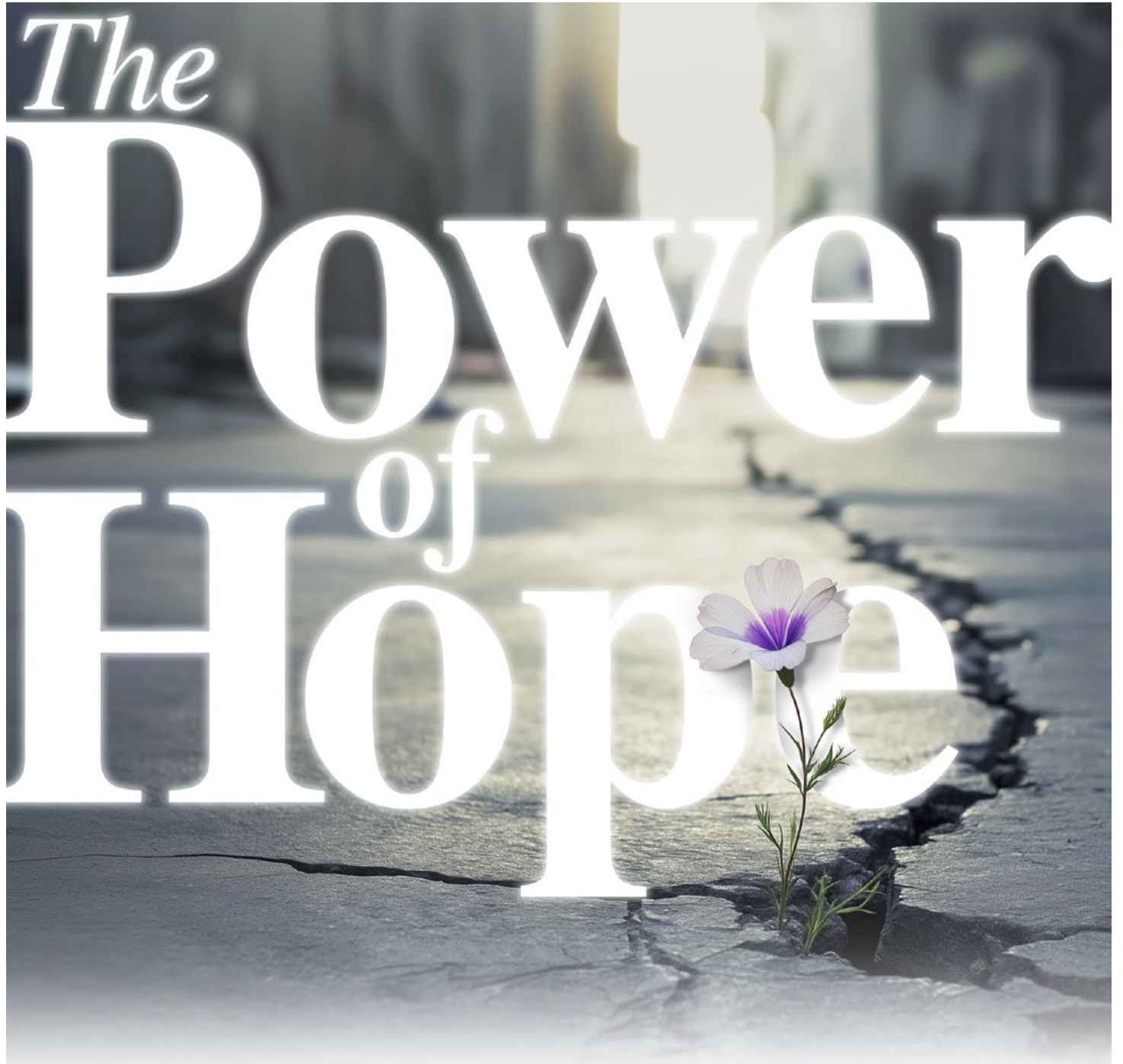


The **Power** *of* **Hope**



**Small Group Faith Sharing Guide for Lent
In the Jubilee Year 2025**



In collaboration with the Paulist Fathers' Initiative on Polarization

Pilgrims of Hope

Life can often feel overwhelming and complicated, especially with the endless stream of information we consume on a daily basis. As the Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* remarks, "Sometimes, I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." In trying to make sense of it all, we gravitate toward voices that offer clarity and reassurance. However, this tendency has led us to align closely with like-minded groups, creating deep divisions – both in politics and within the Church, places we rely on for direction and meaning.

In his wisdom, Pope Francis has named this jubilee year *Pilgrims of Hope*. He recognizes that, despite the vitriol and noise surrounding us, a glimmer of hope dwells in each of us. As he writes, "Everyone knows what it is to hope. In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring."

We often associate hope with a positive emotion, but it is less about our feelings and more about a grounded perspective. This year, we focus on the Sunday readings from Cycle C, which come from the Gospel of Luke – a Gospel that highlights Jesus' compassion, inclusion, and call to mercy. Anchored in this vision of Christ's ministry, hope serves as the keeper of memory, offering us a broader view from a higher vantage point. Hope reminds us that true fulfillment comes from a source beyond ourselves. It strengthens faith and love by easing the tensions that often challenge them.



