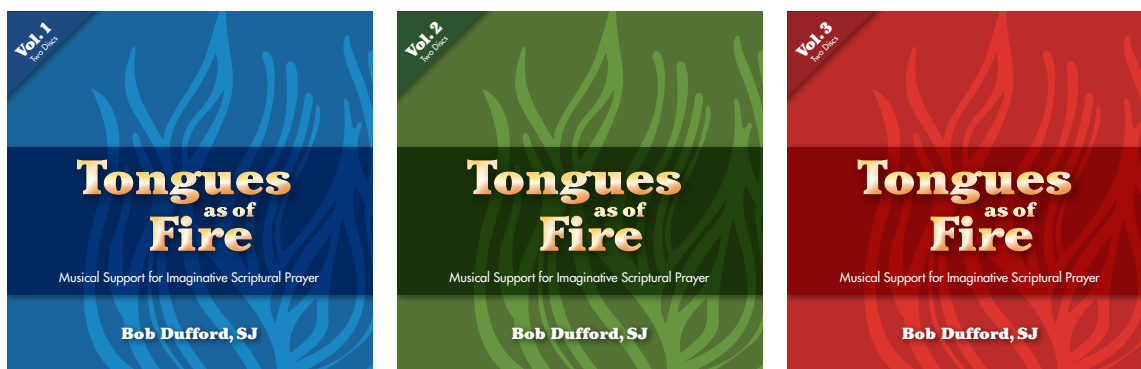




Tongues as of **Fire**

Bob Dufford, SJ

Meditation Texts



This PDF is intended to complement the music and narration found in Volumes 1–3 of *Tongues as of Fire*, allowing listeners to follow the spoken voice.

Go [here](#), to purchase the entire collection as a 6-CD set or in digital format.

CONTENTS

To go immediately to a particular script, click on its title.

[With Adobe Acrobat Reader: To return here from a script, click on the blue TOC button near the top of the script.]

WEEK 1: God's Generosity, Mercy and Call 5

1-01 The Longing	6
1-02 Ever Ancient, Ever New.	7
1-03 Scarlet and Snow.	9
1-04 Ice and Fire	11
1-05 The Call	14

WEEK 2: Jesus' Infancy, Childhood and Public Ministry 16

2-01 Among Us	17
2-02 Mary and Elizabeth	18
2-03 To Bethlehem.	20
2-04 Born to Night	21
2-05 The Child Grew.	22
2-06 The Lamb of God	23
2-07 Ache in the Desert	25
2-08 A Great Catch.	27
2-09 Give Me to Drink	29
2-10 Theirs Is the Kingdom.	31
2-11 Stand and Walk	33
2-12 Sent Forth	35
2-13 Five Loaves.	37
2-14 A Walk on the Sea.	39
2-15 Radiant as Light.	41
2-16 Up a Tree	43

WEEK 3: Jesus' Passion and Death 45

3-01 Hosanna.	46
3-02 In Memory of Me	48
3-03 Let This Cup Pass	51
3-04 Three Trials.	53
3-05 Led Away	55
3-06 It Is Finished.	57
3-07 This Is Your Mother	59

WEEK 4: Jesus' Risen Life and Pentecost 61

4-01 It Is the Lord	62
4-02 Burning Within Us.	64
4-03 Do You Love Me?	66
4-04 He Is Not Here.	68
4-05 Tongues as of Fire	70
Final Prayer of Gratitude and Self-surrender	72
4-06 Rays from the Sun	73

INTRODUCTION

The Organizing Pattern of the Spiritual Exercises

St. Ignatius of Loyola created a way of helping people to relate more intimately to God. He called this pattern the Spiritual Exercises. He divided it into four “Weeks.” Now a Week is not determined by the number of days, but rather by the progress of the retreatant in engaging the grace of the current Week. This is normally determined with the help of a “director,” i.e., a person experienced in giving the Exercises and in listening carefully.

In the succeeding pages, at the start of each Week you will find a brief description of the grace for that Week. The musical pieces are aimed at supporting your petition for that grace.

There is much more to the progress through the Spiritual Exercises than the mere thirty four pieces contained in this set of recordings, but they may help you to enter into the spirit of the Week.

I strongly suggest that you listen to the three introductory audio tracks on the CD or playlist. They will develop what is said here.

In the numbering of the pieces, such as 1-03 or 3-07, the first digit (1 through 4) refers to the Week. The last two digits are simply a way to sequence the pieces in the approximate order of the gospels, though the gospels themselves do not present the various scenes in same order.

In Jesus,
Bob Dufford, SJ

Week 1: God's Generosity, Mercy and Call

At the beginning of the Exercises, Ignatius encouraged the retreatant (1) to focus all the longing he or she could muster for deeper life, for growth, for holiness—in short, for God; and then (2) to trust that God was already desirous to give it. The other important factor to begin with is that the retreatant be able to trust her or his own internal experience, or at least to be willing to risk trying.

The gift or grace that Ignatius has in mind for the First Week might be described as an appreciation for the astounding mercy of God. The first step toward this is to ask for God's help to face the truth of my own sin. This step may seem nearly impossible for those who have grown up with a distorted and toxic sense of shame. Every instinct will be to turn away from God and hide since it feels like there is something wrong with me, that I am defective as a being, so anything that I do will turn sinful. So the important risk here in the First Week will be to trust that, whether I like it or not, whether I feel I deserve it or not, I am prejudicially loved—not merely tolerated—by God. This is mercy in a broad sense. We often imagine God as re-acting to sin in mercy. But God's mercy is as permanent and fundamental as God's own self. It precedes all sin. Mercy is Love Itself still faithful despite our sin. Without this sense of the mercy of God meditation on sin can actually be harmful and drive us further into hiding, like Adam and Even after they had eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

This wider sense of mercy is grounded in God's passionate care for our whole, vast universe, including this little bit of it called "earth" and the little slice of time that is my lifespan.

Reflecting on sin, death, hell and heaven is done in order to ask for God's help in risking to trust such ancient and enduring mercy.

1-01 The Longing

[These words were never meant as a script in the same way as are all the others. Rather they are almost as whispered lyrics as if “sung” by whichever instrument has the foreground melody. (Hence, this piece does not have a music version with the spoken script.) Imagine each instrument as a part of your own soul whispering words such as these to God.]

Part 1

[oboe]

Come and stay, O Lord,
night and day, O Lord.
Fill the dark and empty depths
that long for Your sunlight.

[clarinet]

You know the way, O Lord.
That path was made for You alone.

[oboe]

Quell the noise that sprawls,
that crawls, enthralls my ear.

[horn]

Come this way, O Lord.
Stay away no more.

[oboe]

Take the path Your feet have worn
since life rose within me—
now.

Part 2

[clarinet]

Stride through all my years.
Side with all my tears.
You alone know all of me.

[celli]

O Guide through ages past,
Home some day at last,
You have sought me, and caught me,
and have bought me dearly.

[violins]

Long You cared for me,
life prepared for me.
Long before,
before I ever knew Your name.

Part 3

[oboe]

Light these days, O Lord.
Show Your ways and more.
Take my hand to leave the land
where chains ever bind me.

[horn]

Teach me Your song, O Lord.
Unfurl my wings to soar with You.

[flute/oboe]

Fill my lungs with life,
my eyes with laughing light.

[horn]

Touch and still my soul. One
drop can fill my bowl.

[oboe]

Load my empty hands with gifts
to tell of your story,
tell for your glory.
Make my feet to walk with you.

[flute]

You alone have known my journey.

[oboe]

Come and stay, O Lord!

1-02 Ever Ancient, Ever New

Read: Gen 1-2; Ps 8; Jn 1:1-3

Sp Ex § 23

Before this or any world exists,

before space and time and matter,

there is only the unlimited Love that is God.

This boundless Love breathes a tiny universe into being.

At once the intense energy expands and there is light and eventually matter.

Gigantic clouds of it begin to swirl and contract into galaxies.

Through untold ages huge stars continue to ignite,

share their radiance, and finally burst in glory

scattering their substance in pale imitation of God's own self-giving.

One of these huge clouds has condensed to become our sun and its circling worlds.

With heat from without and within¹, the infant earth melts

allowing the heavy, molten iron to sink to a core that is hotter than the surface of the sun.

The spinning of that core creates a magnetic shield that guards our thin atmosphere.

Slowly the surface cools and hardens,

allowing the water to condense and fall as rain for millions of years leaving behind vast oceans.

In that ocean, trillions of tiny bacteria learn to live using the sun's light,

and give us an atmosphere rich in oxygen.

After a long age of glacial ice, volcanoes burst through the frozen surface

and awaken an explosion of new life.

Eventually plants and then animals venture from the sea onto the growing continents.

Finally bodies evolve which can support human thought and human choices

and human history.

As I stand and stare at the stars,

I am amazed at how the universe unfolds

from patterns built into nature itself.

Then, in the dark and quiet of my own soul,

very gradually, like the slowly-rising light of dawn,

I sense that I am not alone—

in fact, have *never* been alone.

The One who whispered all things into being

now surrounds me like a mother's arms.

In joy and wonder, I realize

that I have a part in the unfolding of the universe,

yet, unlike trees and dogs, atoms and mountains,

I can—in fact, must—decide my own role in this great story.

All-that-is has come forth from the secret of your love

and has been borne all the way to me

billions of stars later.

¹ I.e., heat “from without”: that which comes from collisions with comets and asteroids; “from within”: that which comes from radioactive elements already present, like thorium and uranium.

I am drawn not only to praise you as its source,
but also to reverence it as the deliberate gift of your heart
—as if you are saying to me, “I thought you’d like it.”

I remember the words of a psalm:
“Who are we, O Lord, that You should be mindful of us?”²

And so, I will take up your invitation to labor with you in making the universe.
I wish to understand its ways and be amazed at its beauty,
to care for it and heal it when I can ,
to respect it and bring it to fulfillment,
to receive its blessing and grow from its contact.

Lord, now I realize that in coming to know your universe,
I have come to know you, its continuing source.
The deep longing of my heart lies with you
but the beauty of your gifts easily distracts me
and I rush to them instead of to you.
Help me find my way through this maze.

When I climb a ladder, I ascend by successive rungs,
taking hold and pulling, stepping up and pushing.
And occasionally I may come upon a delightful rung
colorful or pleasant to grip and feel.
Though I may be drawn to dally there,
yet if I am to get to my destination, I will need to let go of it.
As long as the rung helps me, I respect it and make use of it.
And when I must let it go, I do so, not because it is evil or defective ,
but because it keeps me from where I long to go.

So it is with all the goods in my life—
my mind and body,
my health and span of life,
my skills and resources—
all your beautiful world I will love passionately and use respectfully
that others may do so in the future
but, I ask for strength to let them go when they keep me from you.

For you are the Source of all I am and the Goal of all my yearning,
You are the Light of every morning and Food throughout the day.
Help me to learn to know and love your ways.

² Psalm 8

1-03 Scarlet and Snow

Read: Sp Ex §47; Is 1:18

“I imagine myself living among brute beasts.”

All around me, the vast hoard swarms in an endless rush.

Voices urge me on:

“Grab all you can get.”

“Never let them see you sweat.”

“Take an eye for an eye.”

“Gloat in victory.”

Days become months ... become years:

ceaseless pursuit,

driven by the need to dominate, to control.

All my life’s precious energy is lavished on getting and having more —

Yet it never fills the aching hunger.

In the end, I am worn out with watching and guarding.

Finally my castle gate is breached by unknown forces,

the walls give way,

and all comes crashing down.

Suddenly, I am like an infant, naked and helpless.

Frantic to flee the shame, I flit from one distraction to another,

trying to gain back what I have lost.

But nothing works.

I fear my world is gone now.

Tired of the constant running, I quit trying.

Tired of yelling at the night, I sink into silence.

At last, in the empty quiet I hear an oddly-familiar voice:

“All your battles have gone amiss,

All your treasures have rusted.

