

Jesus continued, “Tell me what you think. If a shepherd has a flock of 100 sheep and one gets lost, what does the shepherd do? Doesn’t the shepherd look far and wide, climb the hills and search the gullies, seeking after

<sup>134</sup> c.f. Malachi 3:2-3 which speaks of the “refiner’s fire” that does not consume but purifies the precious from the dross (e.g. silver

vs. filings). The reference could be to a traditional vision of hell, though I have chosen a different connotation.

<sup>135</sup> c.f. John 1:14.

the one lost and alone, who has gone astray? When the shepherd finds the one lost and alone, the one who has gone astray, what does the shepherd do? Rejoices! Celebrates! Indeed, greater joy is felt in finding the one lost and alone, the one who has gone astray, than in keeping tabs on the ninety-nine. In a similar way, the will of The Truth is to grieve the loss of even one who is lost and alone, who has gone astray.

*Summer heat, SoCal beaches, the call goes out:  
a lost child on the beach.  
Lifeguards spring into action—binoculars out!  
The race is on, pride over peers the victor's wreath.*

*Scanning the endless crowds—  
bodies amidst sand and surf.  
How is it even possible to find  
one lost child amidst the throng?*

*The trick is noticing  
someone off,  
wandering about,  
disconnected from the adults nearby.*

*It's actually not difficult to find a lost child.  
The trick is always in the noticing,  
fear, confusion, the little signs that scream,  
"I am alone."*

*No, Little One, you are not.  
We, the lifeguards, are seeking.  
Your frightened parents are searching.  
The Truth has already noticed.*

Lord, make me an instrument of searching,  
not merely for those who fit in  
but for those who stand apart,  
not only for my good but for wellness of all,  
not for power but for purpose,  
not for control but for character,  
not just to have but to use well—  
to protect those who are lost and alone.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to remain behind as to go searching,  
to protect what I have as to search for what is lost,  
to play it safe as to risk it all to save even one.  
For the measure of a society is how it treats  
the least of our brothers and sisters,

to remember in our abundance those  
who know only scarcity.

*Go into the world...* Notice who is lost, who is alone, who has gone astray? Maybe the someone is you—if so, notice and accept this truth with gentleness, knowing The Truth's love is seeking and searching. If the someone is another, open yourself to listen, to be present, to make space for them—be for them like a good shepherd. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 18:15-17**

Jesus continued his teaching, "If another member of the gathering of The Truth's people harms you, speak directly yet privately with the sister or brother. If the sister or brother listens to you, taking your words to heart and allowing them to spark the healing transformation of repentance, you have reclaimed a holy community with them. If the sister or brother rejects your words, closing their heart and mind to the brokenness they are causing or the ways they are distorting truth, bring two or three others as witnesses. If the brother or sister remains stubborn in their refusal to look at themselves and hear the harm they are causing, speak openly to the full gathering. Do not let them hide behind privacy and continue their destructive path through the gathering. Instead, treat them as you would an Outsider or as someone who pretends to be part of the gathering yet betrays its principles: they are to be loved with a love so fierce that boundaries are set and behaviors enforced, even while welcome remains.

*Cracking and then cleaving, breaking and then broken:  
too often the rhythm and ritual of the Body.*

*Sometimes the pain  
is sharp, penetrating, an incision of the heart.  
is a dull ache that lingers in the stomach.  
throbs behind the eyes.*

*Seldom is there one  
willing to start the healing journey.  
willing to call bulls\*\*\* on bad behavior.  
who speaks the kindness that admits bulls\*\*\* smells,*

*Too seldom is there one  
who sets boundaries as the path to welcome.*

Lord, make me an instrument of peace,  
in a culture of avoidance, confronting with kindness,  
practiced in faking, being authentic,  
anxious not to offend, breathing calm,  
in a church intolerant of disagreement,  
disagreeing agreeably.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to number others' sins as to count my own,  
to expect everyone to say nice things  
as to hope at least one friend will be honest,  
to justify myself as to accept my justification is in you.<sup>136</sup>

For the community for which we long  
is founded on a holy communion  
in, with, and through you,  
that forms the basis of a compassion  
willing to speak the truth in love.

*Go into the world...* Notice your willingness to speak the truth in love. Do you get anxious at the prospect? Speak truth but not in love—relish it a bit too much perhaps? Or calmly say what needs to be said and allow space for the other person to respond? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 18:18-20

Jesus continued his teaching, “Let me lay some truth on you: the unholy power you bind up on earth has already been bound in heaven, and the holy power you set loose upon the earth has already been set loose in heaven: binding the unholy and loosing the holy—that’s your job, and in this way you work in harmony with heaven.

“Again, let me lay some truth on you: when you agree on earth even about pragmatic matters,<sup>137</sup> that’s a sacred moment, and The Truth will be at work for you and through you. Where even two or three brothers and sisters gather in my name, I am present, and the *shekinah* glory radiates.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Justification is the Christian doctrine that The Truth proclaims us innocent, not because of our sinless, errorless, perfect lives but because of The Truth’s love found in Christ Jesus.

<sup>137</sup> The Greek word is *pragmatos*, meaning “something accomplished,” so the translation attempts to frame the phrase as not being too global; believers don’t get everything they ask for just because we can find someone to agree with us.

*Not only televangelist experience glory.  
“Signs and Wonders” not always the way, truth and life,  
just spiritual indigestion.*

*The Amish know about glory.  
The Truth’s glory found in raising a barn together.  
Binding hatred through “Amish Grace.”<sup>139</sup>*

*The Quakers await glory in stillness  
a more certain path than signs and wonders.  
Loosing peaceable acts as the path to radiance.*

Lord, make me a peaceable vessel,  
listening to common sense,  
learning from the least expected voice,  
seeing your reflection in simple things.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to live “wondrously” as to live simply and well,  
to unleash fire and brimstone as to practice faithfulness,  
to “bind the Enemy” as to build the Body,  
(not that binding the Enemy is a bad idea).

For you are in the midst of us,  
blessed when able to see and hear and appreciate it,  
made far more difficult through constant bickering.

*Go into the world...* Notice your desire to do great things versus your willingness to do simple, good things. In what ways does the need to do great, be noticed, or have a sense of accomplishment live within you? Does it get in the way of being present with and for others? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 18:21-22

Peter responded to Jesus, “Rabbi, if a brother or sister from the gathering sins against me, how many times must I forgive?” And thinking he was being super spiritual, for the rabbis of the day taught those closest to The Truth would forgive three times, Peter added, “As many as seven times?”

<sup>138</sup> First-century rabbis taught that “Where two or three are gathered to study Torah, there the *shekinah* glory of The Truth is present.” Jesus plays off this well-known teaching among his contemporaries to place himself in the position of Torah.

<sup>139</sup> *Amish Grace* is a title of a book that recounts the story of how an Amish community forgave the man who shot-up a school, killing multiple children. Kraybill, Donald, *Amish Grace*. (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2010).

Jesus said to Peter, "In Genesis, Lamech boasted of his anger by saying, 'If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.'<sup>140</sup> The heart of your mercy must be at least as great as the heart of Lamech's wrath: forgive not seven times but seventy-seven times."

*Perhaps forgiveness is too difficult:  
probing unhealed memories too painful,  
poking the tender place behind and beneath the heart.*

*Perhaps forgiveness requires more than I have to give:  
insufficient energy, intelligence, imagination and love,<sup>141</sup>  
imperfect resistance to the morsel of my grievance.*

*Perhaps I can refuse Buechner's Feast fit for a king":<sup>142</sup>  
"...what you are wolfing down is yourself,"  
"...the skeleton at the feast is you."*

*In your mercy, hear my (as yet unspoken) prayer:*

Lord, make me an instrument of mercy,  
not holding but letting go (resentment),  
not ignoring but identifying (hurt),  
not nursing but naming (anger),  
not avoiding but allowing (healing),  
not forgetting but forgiving (all things by your grace).  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to forget to forgive as to forgive to forget,  
to forgive all at once as little by little,  
to forgive for others as to forgive for my own wholeness.  
For the sacred heart of mercy is the heart held as sacred,  
made whole and complete by joining the divine dance  
of the Love that formed and is forming all Creation.

*Go into the world...* Notice what you ignore, what you hold, and what you let go. Do you notice resentment, hurt and anger? When you notice, what do you do with these feelings? What encourages honest naming and holy relinquishment? Notice. Pray. Act.

## **Matthew 18:23-30**

Jesus told the disciplined followers this story: "Because the rule of sovereign love is built upon the foundation of mercy, it is important that you understand: the God-life is like a monarch who settled accounts with her subject. She went to one who owed 150,000 years' worth of wages! Of course, the debtor could not pay it, so the monarch ordered the subject's entire family, kids included, and all possessions be sold. Every. Single. Thing! The debtor fell on his face and begged the monarch, 'Please, please, please! Have mercy! I'll pay what I owe; I just need more time!' The monarch felt pity and forgave the entire debt. All. Of. It!

"But then, that same debtor went to someone who owed him money, a mere hundred days' worth of wages, and grabbed him by the throat. He said, 'Pay your debt!' This second debtor, the one who owed a mere hundred days' worth of wages, pleaded using the exact same words, 'Please, please, please! Have mercy! I'll pay what I owe; I just need more time!' But to no avail, and the first debtor had the second debtor thrown into jail.

"When the neighbors to these men witnessed what happened, they were appalled and reported everything they saw and heard to the monarch. The monarch was enraged! She confronted the first debtor, 'How dare you? I forgave you everything you owed. Every. Single. Thing! You hard-hearted and unkind man: how did you not have mercy on your fellow debtor after you yourself received mercy?' Furious, the monarch handed the first debtor over to jailers until his debt could be paid: it was a life sentence.

"This same sentence awaits anyone who refuses to forgive a brother or sister from the heart."

*We cannot receive what we have not given.  
Mercy withheld is mercy rejected.  
How can The Truth pour mercy into clenched fists?*

*Only the open hand can be shaken.  
Only open arms can be embraced.  
Only the open heart can be forgiven.*

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<sup>140</sup> c.f. Genesis 4:24.

<sup>141</sup> Energy, intelligence, imagination and love are included in the ordination vows for Presbyterian ministers, elders, and deacons as ways we are to love our people.

<sup>142</sup> Buechner, Frederic, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*. (Harper and Row Publishers: San Francisco, 1973), 2.

Lord, make me an open vessel,  
 molded to pour mercy into the world,  
 able to receive the love you long to give,  
 willing to share the gift of loving-kindness.  
 O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to get what's coming to me  
 as to give what only you can give,  
 to get out of paying my debt  
 as to offer freedom to other debtors,  
 to get paid back as to pay it forward.  
 "For the quality of mercy is not strained,  
 It droppeth like a gentle rain from heaven...."<sup>143</sup>  
 May it drop upon us all.

*Go into the world...* Notice your resistance and openness to mercy. When and for whom are you open to offering mercy? When and against whom do you resist offering mercy? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 19:1-9

After Jesus finished his teaching on forgiving and showing mercy, he left Galilee and journeyed into the desert, to a place called Judea beyond the Jordan. Large crowds followed Jesus into the desert, and he made them whole. Some of the Intense also came to the desert, but only to challenge Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on a whim, or does he need a good reason?"

Jesus answered the Intense, "The scriptures begin, 'In the beginning,' and so tell of The Truth's original purpose: two people sharing life, together as one, each completing the other in a sacred communion. Together they move beyond father and mother to become a holy unity. This is The Truth's ideal and should not be broken."

The Intense objected, "But Moses allows our unions to be broken, so long as the man writes a certificate of divorce for his wife."

Jesus responded, "Moses only did this because of your hard hearts. Moses was protecting women against the capriciousness of their husbands. In this time men hold all the power, and Moses sought to protect wives from being thrown into the street with no means of caring for themselves. But the ideal 'In the beginning' was and is for sacred communion to endure. Indeed, husbands today use Moses' protection as a perversion, as a loophole for their immorality. They choose divorce rather than risk being

caught in their adultery and risk death by stoning as Torah requires.<sup>144</sup> Here's some truth for you: tossing aside your beloved to get a little on the side, even if legal, is still adultery, and The Truth is not fooled."

*Do you take...?*

*I do.*

*For worse...?*

*I do.*

*For poorer...?*

*I do.*

*In sickness...?*

*I do.*

*Until one of you is dead?*

*I do but why all the negative questions?*

*Sacred communion is neither quick nor easy.*

*Tell me about it.*

*I never promised easy but a life together:*

*two becoming whole as one.*

Lord, make me a faithful companion,  
 washing my thoughts (and the dishes),  
 laundering my language (and the clothes),  
 taking out the garbage (literal and emotional),  
 fixing what is broken (especially within me),  
 offering all of myself for the sake of all  
 we have become, are becoming, and will become.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to be loved as to love,  
 to be cared for as to care,  
 to be served as to serve.

For marriage is a partnership of two equals,  
 equally broken in their own ways,  
 both made whole as two become one.

*Go into the world...* Notice your beloved. Maybe a spouse. Maybe a pet. Maybe a treasured friend. Notice your beloved in their depth and their desires. Notice their quirks and when they are quick to love (or take offense). Notice *them* and say thank you to The Truth. Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 19:10-12

Hearing Jesus' teaching about marriage, his disciplined followers exclaimed, "If we have to be perfect, no one should ever marry!"

<sup>143</sup> Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. Act IV, Scene I.

<sup>144</sup> c.f. Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22.

Jesus shook his head, “Slow down and calm yourself. Do what you can, not what you cannot. Be the best ‘you’ you can be. Give the best effort you can give. Accept what you are able to accept and take a single step forward toward wholeness. No one will be perfect in marriage, but everyone should be as faithful as they are able to be for the sake of their beloved and for the rule of sovereign love.”

*Lord, I am so thankful to be a Calvinist:  
not having to pretend I don't sin, that I'm not broken.  
Damn! We know we have issues!  
Hallelujah and Amen!*

*I feel for my Methodist (Arminian) friends:  
bearing the full burden of their actions,  
their choices defining their identity,  
they have only themselves to blame.*

*Sorrier even more for my Holiness Movement friends:  
ignoring what all around them see plainly,  
fearful others will spill the secret:  
they sin just like the rest of us.*

*I am a fool to judge, living in a glass house as I do—  
the gap between my ideals and my reality,  
not quite the Grand Canyon,  
but not quite a crack in the sidewalk either.*

*Ah, thank The Truth I'm a Calvinist:  
doing the best I can as I am able,  
thankful response to goodness and gift received,  
resting in your grace as my one and only hope.*

Lord, make me an growing person,  
not who I used to be,  
not who I can never be,  
but rejoicing in who I am becoming in you,  
not what I once did,  
not what I will never do,  
but honored to reflect your light today.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to fulfill others' callings  
as to hear your call to me,

to do what I cannot as to do what I can,  
to punish myself with guilt and shame as  
to accept each step, each day,  
as part of my journey with Jesus.

For it is not the well who need a doctor but the sick,  
not the whole who need healing but the broken,  
not the perfect who need your mercy but me.

*Go into the world...* Notice what happens when you try and fail. How do you show yourself mercy or judgement? How are you able to find acceptance and peace in the seeking, or must you meet a certain standard of excellence? What gives you the freedom to “try, try again”? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 19:13-15**

Even in the desert beyond the Jordan, families with little children were bringing their small ones to Jesus, so that he would bless them and pray over them, which was unconventional to say the least. Children of the day were to be seen and not heard, and certainly not supposed to disturb an important rabbi like Jesus. The disciplined followers rebuked the parents, but Jesus said, “Let the little children come! May The Truth forbid that you stop them, for these little ones—rambunctious and energetic, inquisitive and curious, both the shy and the open—they belong to the rule of sovereign love and the rule of sovereign love belongs to them.” And Jesus’ fingers brushed their cheeks, and he placed the palm of his hands upon their heads.

*Jesus loves me...in my weakness and vulnerability,  
this I know...as Spirit flush brushes my cheek,  
for the Bible...with tales of a “strange, new world,”<sup>145</sup> that  
tells me so...people can hope beyond their own story,  
Little ones to him belong...as chosen and claimed:  
they are weak but he is strong...and rescue bursts forth.  
Yes, Jesus, loves me...Hallelujah!  
Yes, Jesus, loves me...Amen!  
Yes, Jesus loves me...his Story has become my story,  
The Bible tells me so...so may I trust and so may I live.*

<sup>145</sup> Karl Barth, “The Strange New World of the Bible,” in *Word of The Truth, Word of Man*. (Philip Smith Publishers: Gloucester, MA, 1958), pp. 28ff. Barth’s essay details the marvelous, counter-

intuitive nature of the biblical story, where the first are last and the last are first and grace defeats sin.

Lord, make me an instrument of praise,  
 grateful for your choosing,  
 thankful for your claiming,  
 rejoicing in your naming,  
 praising you, the Name above all names.  
 O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to parse the details of heaven as to anticipate its joy,  
 to argue the whims of theologians  
 as to celebrate belonging,  
 to worry about being right  
 as to walk the Way, the Truth, and the Life.  
 For your love for the little ones  
 promises blessing to us all,  
 if we can learn to get out of our own way,  
 and let you come to us, even as you are already here.

*Go into the world...* Notice children. What in them most suggests the Way of Jesus? What might you emulate as you seek to open yourself to the Truth of Jesus? How, in their reflection, do you see yourself as living the Life of Jesus? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 19:16-22**

Jesus' words about the rule of sovereign love belonging to children seemed to pique the curiosity of a young man, who asked, "Rabbi, I am no longer a child, so what can I do to be good and get the God-life?"

Jesus said to the young man, "So you want to be good, do you? You know only The Truth is good, right? However, if you desire to immerse into the God-life, demonstrate your love and devotion through your obedience to The Truth's will."

"Please, Rabbi," the young man pleaded, "tell me how? I both trust and obey all The Truth commands. Tell me what to do, and I will do it!"

Jesus answered him, "Keep the commandments. You know what the second tablet<sup>146</sup> says about loving one another: 'Protect life; Be faithful; Be trustworthy; Be honest; Show honor to your parents and love to your neighbor.'"

The young man's heart leapt, "Yes! Yes! All these I do and have always done. What else do I need to do?"

Jesus answered, "You honor the second tablet, which is good, but you need also to commit yourself to obeying the first tablet: 'Love of The Truth before all; Living the God-rhythms as your primary devotion.' If you want your devotion to be whole and complete, you must let go of your competing devotion to the world: money and the things of this world control you. Let these things go, share generously with the poor, and you will have treasure the world does not know and which cannot be taken away, for it lives in heaven. Do these things and then come, follow me, become one of my disciplined followers." Upon hearing Jesus' words, the young man was consumed by grief. He went away—him and his many possessions.

*A stimulus check came in the mail today,  
 even though I am paid to work from home.  
 COVID rages while I drink coffee on my couch.  
 Though I do not need the check, I like it:  
 Who wants to turn down cold, hard, cash?*

*Do I own money, or does money own me?  
 Do I love people and use things,  
 or love things and use people?  
 I guess I'll find out sooner rather than later  
 by how I spend the government's largesse.*

Lord, make me an instrument of generosity,  
 feeding the hungry,  
 giving water to the thirsty,  
 sharing clothes with the naked,  
 providing hospitality to the traveler,  
 supplying care to the sick and those in prison.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
 to store up treasures on earth as treasures in heaven,  
 to be one of the goats as to be one of the sheep,<sup>147</sup>  
 to bury my talents as to use them in the Master's service.<sup>148</sup>  
 For as I do for the least of my brothers and sisters,  
 I do for you, Lord Jesus, for  
 in them, with them, and through them,  
 you are present.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>146</sup> The Ten Commandments are often referred to as the "first tablet" and "second tablet": love of The Truth in the first four commandments and love of neighbor in the second six commandments. Jesus seems to claim for himself THE

requirement of obedience to The Truth conveyed in the first tablet.