This Faith Sharing Guide invites you on a Pilgrimage of Hope. Over the six weeks of Lent, you and your small group will journey through the scriptures the Church offers to us during this sacred season. May this pilgrimage of hope deepen your faith and bring you closer to its true source.

Claire Henning, D.Min.

Faith Sharing Guidelines

Faith sharing is a unique kind of conversation, so we set aside some of our usual conversational habits in order to allow room for the Spirit.

1. Please try to show up on time. But don't hesitate to quietly join late when you have to, we just won't be able to catch you up as it takes away from the flow of the faith sharing.
2. What is shared in the group is privileged and stays in the group.
3. Everyone's input is valuable, but no one is required to speak.
4. Please only share on the level at which you are comfortable.
5. Please limit your sharing time (two-to-four minutes) and wait until everyone else has had the opportunity to share before you share again.
6. As a group, we give the moderator permission to gently intervene if someone is speaking for too long, so that everyone has a chance to contribute, and our time together remains balanced and respectful.
7. Only one person speaks at a time.
8. Please, no cross talking, which means no commenting on another person's sharings. We are not here to fix each other. We accept anything said as a gift we hold for the other person. "I" statements are better than "you" statements.
9. Please do not ask for advice. It tends to move the group into "fixing" mode and takes us away from faith sharing.
10. Please, no side conversations. Value one another by listening.
11. For zoom meetings, please mute your speaker if there is outside noise at your location.
12. Periods of silent are natural and allow the Spirit to work. Resist the urge to fill in the silence unless you have something meaningful to say.

Guide for Group Leaders

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate this faith sharing group. Here are a few hints for creating a comfortable environment for prayer and faith sharing.

- 1.Honor your group members' time. Start and finish on time.
2. When the group members first gather, read through and discuss the Faith Sharing Guidelines (p. 2).
- 3.Reiterate the guidelines when a new person joins your group, or whenever you feel the group needs a reminder.
4. It can help the flow of the meeting if each week four people volunteer to read the three scripture readings and the reflection piece before faith sharing begins.
5. Begin each meeting with prayer. (An Opening Prayer is provided on page 4).
6. Don't feel like you have to get to all of the questions, or that they have to be taken in the order they are written. Let the Spirit guide you here.
7. If the conversation gets off track, gently pull it back to the question at hand. One technique to refocus a group is to move to another question.
- 8.Gently encourage participation and the sharing of faith. After a period of time you might ask if someone who hasn't had a chance to share would like to speak.
- 9.Be willing to share your own faith experience.
- 10.End each meeting with everyone offering their personal prayer intentions. You can close by leading them in the "Our Father" and a closing prayer. (A Closing Prayer is provided on page 4).
- 11.Enjoy yourself!

Opening Prayer for Meetings

God of all hope,
we come before you as pilgrims
on a journey of faith.

Thank you for the grace and peace
this time together provides for us.
Help us to recognize this gathering as holy ground,
a place where we can grow in trust and understanding.

May the power of hope
fill our hearts and strengthen our spirits.
Help us to listen deeply for
your living presence within us and among us.
In Jesus' name, we pray.
AMEN

Closing Prayer for Meetings

Loving God,
We thank you for this time together,
where your presence unites us
and draws us closer to you.

We are grateful for the call
to be your disciples,
and the gift of this time together.

As we leave, may your Spirit
inspire all that we do,
and guide the way we do it.

Work through each of us, Lord,
to bring harmony and hope to the world.
In Jesus' name, we pray.
AMEN

First Sunday of Lent

HOPE Springs Eternal

Reading I: Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Moses spoke to the people, saying:
“The priest shall receive the basket from you
and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God.
Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God,
‘My father was a wandering Aramean
who went down to Egypt with a small household
and lived there as an alien.
But there he became a nation
great, strong, and numerous.
When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us,
imposing hard labor upon us,
we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers,
and he heard our cry
and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.
He brought us out of Egypt
with his strong hand and outstretched arm,
with terrifying power, with signs and wonders;
and bringing us into this country,
he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.
Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits
of the products of the soil
which you, O LORD, have given me.’
And having set them before the LORD, your God,
you shall bow down in his presence.”

Reading II: Romans 10:8-13

Brothers and sisters:
What does Scripture say?
The word is near you,
in your mouth and in your heart
—that is, the word of faith that we preach—,
for, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.
For one believes with the heart and so is justified,
and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.
For the Scripture says,
No one who believes in him will be put to shame.
For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;
the same Lord is Lord of all,
enriching all who call upon him.
For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Gospel: Luke 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan
and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days,
to be tempted by the devil.

He ate nothing during those days,
and when they were over he was hungry.

The devil said to him,
“If you are the Son of God,
command this stone to become bread.”

Jesus answered him,
“It is written, One does not live on bread alone.”