And all the power you sought is scattered on the wind.

The gifts I gave you were all true to themselves.

But you have sought from them what they could not bestow.

Such gifts are far too small for you.

You were made for greater things—

for a Gift that never ceases,

that never disappoints,

that quenches every thirst.

You can only be filled ...

by Me.”

The sound of that voice echoes inside me.
I hear it when I wake in the night.
I hear it in noisy hallways and lonely country lanes—
so different from all my old voices.

And what shall I do now?
Can I begin again, ...
start another story?
I have so bungled the stuff of my life that I do not trust myself.
I am drawn to simply abandon it all,
to run and not look back.
The sight of all those wasted years has left me sick.
So much time lost on honing skills.
Are all these crafted gifts to be thrown out upon a rotting pile?
Or burned in the fires of my anger?

But then, in the bends of my agony, I hear that voice again,
“You are battered by the storm
but I am with you.
I will not leave you, naked human child.
These years that you’ve been distant are not lost.
The skills you have developed are not gone.
They wait within you.
Will you take them up again?
Will you learn to use them well?

I call you to the rest of your life.

I give it freely and without strings.
Will you trust me?”

The voice is silent now, but not as if departing,
rather ... as awaiting a response.

*Though your sins be red as scarlet,
they shall be whiter than snow.*

1-04 Ice and Fire

Read: Sp Ex §313-336

[The picture here is that of someone becoming aware of how strong the power of sin has become in his/her life. It is, as Ignatius suggests, like realizing that he/she is living among brute beasts. The person is under the thumb of what Ignatius calls the evil spirit, who labors to keep all this from becoming conscious. Then the good spirit prods with a sting of conscience, the weight of remorse, discomfort with feeling locked in. This growing awareness is felt as the soul's pain. The evil spirit counters with despair, the impossibility of ever "returning from the dark side," and the urge to return to "what I'm used to."]

I awake

and it is night.

The darkness coils round me

like a python.

I cannot breathe.

How have I come to this?

What twisted path,

What empty promise,

What crumbling slope has given way beneath my feet

and dropped me in this pit?

Light and hope

have left me here

— alone.

Once comfort and honor surrounded me.

Good fortune hounded my heels .

Trophies and medals and number one seeds

abounded,

grounded my world.

Others said I had arrived

and I believed in it.

Doors opened, smiles greeted,

I walked on successful waters.

Then quietly, cunningly, the coils of this dream

enfolded me,

and molded me,

and scolded me if ever I stirred.

Day after day, the thrumming voices urged me

"Take it easy."

"There is nothing to worry about."

"We will take care of you."

"We know what is best for you."

They drew me to forget who I was.
to embrace sleep—
empty, numbing, vacant sleep.
No more feeling pain!
No more feeling responsibilities!
No more feeling—at all !
And I thought, “This must be eternal rest.”

But something has wakened me—
pain—
a mass of glowing, molten magma rising from my own inner core,
like a volcano in an ice age,
like earth’s own energy seeking exit
to end ten million years of ice.

It startles the surface of my life.
It explodes in an urgent agony.
The voices outside rush in to soothe me saying,
“Why should this evil come to you?”
“We can help dim this pain.”
“We can help you to forget.”

But I sense this pain is not an evil,
not a punishment for wrongs,
or a brutal jab to enforce compliance.
Rather, it is the pressure of giving birth,
the need to let life loose into the world.

As the life continues to erupt, I begin to remember my frozen life:
all that I once excused,
all the lies I once embraced,
all the years I never felt.
How can I live with having done such deeds?
How can I unmake what has passed?

The old voices renew their chant:
“There is no going back.”
“You are sunk in too far.”
“No one can return from this dark side.”
How pleasant it would be to return to those easy, well-worn paths,
to what I remember!
Why spend time and toil
to risk the mess and the pain of birth?

This whole struggle teeters on the edge of a knife:
The new energy is so unknown, so alien.
Should I give myself to it so quickly?
Trust it so completely?

Yet something about it feels familiar,
It does seem to be coming from deep within me,
from a place I normally avoid.
How can it both be alien and yet be from me?
There is some mystery here,
something else going on.

Vaguely I sense a presence—another self—inside me.
Unlike my old voices, this presence steadies me,
It's like looking in a mirror, and finding the other face is more real
and more caring than I am,
and yet it never tries to control me.
I so want to do this right, but I'm not sure what I should do.
What if I get things wrong?
I'm afraid of being so ... so free.

These opposing energies leave me confused,
moving me in different ways.

[long pause to let conflicting melodies play]

No. I will live in chaos no longer.
Risky though it feels,
I will trust this new presence.
Until now I've imagined a battle to win back my life.
But this is more like surrender to an embrace.
For I no longer feel alone.
Another
who knows me
is with me.

The relief is both sudden and vast.
The energy trapped by my childhood fears
has been freed for living life.
The only name I can give this now
is JOY.

In my amazement I ask myself:
"Is this the work of God?
If so, it is very different from what I thought.
Maybe I never got the right idea when I was younger.
This is so much more real.

So how shall I work with this new Presence
in the rest of my life?

1-05 The Call

Read: Jer 1:4-10; Jn 1:35-51; Sp Ex §91-98

I come to a place of quiet, deep within myself ...
only to find that I have long been expected.
With ancient and enduring patience, a Voice calls to me,
a voice I think I've heard before.

It says,
"Come, let us walk together."

I answer,
"When have you come here?"

"I have always been here."

"Then why have you said nothing till now?"

"I have. Often.
You seemed to need to surround yourself
with noise and busyness
as armor against some fear.
I have respected your need."

"But now I am here; now I want to listen."

"Yes, you have made a courageous beginning,
and it delights me.
Do you want to continue?"

"I think so, but I'm a little scared.
I don't know where this is going."

"I know you are afraid,
but perhaps you can risk trusting me."

"Are you going to ask me to do something hard?
Something I can't do?"

"Do you ask this of yourself
or are you getting this from others?"

"I'm not sure. It's all mixed together."

"You know, I have respected
your need for armor these many years.
Does that tell you anything?"

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Let us begin then, you and I.
For my part, I will always respect your choice—
as I did with Abraham, and Moses and Jeremiah,
with Mary,
and with Peter, John and Paul
They too had their fears."

"I ... *want* to trust you.
I'm just not sure I really *do*."

"That's enough to begin with.
The courage you have shown in risking to trust me
is the first step out of yourself
and into the wider world.

Until now you were bound up with your own desires:

gaining possessions,
craving the esteem of others,
insisting on your own will.”

“It is embarrassing to admit it. ...
Why does all that seem so small now?”

“You have been freed to see beyond your own skin.

In the world around you
are countless others caught in their small prisons as were you.
I would bless them too, and see them free and flourishing.
for they too are heavily armored against what they fear.
Come with me. Labor with me to free them.

We will be misunderstood and scorned, for that is how the armor works.
You will have to let go of many certainties,
and of controlling your comfort and your good name.

But I promise that you will not be alone in this.
On the way you will learn to recognize and join with others
and experience their support and their gifts.
I would have you bear much fruit,
so that the world may see and trust the goodness of my Father.
So come, let us set out toward deep and uncharted waters. Follow me.“

“Wait! I’m not sure I can I really do this?
I don’t want to make a promise I cannot keep.”

“Remember you will not be alone.
I will always be with you,
sharing every struggle,
every hardship,
every joy
and every loss.
I will be like a vine with you as my branches, bringing you life and courage.
Remain in me, as I will remain in you.
After all, a branch cannot bear fruit on its own.
It must remain connected to the vine.

As my Father loves me and remains in me, so I also love you and will remain in you.

Let us set the whole world on fire with life.

Come, follow me.”

Week 2: Jesus' Infancy and Childhood

Starting with the Second Week our attention turns wholly to the life of Jesus. Ignatius would have us follow him around in our imagination and ask for the grace “to know You more intimately, to love You more deeply and follow You more closely.” By intimate knowledge [“... to know you more intimately ...] Ignatius means the kind of knowing that we pick up by being-there. If you spend time imagining these scenes from Jesus’s life, you will react differently when you hear the scriptures in the future. You will recognize it as “somewhere I’ve been.”

So when you picture Jesus speaking to a paralyzed man, don’t merely note what he says, but hear his tone of voice, watch the expression on his face and where he looks with his eyes. Consider the others in the scene: the Pharisees, the paralytic, the surrounding crowd. What are they doing? What might they be feeling? Ignatius even encourages us to imagine interacting with the others. Feel their touch: are they rough or tender?

“Intimate knowledge” is not about having a mystical vision or getting insider information about “what happened back then.” Your own subconscious will interpret the elements of the scene in ways that you may not expect. When you find yourself adding to the scene things that are not mentioned in the Scriptures, you are finding intimate knowledge of how you see yourself and how you see your relationship with God. As with a dream, it is you telling yourself something about you.

There can be no single, correct way that the scene should be imagined. There is much leeway in the details. The only caution: Stay faithful to the basic meaning of the passage. If you “get it wrong” on occasion, God and your director will help you see through it.

The purpose here is to realize that you have a place in the life of the Word made flesh. You are welcome there.

2-01 Among Us

Read: Rom 6:23; Lk 1:26-38; Jn 1:14,16; Sp Ex §101-109

From the time of Adam and Eve
sin ruled over the children of earth.
And sin brought with it a numbing blindness,
a blindness to itself, a death of the soul.

Meanwhile, in the land of Israel,
there dwelt a faithful few, children of Abraham,
who chose to trust in God's goodness,
and who looked forward to the healing that only God could bring upon the world.
And among this people, in a town of Galilee called Nazareth,
there lived a young woman named Mary.

The world around them knew nothing of all this,
and continued, as it always does,
to measure everything by power and wealth.

Then, with a leap of divine joy,
God begins to call the world back from that reign of sin.
In the fullness of time
God sends the angel Gabriel to speak with Mary of Nazareth.

“Hail, full of grace,
you are most blessed among women.
You shall give birth to a son
and you shall name him Jesus,
for he will save his people from their sins.
He will be great.
He will be called
Son of the Most High
and his kingship will be forever.”

As she listened,
Mary was amazed and yet troubled.
And so, while the angel waited,
she considered what these words would bring.

At last, Mary humbly gave her decision,
“Let it be done to me as you will.”
And then the angel left her.

And the Word was made flesh and lived among us.
And we have seen his glory,
the glory of the Father's only Son,
a glory full of grace and truth.
And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace upon grace.
And Mary kept all these things in her heart.

2-02 Mary and Elizabeth

Read: Lk 1:26-38

Soon after the angel's visit,
Mary couldn't wait to speak with her cousin Elizabeth.
So she joined a group headed south
toward the hill country in Judea.

In her quiet moments she pictured Elizabeth ... now with a child!
She pondered the old stories about Sarah and Rachel and Hannah
for they too had once been called barren
but they each gave birth to a son who blessed all Israel.

Her glance flew over the grass of the fields and the clouds of the sky,
and her soul soared within her as she whispered:
"How can I ever praise you enough, O Lord my God?
For You have done such great things for me!"
And she laughed with Sarah who had said:
"I have borne my husband a son in his old age,
and all who hear of this will laugh with me."

Then the words of the angel returned to her:
"You shall name him Jesus."
"He shall be called Son of God Most High."
"He shall sit on the throne of David forever."
Tears of wonder flooded her face.

As she neared the village of Zechariah,
she thought of Joseph and the beautiful way that he had changed.
When she first told him about the child, he was surprised and hesitant,
but the very next day he had come back to support her.
He had looked long into her eyes as he found his courage .
Then he took her hand and kissed it, and nodded ever so slightly.
She knew that others in Nazareth would not be so accepting.
but that would be part of her life now.