<sup>147</sup> c.f. Matthew 25:32-33ff.

<sup>148</sup> c.f. Matthew 25:14-30.

<sup>149</sup> c.f. Matthew 25:31-40 and 25:17-18.

*Go into the world...* Notice the hold things have on you. What happens when you relinquish them—letting go that another may be blessed? Most everyone denies loving things and using people, but the truth is known only in letting go. What happens in your spirit when you let go? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 19:23-30**

Jesus continued his teaching on wealth: “I speak truth when I say wealth may stifle the spirit, and it is difficult for a wealthy person to bow to the rule of sovereign love, for the rich person trusts in their riches rather than relying upon The Truth. Again, I speak truth when I say it’s easier for a camel to bow down and shimmy its way through a doorway made for you and me than for the rich to walk upon their knees, even if the journey leads to The Truth.”

When the disciplined followers heard Jesus’ words, they were flabbergasted, for they had been raised to believe wealth equates to divine blessing. They exclaimed, “Who, then, can experience the God -life?”

Jesus answered, “Humanly speaking, the rich have no hope. Their only hope rests in The Truth’s desire to act even on their behalf.”

Peter, always the realist, then asked, “Well, how does what you say affect us? If the rich need The Truth’s help, how much more do we? We’ve left our families and jobs to follow you. Doesn’t that count for something?”

Jesus replied, “Indeed it does. And I speak truth when I promise that when all creation is made new, when The Truth seats the Son of Humanity upon a throne, then you who have followed me will join me upon a throne. Thrones will abound! You will help all The Truth’s people sort wheat from chaff, good from bad, health and wholeness from heartbreak and brokenness. Anyone who has left families will belong to communities. Anyone who has left a mere job will discover a divine purpose. And to anyone who has done this to bring honor to my name, The Truth will give the gift of life whole and complete, life abundant and anew, life forever. But many of the privileged will be placed last in line, and those in the back of the line today will be brought forward.”

*This is NOT good news, even if it is THE Good News,  
it is not good news for me,  
as I sip my Café Justo on my back patio.*

*I enjoy my view designed by a landscape architect,  
as I shelter in place, knowing my job is secure  
amidst a global economic meltdown.*

*My privilege garbles the words:  
“The last shall be first and the first shall be last.”  
It sounds to others as if I said, “Let them eat cake!”*

*The divine rebuke comes like a fastball:  
“Sisters have not the luxury of shelter for their place.”  
“Food scarcity is also a scarcity pandemic.”*

*Suddenly I notice Jesus.  
He points to a camel and raises his eyebrows.  
Do I shrug my shoulders or drop to my knees?*

Lord, make me an instrument of *tzedekah*,<sup>150</sup>  
just resources abounding,  
rejecting “dog eat dog,”  
social safety for the least and the last,  
rejecting “by their bootstraps,”  
fairness of measure and means a sign of justice,  
rejecting “might makes right(eous).”  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to maximize profits as to amplify the prophets,  
to agitate for absolute equality  
as to advocate for relative equity,  
to remove all discrepancies as to narrow them—  
narrow, limit, and soften their destructive impact.  
For privilege and partiality are the way of the world,  
not the way of the kin-dom,  
where we live simply that others may simply live.

*Go into the world...* Notice equity of means and measure. Who has the means to care for themselves, and who does not? What is the good others provide society, and the relative measure of their compensation? Notice. Pray. Act.

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<sup>150</sup> *Tzedekah* is one of the Hebrew words for justice, and connotes the fair and equitable distribution of goods and care where all persons have sufficient food, shelter and means.

## Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus continued teaching on wealth, “The rule of sovereign love is like a small business owner who hired workers at dawn to work in a vineyard<sup>151</sup> and agreed to pay them a fair wage. Later that morning the business owner saw some more workers and sent them to the vineyard to work, agreeing to pay them a fair wage. Later still the business owner sent even more workers to the harvest, again agreeing to pay them a fair wage. Near the end of the day the business owner saw some workers on a corner with a sign that said, ‘Willing to work.’ He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day when I need you in my vineyard?’ The workers replied, ‘We didn’t know where to find work with someone who would hire us.’ The business owner also sent these workers into the vineyard, again agreeing to pay them a fair wage. At the end of the day, the business owner had her field manager pay all the workers their fair wage, beginning with the last and then moving to the first. The workers from late in the afternoon were paid a fair wage that would help them support themselves and their families. When the all-day workers saw what these others were being paid, they thought, ‘I bet we get even more,’ but they also were paid a fair wage that would help them support themselves and their families. They were pissed! Like Israel in the desert, they grumbled and murmured against the business owner,<sup>152</sup> saying, ‘Not fair! We worked harder, worked more, and should be treated better.’ The business owner replied, ‘Friend, a fair wage (and just) is what I promised, and a fair and just wage I have paid. Take what belongs to you, Friend, and use it well. I choose to provide for others. Am I not allowed to do good with what belongs to me? Am I not allowed to be generous?’ In a similar way, the rule of sovereign love is generous to all, and many of the privileged will be placed last in line, and those in the back of the line today will be brought forward.”

*Billions wait at home,  
some working, some longing to work.  
Millions wait at home,*

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<sup>151</sup> It is tempting to use “farm” instead of “vineyard” as this translation seeks to convey the vernacular and more of us live near farms than vineyards. However, as an *interpretive* translation I feel it is important to use “vineyard” as it connects theologically and biblically to the way The Truth refers to Israel in the prophets (c.f. Isaiah 5). Vineyard better conveys the sense of the covenantal

*some looking, some not knowing where to look.  
Thousands, hundreds, dozens, a few, just one:*

*Tragedy is always personal,  
not captured by Big Data,  
but captured by poignant desperation:  
the need to feed, to pay rent,  
and maybe a cake for a daughter’s birthday.*

*O Truth, what is a fair wage anyway?  
When will you speak and tell us what to do?  
“I have shown you what is good and what I require.”<sup>153</sup>  
...perform justice, cherish mercy,  
walk, stroll, run, meander...just do it already...humbly.”*

Lord, make us instruments of provision,  
not hoarding but having enough,  
not precisely equal but practicably equitable,  
not “dollars and cents” but dollars making sense.  
O Divine Master, may we not so much seek  
to squeeze every last dime out of a deal  
as to allow all to make a buck,  
to grumble when others receive care  
as to proclaim there is care enough for all,  
to complain when business must pay fair wages  
as to lament our current definition of fair.  
For you have shown us, O Lord, what you require,  
the trinity of ethics of the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

*Go into the world...* Notice attitudes about fairness. Do you apply the same rules for determining fairness for others as you do to yourself? When do you make exceptions and exemptions for yourself that are required of others? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 20:17-28

While Jesus journeyed toward Jerusalem, he took the most disciplined followers aside—12 in all—and for the third time warned them of what was to come, “The Son of Humanity will be betrayed, used and abused and at the

relationship between The Truth and The Truth’s people. Jesus is talking about more than mere wealth in this parable.

<sup>152</sup> The verb Jesus uses links to the Israelites complaining in the desert (c.f. Exodus 15-17, Numbers 14-16, and Psalm 106:25).

<sup>153</sup> c.f. Micah 6:8.

mercy of human cruelty by those who seek to, break, and murder, him. But on the third day, he will defeat Death.”

After saying these words, James and John, the brothers Zebedee, along with their mom, approached Jesus. James’ and John’s mom knelt before Jesus to beg a favor. Jesus looked upon her and wondered aloud, “Yes? Do you want something?”

“Declare,” she demanded from her allegedly humble position before Jesus, “that my two sons will get the prime seats when you rule all things: one at your right and the other at your left.”

Jesus answered the mother, “You have no idea what you are asking nor what you are talking about.” And then looking to James and John, he said, “Do you really think you can hold my cup, much less drink from it?”

“We do!” they both eagerly replied.

“And you will,” Jesus responded, “but it will be at a Festival of Suffering not the Feast of the Table, the seating arrangements for which are not mine to make—The Truth sees to those arrangements and has been preparing the Feast throughout history.”

When the other ten disciplined followers heard about James’ and John’s request, they were furious, so Jesus gathered all the disciplined followers together. “Listen well, friends, for you are behaving as the world behaves—with the same broken values and misplaced priorities, looking through the same distorted lenses to see the world. The broken world believes ‘*Might makes right,*’ and ‘*The one with the most gold makes the rules,*’ but not so among you. If you want to be considered great, to be viewed as important, to have lots of authority, then learn to serve, have a servant’s heart, and be a servant to others. If you want to ‘*Be Best*’ then learn to ‘*Serve Most,*’ for power in the kin-dom is a matter of the faithfulness with which you speak and the integrity with which you serve others. There is no other Way, for even the Son of Humanity came to serve, not be served, and to provide his own life as an offering that gives freedom to multitudes.”

*This is The Truth, and The Truth is like this.*<sup>154</sup>  
*Not greater than Jesus is in this humiliation.*  
*Not more glorious than Jesus is in this self-surrender.*

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<sup>154</sup> The first five lines are quoted from Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 295.

<sup>155</sup> c.f. Philippians 2:3-4.

*Not more powerful than Jesus is in this helplessness.*  
*Not more divine than Jesus is in this humanity.*

*This is me, and I am like this.*

*Unable to accept Jesus in this humiliation.*

*Unwilling to accept Jesus in this self-surrender.*

*Incapable of accepting Jesus in this helplessness.*

*Inept at accepting Jesus in his unequivocal humanity.*

*I wonder why I am not more adept at being a servant?*

Lord, make me an instrument of servanthood,  
in humility, stepping up to help,  
in humility, standing down until asked to help,  
with patience, walking alongside,  
with patience, walking behind,  
for your sake, doing what you need from me,  
for your sake, not doing more.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to do nothing from selfish ambition,  
as to regard others’ as well as myself,  
to look after others’ interests as well as my own.<sup>155</sup>

For the Way of the Servant  
is the Truth that sets us free  
to discover the Life only Jesus can give.

*Go into the world...* Notice people who are good servants. What makes them tick? What do they do, or avoid doing, that makes being in their presence a gift? What is one attitude or action you see in them that you would like to emulate? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 20:29-34**

As they were leaving Jericho to journey the final few miles up to Jerusalem, a large crowd of people walked behind Jesus. Two blind men were sitting beside the road, begging. Hearing the trampling of many feet, they asked what was happening. When told Jesus was passing by,<sup>156</sup> the blind men discerned the presence of The Truth and began shouting, merging theology and politics, “Sovereign! Have mercy on us, Son of David!”<sup>157</sup> The crowd was disturbed by

<sup>156</sup> Matthew is using a phrase loaded with meaning here: “passing by” connects Jesus to The Truth who passed by Moses, while Moses stood protected in the cleft of the rock (c.f. Exodus 33:22).

<sup>157</sup> Lord (Greek *Kyrios*, paraphrased as “sovereign”) can connote “Sir” yet often conveys the divine name. Son of David in the 1<sup>st</sup>

their message and commanded them to stop, but the men refused, “Have mercy on us, O Sovereign! Son of David!”

Jesus paused. He turned toward the blind men and said, “What would you have me accomplish for you?”

They replied, “We would have eyes to see.” Jesus, his gizzard spilling out upon the ground in an act of compassion, touched their eyes. In that moment their eyes were opened—they saw Jesus and began to journey with him.

*I missed seeing Jesus the other day—  
too busy to look at his hungry visage.  
I missed seeing Jesus the other day—  
Netflix has me binging on, like, six shows.  
I missed seeing Jesus today—  
even though I have eyes to see, and they're wide open.*

*Open eyes are no help with a closed heart.*

*I saw Jesus the other day—  
exhausted, near tears, sitting on a bench, in scrubs.  
I saw Jesus the other day—  
setting a bag of groceries at my neighbor's doorstep.  
I saw Jesus today—  
who could have guessed Presbyterians as televangelists?  
Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.*

*Son of David, have mercy on us all.*

Lord, make me an instrument of seeing,  
not merely to have sight but insight,  
not merely to see the surface but the depth,  
not merely to see the obvious but the hidden,  
not merely to have eyes but have them open,  
not merely to have open eyes but a perceiving heart.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to look and see as to have vision and perceive,  
to look away as to remain with the one before me,  
to look with suspicion as with open heart.  
For the Holy One stands before us  
and walks among us, passing by  
if only we have eyes to see.

*Go into the world...* Notice what you notice. Do you focus on what is physically present or emotionally present? What helps you move from mere sight to insight, from the surface of things to their depth? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 21:1-11**

When Jesus arrived in the vicinity of Jerusalem, in the Bethphage neighborhood near the Mount of Olives that overlooks the city, Jesus sent two of his disciplined followers on an errand, “Go into the village. At the first house you come to there will be a colt and her foal tied up. Untie them and bring them to me. If someone asks you what you're doing, just tell them The Truth needs them. They will send them eagerly.” These actions conformed to the promises made by Zechariah, the truth-teller from ages past:<sup>158</sup>

Daughter of Zion, rejoice!  
Rejoice and look! Look and see!  
Your king comes! Humble and victorious!  
Riding a donkey with a colt, her foal,  
walking beside her!

The disciplined followers obeyed Jesus; following his directions, bringing both donkey and colt to him and putting cloaks on both animals. Jesus sat upon the donkey and began to ride down the Mount of Olives, evoking in the people memories of Simon, brother of Judas Maccabeus, who defeated the Greeks and entered Jerusalem in celebration.<sup>159</sup> The people went before him and behind him, waving palm branches, as they had done also for Simon to celebrate his conquest, and shouted the words of the Psalmist's Song of Victory:<sup>160</sup>

Hosanna! Save us, Son of David!  
Blessed is the one who comes  
in the character and integrity of The Truth!  
Hosanna! Save us in the heights of heaven!

When Jesus entered Jerusalem in this manner, the city was in an uproar! People asked, “Who is this? Is he the one who is come to ignite rebellion, to free us from our

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century was a political reference to The Truth's Anointed, the Messiah. The syntax of this verse is odd, and I have chosen to separate sovereign and Son of David into an exclamation and a sentence, which I believe more closely aligns with Matthew's

theology generally, and in this passage specifically, as well as people's conversational tendencies.

<sup>158</sup> c.f. Zechariah 9:9.

<sup>159</sup> c.f. 1 Maccabeus 13:49-52.

<sup>160</sup> c.f. Psalm 118:26, *Hosanna* (Hebrew: literally means “save us”).

oppressors? Is he to be to us as Maccabees were for our forebearers?"

The crowds answered, "This man is the truth-teller of this day, Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

*Christmas merges with Easter,  
thus is the Christian analogy to  
Passover and Hanukkah together:<sup>161</sup>  
victory over Egypt and Greece.*

*"Save us! Save us! Save us!"  
Shouted the long oppressed and still being oppressed.  
Today's politics mere whispers compared to the tumult  
a city in uproar!*

*People leaving cloisters to become crowds.  
Waving historic symbols of  
rebellion, nationalism, and celebration,  
a city on edge!*

*In the center one who rides  
not a Great Steed—general's grandeur—  
but a humble donkey.  
What could go wrong?*

Lord, make us instruments of humble celebration,  
rejoicing the arc of history bends toward justice,  
celebrating little victories: the hungry fed,  
rejoicing in opportunities to be people of peace,  
celebrating simple choices: prioritizing people,  
rejoicing in abilities to make a difference,  
celebrating the one life, or many, before us today.

O Divine Master, may we not so much seek  
to ride the great steed  
as walk alongside the humble donkey,  
to wave flags to our greatness  
as palms for your service,  
to shout, "Lock her / him up!" as "Hosanna!"  
For politics we will always have with us,  
but transformation comes  
from within and through and because  
The Truth is at work amidst Their people,  
which really is worth our celebrating.

*Go into the world...* Notice your attraction to the popular and powerful. How much sway do these twin idols hold over you? Before you profess indifference to their Siren Songs, search your heart for the truth. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 21:12-17**

Having descended from the Mount of Olives, Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the Temple, where he provoked chaos. Jesus overturned the tables and upended the seats of those who sold animals for offerings and exchanged Caesar's coinage for the kosher coins—the coins the Rulers required be used for offerings given in the Temple. Jesus wreaked havoc, castigating the moneychangers, "The Truth proclaimed and Jeremiah, the truth-teller from ages past, wrote it down,

My dwelling place will be a prayer-filled home;  
yet you have made it a crack den for thugs.

Those forbidden by Torah to enter the Temple approached Jesus in the Temple: the lame and maimed, the blind and mute,<sup>162</sup> and Jesus made all of them whole. Yet the Elite and Scrupulous were furious when they witnessed these wonders, and heard children in the Temple courts singing, "Save us! Save us, Son of David! Come and make your people free."

"Do you hear these children singing?" they raged.

"I do indeed," said Jesus before asking, "And have you never read, 'The wisdom of the suckling child is the purest form of praise. Little ones, O Truth, belong; Their adoration raise?'" And Jesus turned and walked away, leaving the crowds and Elite behind. He journeyed to Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, where he slept.

*Spirit hovering over the darkness,  
chaos preventing Creation,  
until The Truth said,  
"Let there be prayer!"*

*And words were spoken:  
praises giving way to rejoicing,  
pleading to lament,  
holy authenticity to confession.*

<sup>161</sup> As the interpretive paraphrase suggests, Jesus merges Hanukkah symbolism (celebrating Simon's victory over Greek

Seleucids) at the time of Passover (celebrating The Truth's victory over Egypt).

<sup>162</sup> c.f. Deuteronomy 15:21, Leviticus 21:18 and 22:22.

*And the chaos gave way to order and goodness,  
evening and morning—a new day,  
walking with The Truth in the midst of a Garden,  
naming Creation for beauty’s sake.*

*And it was good,  
the rhythm of this solitude,  
the drawing together of community,  
the dwelling place that becomes a home of prayer.*

Lord, make me a dwelling place of prayer,  
alone and with others,  
lifting praises and descending into lament,  
confessing sin and being made new,  
renewing community and healing creation,  
being still and knowing you are The Truth.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
the mystic vision as to make myself an offering,  
the perfect words as words honest and true,  
to hear you speak as to be ready to listen.  
For prayer is your gift to us,  
a holy rhythm for slowing and stilling,  
a sacred path for  
becoming the blessing you call us to be.

*Go into the world...* Notice your attitude toward prayer. When are you resistant and when receptive? When do you yearn to pray? What helps you open yourself to insights and wonder while praying? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 21:18-22**

The morning after the triumphal entry, while returning to the city, Jesus was hungry. He spotted a fig tree, ancient symbol of Israel’s faithfulness and fruitfulness when obedient to The Truth.<sup>163</sup> The fig tree looked good—lush and full of green leaves—but bore no fruit. So he said to the tree, “You are not fulfilling your purpose! Be gone, be useless!” In that moment, the fig tree withered.

The disciplined followers, having witnessed the fig tree wither, exclaimed, “Whoa! What just happened?”

Jesus answered, “Here’s some truth: if you trust The Truth, leaning into your God-confidence and away from too much self, you too will be capable of calling out things and people that look good but are not living according to their purpose. Indeed, do you see this

mountain right there upon which the Temple is built? Is it living according to its purpose? Is the Temple helping people live the life of at-one-ment with The Truth? No! And if you trust Them, leaning into your God-confidence, you can say to the Temple itself, ‘Be gone, be useless!’ and it will be so.”