Then he took him up and showed him
all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.

The devil said to him,
“I shall give to you all this power and glory;
for it has been handed over to me,
and I may give it to whomever I wish.
All this will be yours, if you worship me.”

Jesus said to him in reply,
“It is written

You shall worship the Lord, your God,
and him alone shall you serve.”

Then he led him to Jerusalem,
made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him,

“If you are the Son of God,
throw yourself down from here, for it is written:
He will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you, and:

With their hands they will support you,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.”

Jesus said to him in reply,

“It also says,
You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.”

When the devil had finished every temptation,
he departed from him for a time.

Reflection: Be with me Lord, when I am in trouble

– Responsorial Psalm

Have you ever wandered into trouble; got caught up in a situation you never could have foreseen? The scriptures this first week of Lent begin with the story of a wandering Aramean,* an outsider, living in Egypt with a small household. Despite these humble beginnings, he flourishes in Egypt and becomes, as Deuteronomy describes it, a great nation. But this success is soon overshadowed by trouble and hardship as the people are enslaved and forced into grueling labor. Fortunately, the people have hope – a deep reliance on God. They cry out to the God of their ancestors who hears their pleas and delivers them from what seemed like an irreversible fate.

In Luke's Gospel, we encounter another desert wanderer. This time it is Jesus. Isolated and starving, he faces a series of human temptations. Each one proves more challenging than the last. First, there is the urge to satisfy his physical hunger. Next, he is tempted to misuse his power over the world. Finally, he faces the challenge of testing God. Relying on the Word of God in the scriptures, Jesus resists every temptation and leaves the desert prepared to start his ministry.

As his ministry drew to a close, Jesus confronted the greatest challenge of his life. On the night before his Passion, he turned to God in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Through prayer, his hope for a reprieve was transformed into resolute determination.

**Some scholars believe the wandering Aramean to be Jacob, or Abram.*

Faith Sharing Questions

1. Have you ever felt like an outsider or faced a significant faith challenge that tested you? How did you respond?
2. In the second reading from Romans we hear that God's word is so near it is already in our hearts and on our tongues. How does this intimate imagery compare with how you experience God in your life?
3. When you face temptations or challenges, are there particular spiritual practices or scripture passages that give you strength and guidance?
4. When troubles or challenges with others feel polarizing and unsolvable, how does your faith support you?

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: *Faithful God, you are our hope and our strength. Trusting in your love, we bring our prayers before you.*

Petitioner: *(Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord*

Response: *Lord, Hear Our Prayer*

Leader: *(after the final petition begin the) "Our Father"*

Closing Prayer (p.4)

Second Sunday of Lent

A Glimmer of HOPE

Reading I: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

The Lord God took Abram outside and said,
“Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can.
Just so,” he added, “shall your descendants be.”

Abram put his faith in the LORD,
who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.

He then said to him,
“I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans
to give you this land as a possession.”

“O Lord GOD,” he asked,
“how am I to know that I shall possess it?”

He answered him,
“Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat,
a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

Abram brought him all these, split them in two,
and placed each half opposite the other;
but the birds he did not cut up.

Birds of prey swooped down on the carcasses,
but Abram stayed with them.

As the sun was about to set, a trance fell upon Abram,
and a deep, terrifying darkness enveloped him.

When the sun had set and it was dark,
there appeared a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch,
which passed between those pieces.

It was on that occasion that the LORD made a covenant with Abram,
saying: “To your descendants I give this land,
from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates.”

Reading II: Philippians 3:17—4:1

Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers and sisters,
and observe those who thus conduct themselves
according to the model you have in us.

For many, as I have often told you
and now tell you even in tears,
conduct themselves as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction.

Their God is their stomach;
their glory is in their “shame.”

Their minds are occupied with earthly things.
But our citizenship is in heaven,

and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He will change our lowly body
to conform with his glorified body
by the power that enables him also
to bring all things into subjection to himself.
Therefore, my brothers and sisters,
whom I love and long for, my joy and crown,
in this way stand firm in the Lord.

Gospel: Luke 9:28b-36

Jesus took Peter, John, and James
and went up the mountain to pray.
While he was praying his face changed in appearance
and his clothing became dazzling white.
And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah,
who appeared in glory and spoke of his exodus
that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.
Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep,
but becoming fully awake,
they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.
As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus,
“Master, it is good that we are here;
let us make three tents,
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”
But he did not know what he was saying.
While he was still speaking,
a cloud came and cast a shadow over them,
and they became frightened when they entered the cloud.
Then from the cloud came a voice that said,
“This is my chosen Son; listen to him.”
After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone.
They fell silent and did not at that time
tell anyone what they had seen.

Reflection: *The Lord is My Light and My Salvation*

– Responsorial Psalm

In this week’s first reading, God walks Abram (not yet Abraham) out into the night and invites him to count the stars in the sky. These same heavens will one day guide the Magi to Jesus. Both instances are nativities, each marking a new beginning in the salvation story. Both reflect this week’s responsorial psalm: “The Lord is my light and my salvation.”

