

Reclaiming Our Call

Lenten worship resources to spark transformational conversations



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Reclaiming Our Call

The “special seasons” in the church calendar are prime opportunities for pastors and congregations to try something new because they offer a time-limited trial period. We can try a new practice, a new order of worship, or a different style of music, without the pressure of the new thing becoming the permanent way of doing things. The seasons of Advent and Lent provide us with a short-term place to experiment with a defined end in sight should the practice not mesh with the context.

This period of experimentation is one of the foundational pieces of this worship series. “Reclaiming Our Call” is designed to provide a needed departure from the “norm” with the express intent of using that space to open up our thinking about transformation in the church, in our lives, and our community/world. Since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, we have been overwhelmed by the rapid pace of change in our lives and the world. Most of us have heard the siren call for us to make the church “go back to the way it was.” Some of us, maybe many of us, are wondering if that is possible or even beneficial.

It is precisely that feeling that nudging of the Spirit (if you will) that was the initial prompt to create this worship series. As God says through the prophet Isaiah, “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43:19 NRSV) In my mind, there is no doubt that God is a work in and through us. The only question is whether we can perceive what God is calling us toward and let go of those things that hold us back from pursuing that call with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

If you have been around the church for any length of time, you have almost certainly heard at least one “new thing” that God was going to do in our midst. Likely, that new thing was a relatively abrupt departure from what we had done before. Maybe it was a new model of governance or an entirely different style of music. It was probably dramatically different from everything before, whatever the new thing was. While there are times when a dramatic change is needed, all too often, we forget the impact of what has been on our lives and the lives of others.

Earlier in Isaiah, there is a passage we often think about during Advent, not Lent. It says, “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch will grow out of his roots.” (Isaiah 11:1 NRSV) Notice that God doesn’t plant an entirely new tree but uses what has been as the foundation for what is to come. Please hear that there is an opportunity to slide into hurtful rhetoric of supersessionism. That is not my intent. I am hoping to help us see that the church of our ancestors was essential to their faith journeys. We would be wise to remember that God’s call on their lives made it possible for us to be in the place to hear God’s call on our lives today. And with our faithful response of reclaiming that call, our growth as disciples, we will join with God in co-creating the next phase in the process of building God’s beloved community, and the next generation will build on what we have done, and so on and so on!

I hope these worship resources will open the door for conversations about transformation in your life, your church, and your community. May we have the awareness to sense God’s continuing call to renewal and hope as we proclaim and live out God’s transforming love for the world.

About the resource

This resource is heavily influenced by a lectionary created by Wilda C. Gafney, *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church – Year W*. Each Call to Worship is a responsive adaptation of the Psalm that draws from the NRSV and the translation in Gafney's lectionary. The choice of scripture also comes from Gafney's resources. This choice was intentional to elevate a perspective that has historically been silenced. We also sought diverse voices to reflect on each weekly theme for the "preaching prompts." The hymn suggestions draw from "Singing from the Lectionary" at lectionarysong.blogspot.com.

The authors of the "preaching prompt" are noted each week. Alex wrote any additional ponderings or prompts.

In addition to the prompts in this resource, we are offering weekly "preaching circles" at two times on Tuesdays throughout Lent. These Zoom meetings will enable us to come together and discuss what we feel God is saying to each of us through the upcoming text. We can share our stories and hone our messages with our friends and colleagues in ministry. The preaching circles will be held weekly on Tuesday beginning March 1st at noon and 6:30 pm Central (1 pm and 7:30 pm Eastern). Registration for the daytime circle is available at: <https://bit.ly/LPCDaytime>, and registration for the evening circle is available at: <https://bit.ly/LPCEvening>. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Ash Wednesday

Scripture – Joel 2:1, 12-17, 21-22

Theme – Broken AND Beautiful

Call to Worship – Psalm 90

MAKER OF THE MOUNTAINS, you have been our refuge
from one generation to another.

**Before the mountains were born,
or you writhed the land and the earth into birth,
from age to age you are God.**

You turn mortal flesh back to the dust and say,
“Turn back, you who are woman-born.”