*It used to be easy to spot “The Posers,”  
preachers with big hair and teeth a bit too white,  
promising The Truth’s blessing for all who  
send a tithe of their social security, that  
grandma can hardly afford but will send.*

*Though I scorn these Posers, I wonder  
if my own ways of looking good  
hide a kind of pretending,  
if my own rules keep me from  
true at-one-ment with The Truth.*

*Worse still, I wonder if  
the fruit I am not bearing,  
the love I am not sharing,  
the light I am not shining,  
prevents others from knowing love?*

*Save me from being a fig tree that bears no fruit!*

Lord, make me a fruit bearing instrument,  
bearing the fruit of love and joy,  
of peace and patience,  
of kindness and generosity,  
of faithfulness and gentleness,  
of self-control that is ever leaning into God-control.<sup>164</sup>  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to have lush, green leaves as to bear fruit for the harvest,  
live on the vine as to ripen on the vine,  
to bear fruit as be plucked for eating and bringing joy.  
For to each is given a purpose, according to your calling,  
blessed to be a blessing,  
discovering life is meant to be shared.

*Go into the world...* Notice the fruit that others bear. Ignore those who bear rotten or rotting fruit. Focus your attention on those who bear fruit that blesses, fruit that brings joy, fruit that delights. Be grateful and tell them, “Thank you for being you!” Notice. Pray. Act.

<sup>163</sup> c.f. Jeremiah 8:13 and Zechariah 3:10.

<sup>164</sup> c.f. Galatians 5:23-23.

## Matthew 21:23-32

When Jesus entered the Temple courts, the Rulers and Old Ones approached him as he was teaching: “How dare you do what you have been doing? Who gave you permission to have a parade, wreak havoc, and curse helpless trees, all while teaching blasphemy?”<sup>165</sup>

Jesus replied, “I’ll ask you a question first. Answer me, and I’ll share my *bona fides* with you. Tell me your honest opinion about John: did his baptism come from heaven or earth, of divine inspiration or human notion?”

The Rulers and Old Ones argued with one another because they knew they were caught between a rock and a hard place: “If we say, ‘John’s baptism came from heaven,’ he’ll catch us in a trap and ask us, ‘How is it that you did not submit to Heaven’s command?’ But if we say, ‘John’s baptism was just a human notion,’ we’ll have to answer to the crowds, all of whom call John one of the truth-tellers as from ages past. So the Rulers and Old Ones prevaricated, “Don’t know and not sure we should care.”

Jesus understood the game they were playing, and so responded, “Neither will I share with you the foundation upon which my authority rests to act and accomplish all that I am doing.

“What do you think? The vineyard owner had two children who, when asked to go work in the vineyard, answered, ‘No way!’ and, ‘Sure! Absolutely!’ The one who answered, ‘No way!’ changed their mind, went, and worked in the vineyard. The one who answered, ‘Sure! Absolutely!’ never went and never worked. Now which child was obedient? Which child brought joy to the vineyard owner’s heart?”

The Rulers and Old Ones knew the correct answer and pointed to the first child. “Let me lay some truth on you,” said Jesus, “tax collectors, who betray their own people, and prostitutes, who betray their own selves, will enter the rule of sovereign love before you. When John came proclaiming a New Day, you knew he was proclaiming The Truth’s Word and yet you did nothing. You rejected John’s good and refused to work for right relationships in The Truth’s vineyard, while those whose life stories have been about betraying others and themselves understood John’s message of hope, his invitation to prepare for the God-life.”

*We live in an age of media manipulation  
where words have lost their meaning,  
ideas have been turned inside out through emptiness of  
form and function,  
content and character,  
heart and humility.*

*Trust and trustworthiness have glided  
to the edge of the world,  
and I saw their sails fall off the ledge.*

*If the world were round, trust and trustworthiness  
might return; alas, the Earth is flat. Don’t believe me?  
I read it on the internet.*

Lord, make me an honest vessel,  
able to speak the truth,  
willing to love,  
able to say the difficult word,  
willing to receive others’ influence,  
able to share my convictions,  
willing to own my baggage.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to destroy my enemy as to build community,  
to win all arguments as to embrace all justice,  
to obscure the God-life as to reveal it.  
For by a Word did Creation burst forth,  
by your Word was chaos ordered,  
may your Word again speak order into our chaos,  
may New Creation again burst forth.

*Go into the world...* Notice the way you use words. Do you hesitate to speak your truth? Or, do you bludgeon others with it? Do you repeatedly say, “I’m sorry,” and thus diminish your Voice? Or, do you never say, “I’m sorry,” and thus diminish the Voices of those around you? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 21:33-45

Jesus continued, “Listen up for a story. The vineyard owner planted a beautiful, luscious vineyard, sparing no cost: fenced it in, installed the most up to date production machinery, even installed a security system.

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<sup>165</sup> It should be noted ancient manuscripts are not so specific about what Jesus is doing. The first three actions connect with the

most recent of Jesus’ actions, while the fourth projects forward to the accusation that will be made against Jesus in 26:65.

Then the owner leased the vineyard to some renters and left the country. When the vineyard was harvested and the grapes made into wine the agreement stipulated the owner would be paid a portion of the profits, so the owner sent representatives to the vineyard to collect. The renters, however, refused to fulfill their part of the covenant and even attacked the owner's representatives: harassing one, beating another, and even killing a third with mob violence. The owner sent a second set of representatives, who were treated just as abusively. Finally, the owner sent her son, thinking, 'Surely they wouldn't dare harm my child.' But when the renters saw the son, they thought to themselves, 'If the son is out of the way, we can buy up enough of the vineyard's stock to control the company.' And they murdered the son."

Jesus then looked at the Rulers and Old Ones, as well as at some of the Elite who were listening nearby, and said, "What recourse does the vineyard owner have? What do you think she will do?"

They replied, "She is going to make the renters' lives miserable. Not only will they wish they were never born, the vineyard owner is going to find new renters. She'll find others to produce and enjoy the harvest!"

Jesus paused, waiting to see if they would comprehend. Then he gave them a hint, "Have you ever read the Scripture that says,

The stone the builders rejected is the cornerstone;  
The Truth makes it so,  
and it is a marvel to behold."<sup>166</sup>

When the Rulers and Old Ones still did not comprehend, Jesus told them plainly, "Here is the situation: the rule of sovereign love is being taken away from you and given to people that harvest the fruit of the God-life: justice and joy, salvation and *shalom*, peace that endures and even extends beyond borders. Anyone who stumbles upon this new Temple The Truth is building will falter, and when the old Temple falls you will be crushed beneath its rubble."

When the Rulers and Old Ones heard Jesus' words, they finally got it: his story was about them! They were furious and wanted to arrest him on the spot, but they feared public opinion and knew the people revered him as one of the truth-tellers.

*Wait for it...*

*Wait for it...*

*There it is! Comprehension! At last!*

*The powerful understanding systemic oppression.*

*The privileged acknowledging their complicity.*

*The plutocracy accepting the need for greater equity.*

*What?*

*What do you mean they don't care?*

*You mean I have to wait some more?*

Lord, make me an instrument able to hear truth,  
when confronted with a truth I don't want to hear,  
that's difficult to accept,  
that's inconvenient,  
that's hard to hear,  
that challenges what I do,  
that confronts who I am.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to pretend I know answers  
as to be willing to ask questions,  
to surround myself with experts  
as to encourage voices unspoken,  
to get the last word as to listen to the necessary truth.  
For sanctification—journey and growth of holiness—  
comes through relationship,  
joining the divine dance of I and we  
becoming a part of Thee.

*Go into the world...* Notice how you receive information. What information do you accept without question and what do you resist? Are you better at accepting informational or emotional messages? What helps you hear, listen, receive, and accept spiritual messages? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 22:1-10**

Jesus continued to tell stories to the Rulers and Old Ones: "The rule of sovereign love is like the great family, whose matriarch was the ruler and patriarch was her Sargent-at-Arms. They held a wedding feast for their beloved son and invited all the important people in town. As is custom for weddings, the feast would not start until everything was ready: food and drink for all! But once the

<sup>166</sup> c.f. Psalm 118:22.

feast was prepared, when the grand celebration was ready to commence, the family sent servants with the good news: ‘Come! All is prepared! Come join the feast that celebrates our son’s love!’ And no one came. Again, the family sent servants with the urgent news: ‘Hurry! The family oxen are slaughtered, the family calves have been barbequed! All is prepared for you! Come, enjoy the feast of our son’s love!’

But those who had been invited responded with nonchalance: ‘Meh. We’ll think about it.’ And they went to their farms and back to their shops. And those who didn’t return to their work, hung around, talked smack with the servants, shoved them around a bit, a few ruffians beat on them. Some of the servants even died. The son’s mom and dad were enraged. They sent to Assyria; called for Babylon—all within the city would bear the consequence. The city was destroyed.<sup>167</sup>

“The family said to their servants, “The wedding feast is ready and those who have been invited have chosen to exclude themselves. Hit the streets! Invite anyone! Invite everyone! Invite the good! Invite the bad! Fill our wedding feast with guests with whom we can share our joy.”

*Who turns down a feast?  
Roasted pig, apple in the mouth.  
Figs and grapes and apricots galore.  
The wine flowing, flowing, flowing.  
And the cake! Woohoo!!! So. Much. Cake.*

*Do they hate love? (Who hates love?)  
Are they too busy? (For a feast? Really?!)  
Had their fill of love and roasted pig and cake?  
Is it complacency, (assuming we can feast later)?  
Later. Always later. Until it is too late.*

*Yet the family desires to celebrate!  
Oh, shout it from the rooftops!  
The family grieves when others cannot share their joy.  
The family wants to host a party, a grand party,  
The family refuses to allow others’*

*hate or busyness or complacency  
to tarnish  
their party, their joy, their desire  
to celebrate  
the son’s love.*

Lord, make me an instrument of celebration,  
inviting others to join the feast,  
inviting the best and brightest,  
inviting the winsome and witty,  
inviting, also, the least and last,  
inviting, also, the broken and betrayed,  
inviting, also, all those who have never been invited.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to enjoy the feast  
as to invite others to enjoy the feast,  
to enjoy the feast alone  
as to enjoy the feast in community,  
to enjoy feasting in general  
as to remember the feast is about you.  
For Jesus the groom invites his bride, the Church,  
into a holy communion that creates holy community  
that inspires holy compassion  
for all those waiting to be invited to The Truth’s feast.

*Go into the world...* Notice your “invitations.” Not just your written or verbal invitations but the way you open to others (or close yourself to them)? How and to what do you invite others? Are those you invite the “in” crowd, or do you extend yourself beyond a closed circle? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 22:11-14**

Jesus continued the story he was telling the Rulers and Old Ones, “When the matriarch and patriarch entered the feast to greet their guests, they noticed a man in shorts, flip-flops, and a ratty T-shirt. They said to him, ‘How did you get in here dressed like that?’ The man had no excuse, not even an explanation, and so was silent. The family said to their servants, ‘Escort him outside, into the darkness, outside looking in, able to see the feast but not join in its joy.’

<sup>167</sup> The NRSV reads, “[The King] sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned the city.” It is unclear whether Jesus is pointing back toward the historical events that culminated in Israel and Judah’s exile or forward toward the events that caused Rome to destroy Jerusalem. Commentators suggest Jesus has in

mind either the past or the eventual destruction of Jerusalem rather than any eschatological, after-life scenario. Therefore, the author chose to ground the text in history, as the safest choice that also conforms to—it is hoped—what appears to be Jesus’ intent.

Jesus then looked into the eyes of the Rulers and Elite, and said, “Many are invited but not all are willing to accept the invitation. To be called is not the same as being willing and ability does not determine who is chosen.”

*Novelists write about the slacker grandchild living the Trust Fund life.*

*It is, as well, a Hollywood trope: relying on heredity rather than holiness, trusting birthplace and birthright bless and one need bear no burden.*

*I wonder how the matriarchs and patriarchs feel about their progeny?*

*Is it more loving to allow their precious to destroy their own souls, or lay claim to them, demanding a higher purpose?*

Lord, make us vessels prepared for our calling,  
not just in word but in work,  
not just for gratification but for edification,  
not only for self but also for others,  
not only for congregation but also for community,  
not merely to receive applause but to hear your Amen!  
O Divine Master, may we seek your  
blessing and glory and wisdom, your  
thanksgiving and honor and power and might,  
Creation’s, “Amen!” to you, forever and ever!<sup>168</sup>  
For we are created for a purpose—  
to glorify The Truth and enjoy Them forever—  
and know joy full and complete  
only as we live with You.

*Go into the world..* Notice your attitude, especially at “work,” whether it is paid or unpaid. Do you act more from a place of gratitude or obligation? Are you more fulfilling your purpose or your filling time? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 22:15-22**

Hearing Jesus speak against the Rulers and Old Ones, the Intense decided they had had enough and conspired with the Roman Collaborators to ensnare him in a trap. They began with false flattery, saying, “Rabbi, we

know you are full of goodness and truth. What is more, we know you treat everyone with justice and equality, as The Truth desires. So, please, we need your wisdom. Is it legal to pay taxes to Caesar or should we withhold paying them?”

Jesus sensed their malice and knew the question to be a trap. If he answered, “Yes,” the people would consider him a Roman sympathizer. If he answered, “No,” they could accuse him to the Roman authorities. Ignoring their question, Jesus accused them first, “Hypocrites! Why test me? Show me the coin in your pocket you use to pay your tax.” The Intense and the Collaborators pulled out a coin called a denarius, upon which was engraved an image<sup>169</sup> of Caesar, and which, by possessing, caused them to break the first commandment.<sup>170</sup> He asked them, “Who is this? What is this title that is used?”

The Intense and the Collaborators had no choice, “It is Caesar’s image and his title: ‘Son of The Truth.’”

Jesus stared at the Intense and the Collaborators and said, “Give Caesar’s image to Caesar, for to him it belongs. Give The Truth’s image to The Truth, for such belongs to Them, and such are you and such are all who have been created male and female.”<sup>171</sup> Astonished their trap had backfired, they left Jesus alone.

*I’m old enough to remember the tennis star and his commercial: “Image is Everything.”*

*The commercial was for “Icon” cameras: nice touch. Some marketer knew Greek!*

*Jump ahead twenty years: digital generation knowing all about icons. “Click,” “Double click,” “Right click” on the icon.*

*But if we return to the ancient ways, to the deep truths of our nomadic fathers and mothers, when image really was everything,*

*we learn what no marketing can create, no computer can comprehend:*

<sup>168</sup> c.f. Revelation 7:12.

<sup>169</sup> The Greek word *icon* translates into English as “image.”

<sup>170</sup> c.f. Exodus 20:4.

<sup>171</sup> c.f. Genesis 1:27 for the reference Jesus is making.

*we belong to The Truth—reflecting an eternal image,  
created for relationship, I in Thou, We together,  
dancing the dance of Triune love.*

Lord, make us into your image,  
joyful in hope,  
patient in affliction,  
faithful in prayer,  
sharing with those who are in need,  
practicing hospitality.<sup>172</sup>

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to please others as to please you,  
to be molded according to the culture  
as transformed by the renewing of my mind,  
to guess at your will as to confirm  
that it is good and pleasing and makes one whole.<sup>173</sup>

For by the gift given to each one of us,  
we think not more highly of ourselves than we ought,  
but give thanks that to each of us  
The Truth has given us as a gift to all.<sup>174</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice your self-image. How do you refer to yourself? What positive or negative connotations are implied by the terms you use? Do you imagine (image - in) yourself in individualistic or communal terms, as an island or as part of the Body? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 22:23-33**

That same day some of the Elite confronted Jesus about what they called the “myth of resurrection of the dead.” To justify themselves in their own eyes, the Elite described a conundrum for Jesus, “Rabbi, Moses wrote laws directing what is to happen if a man dies childless: his brother is to marry the widow, his sister-in-law, and sire children for his deceased brother. But what if there were seven brothers, all of whom died without children and all of whom, one by one, married the same woman? Whose wife would she be in the so-called resurrection?”

Jesus understood their conundrum was laid out only to challenge him, and so he responded, “It is sad to see you so misguided about the Scriptures. Knowledge is power and you are impotent. The resurrection is the renewal of all things, when all intimacies will be with The Truth, and all community will center around Their love.

As for the resurrection of the dead, is it right to call them dead? Surely you have read the Scriptures and where it is said, ‘I am The Truth of Abraham. I am The Truth of Isaac. I am The Truth of Jacob.’ They abide with and for the living not of the dead.” When the crowds heard Jesus’ words, they felt dazed.

*What if...?*

*What if when we “move on,”  
we actually do see a bright light?*

*What if when we “pass,”  
we actually share in the communion of the saints?*

*What if when we die,  
we actually stand before the throne?*

*What if we lived in the knowledge  
we will one day lay prostrate before the throne?*

*What if we lived in the joy  
we get to share in holy communion here and now?*

*What if we lived shining the light of The Truth’s love—  
to all whom we meet?*

*What if...?*

Lord, make me an instrument that lives the God-life,  
a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called,  
a life with all humility and gentleness,  
a life with patience,  
a life that bears with one another in love,  
a life that makes every effort  
to maintain the unity of the Spirit,  
a life that lived in the bond of peace.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to use my gifts for my own sake  
as to equip others for the work of ministry,  
to strengthen only myself as to build up the Body,  
to be mature as to live within a mature community.  
For there is one Body and one Spirit,  
just as there is one hope and one faith,  
one Truth, Lover of all,  
who is above all and through all and in all.<sup>175</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice your consistency. How often are you aware of living the God-life in a given moment? What helps you become more conscious and intentional

<sup>172</sup> c.f. Romans 12:11-13.

<sup>173</sup> c.f. Romans 12:1-2.

<sup>174</sup> c.f. Romans 12:3-7.

<sup>175</sup> c.f. Ephesians 4:1-16.

about living with humility, patience and bearing with another in love? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 22:34-40

When the Intense heard Jesus had silenced the Elite, they huddled up with them. Upon breaking the huddle, one of the Elite, skilled in oratory and minutiae, tested Jesus with a question commonly asked of rabbis, “Rabbi, what is the greatest commandment in Torah?”

Jesus answered, “Love The Truth your The Truth with your whole person: all your heart, your full intellect, and every atom of your being.”<sup>176</sup> This is the first and best commandment. And its spouse is this: ‘Love your neighbor as you love your own self.’ All Torah stands on these two legs.”<sup>177</sup>

*It doesn't seem like a trick question.*

*What kind of test is this?*

*The most important commandment is to love—*

*The Truth and neighbor and self!*

*Perhaps the test is moving beyond the knowing.*

*Perhaps the test is found in the doing.*

*Perhaps the trick is found in embodying such love.*

*Lord, teach me to stand on both legs.*

Lord, make us vessels of love,  
to loose the bonds of injustice  
and undo the chords of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke,  
to share bread with the hungry  
and house the homeless poor,  
to clothe the naked and not hide from need,  
to satisfy the needs of the afflicted, and  
to stop pointing the finger and speaking evil.  
O Divine Master, may our light rise in the darkness,  
may ancient ruins be rebuilt,  
may we be called “Repairer of the Breach.”  
For you guide us continually,  
You satisfy our needs in parched places,  
You are the Holy One of Israel—our delight.<sup>178</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice how you love. What is your “love language”? What are the “love languages” or those closest to you? What are the boundaries for when and for whom you give the gift of your Self? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 22:41-46

Now the Intense were gathered, all together, in one place, ready to gang up on Jesus. Before they could, he decided to mess with them and asked, “What do you say about Messiah? Whose son is Messiah?”