Once Abram’s gaze leaves the stars, he must stand firm in hope and trust. God has made an incredible promise to this elderly man and his barren wife - that they will have descendants as numerous as the stars he has been admiring. God tests Abram’s commitment in a covenantal ritual. Abram endures a period of confusion and uncertainty, followed by a trance where he faces a terrifying darkness. Through it all, Abram remains steadfast.

In Luke's Gospel, the apostles, much like Abram in his trance, are overcome by sleep. When they awaken, they find a glorified Jesus, shining in dazzling clothes and speaking with Moses and Elijah. The brilliance of the moment fades as a confused Peter misinterprets his role in this encounter. As Peter continues to describe his idea for a construction project, a cloud descends, which envelops and frightens the apostles. A voice from the cloud urges them to "listen." Peter, James and John fall silent. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm." Both Abram and the apostles found their footing

Faith Sharing Questions

1. Our Church is polarized. Can you stand firm in faith and also be open to dialogue with those who hold some beliefs that seem diametrically opposed to yours?
2. In what ways do you listen for God's voice?
3. Reflecting on Abraham Lincoln's quote, how do you discern whether you are standing in the "right place" spiritually or morally?
4. When Peter was confronted with divine mystery he overreacted and "did not know what he was saying." When do you overreact to situations?

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: *Faithful God, you are our hope and our strength.
Trusting in your love, we bring our prayers before you.*

Petitioner: *(Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord*

Response: *Lord, Hear Our Prayer*

Leader: *(after the final petition begin the) "Our Father"*

Closing Prayer *(p.4)*

Third Sunday of Lent

HOPE for the Best

Reading I: Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro,
the priest of Midian.
Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb,
the mountain of God.
There an angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in fire
flaming out of a bush.
As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush,
though on fire, was not consumed.
So Moses decided,
“I must go over to look at this remarkable sight,
and see why the bush is not burned.”

When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely,
God called out to him from the bush, “Moses! Moses!”
He answered, “Here I am.”
God said, “Come no nearer!
Remove the sandals from your feet,
for the place where you stand is holy ground.
I am the God of your fathers,” he continued,
“the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.”
Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.
But the LORD said,
“I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt
and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers,
so I know well what they are suffering.
Therefore I have come down to rescue them
from the hands of the Egyptians
and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land,
a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Moses said to God, “But when I go to the Israelites
and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’
if they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?”
God replied, “I am who am.”
Then he added, “This is what you shall tell the Israelites:
I AM sent me to you.”

God spoke further to Moses, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites:
The LORD, the God of your fathers,
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,
has sent me to you.
“This is my name forever;
thus am I to be remembered through all generations.”

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,
that our ancestors were all under the cloud
and all passed through the sea,
and all of them were baptized into Moses
in the cloud and in the sea.
All ate the same spiritual food,
and all drank the same spiritual drink,
for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them,
and the rock was the Christ.
Yet God was not pleased with most of them,
for they were struck down in the desert.

These things happened as examples for us,
so that we might not desire evil things, as they did.
Do not grumble as some of them did,
and suffered death by the destroyer.
These things happened to them as an example,
and they have been written down as a warning to us,
upon whom the end of the ages has come.
Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure
should take care not to fall.

Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans
whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices.
Jesus said to them in reply,
“Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way
they were greater sinners than all other Galileans?
By no means!
But I tell you, if you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!
Or those eighteen people who were killed
when the tower at Siloam fell on them—
do you think they were more guilty
than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem?
By no means!
But I tell you, if you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!”

And he told them this parable:
“There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard,
and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none,
he said to the gardener,
‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree
but have found none.
So cut it down.

Why should it exhaust the soil?
He said to him in reply,
‘Sir, leave it for this year also,
and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it;
it may bear fruit in the future.
If not you can cut it down.’”

Reflection: *The Lord is Kind and Merciful*

– *Responsorial Psalm*

Hope is the virtue that trusts in the eventual triumph of love and justice, no matter how long it takes. As the palmist reminds us, we believe that the Lord is kind and merciful, but we resist waiting on that kindness and mercy. We don't want to hope for the best, we want the best now. This tension can leave us impatient with God, forgetting how patient God is with us.

When Moses encounters God in the burning bush, he doesn't even know God's name, but God certainly knows his. God has heard the cries of Moses' suffering people in Egypt. And, unbeknownst to this contented shepherd in his second career, the Lord's kindness and mercy is about to be revealed through him.

In the Gospel, God's patience is illustrated in Jesus' parable of the fig tree, especially when viewed from a different perspective. We often interpret the story as the tree's owner representing God, ready to cut down the tree, while the gardener, representing us, pleads for one more chance. But reversing this interpretation enriches the parable. Here, the tree's owner – representing us – wants to cut it down for not bearing fruit, while the gardener – representing God – advocates for giving it more time, promising to pay particular attention to nurturing and cultivating it, believing in its ability to eventually flourish.

