

## A Window on Lent Devotional Activity

*Lent 4*

Week of 14 March 2021



*"From Mount Hor [the Israelites] set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food...'" (Numbers 21:4-5)*

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17)*

Based on the Old Testament story, Moses' act of lifting a bronze staff entwined with a serpent captured our spiritual imagination throughout Sunday's worship. What seems to us to be an obscure story, is, for John's gospel, a theological symbol that points toward Christ's redemptive act through his death and resurrection. The message of John 3 is God's great love story for us and for the world. God's unconditional, all-encompassing love is a gift without exceptions. Each one of us is truly beloved by God! As we grow into God's love and share that love with others, we join in God's redemptive work in the world, here and now and into eternity.

**This week's Devotional Activity offers options for reflection and prayer to help you focus on God's great love for you and for the world.**

### **Where do we find ourselves in the story?**

We hear in the book of Numbers the latest installment in the saga of the Israelites' wilderness journey. They have been wandering in the desert for some time now. They are hungry and exhausted. Much like children who have been on a road trip for far too long, they have become impatient, and so they whine and complain. They have lost their bearings. They complain what they feel they lack, while overlooking God's goodness and provision throughout their journey. Out of their fear and short-sightedness, they long to return to Egypt, their place of enslavement, rather than trust in God to guide them to the Promised Land.

At some level, we can relate to the Israelites' fatigue and frustration. After all, we are wandering in our own wilderness called a pandemic. It has been a long year, and although

there are signs of recovery emerging, we still have a long way to go. We are impatient with continued restrictions, the isolation, and the desperately slow pace of vaccinations. We want it to be over with. In our frustration and fatigue we become prone to the negativity that leads to complaining, losing sight of God's abundance and care for us.

- *How am I doing at this point in the pandemic? What stressors in my (my family's) situation lead me to feel frustrated or impatient?*
- *How does frustration affect my mindset about my wants and needs?*
- *In the past day/s, how quick have I been to complain? What were my complaints about?*
- *Is there a better way I can respond, rather than complaining?*

### **Turning our Complaints into Prayer**

Sometimes complaining is a necessary first step towards seeking justice. Though, all too often, our complaining is the result of bad habit. When we are under stress or frustrated, tired, hungry, annoyed or afraid... when we feel overlooked... when we feel uncertain about our future... These are times when negativity turns easily into complaining. Scripture urges us repeatedly to guard against harmful speech that brings damage to ourselves, to our relationship with God, to others, or to the Body of Christ.

The message of God's all-encompassing love for us and for all the world is perhaps the most powerful reminder that we are deeply loved, that we can trust God fully with all the concerns and frustrations we face, and that God continues to lead us forward with hope. God is a God of abundance and restoration, justice, and peace.

- Go to your window with the rainbow cross. Notice the window glass itself. Is it dirty and smudged? Does it need cleaning? As you look out the window, what else do you notice that seems dirty – like trash, mud, car fumes, nuisance pigeons...? How does focusing on these things affect your spirit?
- Now look for the loveliness that is to be found – signs of spring beginning to appear, vivid colors of nature, vibrant life as people pass by... How does this “re-framing” what you see affect your spirit?
- At your window, create a new rainbow cross. Reflect upon the goodness of God during this time and on the abundances around you – in your life, your household, your community, and the world.



### **Breathing Prayers: Know you are beloved!**

During Sunday's worship, we used deep breaths to help us pray, reminding us just how deeply God loves us. This is a lovely practice to carry into your day and week ahead. You may wish to start and/or close your day this way. Or, during the day, when stress or frustration starts to emerge, take a moment for a deep breath prayer. It doesn't need to take long. It might look something like this:

- \* Take a deep breath in. Close your eyes, if it helps you pay attention to your breath. Take another deep breath and say to yourself, "I am deeply loved..." As you breathe in, imagine God's love filling you.
- \* As you breathe out, imagine that same love flowing out of you and into the world. Continue breathing deeply and slowly for a few moments. With your closing exhale, pray words such as these, "May your love, God, flow through me..."

As we receive and grow in God's love, our love grows for the world and others. We become participants in God's redemptive work of love in the world.

- \* *In what way/s is God inviting me to respond actively to the world's needs with God's love, justice, and mercy?*

### **Let's Make It a Family Affair**

When our frustrations build and we find our words turning into grumbles, that is the perfect time to stop, take a deep breath, and turn that breathing into a prayer. We can encourage each other to turn our focus away from complaining and toward God's great love.

Agree as a family to turn complaints into prayers and loving response this week. When you, or someone else in the family, complains, gently remind that person that we are trying to focus on God's goodness.

- \* Together, take a deep breath.
- \* Count to ten, if needed. Take another breath and say, "I am deeply loved..."

If an issue at hand needs to be addressed, resolve to speak with a calm spirit without using words that tear down another person. When we encourage each other to reframe a situation, there is often a more grace-filled or hope-filled solution at hand. If the situation is one of injustice, discuss what actions can be taken by those involved to bring God's love and healing into it?

- \* *Can I (we) resolve to go an entire day without complaining? ... or the remainder of this week?*

### **Sending Prayer**

Merciful God,  
 You might have abandoned us, but instead you gave us your very self, love incarnate, love divine, love without end, bringing life without end.  
 At every moment in the day ahead, let love rule in my life, conquering any fear or doubt. With your grace, may I raise others up through my words and actions so they, too, might follow the one lifted up on high, Jesus Christ, by whom you loved the whole world.

**Amen.**