They replied, “David’s son.”

“How is it then that David, speaking in the reverie and guidance of Divine Spirit, calls Messiah ‘Sovereign’ saying,

The Truth said to my Sovereign,

‘Sit in the place of authority, here on my right, until I subdue your enemies, making them a footstool, upon which your feet may rest.’<sup>179</sup>

If David called Messiah ‘Sovereign,’ how can Messiah be David’s son?” As they had no answer, the Intense stopped asking Jesus any more questions.

*Asking the right question is soooooo important!*

*Too often people ask, “What are we going to do?”*

*Too easily do people ask, “How are we going to do it?”*

*Far more life giving are “Why?” and “Whose?”*

*Why do we believe ourselves called to love?*

*Who are we, in our deepest, truest sense of self?*

*Whose are we, as in, “To whom do we belong?”*

*And the catechism responds, “We belong...”*

*...in body and in soul,*

*...in life and in death and in life after death,*

*...not to ourselves but to our faithful Savior,*

*...even Jesus Christ*

*David's Sovereign.*

<sup>176</sup> The author begs the reader’s forgiveness for using “atom,” a historical anachronism.

<sup>177</sup> As one whose own mother-in-law died as a paraplegic, the author uses the metaphor of “standing on two legs” with hesitation, acknowledging some are unable to stand physically.

<sup>178</sup> c.f. Isaiah 58.

<sup>179</sup> c.f. Psalm 110:1.

Lord, make me an instrument of whimsy,  
playful enough to mess with my enemies,  
frisky enough to push buttons  
(for Jesus' sake, of course),  
quirky enough to love the whole world  
(for Heaven's sake, obviously).

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to win every argument as to speak with my convictions,  
to become fatigued by opposition  
as to be clear about my purpose,  
to avoid all criticism as to be found a worthy adversary,  
worthy enough that others will seek to criticize,  
some at all costs.

For I know to whom I belong,  
and accept the servant is not greater than the Master,  
but only ask that those who stand against me  
be those who would stand against you as well.

*Go into the world...* Notice your adversaries. See through their attacks, even if they are personal. Hear their anger, sadness, or fear, and their legitimate grievance. Accept and hold on to what is valid and give the rest to Jesus. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 23:1-12**

Following his confrontations with the Intense and the Scrupulous, the Rulers and Old Ones, the Collaborators as well as the Elite, Jesus spoke to the crowds and to the disciplined followers: "The Scrupulous and Intense study Moses and immerse themselves into Torah so do as they say, but do not follow their practice. Listen to their teaching but ignore their example, for they talk the talk but do not walk the walk.

"They load people down with weight upon weight upon weight and idly stand by, watching in judgment, while people are crushed under so heavy a load.

"They like to look good and put on a great show with their long-winded prayers, loving applause and longing for adulation, 'How spiritual you are!'

"They crave respect in social circles and seek honor in holy places, always reserving the most comfortable seats for themselves.

"They are called 'Reverend' or 'Pastor' in the halls of power and it tickles their fancy, assuming they are revered.

"Neither call yourself 'Reverend' nor 'Pastor,' nor any other term of empowerment, for there is only one who is to be revered.

"Neither call anyone on earth your abba for there is only one Abba, who is of heaven.

"Neither call yourself a teacher for there is only one who counsels, one who instructs, one who guides—Messiah! Indeed, rather than step up to be called leader, bend down to be called servant. Applause for the self is silent to all others and you will find highest heaven only when you kneel before the Holy One."

*I am "The Reverend Dr. Brad Munroe."*

*(Literally this is on my letterhead!)*

*I am an "Ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament."*

*(I am not making this up!)*

*I am the "Presbytery Pastor" for TWO presbyteries!*

*I am...I am...I am?!*

*No, no I am not!*

*My title is...My degree is...My position classification is...*

*I am not...any of the above.*

*I am a child of The Truth—chosen and dearly loved, baptized into the Triune dance of love.*

*I am a disciple of Jesus—often faithful, sometimes not, usually seeking to be faithful.*

*I am pretty sorry at obeying the commands of Jesus, as the titles I use so aptly show.*

*Do as I say, but do not follow my practice.*

*Listen to my teaching but ignore my example.*

Lord, make me an instrument of humility,  
learning the ways of obedience,  
learning to walk the walk,  
learning to bear another's burden  
as I carry my own load,  
learning you are the only audience for my prayers,  
learning to offer to others the place of honor,  
learning I am not my title.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be honored as to honor others,  
to be served as to serve others,  
to receive applause as to give praise.  
For only to you, the Holy One of Israel, is honor due,  
only through you, the Eternal Word, is wisdom given,  
only Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

*Go into the world...* Notice invitations to practice humility. When are you invited to step forward but have the opportunity to allow another the honor? How do you respond to the opportunity to lift up another rather than yourself? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 23:13-15

Jesus continued his rebuke, “Anguish be yours, Scrupulous and Intense, who present a false face! You hide the key that opens the rule of sovereign love and forget where you hid it. And when seekers find an open window you pull them from the window and drag them back down to your level.

“Angst be yours, Scrupulous and Intense, pretenders! Neither snow nor sleet nor driving rain keep you from distorting the heart of The Truth’s beloved, and in so doing you force them to join you in the sewer where they are baptized into Gehenna itself!”

*So much for “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.”  
Where is “Turn the other cheek”  
Where is “Forgive seven times seventy”?  
Better to be a schmuck than pretend to be religious,*

*lacking empathy toward the broken,  
lacking love of neighbor, stranger, and even enemy,  
lacking justice—mishpat and tzedakah,<sup>180</sup>  
lacking kindness and humility, too.<sup>181</sup>*

*Kind to the broken yet implacable toward those  
who know better and lead others astray:  
I like this new Jesus—  
“Jesus, ripped and ready to rumble!”*

Lord, make us integrated,  
maintaining structural integrity,  
a dam able to hold back flood waters,  
a bridge over which trains safely tread,  
followers of Jesus worthy of the name,  
leaders who guide toward heaven  
rather than plunge into hell.

O Divine Master, may we not so much seek  
to hide the keys to the kin-dom as to share them,

to be honest guides, sharing what wisdom we have,  
being honest, too, about our limits.

For our false self wears a mask  
called “The Hypocrites’ Covering,”  
shading your countenance from us,  
rather than lifting it and granting us your peace.

*Go into the world...* Notice when you pretend. When is there divergence between who you want to be and what you actually do? What helps you be who you are in Jesus? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 23:16-22

Jesus continued his rebuke, “Misery be yours, Scrupulous and Intense, who shut your eyes that you may not see. You disparage cathedrals yet honor their gold. You deride the sanctuary yet hound others for its offering. You degrade the sacred for the sake of your wealth, your well-being, and your whims. Fools you are, opening your eyes yet still refusing to look! You teach others that contracts only matter if money is exchanged and covenants are worthless because they are only words. The oath gains value because of The Truth for whom it is made. The pledge is made sacred because of They who dwell within it. Heaven comes to earth through those who honor what is truly sacred, yet you do not see what is before your very eyes.”

*Carnival barkers are everywhere—a hive without bees.  
Politicians betraying our nation as they sell fear.  
Those called to protect and to serve—agents of terror.  
Preachers shilling a Gospel Jesus would not recognize,  
while I long for the merest glimpse of the sacred.  
Lord, give me eyes to see what honors you,  
and the purity of heart to say yes to it.*

Lord, make me an honest wordsmith,  
speaking the truth in love,  
naming life as it is and not as I would have it,  
pointing to a hope as you would have us live,  
holding space for those who long to touch the sacred,  
and to be touched by you.

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<sup>180</sup> *Mishpat* and *tzedakah* are Hebrew words both translated as “justice” and refer to fairness of means and process (*mishpat*) and fairness of result and outcome (*tzedakah*).

<sup>181</sup> c.f. Micah 6:8.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
that which others prize but only that which is priceless,  
that which conveys prestige  
but only that which is precious,  
that which humanity creates  
but that which you alone give.  
For to know the cost of all things  
and the value of nothing,  
is to live without eternity in one's heart;  
it is to miss the gift of dancing to God-rhythms  
and living the God-life.

*Go into the world...* Notice how you use words. When are you tempted to shade the truth? With whom is it easier to speak from your heart, even if speaking a difficult word? How do your words honor The Truth, respect others, and share your true self? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 23:23-26**

Jesus continued his rebuke, “Disaster be yours, Scrupulous and Intense, frauds! You are generous with all that costs little and matters less—herbs and spices you freely give—but are stingy with what matters most: creating a culture worthy of the kin-dom and honoring The Truth in what you do and how you do it. You should be generous in the costly things while also remembering the small kindnesses. Confused you are—so confused! You limit your debt and then max out your credit cards!

“Desolation be yours, Scrupulous and Intense, charlatans! You disinfect your phone and then use it to steal. You wash your hands and then slap others with them. Confused you are—so confused! Purify your soul that your spirit may be clean; make strong your heart that your hands will do what is good and what The Truth requires of you.”<sup>182</sup>

*First things first: Important and then urgent.*  
*Health more vital than clothes and make-up.*  
*Prayer more significant than Facebook.*  
*Scripture more life giving than ESPN.*  
*Neighbors more important than strangers on the news.*  
*Building shalom from the inside-out and ground up.*  
*Never neglecting what matters most,*  
*even small kindnesses.*  
*I have to start somewhere.*

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<sup>182</sup> Traditional translations describe the Scrupulous and the Intense neglect as being “justice and mercy and faith,” which is an

Lord, make me a pilgrim with priorities:  
the health and wellness of birthing mothers,  
helping all kids get a Head Start on learning and life,  
guiding youth in their becoming,  
finding purpose and people with whom to share it,  
living for significance more than success,  
longing to hear, “Well done, good servant.”  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to punch a clock as to discover a purpose,  
to check boxes as to check-in with the lonely,  
to cross my “t’s” and dot my “i’s”  
as to write a sacred narrative.  
For I long to live from the inside-out,  
being and becoming your beloved child,  
that I may share your blessings with all.

*Go into the world...* Notice what sticks in your craw, what gets your goat! Do the things that push your button matter in light of eternity? How are you concerned about things that, if they were to improve, would lead to others’ blessing? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 23:27-36**

Jesus continued his rebuke, “Calamity be yours, Scrupulous and Intense, whose image is a lie. You are like a cemetery in Spring: full of flowers and neatly cut grass hiding the stench of death. You appear to live right with all but appearances can be deceiving. What you present to the world is not what is found in your hearts.

“Catastrophe be yours, Scrupulous and Intense, deceivers! You laud all the great saints and applaud the best and brightest from history. You quote from Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr. in your sermons and lift up the lives of Mother Teresa and Bishop Romero as exemplars; the Prayer of St. Francis hangs from your wall in needlepoint. You say, ‘Oh, if I had just lived in Germany in the 1930’s, I would have rallied the Church to stand against Hitler! We would have saved our neighbors from the Holocaust!’ Thus you bear witness to the Church’s guilt and to your guilt by association, for you are a child of the same Church who was complicit in murder.

“Confirm that you embrace the full measure of your ancestors’ evil, you den of scorpions! Do you really believe you will escape the crisis point of history, that of all

obvious allusion to Micah 6:8. Therefore, I tried to bring an equally obvious allusion into the paraphrase.

humankind you alone will not face the sentencing that purges corruption? Clearly you do believe this. Therefore, I will show you your sin: truth-tellers will come before you, and you will believe them to be liars. Wise ones will speak to you, and you will call them fools. The greatest scholars of our time will seek to educate you, and you will believe what is posted by your friends on Facebook. You will bathe in the blood of all the saints and martyrs, from A to Z, from Narthex to Nave, from pulpit to table to font your shame will be exposed. Here's some truth: this generation, and all generations, will see my Cross and there will be no hiding from it."

*Fourteen crosses hang in my home:  
one for each station of the Cross.  
Decorating my walls, beautifying my home,  
suggesting I am more spiritual than you (I bet).*

*Hiding behind these crosses—my inner life also hidden:  
petty jealousies and ancient grudges  
need not see the light of day,  
not when I have a cross hanging from my wall.*

*I am thankful my sin need never be exposed.  
I am grateful I can hide my sin behind the Cross.  
I don't worry about making my heart clean, for  
I've got my bases covered, don't you see?*

*By crosses.*

Lord, make me repentant,  
not only displaying crosses but living a cruciform life,  
not merely saying sorry but feeling sorrow,  
not only wishing sin away but walking away from sin,  
not only admitting faults but embracing my holy identity,  
not old living but new life.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
only to confess as to practice holy contrition,  
only to turn away as to be transformed,  
only to walk away as to walk the Way.

For only the seed that is planted is raised to life,  
and what is sown in dishonor is raised in glory,  
and what is sown in weakness is raised in power.<sup>183</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice and wonder about inequities. What societal circumstances led to them? What obstacles create the inequity? What opportunity is absent that makes overcoming the inequity difficult? And the key question: how are you complicit, through commission or omission, in allowing the inequity to continue? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 23:37-39**

Jesus concluded with lament, "Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, city that murders truth-tellers and crushes those whom The Truth sends to it! O how I have yearned to herd your children as a mother hen herds her chicks, covering them under the protection of her wings, but you would not listen, would not come, would not be gathered and therefore have no shelter but your own self. Look! Your home is only a house, and an empty one. I tell you truthfully: you won't see me again until the Son of Humanity comes in glory and you shout aloud, 'Blessed! Blessed is he! Blessed of The Truth!'"

*Brokenhearted, The Truth weeps  
for the city of three faiths,  
all of whom believe the Creator, the One and Only,  
created in love, to love, and for love.*

*Why, then, does the city torment  
her fathers and cause her mothers to grieve?  
Why, then, does the city send  
her sons to die and make widows of her daughters?*

*Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, city of a mother's love!  
Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, city of peace!  
Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, city of sorrow!  
Kyrie, eleison! Christe, eleison! Kyrie, eleison.<sup>184</sup>*

Lord, make me willing to lament,  
to express emotion in prayer:  
unbridled and uncensored,  
honest enough to hurt,  
wild enough to weep,  
waiting for hope to be born  
waiting for love to be borne.

<sup>183</sup> c.f. 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

<sup>184</sup> The "Kyrie" (Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy) is an ancient prayer.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to pray for “concerns” or ask for cosmic help when ill,  
as to admit when “concerns” are too light a thing,  
and even cosmic help is not enough.  
For the hope waiting to be born ignores my entreaties,  
It stubbornly refuses to do my bidding,  
its listens only to time, love and the whisper of your Spirit.

*Go into the world...* Notice sorrow in yourself and others.  
What gives you permission to feel what you feel? What  
allows you to experience the freedom of speaking the truth  
of your hurt, woundedness, or anger? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 24:1-3**

As Jesus was leaving the area after berating the  
Scrupulous and the Intense, his disciplined followers noted  
the grandeur and glory of the Temple and its grounds. “All  
this is just rocks,” replied Jesus. “Boulders will become  
stones and stones be turned to gravel until there is nothing  
left but tears and lament.”

Later, while Jesus was sitting on the Mount of  
Olives that looks across the Kidron Valley toward the  
Temple, his disciplined followers approached him  
privately. “Rabbi, please tell us,” they asked, “when will it  
all happen, the destruction you spoke of and the rule of  
sovereign love made whole and complete?”

*I clasp my hands together, fingers interlocked,  
“Here is the church...”  
My index fingers lift, pointing heavenward,  
“Here is the steeple...”  
I reverse my hands, palms upward,  
“Open the doors...”  
I wiggle my fingers,  
“See all the people.”*

*This has always been suspect ecclesiology,<sup>185</sup>  
even more so now during the Covacalyptse,  
when church buildings are closed  
but the Church is decidedly open:*

*for love, and for listening to others’ stories,  
for prayer and for sharing The Truth’s stories,  
for delivering food to the well-elderly,  
for donating stimulus checks to food banks.*

*The Church has remained open:  
open for business, sacred business,  
the business of being a holy diaspora.  
Look at all the people.*

Lord, make us instruments of holy serving,  
whether gathered or dispersed,  
whether in a building or on the streets,  
whether in open acceptance or active resistance,  
always bringing good news,  
always bearing *shalom*,  
always being the Church.

O Divine Master, may we not so much seek  
for You to live in our buildings as to live in us,  
for our buildings to be a meeting place  
as for us to be Your dwelling place,  
for the world to marvel at our churches  
as to be thankful for Your Church.

For the glory of the Temple is the Spirit  
dwelling in you and in me, in us, the Body of Christ,<sup>186</sup>  
and through us to a world who needs Your love.

*Go into the world...* Notice how you think about “the  
church”? How does your language convey “the church” is  
synonymous with the building? How does it convey that it  
is the living, breathing, loving, living organism of those  
gathered and sent in Jesus’ name? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 24:4-14**

Jesus then taught about the time of fulfillment,  
when the rule of sovereign love will be made whole and  
complete.<sup>187</sup> He began by singing a ditty:

Tricks and fears, hates and tumbles,  
missions and tears, and normal things, too, my dears.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ecclesiology is the study of the church, and comes from the  
Greek word *ecclesia*, which means “gathering” in English and is  
usually translated as “church” in our Bibles.

<sup>186</sup> c.f. 1 Corinthians 6:19.

<sup>187</sup> Most scholars divide Matthew 24:4-44 into three sections:  
focus on the world (1-14), focus on Jerusalem (15-25), focus on  
the world (36-44).

<sup>188</sup> Dale Bruner, *Matthew a commentary: The Church Book, Matthew 13-28*. (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 475. Dr. Bruner reports

Then Jesus warned the disciplined followers, “Beware of great tricks. Be wary and be aware of those who seek to trick you. Many will claim either to be working for me or to be me, but they are not Messiah and only serve to mislead many.

“Beware of great troubles. Be wary and be aware that you will hear of skirmishes and battles and wars. Be wary but not afraid, for such always have been and always shall be, and they do not mean the end is near. Nation will rise to make war against another nation; province and prince will battle prince and province, for such has always been, but that still does not mean the end. Even the earth will war against itself, with famines and quakes in many places, but that still does not mean the end. At worst, the presence of these pains is but the beginning of the new creation The Truth will birth.

“Beware of great trials. Following these things, you will be given over for persecution and punishment and even death. People will hate you, opposing you because of me. Some will hide their trust in a dark closet. Losing the will to dwell in the assurance The Truth is with them, they will join the throng who celebrate hate. Falling away from their faith, they will lose the warmth of love toward brothers and sisters in the gathering. Some of these cold hearts will embrace those who lie about reigniting the flame of love. They will be led to the edge of a cliff, only to take the next, inevitable step.

“Be aware of the great task. Some will remain true—trusting and trustworthy until the end. These will experience the God-life. Good News will proceed from them until the entire world hears the stories of the rule of sovereign love. All the nations will hear these stories, and only then will the fulfillment of sovereign love be made whole and complete.”