**For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past
and like a watch in the night.**

The span of our life is seventy years, perhaps in strength even eighty;
they pass away quickly and we are gone.

**Teach us to number our days
that we may apply our hearts to Wisdom.**

Opening Prayer

God, as we come to you today, we remember that we are mortal, we are broken, we need restoration. We ask that you remind us that we are also your beloved children. Entering these coming days of reflection, of transformation, we pray for your presence. As you walked with your people in the wilderness, with Elijah, with Jesus, walk with us, guide us, transform us, we pray. Help us, Holy One, to sense your call on our lives as individuals, churches, and communities. Give us the courage to respond to your calls as both broken and beautiful believers. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH575 – Come and Find the Quiet Center

CH257 – There’s a Spirit in the Air

CH75 – I was There to Hear Your Borne Cry

CP86 – Change My Heart, O God

CP64 – More Precious than Silver *(This chorus can be especially powerful if you have an “offering” of sins or intentions and burn slips of paper with those things the congregation would like to change, begin, cease, within the context of worship. If you do this, be sure to take precautions like a grate over the fire to keep ashes from floating away and causing damage!)*

Preaching Prompts

Rev. Dr. Alex Ruth

Associate Regional Minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Illinois and Wisconsin

Any process of change or transformation brings with it grief. That which once was important no longer fits brings joy, etc., in the way it once did. As we focus on transformation in our lives, churches, and communities, Ash Wednesday is appropriate to acknowledge this grief. More than that, however, we can celebrate what was, even as we make way for what is to come.

Some years ago, the Rev. Wil Gafney Ph.D. wrote a reflection on Song of Solomon 1:5. I encourage you to read her thoughts¹. In summary, she demonstrates the power of reframing the standard translation of that verse, “I am black *but* beautiful,” to more accurately read “I am black **AND** beautiful (emphasis added in both). Rev. Gafney opened my eyes to something I had never considered as a white man. The person in this passage is not beautiful despite their dark skin. They are beautiful because of who they are.

So often, we talk about our worthiness of God’s love in similar terms. Even, or especially, on days like Ash Wednesday, we proclaim that we are loved despite our sinfulness. Remembering that we are broken and sinful is vital in our faith. That recognition of missing the mark can be the impetus for needed transformation in our lives. Acknowledging how we have fallen short of our calling empowers us to live into our call in new and life-giving ways.

However, God doesn’t love us despite our failings. God simply loves us. Being loved despite our brokenness promotes shame. Shame separates us from God, which is precisely counter to the message of God’s radical, overwhelming love.

On this day of reflection and repentance, may we all remember that we are broken AND beautiful. We are broken AND beloved. Acknowledging our grief, may we lean into the transformative work of reclaiming God’s call on our lives. May we work for healing and restoration in our lives, churches, communities, and world.

¹ <https://www.wilgafney.com/2013/11/16/black-and-beautiful-and-sunburned/>

First Sunday in Lent

Scripture – Genesis 2:7-9, 15-25

Theme – Reclaiming our Past

Call to Worship – Psalm 104

Bless the Fount of Life, O my soul.

Creator of all, our God, you are very great.

Wrapped in light as a garment,

you stretch out the heavens like a tent.

To all of those who hope in you,

you provide their food in due season.

You send forth your spirit, they are created;

and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Opening Prayer

Creating God, as we look back over our lives, we see how you have formed us and shaped us. Today we bring all of who we are before you, anticipating the ways you will continue to shape us and call us. Quiet our hearts, still our minds, soothe our spirits. Breathe life into us anew this day. Amen

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH568 - 'Tis the Gift to Be Simple

CH622 – Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

CH77 – On Eagle's Wings

CH5 – O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

CH278 – Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather

CH64 – We Sing Your Mighty Power, O God

CH17 – O Worship the King

Preaching Prompts

Rev. Dr. Alex Ruth

Associate Regional Minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Illinois and Wisconsin

Maybe you have been at the place where the church seems to be treading water, doing a lot of work, but not going anywhere. Perhaps you are there now. The pandemic and a growing sense of discord and divide have enhanced the feeling of “what we are doing isn’t working, but we don’t know what the future holds for us” for many of us.