At last she stood at the door and called out to Elizabeth,
and at that very instant
Elizabeth felt her baby suddenly jump within her.
She went to the door at once and cried,
"Mary, how wonderful to see your face again!
Do you know?—the second I heard your voice
I suddenly knew ... You also are with child, aren't you?
Mary was surprised.
"How do you ...?"
"Oh, as soon as I heard your voice, I just knew!
Even the baby seemed to leap within me."
Then they sat down and shared their stories of angels.

When they had finished, Elizabeth sat back and stared in awe at Mary:

“Who am I that the mother of my Lord should visit me?”

Then, back and forth,

they each remembered the prayer of Hannah,

when she gave her only son Samuel

to the service of the Lord.

“My heart delights in the Lord,

my mighty Savior .”

“There is no one like the Lord,

no rock like our God.”

“The bows of the mighty are broken

but the weak clothe themselves in strength.”

“The Lord raises the needy from the dust

and seats them on thrones of glory.”

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months,

and then returned home.

2-03 To Bethlehem

Read: Lk 2:1-7; Sp Ex §111-117

The road from Nazareth to Bethlehem ... long and dusty ...
the soft thud of the donkey's hoof, step by step
Joseph picks out a careful path.
Mary sways on the donkey and lifts her eyes.
The early evening sky is cold but clear.

In the quiet Mary ponders the glory of the stars and the words of an angel.
"He shall save his people ... Son of the Most High ... throne of David his father forever."
Joseph glances at Mary and wonders to himself,
"How hard this must be for a woman so great with child!"

On their way to Bethlehem, they must pass through the great city of Jerusalem.
The tents of the busy marketplace are just closing up for the night.
Their fellow travellers take leave of them a few at a time.
In the distance, they see the great Temple, the holy place of God among us.
Mary whispers, "Yes, God is *truly* among us."

But now they must press on to Bethlehem to the south.
They leave the gates and take to the road once again.

The hand of Mary can almost feel the heartbeat of her child.
Joseph looks back with an encouraging smile,
and together they continue their journey.
And then, Bethlehem at last.

They enter the village, Joseph speaks to an innkeeper, "We need lodging for the night."
"No, no, we have too many." The door is slammed.

He tries at a second inn: "Can you take us in?"
"No room!" they replay and shut the door.

Again the knock; again the refusal: "There simply is no room."
Joseph looks back at Mary, and pleads, "But soon she must deliver a child."
Then, after a hesitation, "Well, perhaps, perhaps you could shelter out back ... with the animals."
Without taking his eyes off Mary, Joseph nods in gratitude.
Filled with relief, they travel the last few steps to the shelter.

Their journey has ended and they rest weary upon a bed of straw.
Outside voices gradually die down, and the silent world waits.

2-04 Born to Night

Read: Lk 2:8-19; Sp Ex §111-117

The night is nearly half-spent.
In the humble shelter, amid the animals,
 Joseph stares in awe at the child now resting in his arms.
Near him, exhausted in sleep, Mary lies on a small pile of straw.
 Meanwhile, the donkey munches on a bit of hay from the manger.

Outside, the voices in the town have gradually died down.
All around them the darkened world waits
 quite unaware of its impending fortune.

Little by little, a cold wind picks up and begins to rush through the streets
 flowing out onto the nearby grasslands.

There in the pastures
 flocks of sheep huddle on the hillsides.
Their shepherds watch over them in the dim light of the moon.
High above their heads a thousand stars look down.

The mysterious wind rustles through the long grass and the fallen leaves.
 The shepherds turn their heads to follow the sound.
One by one, they come to stare at a strange glow on one of the hills.
Driven by curiosity and wonder, they start to walk, and then to run,
 moving always toward the growing light.

Then, they hear a voice coming from the light, straining to contain its joy.
It tells them of the birth of a child,
 a child born this night,
 born in nearby Bethlehem.
“You will find him wrapped in swaddling clothes
 and lying in a manger.
This child is born for you.
 He is the savior God has promised from of old—
 he is the anointed One, your Messiah. And He is your Lord.”

Suddenly the light expands with the sound of a vast singing chorus
 “Glory to God in highest heaven
 and peace on the earth to those who open to his favor.

The shepherds turn around at once and hasten back to Bethlehem,
 to the stable and to a door that opens to them.
Inside they find the new parents and their child just as the voice had told them.

With tears in their eyes
 and a hush in their steps,
 they enter and kneel in quiet awe.

2-05 The Child Grew

Read Mt 2:7--8, 13-23; Lk 2:39-40

Mary peers through a window
and watches Jesus playing on a pile of sand.
She reflects as she often does on her memories of this wonderous child:
the angel,
the misunderstanding with Joseph,
her visit with Elizabeth,
the long journey to Bethlehem,
and his birth among the animals,
the amazing tale of the shepherds,
the day with Simeon and Anna in the Temple,
their years of exile in Egypt and the return home to Nazareth.

She remembers times of nursing him and singing him to sleep,
of sitting him on her lap and making faces and silly sounds,
of noticing how the muscles in his neck, and arms, and legs became stronger.
With a smile she recalls chasing him around when he began to crawl and get into things,
and then the day when she and Joseph heard his first word.
They thought it sounded like “abba.”
And she would never forget the look of joy on his young face as he took his first step .

And now he sits on the sand,
delighting in the feel of the tiny grains flowing over his fingers.
What an amazing child!

A week ago a woman visiting from Bethlehem
told her a tragic tale of how her infant son was taken from her side
by Herod’s soldiers.

She said, “He would have been seven this month.”

Mary then realized that
this must have happened just after Joseph fled with them to Egypt.
He was warned in a dream.

But this woman had no warning.
The soldiers had killed her son before her eyes, and she never knew why.
Mary wept with her,
for she felt as if her heart had been pierced with a knife.

Later that night as she watched the stars,
she remembered saying to the angel something like,
“I surrender my life to your will.”

Then she wondered,
“Was the death of that young boy part of Your will?
I do not understand, but still I will trust you as did our father Abraham.”

2-06 The Lamb of God

Read: Mt 3:4-17; Mk 1:1-11; Lk 3:7-22; Jn 1:29-34: Sp Ex ; Sp Ex §273

Jesus left his home in Nazareth
and stands now on the bank of the Jordan River—
a young man about thirty.
Word had reached him that his cousin John was here
announcing the coming of the Messiah.
Among the people, many think that *John* might be the one,
but John himself denies it.

Ever since he was about twelve, Jesus had known
that his own sense of God
was different from that of other Jews and even from the Temple leaders.
Their notions always seemed to come from others,
but Jesus knew *Abba* intimately, as one who breathes knows the air.
He was like a man with two good eyes living among the blind: he had to tell them.
His mother had encouraged him though it meant he would leave their home,
for she knew it was the meaning of his life.

For several days now, he has been listening to John challenge this widely-varied crowd.
He calls them to share their food and clothing with those who have little or none.
To a soldier he says,
“Do not take bribes or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your pay.”
To a tax collector he says,
“Don’t collect more than what is prescribed.”
To the Pharisees he says,
“Bear fruit worthy of your calling,
and do not hide behind your position.
Trees that do not bear good fruit are cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Though his words are demanding, people still come to listen.
They’ve come here by the hundreds from the surrounding villages,
and even from Jerusalem and Jericho.
Jesus sees in this a sign that people thirst for more than survival and honor,
—they thirst for something only God can give.
It is time for Jesus to begin his ministry.

John’s voice hangs in the air,
“I baptize in water,
but one mightier than I will come
and he will baptize you in fire and the Holy Spirit.”
Jesus makes his way down to the river’s edge
and stands with those seeking to be cleansed.
One by one, John plunges them into the flowing waters:
Jacob, Daniel, Rachel, Elias, Anna ...

To each he says,

“Be cleansed of your sin and turn to bear good fruit.”

And now Jesus stands before him.

John hesitates. Did he recognize him?

“Should not *you* be cleansing *me*?” he says.

Jesus says, “Let it be,” and sinks beneath the waters.

As he comes out, the wind picks up

and John seems to see a magnificent dove hovering over him.

All around, the people hear a voice speaking from the heavens,

“You are my beloved Son. In you I am well pleased.”

Suddenly the wind, the dove, and the voice have vanished.

Jesus thanks John and goes off to pray.

The next morning while John is standing with two of his disciples,

Jesus himself walks near.

John points to him and says, “There!. There is the Lamb of God.”

The two disciples go after him. Then Jesus turns and asks them searchingly,

“What are you looking for? Whom do you seek?”

Hopeful, but stumbling for words, they reply, “Er, teacher, where are you staying?”

Looking intently, he says with the hint of a smile,

“Come and see.”

2-07 Ache in the Desert

Read: Mt 3:16-17, 2:1-11; Lk 3:21-22, 4:1-13; Sp Ex §274

The desert air is dry.
The baking sun is bright.
For forty days Jesus has been here only drinking water.
Carefully he weighs what happened with John at the Jordan.
...the voice of the Father for all to hear:
“This is my beloved Son.”
He has always known this,
but now it is more public.
Now he embraces his mission: to reveal the Father.
How shall I do this?

And then slyly slithering into his awareness
comes the tempter —
the same that approaches every child of Adam and Eve...
... and he speaks in a very reasonable voice.

“So, you are the beloved son of God.
You are hungry, like so many others.
You could give your people bread.
You could feed their hungry bellies,
You could remake these very stones into bread,
Give them free bread and they will follow you anywhere.
If they won't believe in you, they don't eat.
I know this will work.
It's been done.”

“No, that would make them slaves.
I have not come to make them slaves, but to free them.
The real food they need
is the word that my Father gives them,
the truth that they too are beloved of God.
Bread is important,
but the Father would give them much more than that.
Bread is not enough.
They need not only to survive, but to flourish.”

“Flourish ... yes ...:
Picture yourself in Jerusalem,
standing on the highest point of the great temple.
Down below your feet is a vast crowd
all looking up,
all watching you intently.

Leap down from there into their midst.
If you are this favored son of God, would you not be protected at once?
And would that not impress an unbelieving crowd?
 and convince them that you are the Messiah?
Why should faith be so hard?
 Take the risk out of believing.
 Do something spectacular.
You know you can.”

“No. Even if they saw such things, they would find a way to ignore them.
 If they will not trust God, nothing can find its way through.
If they are not willing to risk, they will never allow the intimacy of being loved.
They will always search for certainty, for guarantees,
 so they will never learn to love.”

“Very well, listen carefully.
I run this world. It runs on my schedule, my way.
I work with them as with animals:
 the hand with the rod writes the rules.
 I know power and how to wield it.
You want people to follow the law and do certain deeds?
 I can get it done.
 I have a vast empire already in place.
Let us work together.
 You tell me what you want done.
 I’ll guarantee it happens.
What could be simpler?
 Throw your lot in with me.”

Suddenly Jesus laughed aloud.
“Be gone, Satan.
Your ways keep people animals.
I have come to break your hold on them ...
 not with armies or lies or even shaming words,
 but with the truth about my Father.
 even if they reject it to my face,
 —even in death.

Isaiah once wrote,
 ‘He will not come shouting in the streets.
 A bruised reed he will not break.
 A smoldering wick he will not quench.’

I will not be the Messiah they expected.
 I will be the very Voice of God made flesh.”

2-08 A Great Catch

Read: Lk 5:1-11

“Some fisherman I am,”
Simon complains to the air,
“All night. No fish.”
“We, uh, came up empty,”
he admits to James and John.
“So, let’s ... mend the nets.”

As he works, he notices Jesus across the harbor,
with a gathering crowd.
Pointing with his chin, he tells Andrew,
“There’s that carpenter from Nazareth
who had dinner with us last week.”
“He does seem to draw them in.
Look at that crowd!”
“How can they all hear him?”

As if reading his mind,
Jesus approaches Simon to ask to use his boat,
to speak to the people from it.
Simon agrees and paddles out a bit.
Now everyone can hear well
as his voice carries across the water.
Meanwhile, Simon continues to brood and mend his nets.