*The Book of Revelation is a scary place.  
It should come with a warning label:  
“Here there be dragons!”*

*The Book of Revelation brings out the crazies,  
as scary places tend to do:  
“Look! Danger! Now you see it, now you don’t!”*

*What if The Revelation isn’t read as literal?  
What if it is metaphor speaking a pastoral message?  
What if it is holy charades speaking theological truth?  
What if images are understood as symbols?  
What if symbols speak a message?  
What message are we to hear?*

*“Great tricks, great troubles, even great tribulation...  
and what’s more to remember:  
a great task.”<sup>189</sup>*

Lord, make us ready instruments,  
ready to ignore great tricks,  
ready to overcome great troubles,  
ready to persevere through great tribulation,  
ready to undertake a great task.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be found only reading Scripture  
as to be found always ready to live it,  
to listen to those who promote fear  
as to those who amplify faith,  
to learn from Jesus always, always for the love of Jesus.  
For your words of revelation—of unveiling—  
focus our attention on moving toward you,  
who gives us the endurance to take our next step.

*Go into the world...* Notice how you ponder “The End.” Is it to be feared or embraced? A long way off and far, far away or near at hand, in your next breath? The end will come: how are making yourself ready? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 24:15-25**

Jesus then taught the disciplined followers about the fast approaching trouble for Jerusalem, “So when sacrilege and dishonor desecrate the Holy Place—you readers remember this, don’t you?)—people in Judea (the area around Jerusalem) shouldn’t run to the city but away from it, fleeing the siege that will come as Roman legions encircle the city,<sup>190</sup> fleeing the horrors of those hours. Act quickly. Leave the house as if it were on fire. Leave your coat where you shed it in the field. Oh, pity the pregnant mothers and pray the devastation does not come amidst

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he would sing this ditty to teach the general content of Matthew 24. The ditty has been adapted slightly.

<sup>189</sup> Bruner, *ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> This phrase is not in the Greek text but is interpretive, as anyone living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century would recognize that reason to flee was associated with the tactics of Roman soldiers putting down a rebellion.

winter cold. Even the peaceful rhythms of Sabbath will not protect people from those days of destruction, which will be as bad as bad can get.

“But The Truth is good and so the days will be cut short for the sake of those whom They have chosen. During those days, many will cling to false hope. Seeking someone who can save them, people will say, ‘Here is Messiah!’ and, ‘I am Messiah—follow me!’ Don’t believe them, don’t trust them, and certainly do not follow them, even if they seem to have great power and words that lure you with promises that cannot be kept. Remember my words: The Truth has chosen you.

“So if someone promises the Messiah is just around the corner or just over the hill, don’t be fooled. Like a lightning strike is the revelation of the Son of Humanity—from east to west the sky is lit. You won’t have to play hide-and-seek, for it will be plain for all to see and you’ll know it.

“Joel, the truth-teller from ages past, used some colorful language to describe those days:<sup>191</sup>

The sun grows faint and the moon grows dark.  
Stars fall and the heavens shake.  
Boom! Shakalaka! Boom!

“Joel’s meaning is clear: the Son of Humanity’s unveiling is momentous—a single moment that lasts an eternity. All peoples lament its vision, for they recognize the depravity of humanity when they see the glory of The Truth’s perfection. And The Truth will send celestial messengers on the four winds to the four corners of the earth, and with a trumpet blast gather those whom They have chosen from ocean to ocean and throughout every land.<sup>192</sup>

“Learn the lesson of the fig tree: when its twigs begin to leaf and sprout you know that summer is near. And just like the fig tree, so will be the coming of Jerusalem’s destruction. I’m telling you truth: some of you here will live to see this happen. Heaven and earth may disappear and my words will remain—steadfast and true.”

*We often read Scripture through a distorted lens,  
hearing its strange dialect with  
comfortable, first-world ears and, therefore,  
we miss text and mislead people.*

*But to first-century ears conceived in nationalism,  
gestated in militarism, borne upon messianism,  
“Look, there he is!” and, “I am he!”—  
seemed common refrains for nigh two centuries.<sup>193</sup>*

*Difficult today to hear,  
impossible today to comprehend fully,  
how literal the command, “Leave!”*

*Blessed are those who,  
upon hearing this strange dialect,  
comprehend that also literal is the assurance:*

*“The Truth has chosen you.”*

Lord, make us instruments of your choosing,  
chosen for salvation and for service,  
chosen to be saved from the world’s brokenness,  
chosen to be saved for The Truth’s rescue mission,  
chosen to be instruments of The Truth’s *shalom*.  
O Divine Master, may we not so much seek  
to revel in being chosen as to hear its trumpet call,  
to act special as to feel its special burden,  
to see it as the end but as the new beginning.  
For the world still runs on nationalism,  
its fuel more militarism and messianism,  
than grace, mercy, and peace.

*Go into the world..* Notice power dynamics. Observe the ebb-and-flow of who gets to speak (and who doesn’t). Observe when your ideas and voice are silenced—when and by whom? Observe when you silence others ideas and voice—with intent or by habit? Notice. Pray. Act.

<sup>191</sup> c.f. Joel 2:10-11.

<sup>192</sup> Some scholars see this paragraph as a “double interpretation,” in which both Jerusalem’s destruction and the end of time are the referents, which makes an interpretive paraphrase difficult. The author appreciates your understanding 😊

<sup>193</sup> Historians note the years from 60 BCE to 135 CE were pocked with periodic rebellions, which often led to mass crucifixion as in

the case of Judas the Galilean around the time of Jesus’ birth, limited crucifixions as in the case of Jesus, and twice led to the destruction of Jerusalem, in 70 and 135 CE. Jesus seems to be reading the political climate as heading toward collapse, which many take as a supernatural sign but may also be interpreted as being astute.

**Matthew 24:36-41**

Jesus then returned to teaching about the time of fulfillment when the rule of sovereign love will be made whole and complete. “No one knows when the fulfillment will come and The Truth’s sovereign love will be made whole and complete—not me, not the celestial messengers, only The Truth knows—so don’t ask about it and don’t fret.

“The arrival of the Son of Humanity will be like the days when Noah lived. People were going about their lives: eating and drinking, marrying and making babies, you know what it’s like. And then the rains came, Noah entered the ark, and the flood took everyone away. When the fulfillment comes, people will be working at home and away, standing side-by-side—one will be received and the other sent away.”

*If not when Jesus will return and when will it happen?  
What should I ask?*

*Ask how I, a white man,  
can support my black siblings.*

*Ask how I can move beyond not being racist  
to being anti-racism.*

*Ask about the next, best step for police reform.  
Ask about the deeper meanings of justice.*

*And don’t worry so much about when Jesus returns  
for asking (and acting on) these questions*

*will make me ready for Jesus’ return  
whenever it happens.*

Lord, make me an instrument  
of asking right questions,

about justice, asked of those hurt by injustice,  
about prayer, so I can love my neighbor in spirit,  
about practices, so I can love my neighbor in flesh.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to worry about times and dates as neighbors in need,  
to fret myself with incidentals as to focus on loving,  
to eat, drink and be merry  
as to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly.<sup>194</sup>

For those who love to play the game of  
“Guess When Jesus Will Come,”  
forget Jesus is here already through Divine Spirit.

**Matthew 24:42-51**

Jesus continued teaching about the fulfillment, when the rule of Sovereign love will be made whole and complete, “Again I say, don’t ask about the time when the fulfillment will come—don’t ask and don’t fret, but do be aware. The watch you keep should be for the inner symptoms of soul health and outer signs of ethical well-being; *shalom* is the sign you should look for, and if you don’t see it, then it’s time to get your house in good order. It’s like this: if the homeowners knew when their house was to be robbed, they would have been prepared and stayed home to protect it. In the same way, be prepared for the Son of Humanity’s revelation by keeping your house in good order, your inward spirit embracing outward living, personal integrity searching for communal good, always living into the person Abba created you to become.

“Who is faithful? Who is wise? Which servant does the Master place in charge of the household? The servant always fulfilling the Master’s will, always advancing the Master’s purpose. When the Master returns to the house, the house is in good order and *shalom* prevails.

“But suppose for a moment the servant is wicked—not caring, never serving, saying, ‘I’ll do what I want! It’s a free country! No one can tell me I can’t endanger others! You certainly don’t have the right to tell me how to answer to the Master!’ What will the Master do when she returns and surprises the wicked servant with her visit? Let me let you in on a little secret: it won’t be pretty. There will be much whining and complaining and self-justifying arguments, but it won’t matter for the Master had already warned the wicked servant about what to expect. Then there will be weeping and remorse and true lament.”

*We got married sooner because we were “waiting.”  
We waited two years to have our first child.  
We waited nine months for the blessed day.  
We waited 16 hours for our daughter’s delivery.*

<sup>194</sup> c.f. Micah 6:8.

*As the saying goes,  
"Good things come to those who wait."*

*What about those still waiting  
for good news from the doctor?  
for the phone call that will never come?  
for The Truth to take them home?*

*What about those still  
waiting, longing, lamenting justice denied?  
Says the Psalmist, "How long, O Lord?  
"Will you forsake me forever?"*

*Living in a pregnant world,  
we know not when we will be delivered,  
we know not how we will be delivered,  
we know only that we will be delivered.*

*Living in a world yet to be delivered,  
we know by whom deliverance will come,  
we know it is preferable to be prepared,  
for when "When and How?" become "Here and Now!"*

*I can't wait!*

Lord, make us instruments of preparation,  
preparing by digging into the Word,  
preparing through patience in prayer,  
preparing through holy habits of compassion,  
preparing through prophetic calls of justice,  
preparing through the crucible of community,  
with all its warts and boogers.  
O Divine Master, may we not so much seek  
the mystic's vision as the disciples' journey,  
the fast track to holiness as the pilgrim's path,  
wishing and dreams as your Cross and servanthood.  
For as much as I would like  
to be changed "in the twinkling of an eye,"  
I know that will not come  
until the last trumpet sounds.<sup>195</sup>  
Until then, I accept there is no other way  
to be happy in Jesus  
than to trust and obey.

*Go into the world...* Notice how you prepare for things. Is it your habit to jump right in or to ponder and plan? How does your preparation differ at home, work or church, with family, friends or The Truth? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 25:1-13**

Jesus continued teaching on what it means to prepare for the time when the rule of sovereign love is made whole and complete. "Imagine ten truck drivers tasked with carrying emergency food and medical supplies to a city devastated by a hurricane. Five drivers were prepared and five weren't. The unprepared drivers arrived at the warehouse with only a quarter tank of gas, thinking there would be plenty of time to fill up. The prepared drivers arrived with gas tanks already full. As day turned to night, all the drivers sat around playing card games with one another, waiting for the storm to pass. The storm finally passed in the middle of the night, and it was time to deliver the emergency relief. The prepared drivers drove immediately to the devastated area and off-loaded their support. The unprepared drivers drove to the gas station, but the pumps were empty and they couldn't deliver the goods. By the time the unprepared drivers were able to deliver their emergency relief, it was no longer needed.

They said to the people, 'Here's your stuff!'

"And the people said, 'Too little, too late. The rescue party's already started.'

"Well, let us into the party, please. We want to celebrate, too.'

"But the town's mayor said, 'Sorry! The doors are locked, and the key has been lost.'

"I tell you, be aware and be prepared, for you do not know the day, you do not know the hour, when the fulfillment will come and sovereign love will be made whole and complete."

*Days turn to weeks to months to years...  
I'm more concerned about my Zoom meeting.  
Years turn to decades to centuries to millennia...  
I can't get my my kids to do their homework.*

*Longing for sovereign love is fine...  
no complaints here...  
sounds like a good time...  
I'm stuck in traffic and late to choir practice.*

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<sup>195</sup> c.f. 1 Corinthians 15:52.

*I wonder what “Always be prepared” means?<sup>2</sup>  
I wish being a blessing was less complicated.  
I want simply to live my life for Jesus.  
Is that too much to ask?<sup>2</sup>*

Lord, make me an instrument prepared to play,  
the sweet melodies of grace,  
the somber tunes of lament,  
the bright sounds of mercy,  
the dark tones of longing,  
my part in the symphony of your peace..  
O Divine Master, may I not so much  
worry about today as prepare for tomorrow,  
live in the moment as live toward eternity’s horizon,  
eat, drink and be merry  
as to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly.<sup>196</sup>  
For the future is far off and history a long time ago,  
yet both are the moment for justice and joy,  
and will become the day of your return.

*Go into the world...* Notice how prepared you are to greet Jesus. How are you becoming the beloved that Jesus sees? How have you growing more fully into the image of Jesus? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 25:14-30**

Jesus continued teaching on the time of fulfillment and what it means to be preparing to receive it. “Imagine a business tycoon who entrusted her employees with wealth, each according to their skill level and abilities. To one she entrusted humongous resources of money, goods, and operational control. To another she entrusted large resources of money and goods. To a third she entrusted significant resources of money. She then returned to her corporate offices.

“The employee who had been entrusted with humongous resources went straight to work: wheeling and dealing, building networks of connection, cohesion, and collaboration. His team’s results were tremendous, the return on investment substantial.

“The employee who had been entrusted with large resources wandered a bit but finally figured out something to do. It took a while, but she was finally able to put a team together that worked, and their results were above the market average.

“The employee who had been entrusted with significant resources did not trust himself, nor those around him. He was afraid to act and even more afraid to ask for help. He never was able to put a team together, and he kept the money entrusted to him in a money market account so at least it wasn’t lost.

“After several quarters and even an annual reporting period had passed, the tycoon returned to review her employees. The employee with humongous resources showed how a new division of the corporation had spun off from his efforts. ‘Well done!’ the tycoon responded. ‘You show character and creativity worthy of my trust. I am so happy with you. You will be one of my top managers!’

“The employee with large resources was able to show the solid, above market valuation of her efforts. Again, the tycoon responded, ‘Well done! You show consistency and care worthy of my trust. I am happy with you also. You will be one of my key managers.’

“Finally, the employee who had received significant resources came and said, ‘Madame CEO, I know your reputation. You expect great things from people, so I was afraid. I kept your money safe and sound in a money market though, so I wouldn’t lose it. Here’s a check for you—it’s all there.’

“The tycoon responded, ‘You worthless worm! You know I am tough and expect great things. You know I value progress and moving forward in strategic directions, and you hide my money away in a do-nothing money market? Unbelievable!’

“Take the money given to this worm and give it to my top lieutenant: more resources for the one who has proven most responsible. As for this ‘Fraidy-Cat’ here, show him the door. The joy of working to build something important, together with people who share the same vision, will always be lost on such as these.”

*Entrusted  
to me  
Sacred Calling  
for you.*

*In-trusted  
within me  
Gifts and Abilities  
for community.*

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<sup>196</sup> c.f. Luke 12:19 and Micah 6:8.

*Trusted-In  
through me  
Gospel Hope  
for humanity.*

Lord, make me a trusted and trustworthy vessel,  
whom others find dependable,  
seeking to serve,  
using the gifts you bestowed,  
channeling the abilities my mentors passed down,  
nurturing the skills I have learned.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to work for my own benefit as for others' blessing,  
to make money as to make meaning,  
to serve self as to serve the common good.

For time, talents, and treasure are your gifts to us,  
intended to be shared as a calling of holy communion.

*Go into the world...* Notice and name your talents. Not in the biblical sense of "money" but in the modern sense of "What are my gifts?" Don't underestimate your gifts! Thank The Truth for you! Look for the opportunity to bless others with them. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 25:31-48**

Jesus finished his teaching on the time of fulfillment and what it means to live as those who fully embrace the rule of The Truth's sovereign love, so folks will be prepared when it is revealed whole and complete. "The Son of Humanity's arrival will be glorious, and he will not arrive alone but be companion of a royal host of The Truth's messengers. And he will reign, dividing nations and people and hearts, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"The glorious One will say to the sheep, 'Come, for you are blessed by Abba, who gives you an inheritance as sons and daughters, to live as The Truth's beloved community. Imma has been preparing you for this from the very foundations of time. I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a foreigner, unknown to you, and you treated me like family. I was naked and you gave me clothes. I was sick and you

cared for me with heart and hands. I was in prison, and you continued to embrace me as a brother.'

"And the sheep will respond, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty and provide for your needs? When did we see you naked or like a foreigner and give you dignity? When did we see you sick or in prison and give you the gift of human presence?'

"And the glorious One will answer, 'I am speaking truth upon truth: anything and everything you did for the least, the last, and the lost, you did to me, for I am in them and they are in me.'

"Then the glorious One will say to the goats, 'Leave my presence! You are cursed, and in the consuming fires you shall be devoured, along with the Adversary and those who follow him. I was hungry, and you left my belly empty. I was thirsty, and you left my mouth parched. I was a foreigner to you but known to The Truth, and you decided your knowledge was more significant. I was naked, and you let me freeze and remain humiliated. I was sick, and you denied me your presence and your care. I was in prison, and you denied me human dignity.'

"The goats will respond, 'Lord, when did we see you having a bad day and not offer thoughts and prayers?'

"The glorious One will answer, 'Truth upon truth to you as well: as you ignored the least so you turned your back on me. The compassion you withheld from the last was withheld from your Christ! I stood before you as the lost and you cared not to inquire even my name.'

"The goats, who cared not about right relationships or beloved community, will travel to The Truth's consuming fires, never again to live or to love, and the sheep, who sought right relationships and found them, who searched for beloved community and became it, will embrace and be embraced by life made whole and complete."

*Martin Buber, the great rabbi, whispers in my ear,<sup>197</sup>*

*"See the glory in others."*

*"Relate to them as beloved."*

*"The imago dei that is in you is also in them."*

*I to Thou, Thou to I, together embraced in love.*

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<sup>197</sup> Buber is author of *I and Thou* and lived from 1878-1965. Buber's essential message was the ethical call to treat others according to their God-gifted dignity as "I-thou," rather than

treating them as objects to be manipulated as "I-it." The following quotes are the substance of Buber's thought but not quotations. Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*. (Scribner: New York, 2010).

*Martin Buber warns my other ear,  
“Do not pretend they are not as you.”  
“Do not think they exist for your folly.”  
“Do not imagine your humanity diverges, is different.”  
Not I to It but I to Thou.*

*I to Thou, O Truth.  
I to Thou, my brother.  
I to Thou, my sister.  
I to Thou, Creation.  
I to Thou, you in the mirror.*

Lord, make me an instrument of seeing  
the blessedness of others,  
the dignity of all,  
the woundedness that hides humanity,  
from others and themselves,  
the Christ who stands before me,  
naked as a Jaybird.  
O Divine Master, may I seek  
to see inequities and not look away,  
to name injustices and not be silent,  
to hear lament and not become deaf.

For Christ is found in neighbor and stranger,  
even enemy,  
and even more in least and last and lost,  
so if I want to meet Jesus face-to-face,  
all I have to do is look with the eyes of my heart.

*Go into the world...* Notice Jesus. Look for Jesus in others, especially the least, last and lost. Look for Jesus within you. When does Jesus most express himself in your life and through your living? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 26:1-5**

After Jesus finished teaching his disciplined followers how to prepare for the fulfillment of time when the rule of The Truth's sovereign love will be made whole and complete, he said to them, "You know the Passover is two days away. You also know, at some level, though you are loathe to admit it, the Son of Humanity will be given to the authorities to be mistreated and even tortured, and then to die by crucifixion."

Meanwhile, the Rulers and Old Ones congregated in the luxurious confines of Caiaphas the High Ruler,

whom some called the Chief Priest. They conspired together how to manipulate the system, to use loopholes in either Torah or custom to arrest Jesus. They plotted how to apprehend him secretly, at night when no one would see. They planned to murder him. "But we can't do it on the day of the feast," they decided, "because the people revere him too much and there will be rioting in the streets."