Several years ago, I found myself in a similar situation with the congregation I was serving. We had lost our sense of identity. We knew God was calling us to something, but we didn’t know what that **something** was. With the help of the Elders, we invited the entire congregation to be intentional in praying for a process that began by looking back to where we felt God had been most present in our lives in the past.

In those conversations, a theme developed. God’s presence had been most tangible around events and experiences surrounding food. From chicken dinners for the community on Sundays to soup lunches during Lent to the importance of weekly communion, food was the theme. As we talked more, someone offered the revelation that God might be calling us to “feed” our community physically and metaphorically.

It was as if a switch had been flipped. We quickly knew that was precisely what God was calling us to do, who God was calling us to be. Although we had no idea how that would happen, we had our call.

What was most important was that this “new” call grew out of our “old” call. We began to live out the scripture we read at Christmas, where a new shoot springs forth from the stump of Jesse. We began to see that God doesn’t plant a new tree but grows something new and vital from what seemed dead, destined to rot into nothingness. What about our past can be the soil for our new growth as the people of God? What forgotten dust can become the soil from which the beloved community of God can grow?

Our denomination was founded on two opposing principles: restoration and reformation. When held in creative tension, looking back to what has been and looking forward to what may be, root us in the best of our history and coax us forward in our journey of faith. These verses from the second creation narrative in Genesis remind us that the breath of life in each of us comes from you. And these verses remind us that we are meant to be in community with others. We were not made to be alone.

And yet, these same verses have been used to oppress our siblings, to create an artificial hierarchy, to build walls that separate us from one another and shout down anyone who disagrees. That is part of our history, and we cannot ignore it. As we begin to reclaim our call this Lent, what are some of the parts of your congregational history, your origin stories, that you need to grieve, release, or reclaim?

Second Sunday in Lent

Scripture – Matthew 7:15-20

Theme – Reclaiming Our Identity

Call to Worship – Psalm 92

It is good to give thanks to the AGELESS GOD,
to sing praises to your name Most High;
to declare your faithful love in the morning,
and your trustworthiness by night.

For you have made me glad, WELLSPRING OF LIFE,
we sing for joy at the works of your hands.

Opening Prayer

Creator G-d,
You know us so well and love us so much,
forming us in the depths and naming us,
stitching us together thread and fabric,
welcoming us to the table to help sew,
our lives and your world in unity,
repairing every broken thread,
teaching us to repair the world,
moving toward wholeness,
transforming us,
in sacred change.
In the name of our morning star, Christ Jesus, Amen.

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH568 - 'Tis the Gift to Be Simple
CH464 – God of Grace and God of Glory
CH595 – Be Thou My Vision
CH182 – Transform Us
CH284 – Gather Us In
CH600 – Jesu, Jesu
CH661 – What does the Lord Require of You?
CH346 – Where He Leads Me

Preaching Prompts

Rev. Ari Douglas

Pastor, First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Janesville, WI

When my mom was young, she had an older friend who she called Grandmother. When Grandmother died, my mother was given a star quilt. Star quilts, in indigenous northern plains traditions, are given to families when their loved ones die, to those graduating, and to others on special days. It represents the morning star, the brightest star before dawn. Jesus is our morning star, the star that shines brightest before dawn. I like to think of our personal stories as quilts that are never quite finished...the work that G-d is doing within each and every one of us, the creation that we get to join G-d in doing, stitch by stitch, and piece by piece.

My first pieces come from my early childhood...my mother and father moved us to Germany when I'm five months old. My first spoken language was German, giving me an identity that appreciates the struggles that others have with English. My first protest was when I was in a stroller, and my father was risking arrest protesting American missiles that were in Germany. The first home that I remember living in was a Mennonite House, an apartment complex and shared living community which was focused on peace and living in harmony with one another. When we return to the United States, my parents quit speaking to me in German, and I am silent for a year. My language and my thinking transforms from one language to another, but the values that my parents are instilling in me are still taking root. My mother is ordained in the Church of the Brethren, and much of my childhood involves arguments with Missouri Synod children that women can too be ministers. At times my siblings and I, along with various cousins, spend time in North Dakota. We learn about our Swedish culture from my grandfather, and my grandmother tells us about our indigenous roots. Piece by piece and stitch by stitch, the start of a quilt emerges.