Then he is aware that the talking has stopped
and Jesus is standing next to him saying,
“Thank you for the boat.
How about showing me where you fish—out there—in the deep water.”
Simon says, “Why not?”
and he and Andrew maneuver the boat out onto the lake.

When they arrive at their spot,
Jesus says, “So, show me how you toss a fishing net.”
Simon humors him and explains it all.
Then Jesus makes his first cast,
and the net spreads out over the waters.
“Nice throw,” says Simon. “You catch on quick.
It’ll come up empty though.
The fish don’t come here in the daytime.”
But, as they drag it in, the net begins to jerk and quiver.
Instantly, Simon is on the alert.
“There are fish here!,” he says, “a lot of fish!”
And together they strain to haul the net in.
He waves to James and John to bring another boat.
Soon fish are flailing and flopping everywhere.

Then amid all the activity, Simon suddenly stops and looks around.

“Wait a minute.

There’s something strange about this.”

He looks at Jesus, who winks at him, while pulling in fish.

“This is you, isn’t it?—this catch.

How ... ? Who ... ?”

He thinks: No, this is all wrong. I don’t belong ...

He wades through the fish over to Jesus and sinks down.

“I think you’ve got the wrong guy.

I’m not ...

I’m ... *always* coming up empty.

I don’t belong with ... someone like you, Lord.

I’m a sinner.”

Long Jesus holds him in his eyes and at last says,

“I know,

but come with me all the same.”

“But I’m a fisherman!”

“Yes, and soon you will be catching people.”

Meanwhile, the crowd on shore has noticed the amazing catch.

They know prices will be down.

That afternoon, Simon and his partners sell nearly all the fish,

but they’ve kept some and use it to celebrate a two-family feast.

Later that evening, Andrew, James and John hear the very same call:

“Come with me,” Jesus says to them.

They look to Simon who shrugs a little .

Smiling broadly Jesus contemplates each one of them

and then says,

“You are a great catch.”

The next day they leave everything behind

and follow him.

2-09 Give Me to Drink

Read: Jn 4:4-26

On his way through Samaria,
Jesus came to a town called Sychar,
near a well on land that Jacob had given his son Joseph.

Tired from his journey, he sat down by the well.
It was about noon.
Now, a Samaritan woman came to draw water at the well.

Jesus asked her,
“Would you give me a drink?”

She said to him,
“You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan and a woman.
How can you be asking me for a drink?”

[Jews always avoided contact with Samaritans.]

Jesus answered her,
“If only you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink,
you would have asked him.
He would have given you living water.
—yes, living water.”

The woman answered him,
“Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep.
Where can you get this lively, fresh water?
Do you think you are better than our great ancestor Jacob?
We have been told that he gave us this well,
and that he himself drank from it,
and his sons and all his herds.”

Jesus said to her,
“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,
but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst.
Indeed, the water I give
will become a spring of water flowing within
welling up to eternal life.”

The woman said to him,
“Sir, give me this water
so that I won’t get thirsty and have to come here to draw water.”

Jesus told her,
“Now you are ready.
First, you must go and call your husband and then come back.”
The woman hesitated and then replied,
“I have no husband.”

Jesus said,

“True, you have no husband now.

The fact is, you have had five husbands³,

and the man you now have is not your husband.

So you *have* spoken the truth.”

And she answered,

“Sir, I can see that you are a prophet.

Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain,

but you Jews say that we should worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.”

“Woman,” he said, “believe me,

a time is coming when you will worship the Father

neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

You Samaritans do not really know the god you worship;

we worship what we do know,

for salvation is through the Jews.

Yet a time is coming, in fact is already here,

when the faithful will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth,

for God is spirit, and so true worship must be in the Spirit and in truth.”

The woman said,

“I know that someday the Anointed One, the Messiah, will come.

And when he comes, he will tell everything we need to know,

and make it clear to us.”

Jesus paused and peered into her eyes.

Then, very carefully, he said to her,

“He, the Messiah,

is the very one that is speaking with you now;

I tell you plainly, ‘I am he.’”

³These “five husbands” are a symbol of the foreign gods worshiped by those living in Samaria after the Assyrians sacked the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC and replaced them with people from five different nations, who worshiped five different gods (Samaria’s husbands). The story is in 2 Kgs 17:24-36

2-10 Theirs is the Kingdom

Read: Mt 4:23-25; Lk 6:17-26; Sp Ex §278

Jesus travelled throughout Galilee.

He taught in their synagogues.

He proclaimed the good news of the reign of God.

Large crowds followed him from all over:

from Syria in the north,

and Judea in the south,

and from the Decapolis in the east;

and they brought to him those who were sick or wracked with pain,

those who were possessed or insane or crippled

and he cured them all.

And so he knew well the struggles and dangers in their daily lives.

Often when he saw the crowds,

he would go a ways up the mountainside,

and sit down with his disciples.

Then, like Moses on Mount Sinai,

he would teach them

in words such as these:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

who know their life has come from God,

for God will reign in their lives.

Blessed are those who mourn,

who suffer many losses,

for they will be consoled.

Blessed are the meek and gentle,

for the earth they inherit,

is God's own kingdom.

Blessed are all who hunger and thirst to know God's saving power,

for they shall be filled at the banquet of heaven.

Blessed are they who forgive,

who take no revenge on those who hurt them,

for they shall themselves be forgiven.

Blessed are the pure of heart,

the single-minded in their search for holiness,

for they shall find what they have sought.

Blessed are they who spend their lives for peace,

who are not deterred by the those who have given up,

who are not held back those who are afraid,

and who do not crave to see success within their lifetime,

for they are of God's own family.

And, you who hear these words,
blessed are you when they persecute you
attacking you with force of arms or unfair laws,
slandering you with clever falsehoods,
—all because of me.

On that day, lift your heads and rejoice,
for you will stand before the Lord with all the prophets
who've gone before you.

When Jesus finished speaking like this,
people were always astonished at the way he taught,
for he spoke as someone who really knew human life,
and not like most of their scribes
who often spoke only what they had heard from others.

2-11 Stand and Walk

Read: Jn 5:1-14

In Jerusalem, at a pool called Bethesda,
many have come
heavy with their afflictions:
the blind, the lame, the arthritic, the ones with chronic pain.
Each one hopes to be there when the pool bubbles and churns,
for it was said that an angel stirred the waters with healing powers,
and the first ones into the water would be cured.
One of these, Amos, lies crippled on his mat. He comes here every day.

Someone says, "The waters are moving!"
At once friends come forward to help others into the healing waters.
But Amos cannot hurry at all.
He must use his arms to drag himself to the pool.
And he never gets there in time.

The waters stop churning,
and he drags himself back to his mat.
He has failed again. In fact he has failed for thirty-eight years.
Amos has grown used to failure.

When Jesus sees him lying there,
he can tell that he has been ill for a long time.
He walks over to him and holds him in his gaze.
And then he asks, "Do you want to be healed?"

Amos stares over at the others and says,
"Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up;
someone always gets there before me.
Jesus says again, "Do you want to be healed?"

Finally the man looks up at him
and sees that Jesus peers directly into his eyes, into his soul.
There is something different about his one
—as if he has known him all his life.
"Could this be the one to help me into the pool?
Could I finally be free to walk like others?
Can I trust this man?"

Then Jesus says something quite unexpected, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk."
Immediately the man feels a change in his legs, his muscles, his feet.
They begin to move. *He* begins to move them.
No pool, no waters, no race to be first.

Slowly he sways to the side and pushes himself up to his knees.

Leaning on a pillar, he begins to rise on unsteady limbs.

He wavers and finds his balance,
and at last lets go and stands free.

He walks around amazed, exhilarated.

Can it be that simple?

Can this really have happened to me?

—after thirty-eight years!

Then, remembering the words of the one who healed him,
he returns to pick up his mat and walk home.

And all this happened on a Sabbath.

2-12 Sent Forth

Read: Mt 10:1-5; Lk 9:1-6; Sp Ex §281

Jesus summoned the Twelve
and gave them power and authority over the forces of evil
and to cure every disease.
He sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

He said,
“The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few.
So ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.
I know that I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.
The wolves will expect you to act as they do—
seeking wealth and power and the honor from others.
So I tell you:
Take nothing for the journey.
Leave behind walking stick and baggage,
and even food and money.
Trust the Father in your every move.
Then you will not be a wolf
and the sheep will learn to trust you.

When you arrive at a village,
stay with the first people who welcome you.
Do not seek for places more pleasant.
While you stay among them,
cure the sick and comfort the dying.
Give them the good news that I have given you:
Tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand for you.’

Encourage those who are afraid
and be gentle with those who have been hurt by others.
Let them see how you trust God
who cares even for the sparrows of the air,⁴
for they are worth more than many sparrows.
Tell them to look long at the lilies in the field,
who neither sew nor spin, yet God clothes them.
Not even King Solomon had garments such as these.
Say to them,
“Will not God, who cares for the simple flowers, provide much more for you?”

⁴Lk 12:27ff

Take for yourselves the words of Isaiah:⁵

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

He has anointed me

to bring glad tidings to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.

I tell you,

many kings and prophets desired to see what you see, but never saw it.

They longed to hear what you hear, yet never did.”

⁵ Lk 4:18ff; Is 61

2-13 Five Loaves

Read: Mt 14:13-21; Jn 6:1-15; Sp Ex §283

The apostles returned from their very first mission beaming with joy:
the good news of Jesus came to people through *their voices*,
the healing of Jesus came through *their hands*.

At about the same time,
they received the sad news that the great John the Baptist
had been beheaded by King Herod.

Jesus said to them, “We need some time for ourselves,”
and so they left in boats for a place of quiet.
But people got wind of this and rushed on ahead,
so that, when the boats arrived, they found a large crowd
milling around like sheep without their shepherd .
The people looked hungry to hear him
and Jesus’ heart went out to them.
So he talked to them again about his Father.

As the day drew on, the apostles told him,
“These people have had no food all day.
Perhaps we should disperse so that they can buy something
in the nearby towns.

Jesus looked at them as if deciding something and then said,
“Why not give them something to eat yourselves?”
The twelve gaped at each other, and finally Phillip said,
“Lord, how could that ever be enough?
All we have is five barley loaves, and a couple of fish.

Jesus said,
“Bring me what you have
and tell the people to sit down in groups on the grass.”
He gazed down at the five loaves and the fish
and then out at the vast crowd,
and finally raised his eyes to the heavens and prayed,

“Father, Source of all good,
feed your hungry people
with the true bread that only you can give.”
Then, he broke the loaves,
and gave them to his disciples to pass around,
and did the same with the fish.

Over and over the disciples gave out food from their baskets,
and over and over there always seemed to be enough.
And even though there many thousands in the crowd,
each man, woman, and child ate and was satisfied.

Afterwards, as people were sitting and talking,
Jesus had the disciples gather up what was left over.
When they finished, they were staring in wonder at a full twelve baskets,
for Phillip remembered starting with only five loaves and two fish.

Those in the crowd, realizing what Jesus had done, said to each other,
“Surely this is the Prophet, the Messiah we’ve have waiting for.”
Jesus heard their murmurings
and knew that they would to come and try to make him their king.
He looked sadly at them
and then withdrew to a quiet place to pray.
He looked to the heavens again and then said,
“Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.”

2-14 A Walk on the Sea

Mt 14:22-33; Mk 6:32-44; Jn 6:1-13; Sp Ex §280

The lake was calm and small waves lapped at the boat.
Nearby on the shore, stood the group of apostles
waiting for Jesus to join them.
They were talking excitedly about the amazing feeding of the multitude that afternoon.

When Peter arrived, he told them,
“Jesus said he wanted time to pray,
and that we should go on ahead in the boat.
Perhaps he’ll walk around the north shore.”
So they got in, and James and Andrew began to row.

