

Edgecomb Community Church

United Church of Christ

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Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 29, 2020

Scripture: John 11:1-41

Sermon: *The Invitation*

In our scripture passage for this Sunday, Jesus, on hearing of Lazarus' illness, returns after a short delay, to Judea, risking his own death, in order to raise Lazarus. After he proclaims himself as "the resurrection and the life" Jesus raises Lazarus, and many people believe in him as a result. As we ponder this scripture passage, we'll consider the invitation Jesus asks of us through his words.

People of God, as we spend more time away from each other due to social distancing in order to help stop the spread of COVID-19, if we see this time through a different lens, I think we will find a blessing in disguise. The blessing is to use this time to become closer to God by praying with scripture. A special way to do this is through the ancient practice of *lectio divina*.

Lectio divina, Latin for "divine reading," gives us a way to pray with the Bible. Rooted in an ancient Hebrew tradition, *lectio divina* was practiced by the desert mothers and fathers and by later monastic communities. By the twelfth century this practice has been created into a pattern still practiced today.

(FYI – I've attached a link in this email to a video created by the Reform Church in America. It nicely explains the practice of *lectio divina*.

The link is: <https://www.rca.org/resources/spiritual-formation-faith-formation/lectio-divina>)

How to Begin

Begin by choosing a section of scripture that you would like to read and pray. You can choose scripture randomly or use a prayer book like the Book of Common Prayer. Try not to set a goal for how much content you will read. The goal is to listen for God and experience God's presence.

Preparation

Next, do what you must to quiet and prepare yourself to hear from God. If you need to find a quiet room, or sit in silence for several minutes, or sit in a comfortable chair, take whatever posture will help you prepare to receive and experience God's presence.

***Lectio* – Reading /Listening**

When you sense that your heart is prepared, begin by slowly reading the passage of scripture that you have selected. Don't move quickly through any sentence or phrase. As you read, pay attention to what word or phrase or idea catches your attention.

***Meditatio* – Meditation**

Next, begin to meditate on the word, phrase, or idea that captured your attention. Repeat it again and again. What thoughts come to mind as you meditate on this word, phrase or idea? What are you reminded of in your life? What does it make you hope for? Meditation is no easy task. As you try to concentrate, don't be disappointed if random thoughts enter your head. As they do, offer them to God.

***Oratio* – Prayer**

Now begin to speak to God. Tell God what word, phrase or idea captured your attention and what came to mind as you meditated upon it. How is God using this word, phrase or idea to bless and transform you? Tell God what you have been thinking and feeling as you've listened and meditated. Tell God how you hope this word, phrase or idea will change your heart to be more like his.

***Contemplation* – Contemplation**

Finish by focusing your attention on the fact that God's presence is with you. If as you try to focus on God's presence you sense a need to read the text again, or continue meditating, or to simply continue talking with God, allow yourself to do so. As you do, know that you are in the presence of God.

***Incarnatio* – Return**

In recent years some have suggested adding a fifth step to these traditional four: *incarnatio*, or return. This final phase honors the need to put into action what we have discovered through the prayerful reading of scripture, to return to daily life assured of God's presence and more willing to love and serve the world. *Incarnatio* reminds us that

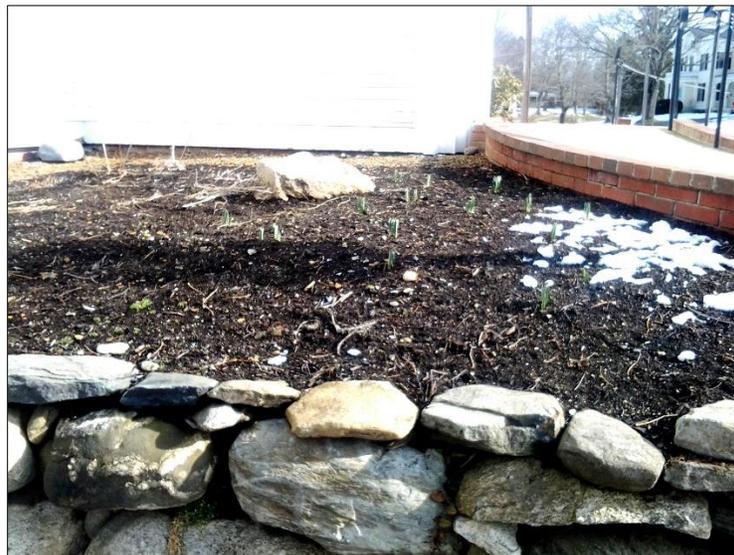
the purpose of *lectio divina* is not simply to deepen our individual relationships with God but also to transform our hearts and minds to the will of God so we may be faithful disciples in the world.