The needle pierces deep, and the thread comes with it as I struggle with my faith in high school, eventually leaving Christianity for Judaism. Learning the rituals, culture, history, language, and food of my new religion, important parts of my quilt are being put in place. Several years of study culminate in conversion in a Reform-Conservative synagogue, and the important lesson of repair of the world becomes something that is of deep importance to me. Experiencing antisemitic attacks take their toll but finding pride in who my people are is unshakeable. Yet additional pieces of fabric are added to my story as I meet my best friend in college, and we spend hours debating. My return to Christianity takes place when I fall deeply in love with the teachings of Christ and come to believe that if Christians followed them, perhaps a messianic age of peace truly would take hold. Still in transformation, while I am considering graduate school for history, I join my friend as a youth sponsor at a bible camp...and a vital piece is added to the quilt.

While considering what I might be able to do with my knowledge of Judaism and Hebrew Bible to help the Christian community...I am struck with the deep and undeniable feeling that I should go into ministry...that sharing my knowledge with others may help bring more Christians to truly be Christ-followers. I apply to Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, OK. Days and weeks go by, and I don't hear from Phillips. Finally, on the day that I am planning on moving up to Tulsa, my welcome packet arrives. It is a sacred coincidence. I feel affirmed, excited, and seminary begins well. As it happens...I meet the woman who was going to be my wife. I identified as bisexual, but while

this had been a torturous piece of fabric for me when I was younger, it was not one that I was concerned with at this point, and I buried it deep. The relationship was at times rocky and at times good, as relationships often are, and that bit of fabric was present in my quilt. An important piece was added with the birth of my son...which transforms any person in deep ways. Sometime soon after my wife became pregnant, we moved from the Church of the Brethren to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) due to the Church of the Brethren affirming their homophobic paper on human sexuality. I had already finished seminary at this point...and so it took another four years for that piece of fabric called ‘ordination’ to get added to my quilt.

My first call was as an interim minister in eastern Washington state, and it was deeply rewarding. A piece of fabric was added to my quilt, but one that I tried to hide from most: my identity as a nonbinary individual. For me, it meant living into the truth that Galatians 3:28 speaks, that there is no longer Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female for all are one in Christ. I spoke my truth of needing a progressive, loving church that was open to becoming open and affirming and found my next call. Unfortunately, that call put my entire quilt through the wringer. That long-term call ends only fifteen months later, and it shakes the foundation of my relationship with my wife ending in our divorce. As pieces of fabric were being torn from my quilt, I felt like it would all unravel. Following two successful interim ministries and my emotionally breaking down, the realization came to me “If G-d loves me, who am I to hate me?” I was transformed. My entire perspective changed from scarcity to the abundant love of G-d. With that in mind, with my fully accepting that, I came out as nonbinary, first in my search profile and to the church that would call me as their pastor, and then to the world. If we stop hating ourselves and start loving ourselves as G-d loves us, then true change will happen.

May we all prize our own quilts with our morning star, Jesus, who is central to our lives, and may the quilts of our lives testify to the transformation of that morning star.

The teaching from Matthew 7:15-20 tells us that we are known by our “fruits,” that our attitudes and actions point toward our identity. Ari stitches together a story of how they came to accept their identity as one whom God loves. What stories illuminate who you are as someone who God loves? What kind of fruit does one of God’s beloved bear? What do you (and your congregation) need to hear, see, and experience, to remind you that God loves you and is calling you to repair the brokenness in the world?

Third Sunday in Lent

Scripture – Romans 8:31-39

Theme – Reclaiming Our Purpose

Call to Worship – Psalm 96

Sing to the EXALTED a new song:

sing to the CREATOR, all the earth.