Like the fig tree, we grow and change in our own time, much like flowers blooming or pregnancies progressing – natural processes that cannot be rushed, no matter how impatient or uncomfortable we feel. Through this lens, the parable reveals a God who is infinitely patient, kind, and merciful, giving us the time we need to bear fruit.

Faith Sharing Questions

1. Have you ever experienced a season in your life where growth or change came only after a period of waiting? How did that shape you and your faith?
2. In our polarized nation and Church, how might trusting in the slow work of God help you find some personal perspective?
3. What is the difference between remaining hopeful and exercising patience? Which is more difficult for you?
4. How does the image of unfolding, like a flower or a pregnancy, inspire you to trust in God's timing for your own growth and transformation?

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: *Faithful God, you are our hope and our strength.
Trusting in your love, we bring our prayers before you.*

Petitioner: *(Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord*

Response: *Lord, Hear Our Prayer*

Leader: *(after the final petition begin the) "Our Father"*

Closing Prayer *(p.4)*

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Let your HOPES not your Hurts Shape your Future

Reading I: Joshua 5:9a, 10-12

The LORD said to Joshua,
“Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you.”
While the Israelites were encamped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho,
they celebrated the Passover
on the evening of the fourteenth of the month.
On the day after the Passover,
they ate of the produce of the land
in the form of unleavened cakes and parched grain.
On that same day after the Passover,
on which they ate of the produce of the land, the manna ceased.
No longer was there manna for the Israelites,
who that year ate of the yield of the land of Canaan.

Reading II: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Brothers and sisters:
Whoever is in Christ is a new creation:
the old things have passed away;
behold, new things have come.
And all this is from God,
who has reconciled us to himself through Christ
and given us the ministry of reconciliation,
namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,
not counting their trespasses against them
and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.
So we are ambassadors for Christ,
as if God were appealing through us.
We implore you on behalf of Christ,
be reconciled to God.
For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin,
so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus,
but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying,
“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So to them Jesus addressed this parable:

“A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father,
‘Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.’

So the father divided the property between them.

After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings
and set off to a distant country

where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything,

a severe famine struck that country,

and he found himself in dire need.

So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens

who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.

And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed,
but nobody gave him any.

Coming to his senses he thought,

‘How many of my father’s hired workers

have more than enough food to eat,

but here am I, dying from hunger.

I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him,

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I no longer deserve to be called your son;

treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.”

So he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off,

his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion.

He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

His son said to him,

‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you;

I no longer deserve to be called your son.’

But his father ordered his servants,

‘Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him;

put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

Take the fattened calf and slaughter it.

Then let us celebrate with a feast,

because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again;

he was lost, and has been found.’

Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field

and, on his way back, as he neared the house,

he heard the sound of music and dancing.

He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean.

The servant said to him,

‘Your brother has returned

and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf

because he has him back safe and sound.’

He became angry,

and when he refused to enter the house,

his father came out and pleaded with him.

He said to his father in reply,
‘Look, all these years I served you
and not once did I disobey your orders;
yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son
returns
who swallowed up your property with prostitutes,
for him you slaughter the fattened calf.’
He said to him,
‘My son, you are here with me always;
everything I have is yours.
But now we must celebrate and rejoice,
because your brother was dead and has come to life again;
he was lost and has been found.’”

Reflection: *Taste and See the Goodness of the Lord*

– Responsorial Psalm

This week’s readings focus on the goodness of God. Joshua recalls the Passover celebration, marking a time when the Israelites, now settled in their homeland, can eat the produce of Canaan, no longer needing to rely on manna. In Luke’s Gospel, we hear one of the most beloved parables – the story of the Prodigal Son. After squandering his inheritance, the son returns to his father, broken and repentant. The father greets him with open arms, throwing a feast to celebrate the return of the son who “was lost but now is found.”

For many of us, the final part of the Prodigal Son story, though brief and almost like an afterthought, may hold the story’s most profound message. Like the older brother, our struggle isn’t really about jealousy or underserved love and attention. The deeper issue is that we have never fully embraced the words: “My child, you have always been with me, and all I have is yours.”

In 2 Corinthians, we are reminded that we are ambassadors for Christ, entrusted with the message of reconciliation. Yet, like children crying out for justice, we often shout, “It’s not fair,” fearing that others might be getting away with something and expecting God to act the strict judge. Like the older brother in the Prodigal Son story, we may focus on doing everything right but get so caught up in our righteousness that we risk losing the richer aspects that love, forgiveness, and celebration can bring into our lives.

Faith Sharing Questions

1. What does it mean for you to hear God’s words, “My child you have always been with me and all I have is yours?”
2. As an Ambassador of Christ, how can you promote forgiveness and reconciliation to our polarized Church and society?
3. How does the shift from relying on manna to producing the fruits of the land in Joshua’s story relate to your spiritual journey.
4. How can choosing hope over hurt influence the way you approach challenges and shape the future God wants for you?