I encourage you to try this spiritual practice as a way to encounter God in the living word. Our prayers can lead us to hope, transformation and to action. Prayer can lead us to simply living with more hope and for that, prayer is worth it!

Sources:

The Reform Church – www.rca.org/resources/spiritual-formation-faith-formation/lectio-divina

Companion's in Christ: The Way of Prayer by Jane E. Vennard with Stephen D. Bryant



Look carefully and you'll see little **green** shoots of hope! Spring is here!

Our neighbor, Sarah Koopus, sent the following poem.

Pandemic

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,

reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

—Lynn Ungar 3/11/20

Joani McArdle shared the following from an *Our Daily Bread* Video Devotionals email. I think you will find comfort watching this video.
The link is: <https://youtu.be/W9uwo37sKkU>

Coronavirus: What Do We Do Now? – Philippians 4:5–7

Are you consumed with worry over the coronavirus? Media coverage alone can send us into a panic, and being isolated from others doesn't help. But rest assured, the Lord provided us with instructions that will help us get through this season. Watch the video for a moment of peace and wisdom found in His Word Written and presented by Daniel Ryan Day.

Hildegard of Bingen, the 12th-century Christian mystic, said that we need to fly with two wings of awareness. The one wing is an awareness of life's glory and beauty. The other is an awareness of life's pain and suffering. If we try to fly with only one of these, she said, we will be like an eagle trying to fly with only one wing. In other words, we will not truly see.

We are living through a moment in time that invites a new strength of awareness. We are hearing stories from around the world today of terrible suffering and loss. And, at the same time, we are hearing accounts of great beauty of spirit and love.

I pray for all of us these days that we may be strong in our seeing and in our loving of another. As one of the prayers in Sounds of the Eternal puts it,

Let us serve love with our strength this day,
let us serve love with our strength.
In heart and mind and body this day
let us serve love.

John Philip Newell

**Ringing a bell for our health care workers
and first responders at 7:00 p.m.**

Joan Spurgat saw the following letter to the editor in the Portland Press Herald after hearing ECC's church bells being rung and Gail Boudin's drumming last Sunday in front of the church at Noon.

Letter to the editor: Building community in troubling times

I received an email from a dear friend in Switzerland telling about the challenges they are facing to maintain their sense of community as they hunker down to defeat COVID-19.

What struck me most was that everyone in all communities across the country, pause and ring their bells at 7 each night to recognize, honor and give thanks to all the brave health care workers and first responders who stand on the front lines of this crisis.

Please join me tonight, and every night, in asking our families and communities to pause for a moment at 7 to ring a bell together.

Please share this with your organizations across the state and beyond. What a poignant reminder this will be of our shared humanity. Thank you.

Rick Osann

Bar Harbor

<https://www.pressherald.com/2020/03/25/letter-to-the-editor-building-community-in-troubling-times/>

Several of you have asked about my granddaughter. Here is the latest photograph of her emailed to me last night by my daughter. All are doing well at home.



Hannah Christine Bell
So newly from God.

The following prayers are from Worldvision.org.

Pray for families adjusting to new ways of life.

Holy Spirit, as families adjust to everyone being home as businesses and schools close, we ask that You guide people in their new realities. Give spouses grace for each other.

Prompt worn-out parents to speak words of kindness and encouragement to their children. Help children find creative ways to experience the beauty of all You have created and continue learning.

Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. — Psalm 57:1 (NIV)

Pray for medical professionals, caregivers, and researchers responsible for fighting the new coronavirus.

God, as more people get sick, healthcare workers and first responders are working longer hours with fewer supplies and with more risk of contracting the new coronavirus themselves. Renew their energy and sustain them on long shifts. Bring Your protection upon them as they work with patients. Multiply their supplies so they have the protective items needed to stay safe on the job.

Inspire and invigorate the research doctors developing better tests to diagnose the virus, create vaccines to prevent it, and identify protocols to eliminate the disease's spread.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. — Psalm 23:4 (NIV)

<https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/prayers-people-affected-new-coronavirus>