*The Truth forbid there be rioting in the streets!  
Clear out Lafayette Square!  
Tear gas! Rubber bullets! Arrests!  
There shall be order amidst this peaceful protest!*

*The Rule of Law or the Law of Rule?*

*Authorities mirroring Powers and Principalities.<sup>198</sup>  
Nothing new to see here.  
Caiaphas, too, knew the power of a photo op.  
Jesus had to die,  
visuals made it look justified.*

*It was all good.*

Lord, make me an instrument of the resistance,  
through protest and prayer,  
through words and action,  
for today and tomorrow,  
until the arc of history bends enough  
to finally break the dam  
and let justice roll down like a river.<sup>199</sup>

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to remain comfortable as to allow a holy discomfort  
to compel me toward action  
that refuses to adjust, once again, "back to normal."  
For powerful people still plot and plan,  
still arrest and abuse,  
still murder the innocent.

*Go into the world...* Notice how you respond when you see images or hear rhetoric that horrifies you, do you lash out, shut down or respond? How does The Truth nudge your personal discomfort toward becoming a holy discomfort? Notice. Pray. Act.

<sup>198</sup> c.f. Ephesians 6:12.

<sup>199</sup> c.f. Amos 5:24.

## Matthew 26:6-13

While Jesus was in Bethany, a couple of miles away from Jerusalem, he abided in the home of Simon the Leper. A woman present among all the male disciplined followers (which was unheard of in the day's culture), approached Jesus. The woman initiated Jesus' last days, his passion, by anointing him, pouring a very expensive perfume upon his head as he was reclining at the dinner table.

The disciplined followers were furious! "What are you doing?" they shouted, incredulously. "Waste! Waste! Why not sell this perfume? Do you know how much cash we could have made? Do you know how many poor people we could have fed?"

Jesus rebuked them, "Why are you harassing her? Don't harass this woman, especially when she has done something beautiful for me. We live amidst a broken world; thus, the work that Deuteronomy commands will remain: "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore, I command you to be open-handed toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land."<sup>200</sup> While helping the poor will be forever, shadows lengthen on my presence with you. In anointing my head with this perfume, she has prepared me for death. Here's some truth for you: anywhere and everywhere the Story of my life is told, even to the four corners of the earth, her actions will be part of my story, so all will remember her."

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This poem is dedicated to Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza who famously highlighted the irony of the Gospel's words, "all remember her," yet leaving absent her name, c.f. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, (Herder & Herder: New York, 1994).

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*Why don't we remember your name?  
Are you an archetype of all women?  
Hardly seems appropriate.  
Are you unique, with thoughts and feelings,  
a history of your own?*

*Did you go on to build a life with someone,  
perhaps have a family?  
Did you love deeper, with greater heart  
because you met Jesus?*

*Was the perfume you poured  
your dowry for your future wedding?  
Was it used in a profession  
that excluded you from polite society?<sup>201</sup>*

*What did it cost you to  
pour such expensive perfume on Jesus' head?  
Did you know you prepared him for his death?  
What is "The Rest of the Story," your story?*

*And why don't we know your name?*

Lord, make us vessels of honor,  
ready to honor Jesus,  
willing to honor the poor who are with us,  
able to honor the challenge always before us,  
ready to honor women,  
willing to honor the woman with us,  
able to honor women whose names are forgotten.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to work without end as to know when to pause,  
to honor that which is beautiful,  
as to honor the Name above all names.  
For better must give way to best,  
and good give way to great,  
and great give way to grace,  
which comes as we honor Jesus.

*Go into the world...* Notice to whom you give honor. How do you convey honor? How do you prioritize the giving of honor? How do you honor those who are often overlooked in our society? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 26:14-16

One of the disciplined followers, a part of Jesus' inner circle, named Judas Iscariot, searched for and sought out the Rulers. He asked them, "What will you give me if I betray my master?" They laid the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver on a table. Judas clutched the silver.

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<sup>200</sup> c.f. Deuteronomy 15:11.

<sup>201</sup> Prostitutes in the 1<sup>st</sup> century would use perfume to obscure any bodily odors created while performing their job.

Beginning from that moment, Judas searched for and sought an opportunity to betray Jesus.

*What's in a name?*

*Judas' name may refer to a place—Judas of Kerioth, or a profession—"The Knife Men," ancient rebels all.<sup>202</sup>*

*Does it matter when it has become a synonym for traitor, turncoat, betrayer?*

*Mesmerized...*

*by desire the husband and wife look across the room. Only it is not his wife and not her husband.*

*by rhetoric, people wait to vote only to find, "I will do for you," becoming, "You must do for me."*

*by the promise of love, sinners come forward. Only to be shocked a cross awaits them.*

*Am I the traitor, the turncoat, the betrayer?*

Lord, make me an instrument of fidelity,  
faithful in deeds as well as in name,  
faithful to the words of Jesus,  
faithful to the Way of Jesus,  
faithful to the person of Jesus.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be right as to be truthful,

to express core values through consistent actions,  
as to devote my life to the One who gave his life.

For to betray another is ultimately to betray oneself,  
to lose the deepest truth about one's identity,  
to become the one we have long feared.

*Go into the world...* Notice your commitments. To whom and to what have you pledged yourself? Name the relationships that form your foundation in life. Name values that are as close as your breath, that losing which would mean you are not yourself. Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 26:17-30

On the first day of the seven-day festival of Passover, also known as the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciplined followers asked Jesus, "Where should we prepare to celebrate the Passover?" Now the Passover celebrated The Truth's deliverance of the Jews from Egypt when, during the tenth plague that They sent upon the Egyptians, the angel of death passed over all the Israelites' houses whose doorframes had the blood of a lamb sprinkled upon them, thus sparing the Israelites from the plague.

Jesus told the disciplined followers, "Go into Jerusalem to the man to whom I send you. Tell him, 'The Rabbi says his time is close to being fulfilled and desires to celebrate the Passover at your house.'" The disciplined followers obeyed and prepared the Passover feast.

As twilight left and darkness descended, Jesus was surrounded by the disciplined followers at the Passover table. In the midst of the feast, Jesus said, "I tell you from the depths of my heart: one of you will betray me."

The Disciplined followers were sad and upset, deeply in denial: how could this be?! Then the Disciplined followers were afraid: did Jesus know their inner thoughts and feelings better than they knew themselves? "Surely it won't be me?" they all asked.

Jesus answered, "One who has shared this bowl with me will betray me, even one whose hand has dipped with my own. The Son of Humanity will die as foretold in Scripture, and sorrow to the soul of the one by whom he is betrayed. Better that he had not been born."

Judas then asked, "Surely it won't be me, Rabbi?"  
Jesus replied, "As you have said."

In the midst of the feast, according to the custom of the Passover, Jesus held the unleavened bread and gave thanks for it. Breaking from Passover custom, Jesus broke the unleavened bread while saying to his Disciplined followers, "Take this bread and eat it, for this is my body." Then he took the cup after supper, which was the third of four ritual cups in the Passover feast; it was known as the Cup of Redemption. After Jesus had given thanks for the Cup of Redemption, he said, "Drink from this cup, all of you. This cup is the holy relationship sealed in my blood, which is poured out for multitudes to forgive sins. I will

murderer, which may be a reference to a first-century movement known as the Sicarii, who advocated for the violent overthrow of Roman rule.

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<sup>202</sup> Scholars debate whether the Greek word *Ischariotes* is a derivation of the Hebrew town of *Isbkerioth*, meaning Judas of Kerioth, or a derivation of the Latin word *sicarius*, meaning

withhold sharing such joy as this cup represents until the Day of Fulfillment when the rule of sovereign love is made whole and complete.” And as was the custom, the Passover feast concluded with Jesus and his disciplined followers singing a hymn of praise, and they then walked into the night to the Mount of Olives.

*Shadows lengthened upon Jesus.  
His disciplined followers could not see them,  
but the shadows came, nonetheless.*

*His disciplined followers felt the shadows, however--  
a Sadness they could not name  
but which knew their names too well.*

*And, as well, the Strangeness:  
“This is my body.” “This is my blood.”  
“I will not drink of the vine again until...”*

*When will Strangeness become normal?  
When will Sadness depart?  
This is the joyful feast?*

Lord, make me an instrument of comfort  
amidst ambivalence,  
amidst confusion,  
amidst surprising turn of events  
I could not imagine and do not want.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to control circumstances  
as to confront them with courage,  
to guard against all unforeseen events  
as to trust you are with me in the midst of them,  
to fathom all your mysteries  
as to journey ever deeper into your love.  
For the human journey is full of surprises  
and, contrary to what I like to think,  
I don't yet have it all figured out (and never will),  
so help me let go and let you lead me into wisdom  
only revealed as I walk this life with you.

*Go into the world... Notice your emotions—attend to them  
as cherished companions. Whether joyful or sorrowing,  
accept what you feel. Now notice how others seem to feel.  
Accept them, too, where they are. Notice. Pray. Act.*

## Matthew 26:31-35

While walking to the Mount of Olives, Jesus told his disciplined followers, “All will fall tonight. You will all falter, all fall, just as the Scriptures say, ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.’<sup>203</sup> Fear not! After I have defeated death, I will go before you to Galilee.”

“Not me!” boasted Peter. “I will never falter; I will never fall.”

“Do you want some truth, Peter? Here it is: Tonight, you will falter. Yes, I say, this very night you will fall. In fact, before the rooster crows once you will disown me thrice, which is saying something because roosters crow all the time, Peter. All. The. Time.”

But Peter denied it. “Not me! Even if everyone else falls, I will stand. I am the exception.” And each of the disciplined followers, one by one by one, all said the same as Peter. All claimed to be the exception, and all denied they would fall.

*Sin is what other people do.*

*Betrayal of sacred and secular, my neighbor's problem.  
Fallen humanity a symptom of “those not like me.”*

*Much easier to look out the window at others' sin  
than look in the mirror at myself.*

*Much easier to accuse my neighbor—  
“Someone egged my window!”*

*Much easier to ignore the pimple I see—  
“Damn, cheap mirror!”*

*Much easier to blame “those people” than accept  
responsibility that I, too, would have denied Jesus.*

*And, too often, continue to deny him.*

Lord, make me a repentant vessel,  
honest about faults and fractures,  
open to naming where I need to be more like Jesus,  
accountable to those courageous enough to call B.S.,  
knowing that I am on a sacred journey,  
and you are my destination.

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<sup>203</sup> c.f. Zechariah 13:7.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to deny my sin as to name it,  
to deceive myself  
as to accept I must be transformed,  
to declare "Mission Accomplished"  
as to trust your mission never ends.

For the journey is toward being made holy,  
to be nurtured into the image and likeness of Jesus,  
even if it takes a lifetime.

*Go into the world...* Notice those things you deny. Do you deny your feelings? Deny your intentions? What tempts you to self-justify when you have hurt someone? How do you respond when someone "speaks the truth in love" to you? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 26:36-46

Jesus led his disciplined followers to a garden of olive trees called Gethsemane. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him. He said to them, "Sit. Wait. Be still while I go away to pray. My spirit is flooded with grief, anguish slays my soul. Abide with me. Watch with me."

Walking a little way more, Jesus collapsed to the ground, "O Truth!" he pleaded. "Is it possible? Could this cup be lifted from me?" Jesus continued in prayer, in contemplation upon the enormity of what lay before him. Jesus continued to pray, "Yet not as I desire but as you desire, not my wanting but your will be fulfilled."

Jesus ended his prayer and returned to Peter, James, and John. He found them sleeping! Jesus erupted, "One hour! That's all I needed from you! Could you not watch with me for one hour? Beware for yourselves. Be aware the Accuser seeks you, for it knows your spirits may be willing, but your flesh is weak."

Jesus walked away a second time and prayed, "O Truth, lift this cup from me; take it from my hand. Yet if you will not, I will drink it that your purpose be accomplished."

When Jesus returned to Peter, James, and John, he once again found them sleeping, as it was late and their eyes heavy. Jesus let them be and once again walked away to pray a third time. Once again he prayed, "O Truth,

please, take it, take the cup from me. Yet not my desires but your determination be made whole and complete."

Jesus then returned to all the disciplined followers, where he found them asleep. "Get up, Sleepy Heads! The *kairos* has come, the key moment is at hand, when shadows fall and light is subsumed in darkness; when life turns toward death. My *kairos* is here, when the Son of Humanity falls into the hands of those who will use and abuse, torture and kill him. Rise! My betrayer approaches."

*"O, my people!"*

*We were gathered upon the chancel in a chapel.*

*"OOO, myyy peo-ple!"*

*A service of lament for the victims of genocide.<sup>204</sup>*

*"OOOOO, myyy peeeeo-plllle!"*

*Raw, visceral lament such as I had never heard.*

*"O my God! My God!"*

*Months before, our colleague had come to study.*

*Now there was no way to return.*

*"Father! Father! Take me!"*

*He could not return home.*

*He did not know if his wife or children lived.*

*And so he prayed.*

*And as he cried out,*

*we stayed awake.*

Lord, make me a vessel for sorrow,  
holding space for others' pain,  
a container where others vomit their suffering,  
a safe place where lament is honored,  
a presence where healing is found.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to pray as to pray deeply,  
to say words as to speak profound truth,  
to grieve as to lament.

For lament is an act of trust,  
public confession of the goodness of The Truth,  
holding space for The Truth to make good.

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<sup>204</sup> This experience could have been any number of historical events. It happened to be a response to the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

*Go into the world...* Notice pain in others and yourself. How willing are you to face it, to confront and engage it? How tempted to run from it or hide it away in places you believe it won't be able to find you? Notice. Pray. Act.

### Matthew 26:47-56

While Jesus was speaking, Judas was betraying—indeed, one of the disciplined followers arrived to betray his Master. Accompanying Judas was a gaggle of goons with swords and clubs. These hooligans were sent by the Rulers and Old Ones. Judas, the betrayer, had arranged a signal for the goons, who had no beef with Jesus; indeed, did not even know him. “The one I kiss on the hand is the one to arrest.”<sup>205</sup> Walking directly to Jesus, Judas faked innocence, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

Jesus saw through Judas' ruse, “Fulfill your purpose, my friend.” The goons then stepped forward, seized and arrested Jesus. One of the disciplined followers sprung to Jesus' defense, reaching for his sword and drawing it out. He struck the assistant to the Head Ruler and sliced off his ear. “Peace!” Jesus bellowed at his disciplined followers, “Be still! All who live by the sword shall die by the sword. Do you not know? Can you not imagine? One word from me and The Truth will send twelve legions of celestial messengers, each one of whom is more warrior than all gathered here against me. This is the divine necessity.”<sup>206</sup>

Jesus spoke to the assembled goons and those who directed them, “Do you truly believe me to be leading an uprising? My servant had a sword, yes, but we are no real threat. I, a man of peace, sat in the shadow of the Temple day by day, and you did nothing. I taught the people the rule of sovereign love and for this you arrest me, and at night, in secret. You think you have gained the upper hand but know this: all this was foretold by the truth-tellers from ages past. Nothing unexpected here.”

By then, Jesus' disciplined followers had deserted him. Though Judas had betrayed Jesus, all the disciplined followers deserted their rabbi, their master. And so Jesus was alone.

“My friend.”

*I am not sure I can be like Jesus here.*

“My friend.”

*I know what betrayal feels like.*

“My friend.”

*Anger that burns.*

“My friend.”

*Disorientation, feeling unstable, even crazy.*

“My friend.”

*Yet this is what Jesus called Judas.*

“My friend.”

*With whom he walked dusty roads.*

“My friend.”

*With whom he shared love and tears.*

“My friend.”

*With whom he shared wine and laughter, too.*

“My friend.”

*I want to be like Jesus here.*

“My friend.”

*I want to be able to forgive,*

*my friend.*

Lord, make me a leaky vessel,  
with a hole in the bottom from which drains  
anger, bitterness, and hurt,  
woundedness and ruminating thoughts,  
memories too painful to bear.  
O Divine Master, may I seek to learn  
that forgiving is a marathon not a moment,  
begins as a spark in the heart yet must be nurtured,  
and sometimes a lifetime is not long enough.  
For some wounds are too deep,  
some burdens too heavy to carry,  
and we find our only respite  
when you call us  
“My friend.”

*Go into the world...* Notice your wounds and be gentle with yourself. Can you name those whom you feel have betrayed you? Where are you on the journey of forgiveness? Can you release, even a wee bit, the hold the betrayal has on you? Notice. Pray. Act.

<sup>205</sup> It was customary of a disciple to kiss his rabbi on the hand in a manner similar to the way a Roman Catholic might kiss the Pope's ring. Two rabbis, of equivalent social rank in 1<sup>st</sup> century culture, would kiss each other on the cheek, similar to those of Italian or French heritage.

<sup>206</sup> The Greek word *dei* translates as “must” and has the connotation of divine necessity. If texting this word to their teenager, an anxious parent might capitalize—MUST BE HOME BY TEN! Only the affect of *dei* is more forceful for it is The Truth's necessity, not just a parent's.

## Matthew 26:57-68

The goons who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the Head Ruler. They assembled in the council hall where the Rulers held court, conducted formal debates and made their decisions. Peter followed them, at a distance so as not to be seen, and perched in the courtyard. Peter even sat next to the guards as if he were a curious bystander wanting to see the proceedings.

The Rulers and the whole Council were seeking deceit and searching for deceptions. They wanted Jesus dead. Regardless of how hard they tried, the Rulers could not find what they needed, even though many came forward as false witnesses to appease the Rulers. Finally, two witnesses agreed with one another, as required in Torah.<sup>207</sup> The two witnesses leveled the accusation: “This guy (they didn’t even know Jesus’ name), said, ‘I can blow up the Temple and build it again—easy-peasy—three days tops.’”

Caiaphas confronted Jesus, “Answer them! What do you say? How do you answer these *two witnesses*?” Jesus remained silent, as the truth-teller Isaiah from ages past had foretold.<sup>208</sup> Caiaphas was incensed: “Speak! Declare yourself! Under oath and by the name of The Truth: Tell us if you are the Anointed, the Beloved, The Truth’s Son.”

“You said it,” replied Jesus. “What I will say to you and to all assembled here is this: the witness I bear comes from the Psalmist and from Daniel, the truth-teller from ages past:

The Son of Humanity sits in the place of authority; the seat prepared for him by The Truth.<sup>209</sup> Look up! Search the heavens, and you will see this one who comes from Abba’s throne.”<sup>210</sup>

Caiaphas tore his shirt as a sign of grief because of what his ears had heard Jesus say, for Caiaphas considered the words blasphemous. “Blasphemy!” he accused Jesus to his colleagues. “We need no more witnesses.”

“This man deserves death!” responded the Rulers and Old Ones, as they fell on Jesus in a mob. They spat in Jesus’ face, pummeled him with their fists and ridiculed him, asking, “Tell us, O Wise and Anointed One, who hit you?”

*The mob is mindless,  
driven by feelings so raw reason can’t breathe,  
convinced their truth is fact.*

*Have we become a mob society?  
Jesus remains silent,  
allowing our madness to descend.*

*How deep do you suppose we’ll go?*

Lord, make me an instrument of silence,  
knowing when not to speak,  
knowing when only listening will heal,  
accepting my experiences don’t define all reality,  
accepting others have walked a different path,  
seeking to find a common bond,  
seeking to discover a shared humanity.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to speak first as to listen first, last and always,  
to bear witness as to speak only what I have seen,  
to hate those who oppose me  
as to hold space for their fear.  
For as you stood before your accusers  
like a sheep before her shearer,  
you took the path that would lead to our redemption,  
powerful message masquerading as silence.