As the boat crept across the waters,
they pored over their experiences .
Philip said,
“I remember staring out at that huge crowd
and then down at the meager loaves and fish
and feeling so helpless: How could we ever feed them with this?”
Thomas said,
“I could hardly believe it happened until we gathered up what was left.”

Still deep in their conversation, they felt a sudden wind on their faces.
At the same time the waves picked up and rowing became much more difficult.
They were shocked to realize: it had grown quite dark.

Lightning forked across the skies; a storm was brewing.
The boat lurched and rolled beneath their feet,
and they groped at the sides for something to hang onto.
Then Peter remembered:
The *last* time this happened,⁶
“Jesus was with us, asleep in the stern.”
But *this* time they were alone and already standing in a foot of water. .

He and his brother Andrew had grown up there and knew the lake area well.
They shielded their eyes in search of the shoreline, but it was no use .
Those who were *not* fishermen began to worry now: they had lost their way.
Lightning flashed again, and John spied something on the port side:
“Look!” he said. “What’s that?”
Another flash showed a human form
which seemed to be standing upright on the surface of the water.
“This can’t be! It’s a ghost!” shouted Phillip. “Row!”

Peter rubbed his eyes and was still staring into the dark.
Then amidst the wind, he heard a strong voice,
“Courage, my friends. I am with you. I am here.”

⁶ cf. Mt 8:18ff

A thrill ran through Peter: "I know that voice!"

"Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water."

At once Jesus said, "Come."

Without a second thought, Peter stepped out of the boat
and began to walk toward Jesus.

his eyes firmly fixed on that dark form,

Then a gust of wind upset his balance.

He looked down and realized that he was walking on water.

Panic took him and he began to sink.

He cried out, "Lord, save me!"

The strong right arm of Jesus caught him, lifted him up
and brought him back to the boat.

As they got in, the wind died down,

and Jesus bent toward Peter to say, "Did you think I left you?"

The others, meanwhile, stared with open mouth.

They had even forgotten to row.

All the wonders of that day had overwhelmed them.

And they knew that they were in the presence of something

—of *Someone*—

far beyond them.

After a bit,

a gentle lurch of the boat told them

that they had arrived safely at the shore.

2-15 Radiant as Light

Read: Mt 17:1-9; Mk 9:2-8; Lk 9:28-36; Sp Ex §284

The disciples had seen many wonders in their years with Jesus;
curing the blind, the deaf and the lame;
feeding multitudes with a few loaves,
raising those who had died,
walking over stormy waters,
changing water into wine.
All these things fed their sense of what the Messiah should be,
and they longed to see it come to pass.

So when he said he would be going to Jerusalem,
would be rejected by the chief priests and the elders,
would suffer and be killed,
they just stared ... dumbly.

Even when he added "and be raised after three days,"
it did not fit.

They had no idea what that might mean.

And then he started saying frightening things like
"Whoever wants to come after me
must take up his cross and follow me."

He seemed be deliberately pouring cold water
on all their fine visions.

When Peter tried to object to this, Jesus just rebuked him.

About a week later,
he took Peter, James, and John with him
for a special trip up the side of a mountain.

On the way up, he kept a steady pace.

He seemed focused: there was something he had to do there.

A cool, dry breeze flapped at their garments.

Between breaths the disciples argued
about how "suffering and death"
could go with "being the Messiah."

When they reached the top they were panting heavily,
so they sat down or leaned on nearby rocks to catch their breath.

Jesus had come to a stop and stood looking upward.

Eventually the three dozed off.

Then they awoke to the sound of the wind,
and Jesus was now facing them,
looking at each one.

Then a cloud shifted and he was in the full glare of the sun.

As they squinted they realized that it wasn't just the sun.

He himself was brighter than that sun.

There was so much light they could barely see.

Then they saw two others standing on either side of him,
and they were speaking with him about his journey to Jerusalem.

Peter, always so impetuous, said something about setting up tents.”

While he was speaking, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them.

Then a voice from the cloud:

“This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.”

That was too much for the three disciples.

They went flat on the ground in their fear.

When the wind died down, Jesus touched them saying,

“Come. There is nothing to fear here.”

They looked up,

and were relieved to see no one, but only Jesus.

But now they saw him with new eyes.

On the way down the mountain,

and in the days to follow,

they said nothing to anyone else.

However, they felt different now about his “going to Jerusalem.”

They said to themselves,

“There is nothing to fear here.

There is only Jesus.”

2-16 Up a Tree

Read: Lk 19:1-10

Zacchaeus crept around to the front window and peered through.
He had heard excited voices saying:
“It’s Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth.
He’s coming through Jericho!”

Going from window to window,
Zacchaeus stayed out of sight
for the townsfolk hated tax collectors.
But he had heard that Jesus shared meals with them,
and even numbered one among his closest disciples.
Maybe he could invite him to his house.
The key would be to avoid being seen
until he could meet Jesus on his own.

Now Zacchaeus was wealthy enough to have a house
with a private courtyard.
And so he grabbed a cloak and went out the back way.
He knew he would be hidden by the trees
until he could get ahead of the crowd.

When he reached the road,
he spied a sycamore tree with some low-lying branches.
He struggled his way up to a hidden spot and then looked down.
The small crowd was just coming into view
and he could hear Jesus speaking to the people.

To be honest, he felt a little silly up here in his nice cloak and good sandals.
(He always used nice clothes to guard his dignity,
for he was quite short.)
From the tree, he would be able to see Jesus when he passed by.
He was pretty sure the leaves would hide him .

Meanwhile, Jesus was about to pass under that sycamore tree,
but he stopped and looked up.
Zacchaeus realized that Jesus knew he was there.
Then Jesus grinned and said,
“Zacchaeus, come down.
I’d love to meet you.”

As he backed down the branches,
he felt horribly awkward,
but by the time he reached the ground,
he noticed he was no longer afraid!

Before he could say a word,
Jesus said, "I'm inviting myself to stay at your house today."
The little man was strangely speechless,
but his broad smile said everything.

When the crowd heard this,
they began to grumble:
"He is staying at the house of a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stood his ground,
"Lord, I hereby give half of all I own to the poor,
and if I have cheated anyone
I shall repay it four times over."

Then Jesus said,
"Today salvation has come to this house
for this man too is a descendant of Abraham.

The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost."

Week 3: Beginning of the Passion

The Third Week is about the last days of Jesus' life, his fidelity to his mission to reveal how God is toward us. "He who sees me, sees the Father." [cf. Jn 12:45, 14:7-9] Some people avoid contemplating the passion because of the physical and emotional violence. But the aim is not at glorifying pain and violence or even seeing Jesus as a tough hero who can take any pain that is thrown at him. Freely-born pain does not make up for past sin. But God can choose to forgive it. The question is: Can we believe that God is such that God would forgive us? As Pope Francis has often said, "God never tires of forgiving us, but we often tire of asking to be forgiven." Gazing at Jesus hanging on the cross is not meant to focus us on ourselves in guilt or shame, but to help us appreciate how far God would go to win us back. The focus is not on us at all, but on this Gift of God who is Jesus of Nazareth.

So the grace of the Third Week is the same as the Second Week ["to know you more intimately ..."] but we add "even though it be to loss and death."

3-01 Hosanna

Read; Lk 19:28-44; Jn 12:12-19; Sp Ex §287

Jesus told two of his disciples:

“In that village you will find a young colt.

Untie it and bring it here.”

They found it just as he said.

They told the owners, “The Master has need of it.”

The owners let it go.

They brought it to Jesus,

threw their cloaks over it,

and helped him on.

Then he began to ride—toward Jerusalem.

All along the way,

people spread their cloaks on the road before him.

while others covered the way with leafy branches from the fields.

When he neared the Mount of Olives,

some began to sing.

Soon the whole crowd erupted in praise to God,

for they had all seen his mighty deeds.

With infectious joy they chanted:

“Hosanna! Praise to God!

Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And blessings on the kingdom which is to come,

the kingdom of David, our father.

Hosanna! Give glory to God in the highest.”

Some of the Pharisees said to him,

“Teacher, tell your disciples not to say such things.”

He replied, “I tell you, if you silence them, the very stones will cry out!”

Thus was fulfilled the words of the prophet Zechariah:

“Shout for joy, O daughter Zion,

For, behold, your king comes to you—

a just savior, riding humbly on the foal of a beast of burden.”

A great joy fell upon the city,

and those who dwelt there took palm branches

and went out to meet him

Meanwhile the children appeared everywhere

running and laughing and dancing in the streets.

A small group of the Pharisees, seeing all that was happening,
were dangerously troubled.

They said to one another,

“Look at this!

All our works, all our plans have been for nothing.

If we are not careful,

the whole world will soon be going after him.”

Then, as they rounded the Mount of Olives,

Jesus caught sight of the holy city

and gazing at it, he began to weep.

Quietly he said,

“Jerusalem, O Jerusalem,

if only you knew, even at this eleventh hour,

if only you knew what brings true peaceback—

but you cannot see it.

The days are coming

when your enemies will surround you, and cut you down,

and leave not one stone upon another

for when God came to you, you did not know it.”

When at last he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up.

They asked, “Who is this?”

And the crowds replied, “Jesus the Nazarean, the prophet from Galilee.”

“Shout for joy, O daughter Zion,

‘For, behold, your king is coming to you.

A just savior is he,

riding humbly on a young donkey,

on the foal of a beast of burden.

Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David!”

3-02 In Memory of Me

Read: Jn 13:1-30; Mt 26:21-29; Sp Ex §289

Just before the Passover,⁷
Jesus realized his time was short,
for hatred was building among the scribes and Pharisees.
And yet his life's mission
was to reveal the truth about his Father to his disciples.

And so during their Seder meal,⁸
aware of who he was and what he was to do,
he rose,
took off his outer garments,
and tied a towel around his waist.
He poured water into a basin
and knelt down before Andrew.
He carefully smoothed the water over his skin
until the dirt of the streets was borne away.
Then he toweled it dry and looked up into his face.
Andrew looked back, wide-eyed like all the others.

Then Jesus continued ... Phillip, Thomas, Bartholomew,
Matthew, John, James ...
Each one was different:
each was touched,
and each was cleansed—
even Judas, though he did not return Jesus' gaze.

When he came to Simon Peter, he knew there would be trouble.
Peter was already pulling back clearly embarrassed by this reversal of honor:
“You’re washing my feet?”
Jesus only smiled, and then reached for Peter’s foot.
He said,
“Yes. If you are to be clean, I must do it. Soon you will understand.”

When he had finished and reclined again with them, he said,
“You find it strange that your Lord would do this for you?
Yet my Father has served you quietly
since he first breathed life into the clay of Adam.
If you would have part with me and my Father,
then you need to do for each other as we have done for you.”

⁷Jn 13:1

⁸Jn 13:2-5

Later, while they were eating,⁹
a few of them sensed that Jesus was distressed.
Then he spoke to them saying,
“I need to tell you this: one of you will betray me.”
Stunned, they began to look around at one another.
Then they began to doubt themselves.
They said, “Lord, could I be the one?”
Jesus said only,
“It will be done by one who has shared this meal with me.”

With a meaningful look Peter urged John to find out who it was.¹⁰
When John asked him,
Jesus dipped a piece of bread in the sauce
and then offered it to Judas.
Judas became uneasy and made ready to leave.
Jesus held him back for a moment with a touch
and, to cover his exit, looked at him and said,
“Hurry back to us when you are done.”
Judas looked back at him, took the morsel, and left at once.

And so it was night.

Jesus watched him go
and then looked around at those who remained.

They were eating bread made without leaven
in memory of the hasty exodus from Egypt.

Following Jewish custom,
Jesus took the bread
and blessed God for giving it and for freeing them from slavery.
He broke it, and gave it to them.

But then he said something unexpected,
“What I give you now is my own body.
Take it, each one of you, and eat of it.”
Their eyes widened and they became very still.
They could see that something new was happening—
something intimate ... something sacred.