For great is the AGELESS GOD, and greatly to be praised.

Bow down and worship the SOVEREIGN ONE in majestic holiness;

tremble in God's presence, all the earth.

God will judge the world with righteousness,

and the peoples with truth.

Opening Prayer

Faithful God, amid the busyness of our lives, we can feel overwhelmed. The brokenness, anxiety, fear, and stress can choke the air from our lungs. Remind us, again, of your love for us. Help us to sense the closeness of your presence, your grace, your mercy. And, by your power, give us the courage to face the hardships of life, assured of your love for us all. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH568 - 'Tis the Gift to Be Simple

CH77 – On Eagle's Wings

CH67 – O God, Our Help in Ages Past

CH375 – In Water We Grow

CH677 – Let There Be Peace on Earth

CH494 – They'll Know We Are Christians

CH589 – Lord, I Want to Be a Christian

Preaching Prompts

Jed Fisher

Founder and President, Arzee Zebra Project

As a disabled person, by most standards, I am considered weak. This scripture taken out of context meant something totally different to me, yet it fits with reclaiming our purpose.

You don't throw away a human because of a broken leg. Yet society does it all the time. To me, it meant that weak things could become strong. Being disabled meant going about doing the same tasks differently. A prime example is a man born without arms, so he learns to brush his teeth using his feet. He becomes a talented painter who can paint better than most people born with hands.

In my personal life making weak things strong has become a mantra. From taking old broken computers and turning them back into functioning machines providing technology to those who can't afford a computer. Sometimes we discover hidden talents from weakness. I had no training in computer repair when my computer stopped working. But, local church gave me a computer. I took the parts from the old one and put them into the new one. It worked. I discovered a hidden talent for rebuilding computers. In an effort to multiply that talent, I built a hundred more. That, my friends, is how broken things and broken wings mend with time.

From the computers, my work grew, into diversity education, from diversity education to housing the homeless, clothing the naked feeding the hungry.

The world had me convinced that disabled people are weak and are of no value to society. Well, if a disabled person can reclaim their right to life, certainly nothing will stop you from reclaiming your purpose. Too often, we place value on our careers, money, wealth, and power. When those things are gone, we can lose sight of our purpose in life. For example, imagine a star athlete who becomes disabled in an accident. They might struggle to recover because they can't accept a purpose outside of their athletic abilities. Or, they might fight to recover because they realize there is more to life than their athleticism. Maybe they even end up wheeling through marathons in a wheelchair.

I am reminded of a disabled man who was told, "take up your bed and walk." Did he? I am like that disabled man, but did I not walk? Did I not run to reclaim my purpose? According to my mother, I shattered what anyone thought was even possible. In the end, it comes down to this: the only one standing in your way of you reclaiming your purpose is you. Did God not make this weak thing strong?

Every person has a higher calling; most never find it because they don't look or try because the change scares them or keeps them in learned helplessness. Life forced me to look and, most of all, to try. Sometimes we end up shocking ourselves of what is possible for us until we pull it off. Until we say, "Look at that! I did it!" Changing the world is easy if you dare to try.

Have you ever seen a disabled man rollerskate in a wheelchair?

Christ said, take up your bed and walk. I say take up your chair and roller skate.

Jed reminds us that we are not defined by what we can or cannot do but by who we are in relationship to one another and God. Our purpose in life may change, but God's love is constant. We might have to rethink our purpose in life, but we can be assured that nothing can "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:39b NRSV) What purpose might God have for you and your community of faith today? How might you work to make the church even more accessible for ALL people to share their God-given gifts and talents with the world?



Fourth Sunday in Lent

Scripture – 1 John 4:7-12

Theme – Reclaiming Our Vision

Call to Worship – Psalm 136

Give thanks to the FOUNT OF LIFE, who is good,
for God’s faithful love is everlasting.

Give thanks to the GOD OF GODS,
for God’s faithful love is everlasting.

Give thanks to the MAJESTY OF MAJESTIES,
for God’s faithful love is everlasting.