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: *Faithful God, you are our hope and our strength.
Trusting in your love, we bring our prayers before you.*

Petitioner: *(Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord*

Response: *Lord, Hear Our Prayer*

Leader: *(after the final petition begin the) “Our Father”*

Closing Prayer (p.4)

Fifth Sunday of Lent

High HOPES

Reading I: Isaiah 43:16-21

Thus says the LORD,
who opens a way in the sea
and a path in the mighty waters,
who leads out chariots and horsemen,
a powerful army,
till they lie prostrate together, never to rise,
snuffed out and quenched like a wick.
Remember not the events of the past,
the things of long ago consider not;
see, I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
In the desert I make a way,
in the wasteland, rivers.
Wild beasts honor me,
jackals and ostriches,
for I put water in the desert
and rivers in the wasteland
for my chosen people to drink,
the people whom I formed for myself,
that they might announce my praise.

Reading II: Philippians 3:8-14

Brothers and sisters:
I consider everything as a loss
because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things
and I consider them so much rubbish,
that I may gain Christ and be found in him,
not having any righteousness of my own based on the law
but that which comes through faith in Christ,
the righteousness from God,
depending on faith to know him and the power of his resurrection
and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death,
if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

It is not that I have already taken hold of it
or have already attained perfect maturity,
but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it,
since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus.
Brothers and sisters, I for my part
do not consider myself to have taken possession.

Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind
but straining forward to what lies ahead,
I continue my pursuit toward the goal,
the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.

Gospel: John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.
But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area,
and all the people started coming to him,
and he sat down and taught them.
Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman
who had been caught in adultery
and made her stand in the middle.
They said to him,
"Teacher, this woman was caught
in the very act of committing adultery.
Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women.
So what do you say?"
They said this to test him,
so that they could have some charge to bring against him.
Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger.
But when they continued asking him,
he straightened up and said to them,
"Let the one among you who is without sin
be the first to throw a stone at her."
Again he bent down and wrote on the ground.
And in response, they went away one by one,
beginning with the elders.
So he was left alone with the woman before him.
Then Jesus straightened up and said to her,
"Woman, where are they?
Has no one condemned you?"
She replied, "No one, sir."
Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you.
Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

Reflection: *The Lord has done great things for us;*

– Responsorial Psalm

It is often said that the only constant in life is change – that we can never step into the same river twice. This Lent, however, we are reminded that alongside the inevitability of change, there is another constant: God's mercy and steadfast love for us. In week one we saw God liberate the Israelites from slavery. In week two, God called childless Abram out of Ur to become the father of a great nation. In week three God nurtured the fruitless fig tree with steadfast patience, and last week we celebrated redemption in the return of the prodigal son. God's love is the constant in life, serving as an anchor for us to hold on to through the inevitability of change.

This week Isaiah reminds us once again of the Exodus from Egypt - that moment when the Israelites began to be a people unto themselves. But after reminding them of God's help in the past, he exhorts them not to overlook what God is doing for them now: "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not: see, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

Philippians echoes this call of awareness to the early Christians and to us as well. We are urged to forget what lies behind and to press on toward what lies ahead. In the Gospel, Jesus saves the life of the woman caught in adultery and then offers her a fresh start, a new beginning, telling her to "Go and from now on do not sin anymore." The Lord continues to do great things for us. But do we perceive them?

Faith Sharing Questions

1. When in your life have you made a fresh start? How did that feel?
2. How constant have you found God to be in your life?
3. How might the constancy of God's mercy work through you to help heal divisions caused by polarization in the family, church or society?
4. What great hope to you hold for the future?

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: *Faithful God, you are our hope and our strength.
Trusting in your love, we bring our prayers before you.*

Petitioner: *(Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord*

Response: *Lord, Hear Our Prayer*

Leader: *(after the final petition begin the) "Our Father"*

Closing Prayer *(p.4)*

Palm Sunday of the Lord s Passion

A New HOPE

Gospel Luke 22:14—23:56

The Passion is presented in a way that allows different members of your group to take on the roles of various characters in the story. In Luke's Passion, there are many people involved. Depending on the size of your group, you can ask for volunteers to read the parts of 1) Narrator, 2) Jesus, 3) Peter 4) Apostles. Everyone else can all read the smaller roles: Maid servant, Another Witness, Third Witness, Guards, Sanhedrin, Crowd, Pilate, Rulers, Soldier, two Criminals, and finally the Centurion..

(Narrator)

When the hour came,
Jesus took his place at table with the apostles.
He said to them,

(Jesus)

“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer,
for, I tell you, I shall not eat it again
until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

(Narrator)

Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said,

(Jesus)

“Take this and share it among yourselves;
for I tell you that from this time on
I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine
until the kingdom of God comes.”

(Narrator)

Then he took the bread, said the blessing,
broke it, and gave it to them, saying,

(Jesus)

“This is my body, which will be given for you;
do this in memory of me.”

(Narrator)

And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying,

(Jesus)

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
which will be shed for you.
“And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me
is with me on the table;
for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined;
but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed.”