*Go into the world...* Notice how much you speak. Do you talk over or interrupt (often a man’s problem)? Do you remain silent when your voice needs to be heard (often a woman’s problem)? And whether you speak or remain silent, is it to serve your need or the well-being of others? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 26:69-75

Peter was sitting in the courtyard outside the council hall where the Rulers and Old Ones were accusing Jesus. A servant girl said to Peter, “You were with this Jesus of Nazareth who is being accused.”

“I don’t know anything about him!” Peter proclaimed, as he quickly walked away, settling farther away under an arch.

<sup>207</sup> c.f. Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15.

<sup>208</sup> c.f. Isaiah 53:7.

<sup>209</sup> c.f. Psalm 110:1.

<sup>210</sup> c.f. Daniel 7:13.

A second servant girl accused Peter, “Yes, you do. You were with this Jesus of Nazareth who is being accused.”

“I don’t know him!” Peter proclaimed loudly. And then proclaimed upon an oath, “I don’t know him, I promise!”

Things settled down a bit, and Peter thought the matter settled. But some others in the courtyard then approached Peter, “Surely you know this Jesus and are probably one of his disciplined followers. Your Galilean accent gives you away, bro.”

Peter began to curse and swear, “Damn it! I tell you, I don’t know Jesus!” In that very moment, a rooster crowed. And Peter, who had just denied Jesus three times, remembered the words Jesus said to him, “Before a rooster crows once, you will disown me thrice.”

Peter ran into the night, bereft and broken, his spirit and soul utterly shattered.

*His pulse quickens, breath getting shallow.  
He has been accused!  
The authorities are near,  
with the power of life and death over people like him.  
If the accusation sticks, it could mean his life!  
Even if false, his life still could be in jeopardy!  
Of course he is afraid!  
Of course he is not at his best!  
Please stop blaming him just for being human!  
Please stop blaming George Floyd for being black!  
What?  
Did you think I was talking about Peter?*

Lord, make me an instrument of affirmation,  
affirming my deepest beliefs,  
my core values,  
speaking truth in love  
in the swirl and chaos of the moment,  
uttering your prophetic call to those not listening,  
willing to be who I am,  
to do what I am called to do.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to hide my beliefs as to live them,  
to hide my values  
as to let them guide my actions,  
to hide my associations

as to profess that I belong to You.

For I am known, and I am loved,  
I did not choose You, but You chose me,  
and even if I disown You, You still claim me.

*Go into the world...* Notice denial. What are those behaviors and beliefs that, when confronted, you have a “hitch in your step” or “catch in your throat,” as if you are about to deny that which is true about you? What people or groups have you disowned? To what extent is your heart at peace about these decisions to disown others? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 27:1-10**

As the next day dawned, all the Rulers and Old Ones schemed and brainstormed around one and only one question: How can Jesus be executed? Because Roman law forbade occupied peoples from having the power of the sword, the Rulers knew they could not execute Jesus themselves on their accusation of blasphemy, so they handed Jesus over to Pilate, the Roman provincial governor, hoping Pilate might execute Jesus for sedition.

When Judas, one of the disciplined followers who had betrayed Jesus, witnessed Jesus being condemned, he was flooded with regret, guilt and sorrow. Judas tried to return the thirty silver pieces he had received for his betrayal, saying, “I broke faith with my friend and am broken. I betrayed innocent blood! Please, at least take back your silver.”

The Rulers and Old Ones laughed at Judas, responding, “What is that to us, friend? Not our money, not anymore. This is your load to carry.”

Judas, overwhelmed with grief, tossed the blood money into the Temple and ran away. In his grief, he hanged himself.

The Rulers grabbed the silver but said, “We must be scrupulous with Torah. We can’t deposit this in our treasury because it is blood money, but we can buy the potter’s field as a place to bury foreigners—dirty money for dirty people.” (To this day the foreigners’ graveyard is called the Field of Blood.) Thus was fulfilled what the truth-tellers from ages past, Zechariah and Jeremiah, spoke,<sup>211</sup>

<sup>211</sup> Original manuscripts only cite Jeremiah, but scholars agree Matthew seems to have drawn primarily from Zechariah but also

Jeremiah, in a rather convoluted bit of proof-texting, c.f. Zechariah 11:12-13, 17, Jeremiah 19:4, 6, 11 and 32:6-15 for one

Thirty pieces of silver,  
for blood to be spilled,  
the price set for a single life,  
and a field for burying many lives,  
all as The Truth commanded.

*Scrupulous with the law, they were:  
managing money well while murdering a man.  
The bean counters among them were pleased.  
Scrupulous with the law, they were:  
keeping their hands utterly clean—no blood here!  
Judas and Pilate? Not so much (but not their problem).*

*Scrupulous with the law, I am:  
following every rule I author.  
And “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” for all the rest.*

Lord, make me an instrument of sorrow,  
sorrowing over my own sin and brokenness,  
sorrowing over a system of sin and brokenness,  
sorrowing over the ways I injure others,  
sorrowing over any time  
I refused to heal when it was within my power,  
sorrowing over all the times  
I could not undo what I have done,  
yet rejoicing that you can.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to fear making a wrong choice  
as to accept I will make many of them,  
to resist choosing  
as to accept the risks inherent in any choice,  
to always choose well  
as to accept sorrow is the price of growth.  
For I wonder, “What if...?”  
What if Judas had not hanged himself?  
What if he had entrusted his sorrow to you?  
What if he had not made an irrevocable choice?

*Go into the world...* Notice your choices. Understand that everything you do is a choice you are making—conscious or unconscious, still a choice. What choices make your heart sing? What choices give heartburn? Where do you want to make different choices? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Matthew 27:11-26

Jesus was forced to stand before Pilate, the Roman governor. “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“You say,” Jesus responded.

The Rulers and Old Ones barraged Jesus with accusations, a cavalcade of charges. Jesus, however, remained silent. Pilate then asked Jesus, “Do you hear what they are saying about you? These are serious charges! What do you say to defend yourself?” Jesus, however, remained silent. Pilate was amazed.

In those days, it was Pilate’s custom to curry favor with the crowds during Passover by releasing a prisoner of the crowd’s choosing. At that time there was a well-known prisoner also named Jesus, who was arrested for sedition, for plotting the violent overthrow of Roman rule. His name was Jesus Barabbas, which translates as Jesus son of Abba.

Pilate sat in an ornate chair, called “the judgement seat,” on a raised platform, elevated above the masses. As he sat in the judgement seat, Pilate shouted over the masses, “Who do you want me to set free: Jesus Barabbas or Jesus the Anointed?” (Pilate, a career politician of some skill, knew Jesus the Anointed had been falsely accused and handed to him for reasons well-known to the Rulers and Old Ones but which he could only suspect, being an outsider to Israelite politics.) While he was sitting upon the judgement seat, Pilate’s wife sent him a message, “Stay clear of this man. I have suffered much in a dream because of him. He is innocent, and innocent blood you will spill.”

Meanwhile, the Rulers and Old Ones had been stirring up the crowd to choose Barabbas over Jesus, to ask that Jesus’ blood be spilled. So when Pilate asked the crowds to choose, the choice had already been made. “Barabbas!” they shouted.

“What do you want me to do with Jesus the Anointed then?” Pilate asked.

“Crucify him!” the masses shouted.

“Why?” Pilate shouted back. “Tell me his crime.”

But the masses were unconcerned about Jesus’ crime. They had been whipped into a frenzy and only their rage spoke: “Crucify! Crucify!! CRUCIFY!!!”

Pilate, skilled politician that he was, recognized a riot was brewing and wanted no part of it.<sup>212</sup> He called to his servant to bring a basin of water. When the servant

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combination of referents from among the several combinations scholars have posited.

<sup>212</sup> This paragraph takes some poetic license with the Greek text and attempts to depict the social and emotional dynamics between an authoritarian leader and the gathering storm of an angry crowd.

returned with a copper basin full of water and a towel, Pilate stood. The masses grew quiet when Pilate stood. It was uncommon for a Roman ruler of the time to leave his judgement seat. In front of the crowd, Pilate dipped his hands into the basin and made an elaborate display of washing his hands. As he dried his hands with the towel, Pilate said to the crowd, "His blood be on your hands."

The masses answered, "We and our children alive today bear this burden."<sup>213</sup> So Pilate released Barabbas but had Jesus beaten and offered up to be crucified.

*Jesus son of Abba or Jesus son of Abba?*

*What kind of Savior do you desire?*

*The Revolutionary or the Prophet?*

*What kind of Lord do you follow?*

*Fists clenched in rage or arms spread in love?*

*What kind of Lord do you serve?*

*Violence seeking power or love seeking reconciliation?*

*What kind of Savior do you proclaim?*

*The one who takes life or the One who give his life?*

*What do you want to do with Jesus son of Abba?*

Lord, make me an instrument of peace,  
creating space for people's rage,  
holding space for their turmoil,  
inviting them into a safe space to vent their lament,  
creating bonds that heal,  
holding as precious each other's hopes and dreams,  
inviting all to live in a love that transforms.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to avoid all crowds as to be my true self in their midst,  
to mimic public opinion as to state my convictions,  
to follow others to violence as to lead them into peace.

For only love transforms,  
and "Love is the only force capable  
of transforming an enemy into a friend."<sup>214</sup>

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Pilate was well aware the crowd outnumbered his Roman guards during a volatile political and religious festival celebrating freedom and liberation from oppressive rule.

<sup>213</sup> There is no easy way to paraphrase this verse. The attempt is made here to limit the damage of centuries of Christian misinterpretation leading to abuse, oppression and Holocaust against Jews by Christians. Modern scholars focus on Matthew's

*Go into the world...* Notice power dynamics. Notice when you pull a "power move" against another. How do you use social, emotional or financial influence to compel or persuade? Notice how it makes you feel when others pull power moves against you. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 27:27-31**

After beating Jesus, Pilate's soldiers dragged him inside the governor's palace. An entire company of soldiers surrounded the one man, Jesus. The soldiers stripped Jesus naked and draped him in the scarlet robe of a ruler. They twisted thorn branches into a crown and forced it down upon his head. They forced a staff into his right hand, the hand of power! They knelt before him in mocking adulation, "Hail! King of the Jews!" They spit upon him, grabbed the staff from his hand and began to beat Jesus with it. After they had mocked Jesus some more, they tore off his robe and forced him back into his own clothes. Then Pilate's soldiers, an entire company, led Jesus away to be crucified.

*Cruelty knows no nationality—  
neither Jew nor Greek,  
neither Israeli nor Palestinian,  
neither citizen nor refugee,  
neither me, nor you, nor any of "them."*

*Cruelty is a condition of all humanity—  
left to our own proclivities,  
left to give vent to our rage,  
left to act without accountability,  
left to serve rulers who care only for power.*

*Cruelty is a manifestation of that power,  
made flesh in the actions of soldiers,  
made incarnate through a malice we wish did not exist,  
made possible through rulers' malevolence,  
borne in the flesh of One whose rule is love.*

focus, which is to comment on the 1<sup>st</sup> century Israelites whose choice of the revolutionary over the sage led to the Jewish revolts of 66-70 B.C.E. This verse is not an indictment against all Jews for all times!

<sup>214</sup> Quote attributed to Martin Luther King, Jr. Citation and circumstance for the quote uncertain.

Lord, make me a mirror of Jesus' loving,  
ready to receive, as he did, insults and worse,  
willing to wear, as he did, the robes of ridicule,  
able to persevere, as he did, when surrounded,  
ready to stand, as he did, before evil,  
willing to absorb, as he did, the hate of others,  
able to suffer, as he did, with a redemptive suffering.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to live without bumps as to encounter them with faith,  
to live without bruises as to endure them with hope,  
to live without brokenness as to overcome with love.

For though a cruciform spirituality is not  
the "flavor of the day" in the Church,  
it is, still, the Way of Jesus.

*Go into the world...* Notice cruelty and your response to it. While easy to recognize on the news, where do you see it in your surroundings? In what ways does it seek to live in your spirit? When you encounter it from others or notice it within yourself, do you greet it as friend or foe? Notice. Pray. Act.

#### **Matthew 27:32-44**

The soldiers forced Jesus out of the governor's palace and marched him toward a hill just outside Jerusalem's city limits, a place called Golgotha, (which means "the place of the skull" because the rock formations looked like a skull when seen from a distance). When Jesus stumbled under the weight of the cross, the soldiers conscripted a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene<sup>215</sup> to carry Jesus' cross. The soldiers, seeing Jesus' suffering, offered him wine mixed with gall, which was often served to prisoners to ease their suffering and act as a sedative. It had the bitter taste of a poison. Jesus refused to drink the sedative-laced wine after tasting its bitter flavor. The soldiers crucified Jesus by driving six-inch iron spikes through his wrists<sup>216</sup> and feet. After crucifying him, the soldiers divided his clothing and threw dice to see who would get them. Then they sat watch at the foot of the cross, while above Jesus they placed a sign with the charge against him: "Jesus, King of the Jews."

Two men arrested and convicted of rebellion, were also crucified, one on each side of Jesus. The gawkers who had followed the parade of suffering up the hill to Golgotha tossed insults at Jesus, ignoring the rebels on either side, saying, "You boasted about destroying our precious Temple and bragged you could build it back in three days! Ha! If you're that powerful, save yourself! Come down from the cross! Lead the rebellion if you really are The Truth's Anointed, the chosen son and instrument of salvation!"

The Rulers, Scrupulous, and Old Ones also mocked Jesus. "Ho! Look! He who saved others! So powerful he was, so courageous and compassionate—the King of Israel! If he's so powerful, let him defeat the cross! We will gladly believe in him. Let the One in whom he trusts rescue him now. Yes, right now! Come on, right now. Why isn't he being rescued? He said, 'I am The Truth's Son.' Where are They now?" Even the rebels joined in the mockery; those who violated others in life violated Jesus in death.

*One will triumph who first died  
for the victims then also for executioners,  
revealing a new righteousness,  
breaking vicious circles of hate and vengeance,  
creating a new humanity.*

*Only such new righteousness is creative,  
creating both for lawless and law-abiding,  
creating love where there is hate,  
creating freedom where there is oppression,  
creating the Way that triumphs over death.<sup>217</sup>*

Lord, make me a vessel of scorn,  
mocked for loving neighbor and stranger,  
scorned for welcoming friend and foreigner,  
mocked for offering a cup of cold water in the desert,  
scorned for protesting unjust laws,  
mocked for believing love transforms,  
scorned for following in the footsteps of the Crucified.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to live without enemies  
as to choose You in spite of consequences,

<sup>215</sup> Modern Libya.

<sup>216</sup> In ancient physiology, the wrists were considered a part of the hands, and only the radius and ulna bones were strong enough to bear the weight of a human body.

<sup>217</sup> Adapted from Jurgenn Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/52217.Jurgen\\_Moltmann](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/52217.Jurgen_Moltmann), accessed June 20, 2020.

to avoid all opposition as to express your truth,  
to never be noticed as to be noticed practicing *shalom*.  
For on the Cross you embraced all suffering,  
taking our sin into your very being,  
that in the divine embrace we might be transformed.

*Go into the world...* Notice ridicule and your response to it. Who is being ridiculed, from whom is the ridicule hurled, and for what “reasons”? Whom do you ridicule? Try to identify within yourself why playing the “ridicule game” brings you pleasure or fulfillment. Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 27:45-56**

High noon darkness descended over all the land. Three hours of darkness punctuated by Jesus’ cry, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani,” a lament from Psalm 22, “My Truth! my Truth! Why have you forsaken me?” Some who heard Jesus’ slurred words imagined they heard him calling for Elijah.

Hearing Jesus’ slurred words, one of the soldiers fetched a sponge, dipped it in cheap, sour wine, put it on a rod, and placed it to Jesus’ parched lips. The other soldiers scoffed at their colleague’s act, saying, “Leave him be. Let’s see if this Elijah character comes to save him.” Then Jesus cried aloud again and sent his spirit back to The Truth.

In the moment of Jesus’ death, the Temple curtain that kept the people from the direct presence of The Truth (the room known as the Holy of Holies) was ripped from top to bottom. In the next moment, The Truth acted in nature: the earth shook, rocks sheared in two, tombs opened so holy people were raised back to life. These holy dead rose from their tombs when Jesus defeated death and came out of his own tomb. They strolled about and appeared to many people.

The Roman soldiers guarding Jesus felt the earth shake and saw all that happened. They were overwhelmed with awe and felt a holy terror, and shouted, “This was no ordinary man but the Son of The Truth!” Many women from Galilee were also there, watching from a distance. The women had followed Jesus to care for his needs, including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of James and John, the brothers Zebedee.

*The Truth’s mysteries are not always so visceral:  
punctured wrists, spilled blood, heaving chest,  
perhaps some drool.*

*Most of us prefer a more sanitized version—  
14 stations cast in bronze,  
or at least fired ceramic tile.*

*But visceral impacts in ways unexpected,  
like a meteor gouging the earth the cross scars my soul,  
leaving a mark that cannot be hidden nor removed.*

Lord, make me an instrument willing to see suffering,  
when confronted, not turning away,  
when suffering myself, enduring,  
through endurance, gaining perseverance,  
through perseverance, finding hope,  
in hope, turning to love,  
in love, overcoming evil.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to confront evil alone as to gather as your Body,  
to complain about its patterns as an individual  
as to challenge its impact as a community,  
to overcome its systems for the sake of your *shalom*.

For I fear not evil—  
its defeat is complete and completed,  
through Jesus’ immersion into  
suffering, death, and hell,  
for my sake and for all.

*Go into the world...* Notice suffering and your response to it. When you see it most poignantly, do you keep it at a distance or bring it into your soul to be offered up to The Truth? When experienced personally, do you pray more lament or supplication—more, “How long, O Lord?” or, “Lord, take this from me!” Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 27:57-61**

The shadows had lengthened—night descended. A wealthy follower of Jesus named Joseph, from Arimathea, just north of Jerusalem, went to Pilate to request Jesus’ body for burial. Pilate ordered his soldiers to give Jesus’ body to Joseph. According to the custom of the day, Joseph wrapped Jesus’ body in a clean linen sheet and placed his wrapped corpse into a tomb Joseph had cut into the limestone. The tomb was new and had never before tasted death.

After placing Jesus in the tomb, Joseph rolled a large, circular stone in front of the tomb’s entrance. As it was the day before the Sabbath, also called Preparation Day, when Jews prepared themselves to be able to observe

holy rest, Joseph went to his home. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary watched Joseph in all that he did as they sat across the way from the tomb, and they, too, left to prepare for Sabbath.

On the next day, the Sabbath, the Rulers and Intense went to Pilate. "Governor, we recall that when the convicted was still alive, he claimed the power of resurrection, which some of our people believe and some do not. But the one you had executed to protect the Empire claimed he would rise from the dead on the morrow. So, your Excellency, we humbly ask you order soldiers to secure the tomb upon pain of death, that neither the living without nor the dead within can cross its threshold. We fear this rabble-rouser's disciplined followers will try to steal his body and claim, 'Look! Resurrection! Just as he said!' If this happens, the people will once again be stirred up and become restless, maybe even rebellious."

Pilate neither understood nor cared about the Rulers' beliefs but understood well the nature of human politics and cared deeply no accusation could be made against him to Caesar. So he said, "As you say. Take my soldiers with you to the tomb. Secure it as you will." The Rulers and several soldiers then went to the tomb. They assured themselves the rock was in place before sealing the stone and posting soldiers to guard it.