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for restoring our sight, for restoring our very lives. You have walked with us through the dangers, toils, and snares of life. Your faithfulness is the assurance we need to carry on. We sing your praises and give you the glory, now and always. Amen

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH568 - 'Tis the Gift to Be Simple
CH622 – Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah
CH244 – Loving Spirit, Loving Spirit
CH517 – Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
CH546 – Amazing Grace
CH357 – We Call Ourselves Disciples
CH452 - Here I Am, Lord

Preaching Prompt

Angelique 'Angee' Jordan Byrd

Regional Director of the Communications Ministry for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Illinois and Wisconsin

God's love has been revealed to us by Him sending his Son into the world that we could live through Him. It was not that we were worthy, but God loved us enough to do so.

Just as God has loved us, we must also love one another. Where are the places and spaces we are being called to share God's love and build community? The Phygital Church has allowed us to reach into homes across the country to love and care for the beloved community. Disciples are reaching those previously unreachable in the physical space, forging friendships and revealing God's love. May we pause and visualize how God is calling us to transform ministry. God has stretched us to share His passion for humankind in new places. May we continue to abide in love and walk in faith to lay the groundwork for future ministries. We can continue to reach the ends of the earth, sharing God's love, when we visualize and are open to God's leading.

Many churches had to pivot quickly to online-only worship options in 2020. We were suddenly faced with a change that we did not choose. That happens sometimes. Sometimes the transitions in our lives are not things we want to experience. Yet, through it all, we can rest in the assurance of God's unfailing love for us. As the passage from 1 John reminds us, God sent Jesus into the world that we might live through him. More importantly, the author of this passage assures us that though we have not seen God, "if we love one another, God lives in us." (1 John 4:12b NRSV)

Where have you seen God at work in your life? Where is God at work in the congregation's life, in the community? Where is that light placed on a lampstand giving us a glimpse of God's love and restoring our hope for God's beloved community to be born in our midst?

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Scripture – Isaiah 51:1-8

Theme – Reclaiming Our Focus

Call to Worship – Psalm 148

Praise the ALMIGHTY!

**Praise the EXALTED from the heavens;
praise God from the heights!**

Let all people praise the Name of the MIGHTY GOD,
for God commanded, and they were created.

Queens and kings of the earth and all peoples,
royal seed and rulers of the earth!

**Young women and men alike,
aged and young together!**

Let them praise the Name of the ETERNAL,
**for God's name alone is exalted;
and God's glory is above the earth and the heavens.**

Opening Prayer

God, our Guide, and Guardian synchronize our spirits with yours. Help us to be vigilant and recognize where you are at work in our lives and in the world around us. Help us to love you with all of our being, heart, mind, soul, and strength. Restore us as we recommit ourselves to the work to which we are called, as we make disciples and work to build your beloved community here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH568 - 'Tis the Gift to Be Simple

CH487 – Help Us Accept Each Other (can be sung to Aurelia, The Church's One Foundation)

CH2 – Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

CH517 – Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

CH442 – We Are Walking (Siyahamba/Caminando)

(a good way to stretch ourselves to sing in other languages)

CH494 – They'll Know We Are Christians

CH22 – All Creatures of Our God and King

CH595 – Be Thou My Vision

Preaching Prompts

All Ministries are interim ministry---between times.

Rev. Dr. Teresa Dulyea-Parker

Regional Minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Illinois and Wisconsin

Regional Minister for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Michigan

Between times are essential and foundational, even if they are unsettling. Unfortunately, we dismiss them as we long for more “stable” and “un-changing” moments. If I have learned one thing from the last twelve years, it is that everything is transition; not just preparation for what’s coming or going back to what once was. Living the moments as they come is all we really have. Life is transitions.

In the practical realm, when I talk with a congregation about hiring an Interim Pastor, I tell them the time of interim is like pregnancy or building a foundation for a new building. They get to choose which metaphor works for them.