(Narrator)

And they began to debate among themselves
who among them would do such a deed.
Then an argument broke out among them
about which of them should be regarded as the greatest.
He said to them,

(Jesus)

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them
and those in authority over them are addressed as ‘Benefactors’;
but among you it shall not be so.
Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest,
and the leader as the servant.
For who is greater:
the one seated at table or the one who serves?
Is it not the one seated at table?
I am among you as the one who serves.
It is you who have stood by me in my trials;
and I confer a kingdom on you,
just as my Father has conferred one on me,
that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom;
and you will sit on thrones
judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

“Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded
to sift all of you like wheat,
but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail;
and once you have turned back,
you must strengthen your brothers.

(Narrator)

He said to him,

(Peter)

Lord, I am prepared to go to prison and to die with you

(Narrator)

But he replied,

(Jesus)

“I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows this day,
you will deny three times that you know me.”

(Narrator)

He said to them,

(Jesus)

“When I sent you forth without a money bag or a sack or sandals,
were you in need of anything?”

(Apostles)

“No, nothing, “ they replied.

(Narrator)

He said to them,

(Jesus)

“But now one who has a money bag should take it,
and likewise a sack,
and one who does not have a sword
should sell his cloak and buy one.

For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me,
namely, He was counted among the wicked;
and indeed what is written about me is coming to fulfillment.”

(Narrator)

Then they said,

(Apostles)

“Lord, look, there are two swords here.”

(Narrator)

But he replied,

(Jesus)

“It is enough!”

(Narrator)

Then going out, he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives,
and the disciples followed him.

(Jesus)

“Pray that you may not undergo the test.”

(Narrator)

After withdrawing about a stone’s throw from them and kneeling,
he prayed, saying,

(Jesus)

“Father, if you are willing,
take this cup away from me;
still, not my will but yours be done.”

(Narrator)

And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him.
He was in such agony, and he prayed so fervently,
that his sweat became like drops of blood
falling on the ground.

When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples,
he found them sleeping from grief.

He said to them,

(Jesus)

“Why are you sleeping?
Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test.”

(Narrator)

While he was still speaking, a crowd approached
and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas.
He went up to Jesus to kiss him.
Jesus said to him,

(Jesus)

“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

(Narrator)

His disciples realized what was about to happen, and they asked,

(Apostles)

“Lord, shall we strike with a sword?”

(Narrator)

And one of them struck the high priest’s servant
and cut off his right ear.
But Jesus said in reply,

(Jesus)

“Stop, no more of this!”

(Narrator)

Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him.
And Jesus said to the chief priests and temple guards
and elders who had come for him,

(Jesus)

“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?
Day after day I was with you in the temple area,
and you did not seize me;
but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness.”

(Narrator)

After arresting him they led him away
and took him into the house of the high priest;
Peter was following at a distance.
They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it,
and Peter sat down with them.
When a maid saw him seated in the light,
she looked intently at him and said,

(Maid Servant)

“This man too was with him.”

(Narrator)

But he denied it saying,

(Peter)

“Woman, I do not know him.”

(Narrator)

A short while later someone else saw him and said,

(Another Witness)

“You too are one of them”

(Narrator)

but Peter answered,

(Peter)

“My friend, I am not.”

(Narrator)

About an hour later, still another insisted,

(A Third Witness)

“Assuredly, this man too was with him,
for he also is a Galilean.”

(Narrator)

But Peter said,

(Peter)

“My friend, I do not know what you are talking about.”

(Narrator)

Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed,
and the Lord turned and looked at Peter;
and Peter remembered the word of the Lord,
how he had said to him,

“Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.”
He went out and began to weep bitterly.

The men who held Jesus in custody were ridiculing and beating him.
They blindfolded him and questioned him, saying,

(Guards)

“Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?”

(Narrator)

And they reviled him in saying many other things against him.
When day came the council of elders of the people met,
both chief priests and scribes,
and they brought him before their Sanhedrin.
They said,

(Sanhedrin)

“If you are the Christ, tell us, “

(Narrator)

but he replied to them,

(Jesus)

“If I tell you, you will not believe,
and if I question, you will not respond.
But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated
at the right hand of the power of God.”

(Narrator)

They all asked,

(Sanhedrin)

“Are you then the Son of God?”

(Narrator)

He replied to them,

(Jesus)

“You say that I am.”

(Narrator)

Then they said,

(Sanhedrin)

“What further need have we for testimony?
We have heard it from his own mouth.”

(Narrator)

Then the whole assembly of them arose and brought him before Pilate.
They brought charges against him, saying,

(Crowd)

“We found this man misleading our people;
he opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar
and maintains that he is the Christ, a king.”

(Narrator)

Pilate asked him,

(Pilate)

“Are you the king of the Jews?”

(Narrator)

He said to him in reply,

(Jesus)

“You say so.”

(Narrator)

Pilate then addressed the chief priests and the crowds,

(Pilate)

“I find this man not guilty.”

(Narrator)

But they were adamant and said,

(Crowd)

“He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea,
from Galilee where he began even to here.”

(Narrator)

On hearing this Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean;
and upon learning that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction,
he sent him to Herod who was in Jerusalem at that time.