⁹ Mt: 26:21-22

¹⁰ Jn 13:23-30

Later they came to the Cup of Redemption,¹¹
wherein the Jews long for the days of the Messiah.
Jesus filled the cup, thanked God,
and gave it to them, saying,
“Drink from it, each of you,
and trust in God’s saving work,
for this cup holds the blood of a new covenant—
my own blood to be shed for the many.”
As they drank from it in wonder, he said,
“In years to come, whenever you gather to do this,
do it in memory of me,
and I, . . . I will always be among you.”

Near the end of the meal, at the Cup of Restoration,
he would not drink, but said,
“I tell you, I shall not share this last cup with you
until the day when we drink it new
in the kingdom of my Father.”
Then, with a song of thanksgiving, they ended their meal,
and went out, as was their custom,
across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Olives.

¹¹ In the course of a Seder meal, there are four “cups,” four moments when wine is drunk by all: (1) the Cup of Holiness [“I will bring you out of Egypt and set you apart”], the Cup of Deliverance [“I will rescue you from slavery in Egypt”], (3) the Cup of Redemption [“I will redeem you with my power”], and (4) the Cup of Restoration [“I will take you as my People.”]

3-03 Let This Cup Pass

Read: Mt 26: 38-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46; ; Sp Ex §290

After their Seder meal,
the disciples go with Jesus to the Garden of Olives.
As they walk along, John looks around at the others:
Peter seems unusually quiet.
And Jesus looks preoccupied—perhaps something about Judas.
Once inside the garden.
they spread themselves around..
Some sit; others lie down.
for they are weary and full with supper,
Jesus walks off a way by himself.
Finally he leans back on a tree, sinks to the ground
and prays:

“Abba,
my soul is deeply troubled,
yet should I ask you to save me from this hour?
Shall I not go before them through these deadly waters?
I am the Word you speak to them.
I am Your Song made flesh.
I am the Bread you feed your hungry world.
It was for this that I came
to this earth
and to this hour.”

As he prays, the Tempter appears:
“Nazarene, we meet again.
Once in the desert, You sent me away.
But now I have measured you.
I have watched your little band:
their weaknesses,
their fears, their needs.
I have seen how you put your trust
in these wavering, wandering humans.
I shall triumph
as I have from the beginning.
I laugh at all your utter foolishness.
This is my hour;
I shall prevail.”

“Father most holy, protect those you’ve given me.

I have been your Word for them,
and the world hates them for it.

But I fear this storm will scatter them:

Peter, John,
Martha, Mary,
Matthew, Judas

I pray they will return;

I give them to your hands.

Keep them in your name.”

Jesus gets to his feet and walks back to his disciples,
but they are asleep.

As he gazes at each one,

the Tempter’s words return to him:
‘weak, wavering, wandering humans.’

Again he prays:

“Abba, how can the world *hear* your Word,
unless I speak to them?

How can they feed on your Bread of Life
unless this grain of wheat shall die?

And how will they know you love,
unless I do your will?

May your will be done,
may our will be done.

Thy will be done.”

3-04 Three Trials

Read: Jn 18 & 19:1-16; Lk 23:1-6,13-25;; Sp Ex §291-295

Peter just stood there in the garden staring.
The image burned in his memory:
Jesus ... his hands tied behind his back.
Jesus ... led away by soldiers.
He drew his sword, but Jesus would not allow it.
Jesus ... taken.

The others had scattered. Only John remained.
He says, "They're going to the house of the high priest."
Peter nods vacantly. And they set out.
The gatekeeper knows John and lets him through,
But Peter must wait outside.

Those on watch huddle around a charcoal fire,
and Peter joins them.
After a while, he realizes he has been shouting denials,
and is filled with fear.
The crowing of a rooster brings him back to the present,
and to a hard memory from their last supper:
"Before the cock crows, you will deny three times that you even know me."
He can still picture Jesus looking at him.
Peter stares back, but his eyes lose focus.
"No! How did this happen? Three times! No! No!"
He turns and wanders back out into the city.
The tears have just begun.

During the long night,
the guards blindfold Jesus and sit him on a stool.
Someone hits him; another cries,
"Tell us who struck you, Messiah?"
And they all laugh,
And then they do it again.
When it ceases to amuse them,
they remove the blindfold and cast him into a cold, dark cell
for the remaining hours of the night—alone.
In the morning, the council of elders brings him up for judgment.
They demand, "If you are the Messiah, tell us now."
"If I tell you, you will not believe. You will not respond at all.
But I tell you, the Son of Man will soon be sitting at the right hand of the power of heaven."

Outraged the high priest tears his garment.
"Blasphemy! You have heard it yourselves. Give the judgment!"
Together they all shout, "He must die!"
At last victory is near at hand.
Someone says, "Time to remove this thorn from our side."
Only one step left.

They have their guards drag Jesus to the house of the Roman governor.

After a significant wait, Pilate goes out to face this irksome crowd.

“This man you brought—is he a criminal? What is he charged with?”

“He claims he is king of the Jews.”

“You have a law court; use it.”

“But Roman policy does not allow us to crucify anyone.”

At this, Pilate goes back inside and asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Jesus says,

“Is this you asking, or it is the temple rulers?”

“I am not a Jew, am I?”

Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me.

What have you done?”

“If I were such a king, my followers would be fighting to free me.

But my kingdom is not from this world.”

“Then you are a king?”

“That is your word and your concern.

I was born into the world for this: to testify to the truth.

All who belong to the truth hear my voice.”

Pilate says, “Truth! Whatever that means.”

Returning to the crowd, Pilate says: “I find no case against this man warranting death.

Even Herod agrees.

But I will have him flogged.

And so the soldiers take Jesus away to be scourged.

The iron embedded in their whips cuts flesh from bone.

In further mockery they crown him with a circlet of thorns.

Finally Pilate has him brought out hoping to shock the crowd. He says,

“Behold, the man!”

“Away with him. Away with him. Crucify him”

In a last effort to free him, Pilate says to them,

“Each year at Passover I release a prisoner to you.

Shall I release this king of the Jews?”

The crowd looks to the chief priests but they smile and answer,

“Release to us the rebel Barabbas.”

Pilate says,

“You want me to crucify your king?”

“Caesar is our king.”

And they shout the louder, “Away with him. Crucify him.”

In the end Pilate gives in to them,

and delivers Jesus over to be crucified.

3-05 Led Away

Read: Lk 23:26-34; Stations of the Cross; ; Sp Ex §296

“I wash my hands of this man’s blood,” says Pilate,
and then turns him over to be crucified.
“Pick it up,” the soldier commands with a whip.
Slowly, Jesus lifts the crossbeam upon his wounded shoulders.
The weight of the wood staggers him.
At last he finds his balance,
and begins to walk.

The scent of the wood calls up memories:
his years as a carpenter in Nazareth,
the day he left his mother to “be about his father’s business,”
the journey to the Jordan River and his cousin John,
and time in the desert,
all the travels around Galilee and across the lake,
... and finally the journey to Jerusalem.
This now would be his last journey.
He takes a step toward the parting crowd.

They jeer, they laugh, they mock,
but his pace remains deliberate
Then amid the noise, he senses a gentle presence.
His eyes suddenly bring him
both deep comfort and keen pain.

His mother’s face draws him back
to setting the table for dinner
and watching children play,
to a confident look followed by “Do whatever he tells you,”
and to a candle-lit prayer after the death of Joseph.
The anguish on her face is laced with determination.
She will remain with him to the end.
“Move along” says a whip,
and he must turn away.

His pace is now slow and awkward.
The stones beneath his feet are uneven.
He slips in his own blood
and falls to the ground.
The heavy cross lands on his back.
“You there! Help him!”
Simon, an African from Cyrene,
lifts the beam as Jesus stands up
and he helps him to carry it.

Step by step his labor becomes an honor
as he watches Jesus walk to his death.

More steps, more falls, more chance-meetings—
the crowd passes through the gates
and up the hill of the skull.

The sky is already darkening and wind has picked up.
At last he and Simon allow the crossbeam to fall.

Ignoring his dignity, the soldiers strip him of his garments
tossing them aside for themselves.

Then one by one they hammer his limbs to the cross
with three iron nails.

His feet will bear him nowhere else;
his journeys have ended.

Lying there looking up to the heavens, Jesus prays,
“Father,
forgive them.
They know not what they do.”

3-06 It Is Finished

Read: Mt 27:35-50; Lk 23:32-49; Jn 19:25-30; Sp Ex §297

I stand amid a crowd on the hill of the Skull.

A stiff wind tugs at my garments.

Roman soldiers complain about waiting for three convicts to slowly suffocate.

Above the head of the one in the middle is a crudely lettered sign:

“Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

Shouted insults rise above the rush of the wind:

“So the King of the Jews saved others, but cannot save himself.”

“Weren’t you going to destroy the Temple
and rebuild in three days?”

“If you want us to believe that you are the Son of God,
come down from that cross.”

“A real Messiah would be able to save all three of us. Can you do that?”

At a lull in the wind a quieter voice speaks up:

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

Jesus turns his head and responds:

“I promise you, before this day is over, you will be there—with me.”

An hour trudges by.

Slowly, in the heavy sky,

the massing clouds have begun to darken the sun.

Meanwhile, the soldiers argue about who keeps his nicely-woven robe.

They decide to roll dice.

High above us, the clouds begin to weep in a gentle rain.

It seems that Earth itself must mourn this event

while its children mock it—or worse, ignore it.

Gradually, the hecklers weary of their sport and return to the city.

Only a few remain now.

Mary Magdalene has fallen to her knees near the foot of his cross,
and she looks up into his eyes.

His slight nod tells her that he knows.

His youngest disciple, John, comes forward with his mother Mary on his arm.

Faithful to the end, she has been in the crowd since the trial.

As they approach, she hears his voice cracked with thirst:

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me.”

The soldiers believe he has begun to despair,

but Mary knows he is praying a psalm¹²:

¹² Psalm 22

*Be not far, O Lord, for trouble is near, and no one is here to help.
All who see me mock me; they curl their lips and jeer.
My life pours out like water; I can count all my bones.
They cast lots to divide my clothing among them.
Yet you, O Lord, have answered my cry,
And generations to come will hear of it and be glad.*

Jesus sees Mary standing by John and whispers:
Mother, he is now your son.
And to John, he says,
She is *your* mother now.
John places his arm around her shoulder
and takes her into his care.
Swallowing hard, Mary peers at Jesus
and remembers the words of an angel long ago.

The sky has grown much darker now
and his breathing more ragged.
Drop by drop the moments drain away
and his blood falls to the earth.
This blood has burned with one passion:
to have earth's children know the Father as he is.
For this he longs more than life itself.
And so, to us and to the world, he says, "I thirst."

In the silence that follows,
I stretch my hand to feel the rough wood of the cross.
As I draw it back I am startled to see two drops of his blood upon my skin.
Slowly I lift my head and realize that he is looking into my eyes
and that all speech has left me.

A peal of thunder rolls from east to west in the heavens.
Looking out to the horizon, he slowly gathers air into his tortured lungs
and with a final effort, he hurls a word to all who would hear: "It-is-finished."¹³
The rest of his breath is lavished upon the world
and he is gone.
Mary grips John's arm
and John remembers standing on another windy hill
hearing the Voice from the descending cloud,
"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

¹³ In the Greek of John's Gospel this is a single word: ΤΕΤΕΛΕΣΤΑΙ, (Tetelestai)

3-07 This Is Your Mother

Read: Jn 19:26-27; Mt 27:51-53

Mary, John, and Magdalene return to the refuge of the upper room.
As they pass through the door,
the memory of Jesus presses upon them from floor to ceiling:
his words, his smile, his touch ... his eyes closed in death.
Twenty four hours ago he was here—washing feet and sharing pascal lamb.