*Death has all the evidence on its side.*<sup>218</sup>

*"Gather 'round,"*

*shouts the one who holds a sickle,*

*"Let me tell you what's really real.*

*Let me show you the only thing you can count on.*

*Let me take you to the bottom line:*

*flesh rots and corpses decay,*

*what you see is what you get!*

*And it's the only thing there is.*

*See over here the lifeless body.*

*See over yonder the grieving family.*

*See within the last, lonely glimpse of hope.*

*Taste desolation.*

*Taste defeat.*

*Taste death.*

*It's your true last meal."*

Lord, make me a vessel willing to hold space  
for those who grieve without hope,  
for those who are numb,  
for those who cannot imagine what hope looks like,  
for those who cannot imagine feeling anything,  
for those who cannot imagine,  
who cannot imagine,  
who cannot imagine.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to avoid death as to embrace life,  
to fear death as to await in hope,  
to see death as the end  
as to encounter death as the new beginning.

For to all the first death comes,  
and we who are your beloved escape  
the second death that never will have power over us.<sup>219</sup>

*Go into the world...* Notice your feelings about death. Are you accepting or seeking avoidance? To what measure are you assured that The Truth's love and eternal embrace will bring you to, through, and beyond the first death to holy comfort in the presence of The Truth? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 28:1-10**

The first day of the week dawned like New Creation. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary journeyed to Jesus' tomb only to discover it transformed into a womb. The earth shook and shook hard, like it wanted to be noticed. Suddenly a celestial messenger struck like a thunderbolt, appearing like lightning in front of the tomb and rolling the large, circular stone from the entrance. The messenger leapt on top of the stone, and it was then the two Marys noticed the clothes: pure and glistening as driven snow. Meanwhile the Roman guards were catatonic, submerged in a fear stupor.

The Truth's messenger gazed upon Mary and Mary. "Be not afraid, sisters, be not afraid. I know you look

<sup>218</sup> This poem is a paraphrase of a sermon I heard the Rev. Dr. Tom Long preach at a workshop on funeral preaching at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 1998.

<sup>219</sup> c.f. Revelation 20:6.

for Jesus here because he was crucified: makes perfect sense. But come, look in the tomb. You won't find him because he is risen. It's just like he said!

"Now skedaddle back to the disciplined followers with the Good News: He is risen! He is risen indeed! He is no longer dead, and you'll see him soon in Galilee. Hurry! Be quick with this news. There's no time to waste!"

The two Marys did not have to be told twice. They skedaddled away from that place of death turned into life, the tomb that had become a womb of.... Of what? New birth? Eternal life? While their hearts trembled with a sublime blend of awe and wonder and more than a little fear, and while their minds tried to grasp the enormity of it all, suddenly Jesus stood before them and said, "Rejoice!" The two Marys dropped to their knees immediately, both vexed and venerating Jesus. "Be not afraid, my sisters," spoke Jesus to them, "be not afraid. Go to my brothers. Go tell my brothers to Galilee I send them. Go tell my brothers they will see me there."

*People told me the joy that would be...*

*as my beloved walk down the aisle,  
as I held my daughter for the first time,  
as I felt the pride of her graduation,  
as I reveled in our Silver Anniversary.*

*What they told me I never imagined...*

*for she was even more beautiful and blessed,  
for she was even more helpless and pure,  
for we were even more proud,  
for we were even more in love.*

*As I wonder how Jesus taught resurrection, I imagine...*

*no way really to describe it,  
no way they would actually get it,  
no eye has seen it, nor ear has heard it,  
no mind can imagine it.*

*Seeing is believing.*

*I can't wait for that day!  
I wait in hope for that day!  
I wait expectantly for that day!  
I wait ready...*

*to be surprised again.*

Lord, make me open to surprises,  
to tombs becoming wombs,  
to death becoming life,  
to swords becoming plowshares,  
to spears becoming pruning hooks,<sup>220</sup>  
to protests becoming change,  
to standard-operating-procedure becoming justice.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to be in denial of death as to embrace the gift of life,  
to look back as to journey forward,  
to keep silent as to tell Good News.  
For I rejoice in the Story of resurrection,  
Jesus is risen! Alleluia! He is risen indeed!  
May this Story shape my becoming.

*Go into the world...* Notice surprises. Not just big surprises, which are hard to ignore, but the little surprises all around, that happen every day. From whom do they originate? How do they arrive into your awareness? What is your biggest delight from a little surprise today? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 28:11-15**

Mary and Mary, the first two sent ones, obeyed Jesus and went to tell the others that he is risen, and they would see him in Galilee. While the women went to the other disciplined followers, the Roman guards went into the city. Knowing their lives would be forfeited for having lost "the prisoner," the guards went not to Pilate but first to the Rulers in hope of preserving their lives. The guards told the Rulers all that had happened, as best as they were able to describe it. (As they had been catatonic with fear, there were gaps in their recollection.) The Rulers and Old Ones huddled to form a plan of action while the guards waited. Finally, the Rulers gave the soldiers a large hoard of cash and directed them to lie: "Tell Pilate his disciplined followers ambushed you in the middle of the night and stole the body. We will talk to his lordship and keep you safe and out of harm's way." So the guards took the money and did as they had been told, keeping their mouths shut about what happened. And their version of the story is still told today among certain groups.

*Two stories and two versions*

*Two perspectives and two intentions*

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<sup>220</sup> c.f. Isaiah 2:4.

*One a miracle, one a manipulation*

*One outrageous yet real, one realistic yet an outrage*

*One the way all shall be, one showing what already is*

*One leading to life, one a descent into death.*

Lord, make me an instrument of Truth,  
that looks beyond the seed that is  
to the harvest that shall be,  
that sees fulfillment as already planted,  
that nurtures hope as an essential crop,  
that harvests love as a sign of eternal life.  
O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to speak of Easter hope as to live it,  
to tell the Story as to embody it,  
to celebrate life to come as to live its fullness.

For there will always be those  
who see only what is before them,  
and are blind to your invasion of time and space:  
heaven on earth and on earth as it is in heaven.

*Go into the world...* Notice how heaven might be invading earth today? How does your intuition and spiritual insight help you to notice The Truth's fulfillment being planted all around you? Notice. Pray. Act.

### **Matthew 28:16-20**

The eleven disciplined followers (eleven because Judas was no longer with them) journeyed to Galilee. Just as Jesus had begun teaching them on a mountain, and had his glory revealed to them on a mountain, so Jesus chose to commission them to their life's work on a mountain. When the disciplined followers saw Jesus, they worshiped him, for he had been dead and was now alive, yet their worship wavered a bit between doubt and belief as this was all new to them.

Jesus drew near to them, saying, "The authority of highest heaven has been granted me, an authority that extends to the four corners of the earth. Because I am who I am, and because you belong to me, I command you: create others like you who are disciplined and disciplined followers. As you go and wherever you go among all the nations, teach people their true name is Beloved. Teach them to dance to the rhythms of the God-life. Teach them

how to live as the Beloved Community. Teach them to obey my words and my will. And bind together their true identity with their full heart and mind through a ritual of cleansing: baptism in the name of the Triune One whose own Spirit seals their identity to them for all eternity. As you go and wherever you go throughout that eternity, remember I am with you until the New Creation bursts forth and its becoming transforms into being."

*Great Commission or Great Identification?*

*For here we learn our true name:*

*Beloved Child, blessed of The Truth to be a blessing.*

*In this identity we live and move and have our being.*

*In this identity we work and worship and even waver.*

*Beloved Community, The Truth's own family.*

*In this identity we know salvation and seek shalom.*

*In this identity we know joy and work for justice.*

*Beloved, in this identity,*

*go!*

Lord, make me one who teaches others the God-life,  
showing their true name is Beloved,  
showing the God-rhythms of the Beloved Community,  
teaching obedience to the letter matters,  
teaching obedience to the spirit sets us free,  
learning together all our living is intended for sharing,  
learning anew that what we share most of all is You.

O Divine Master, may I not so much seek  
to coerce as to invite,  
to cajole as to share,  
to bludgeon as to bear witness.

For "gospel" means Good News,  
and is intended as a gift,  
that can only be received with an open heart.

*Go into the world...* Notice where you go and who you encounter. Notice the ways you speak and act toward them. Do you affirm their true identity as one of The Truth's beloved? Notice. Pray. Act.

## Appendix A: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 Bible Study

### Format

1. *Choose a facilitator.* The person who leads can be the same person each week or rotate among participants. The facilitator's job is not to teach but to create a safe space for everyone to share their perceptions and understanding of the material without being interrupted, talked over, or argued into silence. For all activities, participants may share or pass.

#### 1. *Round 1—NOTICE*

Write<sup>21</sup> and then share five (5) "I notice..." statements about the passages' textual or literary content (e.g., "The word joy is repeated," "The speaker is Moses," "The younger son went to a distant country"). Focus only on the text's content but not meaning or ethics (e.g. Not, "I think this means," or, "What I hear God saying is..."). There will be an opportunity to focus on meaning and action in later steps.

#### **Focus = DATA and DETAILS**

#### 2. *Round 2—WONDER*

Write and then share four (4) "I wonder about..." statements or questions. Questions can focus on textual content, theological meaning, or ethical expression (e.g. "I wonder about how this passage relates to Psalm 119?" "I wonder why David was so angry?")

#### **Focus = INQUISITIVENESS**

#### 3. *Round 3—THINK*

Write and then share three (3) "I think..." statements about what this passage means. These three statements are the cognitive and intellectual expressions of your engaging Scripture (e.g. "This passage expresses God's mercy," or, "God hates injustice").

#### **Focus = CLARITY AND COHERENCE**

#### 4. *Round 4—VALUE*

Write and then share two (2) "I value..." statements that describe the two values to which you are being called by the passage (e.g. "I am called to express humility," or, "God wants me to value corporate unity"). There may be many values implicit in the passage, but only write the two values to which you are most strongly being called today.

#### **Focus = CORE CONVICTIONS**

#### 5. *Round 5—COMMIT*

Write and then share one (1) "I commit..." statement that says one action to which you will commit as a response to this passage (e.g. "I will give you my full attention when you speak," or, "I will honor the sabbath this week by...").

#### **Focus = ACTION**

6. Close by praying for each other!

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<sup>21</sup> Writing can be done either before or during the study.

## Appendix B: 3P Bible Study

### Format

1. *Choose a facilitator.* The person who leads can be the same person each week or rotate among participants. The facilitator's job is not to teach but to create a safe space for everyone to share their perceptions and understanding of the material without being interrupted, talked over, or argued into silence. For all activities, participants may share or pass.

2. *Round 1—PARAPHRASE*

Have each participant choose one passage of Scripture from the assigned text that stood out for them. It may have stood out because it inspired them or challenged them. It may have stood out because it caused them to wonder or answered a question. Invite each participant to share the passage that, for them, stood out and speak to why they chose the passage they did.

(Alternate I) The facilitator chooses one to three verses or short sections of a passage for the group to discuss. For each verse or section, invite participants to respond with what they notice, appreciate or wonder about. Invite participants to respond also to the core comfort, conviction, or challenge they hear in the verse or section.

(Alternate II) The facilitator chooses one to three verses or short sections from an English Bible. Invite participants to write their own paraphrase. If they choose to do so, participants may share their paraphrase with the group.

3. *Round 2—POETRY*

Have each participant choose one passage of poetry from the assigned text that stood out for them. How did the poem speak to them? What insights into Scripture or life did the poem invite? Invite each participant to share the poem that, for them, spoke to them.

(Alternate I) The facilitator chooses one or two poems for the group to discuss. How does the poem tell the Scripture “slant”? What insights or wonder does it invite? What questions or challenge does it provoke?

(Alternate II) Facilitator chooses one or two verses or short sections from Rhythms. Invite participants to write a poem based on the verse or section. If they choose to do so, participants may share what they write with the group.

4. *Round 3—PRAYER*

Have each participant choose one prayer from the assigned text that stood out for them. What in the prayer spoke? Did the prayer evoke “amen” or “may it never be,” or some other kind of response? Invite each participant to share the prayer that, for them, stood out and why they chose the prayer they did.

(Alternate I) The facilitator chooses one or two prayers for the group to discuss. How does the prayer reflect the Scripture? How does it flow from Scripture to life? What insights or wonder does it invite? What questions or challenge does it provoke?

(Alternate II) The facilitator chooses one or two verses or short sections from Rhythms. Invite participants to write a prayer based on the verse or section. If they choose to do so, participants may share what they write with the group.

5. *Round 4—3P FREE-FOR-ALL*

Invite participants to share something they have written from the assigned text. It may be their own paraphrase, a poem, or prayer. Invite each participant to share something they have written.

6. Close by praying for each other!

## Appendix C: Writing Exercises

### Poetry Writing Exercises

1. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your poem. (C) Write a Haiku that focuses on the word or phrase.

Five syllables

Seven syllables

Five syllables

The Haiku may express wonder, insight, challenge, inquiry, lament, rejoicing or whatever the Spirit leads!

Write!

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2. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your poem. (C) Write a Cinquain that focuses on the word or phrase.

One word

Two words

Three words

Four words

One word

The Cinquain may express wonder, insight, challenge, inquiry, lament, rejoicing or whatever the Spirit leads!

Write!

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3. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your poem. (C) Write a free verse poem that focuses on the word or phrase. The poem need not rhyme but it may. The poem can have one stanza or several. The point is not to explicate or summarize the word or phrase but to engage the Word. The poem may express wonder, insight, challenge, inquiry, lament, rejoicing or whatever the Spirit leads!

Write!

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**Prayer Writing Exercise**

1. (A) Choose a passage of Scripture. (B) Choose a word or phrase from the passage. This word or phrase will be the focus of your attention and the expression of your prayer. (C) Write a prayer that uses one of the literary themes listed below:

<b>ACTS Prayer</b>	/	<b>Colloquial Alternative (different order from ACTS)</b>
Adoration		Please!
Confession		Thank you!
Thanksgiving		Oops!
Supplication		Wow!

(D) Additional challenge: using the same passage, choose one of the other literary themes above and write another prayer. It's okay to write four prayers that each have a different literary focus!

Write!

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Write!

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Write!

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### Paraphrase Exercises

**Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV):** “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder,<sup>u</sup> and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister<sup>u</sup> will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’<sup>u</sup> is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

**Matthew 5:21-22 (TIP):** “From age to age it has been taught, ‘Murder someone and you will be judged.’ But I take it further: even anger is a kind of murder; to degrade another a form of killing. To call your beloved a ‘Fool!’ is to invite the fires of purification, for surely you are missing the grace of offering life to one another. Life shared in friendship is among the greatest gifts we can give.”

**Your Paraphrase:**

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**Mark 8:31-32 (NIV):** He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup>He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

**Mark 8:31-32 (TIP):** Then Jesus begins to teach them what it means to say he is the Anointed One. “It means suffering,” he tells them. “The Son of Humanity must suffer—he will be rejected by the Elite, the Intense and the Scrupulous. And, working together with the Collaborators, he will be killed. But after three days rise again.” Jesus says this plainly. He doesn’t stutter.

**Your Paraphrase:**

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**Luke 1:1-4 (NIV):** Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled<sup>1</sup> among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. <sup>3</sup>With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

**Luke 1:1-4 (TIP):** The Story has been told many times in many ways: of divine love alive among us, walking beside us, living, breathing, being. This is the Story told by those who were there, of the things they saw with their eyes, things they heard, touched, felt, experienced. These trustworthy eyewitnesses are servants of the Word. This is the Story to which I have disciplined followers my life, O Friend of The Compassion. I share this Story with you so that you too may know it, so that you too may know Them: The Compassion who loved, the Man who lived, whose light shined upon us.

**Your Paraphrase:**

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**John 1:1-3 (NIV):** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

**John 1:1-3 (TIP):** In the beginning was the Verb, and the Verb was with The I WILL BE, and the Verb was The I WILL BE. The Verb was in the beginning and the source of creation—the WHOOSH! that ignited the cosmos, the generative energy that unleashed everything: every atom and every quark and even the dark matter in between. Neither what is, nor what has ever been, nor what will someday be came about by accident but through divine intention and purpose: spoken into being by the Verb.

**Your Paraphrase:**

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**Acts 10:12-14 (NIV):** It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. <sup>13</sup>Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” <sup>14</sup>“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

**Acts 10:12-14 (TIP):** The blanket was covered with every variety of beast from earth and sky, those considered clean and unclean, those deemed pure and impure. A voice spoke: “Take and eat, Peter. All of it is sacred.” Peter rebelled against the voice, “Never! My lips have never been soiled by such vile impurity.”

**Your Paraphrase:**

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## Appendix D: Reading Plan for Rhythms of the God Life - Matthew

### Matthew

Week 1:	Introduction and Matthew 1
Week 2:	Matthew 2
Week 3:	Matthew 3-4
Week 4:	Matthew 5-7
Week 5:	Matthew 8-10
Week 6:	Matthew 11-12
Week 7:	Matthew 13-15
Week 8:	Matthew 15-17
Week 9:	Matthew 18-20
Week 10:	Matthew 21-23
Week 11:	Matthew 24-25
Week 12:	Matthew 26-28

## About Rhythms of the God-Life

“...an interpretive paraphrase rooted in the Greek text that gives wings to God’s Word through paraphrase, poetry, and prayer. By providing cultural insights to help the reader understand the Word’s meaning, *Rhythms* seeks to capture the beat and harmony of the original text yet also convey wisdom, ethics, and hope for today.”

“...a comprehensive study of biblical scripture, and a confronting, immersive read...with an ability to fascinate even the less experienced reader on the subject through an accessible authorial voice and an in-depth analysis of the language... [The author’s] choices of focus allow deeper analysis on the history of the text, and creates a layered approach that can be used in a contemporary setting. It is a compelling and well researched read, showing the author’s deep knowledge

### Matthew 5:3-12

Sacred openness is given as a gift to the poor in spirit, not full of themselves but longing for that which is from above; the way of deep immersion into the God-life will be embodied in them.

Sacred joy is given as a gift to those who lament life’s cruelty, suffering and tragedy; The Truth’s presence will shine upon them.

Sacred hope is given as a gift to those able to let go and let The Truth; in refusing to grasp they are able to receive, and the earth itself receives them.

Sacred purpose is given as a gift to those who hunger for justice and thirst for shalom; they will be sated by The Truth’s goodness.

Sacred openness is given as a gift to those who respond with compassion to the deep brokenness of humanity; as they offer renewal of friendship to others - mercy - so they open themselves to receiving the same.

Sacred joy is given as a gift to those whose longing is for The Truth; their eyes will see all things, including The Truth and their own, true self, through the lens of faith.

Sacred hope is given as a gift to those whose methods conform to The Truth’s Way - making peace; they will be known as children after The Truth’s own heart.

Sacred purpose is given as a gift to those who suffer at the hands of others in their pursuit of right relationships among all people; the way of deep immersion into God-life will be embodied in them.

Sacred openness is given as a gift to you when others abuse, berate and censure you because you belong to me. Abusing, Berating and Censure are the ABCs of evil - power wielded to control. Great joy and gladness should be yours when this happens, for it means you are walking the way of truth-tellers from ages-to-ages past. When this happens, know that you are immersed deeply in the rule of The Truth’s sovereign love.

## About the Author

The Rev. Dr. Brad Munroe is Pastor to the Presbytery for the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and the Presbytery de Cristo. He earned his Doctor of Ministry from San Francisco Theological Seminary, receiving the Outstanding Contribution to Ministry award for his dissertation in which he coined the phrase “blended worship.” He is also the author of *Waging Peace: Developing Interpersonal Skills for Conflict Transformation* and numerous devotional works and curriculum that can be downloaded at [www.BradMunroe.org](http://www.BradMunroe.org).

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WAS THE VERB...”