Herod was very glad to see Jesus;
he had been wanting to see him for a long time,
for he had heard about him
and had been hoping to see him perform some sign.

He questioned him at length,
but he gave him no answer.

The chief priests and scribes, meanwhile,
stood by accusing him harshly.

Herod and his soldiers treated him contemptuously and mocked him,
and after clothing him in resplendent garb,
he sent him back to Pilate.

Herod and Pilate became friends that very day,
even though they had been enemies formerly.

Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people
and said to them,

(Pilate)

“You brought this man to me
and accused him of inciting the people to revolt.
I have conducted my investigation in your presence
and have not found this man guilty
of the charges you have brought against him,
nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us.
So no capital crime has been committed by him.
Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him.”

(Narrator)

But all together they shouted out,

(Crowd)

“Away with this man!
Release Barabbas to us.”

(Narrator)

— Now Barabbas had been imprisoned for a rebellion
that had taken place in the city and for murder. —
Again, Pilate addressed them, still wishing to release Jesus,
but they continued their shouting,

(Crowd)

“Crucify him! Crucify him!”

(Narrator)

Pilate addressed them a third time,

(Pilate)

“What evil has this man done?
I found him guilty of no capital crime.
Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him.”

(Narrator)

With loud shouts, however,
they persisted in calling for his crucifixion,
and their voices prevailed.
The verdict of Pilate was that their demand should be granted.
So he released the man who had been imprisoned
for rebellion and murder, for whom they asked,
and he handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they wished.

As they led him away
they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian,
who was coming in from the country;
and after laying the cross on him,
they made him carry it behind Jesus.
A large crowd of people followed Jesus,
including many women who mourned and lamented him.
Jesus turned to them and said,

(Jesus)

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me;
weep instead for yourselves and for your children
for indeed, the days are coming when people will say,
‘Blessed are the barren,
the wombs that never bore
and the breasts that never nursed.’
At that time people will say to the mountains,
‘Fall upon us!’
and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’
for if these things are done when the wood is green
what will happen when it is dry?”

(Narrator)

Now two others, both criminals,
were led away with him to be executed.
When they came to the place called the Skull,
they crucified him and the criminals there,
one on his right, the other on his left.
Then Jesus said,

(Jesus)

“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

(Narrator)

They divided his garments by casting lots.
The people stood by and watched;
the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said,

(Rulers)

“He saved others, let him save himself
if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God.”

(Narrator)

Even the soldiers jeered at him.
As they approached to offer him wine they called out,

(Soldiers)

“If you are King of the Jews, save yourself.”
Above him there was an inscription that read,
“This is the King of the Jews.”

(Narrator)

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying,

(Criminal 1)

“Are you not the Christ?
Save yourself and us.”

(Narrator)

The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply,

(Criminal 2)

“Have you no fear of God,
for you are subject to the same condemnation?
And indeed, we have been condemned justly,
for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes,
but this man has done nothing criminal.”

(Narrator)

Then he said,

(Criminal 2)

“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

(Narrator)

He replied to him,

(Jesus)

“Amen, I say to you,
today you will be with me in Paradise.”

(Narrator)

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land
until three in the afternoon
because of an eclipse of the sun.
Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle.
Jesus cried out in a loud voice,

(Jesus)

“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”;

(Narrator)

and when he had said this he breathed his last.

Pause for a short time.

The centurion who witnessed what had happened glorified God and said,

(Centurion)

“This man was innocent beyond doubt.”

(Narrator)

When all the people who had gathered for this spectacle saw what had happened,
they returned home beating their breasts;
but all his acquaintances stood at a distance,
including the women who had followed him from Galilee
and saw these events.

Now there was a virtuous and righteous man named Joseph who,
though he was a member of the council,
had not consented to their plan of action.

He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea
and was awaiting the kingdom of God.

He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

After he had taken the body down,
he wrapped it in a linen cloth
and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb
in which no one had yet been buried.

It was the day of preparation,
and the sabbath was about to begin.

The women who had come from Galilee with him followed behind,
and when they had seen the tomb
and the way in which his body was laid in it,
they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils.

Then they rested on the sabbath according to the commandment.

(A Moment of Silence)

Faith Sharing Questions

1. In this reading of Luke's passion story, what struck you the most?
2. Only in Luke's Gospel does Jesus remain near Peter when the cock crows for the third time. Luke tells us that "the Lord turned and looked at Peter." What do you think Jesus' look conveyed to Peter in that moment?
3. In Luke's account we hear Jesus say "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Have you ever offered or been given forgiveness in such an unconditional way?
4. What does the passion of Jesus teach you about hope? What does it teach you about healing our polarized Church?

Prayers of the Faithful

Leader: *Faithful God, you are our hope and our strength.
Trusting in your love, we bring our prayers before you.*

Petitioner: *(Please end your petition with) We Pray to the Lord*

Response: *Lord, Hear Our Prayer*

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Closing Prayer *(p.4)*



HAPPY EASTER!



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