Magdalene sinks down onto a cushion in a corner and falls asleep.
Mary sits quietly ... and gazes at a thorn she disentangled from his hair.
John looks out a window ... vaguely keeping watch for the other disciples.
As the night drags on, they begin to arrive.
“Where were you when he died?”
“Did you feel the earth quake in the midafternoon?”
“What have they done with his body?”
“Has anyone seen Simon Peter?”

Each new arrival approaches Mary with hesitation,
but she reaches out to embrace each one.
She has remembered Jesus’ words to her from the cross:
“Now *he* is your son.”
And she holds it in her heart to mean not only John
but all the “little flock.”
She will be a mother to all of them now.
She knows they are in pain,
and so she will comfort them and encourage them tell their stories.

After an hour James and Matthew arrive.
“At the end of the trial, we went to the Temple. We needed to grieve at the Holy Place.
And when the earthquake hit,
we saw the Great Veil ripped apart from top to bottom,
Suddenly we could all look right into the Holy of Holies.
John turns his head and says,
“From top to bottom ...
as if God himself tore it to show us that we all have a place there now,
not just the high priests ...
and not just the disciple whom Jesus loved.”
Mary puts her hand on John’s arm.

Meanwhile, Magdalene awakes and comes over to Mary.
The two of them decide to round up a little bread and cheese and wine
to refresh people as they come in.

At a knock, Magdalene opens to three more: Thomas, Jude and the younger James.
They seem rather sheepish, but are relieved to find the others already gathered,
and they sit down to share food and stories.

As Mary looks around, she realizes that many of the twelve are here now.
Only five are missing.

Around midnight Phillip arrives with Bartholomew.
They sit down, and Mary brings food.
They confess that they crept away when the crowd shouted, "Caesar is our king."
Phillip adds, "We walked around the streets,
and then we met some friends who invited us in to talk.
They said they were very sorry to hear about Judas. I said, "What do you mean?"
Well, they told us that he ... hanged himself."
With a sudden intake of breath, Mary feels another sword pierce her heart.

It is now the deep dark before dawn on the Sabbath.
Andrew appears in the doorway with a grim smile and says "Shalom."
Then he looks back to the entryway
as his brother Simon slowly steps into the room.
Mary senses that something is wrong:
his eyes are red and swollen, his tongue silent—
strange attributes for Simon Peter.
She gets up and goes to greet him,
but he stops her, seeing the question in her eyes.
Then it all tumbles out at once.
"Around the fire ... I swore I didn't know him ... A cock crowed ... I ran from their words."
John explains, "This must have happened in the courtyard of Annas.
I wondered where he went."
Andrew says, "I found him sitting on burlap sacks in an dark alleyway."
Mary brushes the tear from Peter's cheek and says,
"You had the courage to come back to us and face this.
If only Judas had done the same!
I am sure that, if we can forgive you, my son would too."
And with that she embraces him and soon the others do as well.

In the quiet that follows, Mary eats from the bread.
As she sips from her cup of wine,
she looks around at them all and says,
"It is an hour of great darkness and I do not know what will come of it.
But we are here and we are breaking bread in his memory.

He always taught us to call God "Father."
So let us pray together:
"O Father of our people, stay with us in this dark hour,
as you stayed with our ancestors in Babylon.
We place our trust in you.
Let it be done to us as you will."

Week 4: Jesus' Risen Life and Pentecost

The scenes of the Fourth Week are from the resurrected life of Jesus. At first glance this may seem to be just enjoying the victory over death and proving to people that he is “still alive.” But the fact is that his human lifespan is over; he has died. This is not reanimation for more of the same as with Lazarus [Jn 11] or the son of the widow of Naim [Lk 7:11-14].

The grace of the Fourth Week is to find hope as we look on the very same world with all its corruption, greed, shaming, and angling for power that still remains. To look upon such a world with hope seems crazy to us because we feel completely inadequate to have much effect upon it. But we are not alone in this. Jesus is still with us in a way we do not fully grasp.

The various scenes in this Week pivot on the dawning realization that Jesus “has been with me/us all along,” e.g., with Magdalene at the tomb [Jn 20], or with the disciples on the way to Emmaus [Lk 24:13-33], or the apostles in the upper room [Lk 24:36ff]. We have hope not because we have power or secret knowledge of the future, but because we trust that God loves us and this world more than we do. As Paul said in Romans 8, if God is for us, what does it matter who is against us?

4-01 It Is the Lord

Read: Jn 20:1-18

Mary Magdalene dances in a quiet garden on her own.
It is the afternoon of the first day of the week.
Gracefully, she twirls and bows.
She stretches her arms to the sky.
She laughs and sings ...
and she remembers the morning:

It was very early.
The sun was just thinking about rising.
I had to walk out to the tomb.
It was my only link
to him,
to what was,
to what might have been.
In my mind I kept picturing the horrors of the day he died.
I remembered him just hanging there
caught on that cross between earth and sky.

Once, when he looked at me,
I thought my legs would give way.
That glance went right through me
to a place I wanted to avoid.
I knew that he chose to embrace what was done to him,
but I could not take it in.
And when the long hours ended and he was gone,
I saw the soldier pierce his side.
Then others took him down.

The last I saw of him was when they rolled the stone to close the tomb,
and so I was shocked when I came to the tomb
and found it open
with the stone rolled away!
I had to tell the others.
Peter and John rushed out to the tomb.
They went in and saw, and left looking puzzled,
and I remained behind ... alone ... with my tears.

When I ducked inside the tomb,
I thought it would smell bad like with Lazarus,
but it didn't.
Then I saw the two people dressed in bright white garments
who asked me why I was crying.
I said, "I think someone has taken his body away,"
and then I broke into tears again.

After a while I heard a noise outside,
so I turned around and caught sight of someone tending flowers.
He said, "Why the tears? What are you looking for?"
I said something silly and he just said, "Mary."
And I knew he was there. That voice!

He was there.
I shouted "Rabbouni," and threw myself down,
and hugged his knees with all my might.
He was really there!
He touched my head and said,
"You don't need to cling.
I'll be with you a while longer.
But now I have a mission for you.
I want you return to Simon and the others
and give them this message:
'I am ascending to my Father and your Father.'
I wasn't sure what that meant, but I put it into memory.
Then I hurried off.
I found them again the upper room, and I told them,
but they just stared at me.
I don't think they got it.
But, I delivered his message, as he asked.

I left, and for a while I wandered around in a kind of daze,
and then I came here to this garden to be alone.
After all that strange wonder of the morning,
I find here ... a kind of quiet delight.

Now I know no power on earth can ever take him away again.
Somehow even death could not hold him.
For a while I feared that maybe death would make him more distant,
less human somehow,
but he seemed even more himself than ever—
it wasn't something I could see.

But now I know what happened,
Now I know the way.
All was lost and dark and wrong.
But that was yesterday.

4-02 Burning Within Us

Read: Mk 16:12-13,19; Lk 24:13-49; Acts 1:3-5,8

Cleopas and his friend were devastated after the death of Jesus
and they decided to return after the Sabbath to their village Emmaus.
It would be about a three-hour walk, and they needed the time to grieve.
So much had been lost, and so quickly.

As they talk along the way, they look back on the astounding events of their years with Jesus.

“Once he healed a cripple let down through the roof.”

“... and the man whose hand was shriveled up.”

“...and the look on his face when he told us of how God is for us ...”

“... like the story about the father who had two sons.”

“Thomas once said he calmed a storm at sea.”

“... Can you imagine ... ? “

“But the chief priests and the Pharisees would not hear of it.

They were out for blood.”

“And then Judas betrayed him,
and in two days it was all over.”

Now, as they speak, Jesus himself draws near and walks with them,
but in their despair they do not realize who it is.

He says, “I couldn’t help overhearing your conversation ...

Who are you talking about?”

They stop and cock their heads, and Cleopas says,

“You’ve got to be the only visitor to Jerusalem
who does not know what happened last week.”

Jesus says, “What happened?”

And so, for the hundredth time, they tell the stories.

“Curing the sick ... Feeding the thousands.

Forgiving sinners ...

Eating with outcasts and standing up for the poor.

And then he was arrested, and tried, and ... crucified.

Now he’s been three days in the tomb,

so all our hopes are gone.

Well, this morning, some women told us

that his tomb is empty,

and that angels said he was alive.

Some of us looked, but didn’t find him.”

Jesus says, “You two! — so slow to believe what the prophets wrote!

Was his suffering not a necessary part of his being accepted as the Messiah?”

Then beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explains all the scriptures that referred to him:

—The promise to Abraham

that his children would be a blessing for the whole world.

—The story of how God was with Joseph to save his starving family,
even though his own brothers had once sold him to passing merchants.
—And then how God worked wonders through Moses
to overcome the might of Egypt,
to lead his people out of slavery and through the desert, to their promised land.
—And how God was with David the shepherd boy as he faced Goliath with just a sling.
—How even during their darkest days in Babylon
God gave them hope
and finally brought them home
to rebuild their lives, their country, and their Temple.

In the late afternoon, they draw near to Emmaus,
Jesus appears to be going on,
but they urge him, “Stay with us, the day is nearly over.”
And so he goes in with them.
Hungry from the walk they sit down for a little bread and fish.
Jesus takes the bread, says a blessing, breaks it, and hands it to them.
As they savor the bread, it begins to dawn on them what is happening..
Their eyes widen and they turn to look at him, but his is gone.
Then they look at each other and say,
“Were not our hearts on fire within us
while he spoke to us about the scriptures?
He’s been with us all along!”

Suddenly they realize that they are no longer tired but filled with energy,
and now they have to tell the others,
and so they leave at once for Jerusalem.
And when they arrive at the upper room,
they hear excited voices,
“It’s true! The Lord has risen! He has appeared to Simon!”
Then the two travelers tell what happened to them on the way.
and how they had recognized Jesus when he broke bread with them.

And even as they speak,
they become aware that Jesus has been quietly standing in their midst.
He calms their fears and opens their minds to the scriptures.
He says,
“And so it is written that the Messiah would suffer
and rise from the dead on the third day
and that, in his name, people of every nation would be called
to turn away from sin and be forgiven—
beginning with Jerusalem.
Of all this, you are my witnesses.
And I will send upon you the promise of my Father
to sustain you and clothe you with power from on high.”

Again and again, for many days,
the risen Jesus reveals himself to his disciples
and prepares them to continue his mission to the world.

4-03 Do You Love Me?

Read: Jn 21; Sp Ex §306

Simon Peter had not said much these last days,
and that was odd.

Soon he got restless
and decided to go fishing ... like the old days.

At dawn, on the word of a voice from the shore,
there had been huge catch.

John understood at once and said, "It is the Lord."

Abruptly, Simon looked up, then jumped in and swam to shore.

He found Jesus had a fire going with bread and fish on it.

Simon could think of nothing to say, but just looked at him and ... dripped.

"Bring the fish," Jesus said and returned to his cooking.

After the meal, as he savored the taste of the bread,
he kept glancing at Jesus who was talking with the others.

Simon realized there was a lump in his throat
and it wasn't from bread:

but something ... unfinished between Simon and his Lord.

Gazing into the charcoal fire,
he remembered that painful night in the courtyard of the high priest.
He could still picture himself by another charcoal fire
... still warming his hands.

When he came back to the present
his eyes were unfocused and distant,
but he heard the voice of Jesus say to him:

"Simon, Son of John, do you still say that you love me more than these others?"

Peter remembered having said, "... I will lay down my life for you."

He lowered his eyes and said,

"Yes, Lord, you know that I do."

Jesus nodded slightly and then said: "Feed my lambs."

Peter swallowed and was silent.

The others looked at each other with gentle concern.

Then Jesus said to him a second time:

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Peter looked down and closed his eyes and said more firmly,

"Lord, you know the whole story. You ... know that I love you."

Jesus looked at him and said,

"Feed my sheep."

Then before Simon could recover,

Jesus asked him a third time,

"Do you love me, Simon Peter?"

Peter felt the old tears running naked across his face.

He summoned all his courage, raised his eyes, and said before the others,

“Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you.”

As he spoke Simon kept his eyes fixed on Jesus.

Then, for the third time,

Jesus entrusted the care of his little flock into Peter’s hands,

“Feed my lambs.”

For a long while Peter chewed on the bread of Jesus’ words to him.

Nothing was said about the denials of that night,

Nothing about his rash estimate of his own strength.

The only thing Jesus asked was, “Do you love me?”

In the future,

when the memories of these last years had become gospels,

Simon would always insist that they include the story

of how Jesus brought Peter back from the dead too.

4-04 He Is Not Here

Read: Acts 1:12-14

Picture a scene like this happening in Acts between 1:14 and 1:15

In my mind's eye, I stand with the eleven on a hilltop near Bethany.

This is the place where we last saw Jesus
as he was lifted up and hidden by the clouds.

That was nearly a week ago.

Now, we gather here again, and the murky day feels like it's going to rain.

Staring up at the stark, grey sky, James says, "Do you think he will return here?"

Peter answers, "I don't know. I had to do something."

Yesterday, I stood right here and shouted to the clouds,
'Lord, where are you? Have you left us now forever?'

John shakes his head in sympathy:

"Simon, you are a like a fish flopping in a boat—surrounded by air yet can't take it in."

James speaks up: "I remember him telling us to wait for the 'promise of the Father.'"

Peter says, "You're right. But how long will it be? And what is this 'promise of the Father?'"

John says, "I'm not sure, but he did tell us to wait in Jerusalem. Come. Let us return there."

As we journey back, we mull over all the astounding recent events.

Peter recalls:

"This is like that first morning when Magdalene told us that his body had been taken away.

I remember running to get to that tomb, and then finding nothing.

With my hand on the cold stone around me, I seemed like I was the tomb—and he was gone from me."

John says,

"I remember that day:

the stone rolled away,

the burial cloths folded so neatly,

and his body just gone.

Who would take his body?

And why would they carefully remove the cloths and fold them up?"

The whole thing left a hole inside me that nothing could fill.

Jude then remembers,

"After you left for the tomb, some of the women showed up claiming they had seen him alive.

I said, "You must be confused. Why spread a story like that?"

and I sent them away.

At noon Clopas and his friend left for Emmaus, heavy and disappointed

The hours after that dragged on with worry and fear."

Phillip brightens up saying,

"Then, during evening meal in the upper room,

Peter rushed in and told us he himself had seen Jesus—alive!

Jude admits,

“Just as the women had told us.

Suddenly I felt sorry that I had treated the women so badly earlier that day .

Phillip continues:

As I looked around at all the joyful faces,

I suddenly stopped when I realized that one of them was Jesus..

Then we all got quiet and a little scared.”

“Until he ate with us,” adds Peter,

“and for a moment I thought that everything would be like in Galilee.”

Jude reflects,

“Now It all feels like it’s too good to be true.

Maybe we want it so much that we are, well, ... fooling ourselves”

Thomas smiles ruefully:

“No, not for me.

The last time I would not believe till I could see for myself.

This time I’m going to trust him.”

Eventually Peter says,

“As I recall near the end he said he was sending us out to preach forgiveness to the wide world.

But I just cannot see us doing that without him.

The words of Magdalene keep haunting me: ‘He is not here. He is not here.’

...

If only he were still here.”

As we near the city gates, we suddenly become silent

until we can get to the upper room.

We want to avoid drawing attention from the authorities.

In the quiet, it strikes me that in my own time—

nearly two thousand years into the future—

the same things still trouble us:

We can no longer see Jesus doing wonders among us

We do not see him standing with us against hostile forces.

We still fear that what he told us about God is too good to be true,

and we still wonder whether we are fooling ourselves.

Now I am drawn to go back to the upper room,

to join the others, and wait with them—

wait for the promise of the Father.

...

Lord, help my unbelief!

4-05 Tongues as of Fire

Read: Acts 1:13-26, 2:1-21,32,41

After Jesus had been taken up into the heavens,
the community of believers gathered often.

Today they are waiting in prayer for what the Lord had called “the Promise of the Father.”
Among them are the Twelve, with Matthias now in place of Judas.

For the Jewish people, waiting has been a way of life centuries.

This day finds them remembering their times with Jesus
and telling each other their stories.

Outside, in the city, are thousands of Jewish pilgrims
who have come from all over for the feast of Harvest,
fifty days after Passover.

Inside the house, the disciples have just finished singing a psalm.

In the silence that follows, the air around them suddenly seems quite full.

One by one their ears perk up.

They seem to hear a strange sound— like a strong wind,
but there is no wind, and the curtains do not move.

Now everyone hears the sound, both inside the house and out.

Heads turn; necks bend; eyes circle round.

Everyone is eager to find the source.

The crowd is alive with different explanations

Gradually the disciples are surrounded by a growing brightness,
like a gentle tornado of light.

Its glowing radiance seems alive somehow.

It stretches out to each of them,

anointing them with light and warmth, with wisdom and courage.

Eyes widening, they turn to look at each other and say,

“This is what Jesus foretold!”

“This is the promise of the Father!”

“This ... this is the Holy Spirit!”

Suddenly, the heavy grief and fear fall away like empty shackles.

The pain and the glory and the losses of these last two months now make sense:

Their hopes have not been dashed;

they have been fulfilled.

At once, they throw open the windows and doors.

Looking out, they see wonder on the faces in the crowd

and the disciples rush out to tell to them about the marvels God has done.

Then, as they begin to speak, the thousands in the crowd are amazed yet again—

for they were not only from Judea and Asia Minor,

but from Egypt and Libya, the island of Crete and lands of Arabia.

There are even visitors from Rome.

And despite their many languages, they each hear and understand.
Peter, remembering how he once denied even knowing Jesus,
stands now before them all and proclaims.
“People of Jerusalem from both far and near,
we may seem drunk to you—
but we are not.

This day in your midst is fulfilled the prophecy of Joel:
“I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.
Sons and daughters both will prophesy,
Servants and handmaids too will speak in my name.
The young will see visions,
Elders will dream dreams.
The Lord will work wonders
in the heavens above
and on the earth below.
And all who call upon the name of the Lord
will be saved.”

Those who accepted his message were baptized,
and about three thousand were added to the disciples that day.

“We announce to you and to the whole house of Israel
that this Jesus whom you crucified,
God has raised from death,
and has made both Lord and Messiah.
Of all this we are witnesses.”

Final Prayer of Gratitude and Self-surrender

Read: Sp Ex §230-237

As a final contemplation in the Exercises, Ignatius has us return to where we began: in amazement and gratitude for all of the created universe, and in seeking balance in our love for and use of it.

Gratitude cannot be forced: “I should be grateful for ...”. Rather it wells up spontaneously when we become aware of the immense generosity of God throughout time, throughout our lives. So Ignatius suggests that we consider all the gifts that come to our minds, and gaze at them from different aspects: (1) seeing and delighting in each good thing in itself; (2) seeing each gift as a self-expression of God for me; (3) seeing how God not merely gave it in the past, but continues even now to labor for me within the gift even now; and (4) seeing how all gifts flow from God to us, are shared among us, and by their very nature draw us to look back to and unite us with their source, as one looks to a fountain while drinking of its water, or looks to the sun while sensing its warming rays upon our skin.

Ignatius hopes that, swept up in this rush of gratitude we will be drawn to make as generous a response as we can to such a gracious Lover. He says we might use words such as these:

Take, Lord, receive all the gifts that make me human: my liberty, my understanding, my body and feelings, my history and relationships, my entire will. All these you have given freely to me; and now I dedicate them to be used only as you would have me do. I receive all things when I receive You, and so I am rich enough and ask for nothing more.

The musical piece, Rays from the Sun selects three kinds of gifts to contemplate: (1) those of life and nurture (using melodies from the nativity scene in Born to Night); (2) those of forgiveness and healing (using music from Fire and Ice); (3) and those of the very life of the Jesus (using music from the incarnation in Among Us).

You are encouraged to focus on those gifts that are most precious to you. And then make a free response to such a tremendous Lover.

4-06 Rays from the Sun

Read: Sp Ex §230-237; Jas 1:17

Lord of my life, where have you taken me these days?

It seems so far from where we first began.

The world seems bigger now.

Your gifts have stretched me in so many ways.

You have given me new eyes to look upon your world.

Step by step I begin to see as you see and hear as you hear.

Love in deeds over words

I suspect that throughout my life you have strewn such gifts across my path,
yet only now do I begin to appreciate them.

When we humans love, we express it in deeds over and above words,
and we share what we have as a way to give ourselves.

Begin to consider gifts

Gracious Lord, I realize now that you too show your love in deeds over and above words,
and that you have given of yourself for us—for me.

Be with me now as I wander amid the memory of your countless gifts.

Gifts of nurture and life

I breathe in air and feel the beat of my heart, and know that you give me life.

I think of my family and the friends that I have known,

and see that through them you have nourished my soul and lightened my days.

And I have learned to speak and read and listen,

and know that you have sent me teachers to call me to grow.

*You've scattered gifts so freely, like a sower sowing seed,
and nothing do you ask for in return.*

*Gratitude wells up within me like a fresh mountain spring,
and I raise my eyes to you.*

Gifts of mercy and healing

For such gifts I praise you, Lord, but for your mercy even more.

for I remember how your mercy has washed over me
like ocean waves wearing away at a rocky shore.

Over and over, when I least deserve it, you begin again with me.

not to punish or destroy, but to heal and to send.

You always free me from my fatal folly.

You are as faithful as the coming of a rainbow when a sun-lit storm has passed me by.

*You've scattered gifts so freely, like waves upon the shore,
and nothing do you ask for in return.*

*Gratitude swells inside me like the need to scream in joy,
and I lift my eyes to you.*

With each gift, you give yourself to us,
but never has it been so clear than in your own Son's human life:
Before he came to us, we pictured you
enthroned in glory and power like human kings,
jealous of your honor, far from human cares,
demanding of us more than we could give.
And so we feared you for we thought you just like them.

But He came among us and walked our roads.
He ate with us and saw our moon and sun.
Born among the poor, learning human speech,
sharing in our hurt and in our joy,
he laughed and cried and healed those he found sick.
He showed us you are merciful by being merciful himself,
and called us to be merciful as well.
And when they sought to silence him with violence and disgrace,
he embraced their cross and hatred-unto-death.
Faithful to his mission to the last,
he asked that you forgive them even this.

*Your countless gifts pour down on us as rays that fall from the sun,
and nothing do you ask for in return.
The need to thank you swells within me
like a child that must be born,
and I raise my eyes to see the Source of all.*

Lord, I long now to be generous with you
for you have been so generous to me,
and so I make response as best I can:

Take my mind and all I thirst to know,
take my hands and feet, my ears and eyes,
and the passion that invades my bones,
use all the memories that I've had in life,
all the training, all the skills.
I freely put my freedom in your hands
for all I have and am has come to me from you.
I wish only to be a part of your great symphony,
a flute or drum or violin,
that the beauty of your song be heard in every land.
With such a gracious part I am content and ask for nothing more.

Eternal Lord of all things,
every good comes from you,
is shared among us,
and draws us to look back to you.

Look back at all the gifts of my life

Make generous response

Finding God in all things

Maker of all worlds, your glory has no bounds,
yet you serve us daily as if you washed our feet.
You are great and Lord of heaven,
yet humble as the grass beneath my step.

Let my life be a tiny mirror to reflect back to you
just one ray of all the beauty you have lavished on us
so that you may take delight in how your goodness was received.

I praise you, Lord, in the mighty dome of heaven.
I stand amazed at all your wondrous deeds.
I leap in joy for your outrageous mercy.
and kneel in awe at your most humble love.

Praise God with sound of trumpets;
Praise with flute and strings;
Praise with cymbal, drum, and human voice.

Praise our gracious God!