In pregnancy, a lot happens unseen. A fetus takes time to develop. A mother needs to care for her body by being attentive to good nutrition, vitamins, rest, prenatal care, exercise, etc. Likewise, building a house requires laying a good foundation. So much of what makes a high-rise stable is what’s below the sightline, underground. Nothing goes up until the footers are solidly in place. Interim time is foundational and gestational. Preparing the way for what will be revealed. When our “in between” time is done well, what emerges has been given the blessing it needs to thrive.

One of the transition moments in my ministry came as the congregation I was serving was preparing to leave a beloved old building for an accessible new facility. We had hoped to make the move in a timely manner but discovered there would be a gap between when we had to leave our old building and when the new one would be ready. Foundations take time, and rainy weather can create delays.

Our good friends/neighbor church one block away offered to take us in. In exchange, I would cover their Pastor’s sabbatical. I served both congregations during the three-month transition. Time for our facility to be completed and their Pastor to be refreshed. It was a great plan that blessed us in ways that none of us could have anticipated.

First Christian, the church I served, celebrated the final worship in the beloved building on the last Sunday in December. As the farewell was planned, I was asked to carry the altar light as we walked out of the building. A special ark had been built to carry our worship elements with us. We were to walk one block to where our United Church of Christ friends would open their doors to welcome us.

At the close of the service, I stood in the center of the congregation with the light in my hands protected by a votive made from stained glass from the building, our young acolyte at my side. I looked around at the faces of the brave people who had done so much work to prepare for this moment. It was time to step out in faith. For just a moment, I thought, “what if they don’t follow me out the door.”

Then, I looked up and out the open doors at the back of the sanctuary. There in the cold sunlight of a late December day, our UCC friends were waiting for us. Ready to embrace us. I knew even as we left behind what we had known, we were being welcomed into something wonderful and new. The unexpected blessing of that welcome has never left me. Nor the blessing of our shared three months together.

God does bless the “between times” with companions on the journey. God loves it when we step out in faith, especially overcoming our fears. God does renew us in relationship. Transitions are fraught: times of preparation and unseen generation. This is life. What a blessing.

Palm Sunday

Scripture – Matthew 21:1-11

Theme – Reclaiming Our Future

Call to Worship – Psalm 118

This is the day that the FONT OF CREATION has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Most High God.

We bless you from the house of the Holy One.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;

you are my God; I will exalt you.

**Give thanks to the Holy One, for God is Good,
for God's faithful love endures forever.**

Opening Prayer

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH568 - 'Tis the Gift to Be Simple

CH192 – All Glory, Laud, and Honor

CH537 – My Hope is Built

CH545 – He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought!

CH141 – A Stable Lamp Is Lighted

Preaching Prompts

Eli Rolon Jeong

Associate Regional Minister for Children and Youth, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Illinois and Wisconsin

The Future is Known

Fed up with political corruption, inadequate action in response to Hurricane Maria, and mounting debt, many Puerto Rican youth took to the streets in the summer of 2019, demanding accountability from their government and culminating in the governor's resignation. Accounts indicate that this movement was intergenerational but was primarily driven by those under 30. One of the organizers said that young people are encouraged to fight for change because "it's our future, and we have the right to fight for a better future."²

As someone who works closely with young people, I am inspired to witness their leadership and tenacity in our world. Youth and young adults have been at the forefront of some of our most pivotal moments in history – the Civil Rights Movement and war protests in the United States in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, pro-rights and pro-democracy efforts in China and throughout Arab countries in 2010, and recent waves of youth-led actions fighting against climate change, gun violence, and racism attest to the courage and determination of young people striving and acting towards something better.

In Matthew, the writer tells us that Zechariah prophesied Jesus' entry into the city. But while the prophecy accounts for a future that comes to be, it is not a future that is yet certain. At least not so until the disciples go into the village, find the donkey, and bring it back to Jesus as he asked them to do. The future is known, but it is not certain. What we do now can lead us towards a known future, just as it may also take us in a different direction altogether.

Youth-led movements give us an insight into some of the anxieties of the future, a future in which disparities are abundant while resources and justice are not. But these youth efforts also allow us to see that there are many who believe that a dismal future does not have to be certain, so we also get a glimpse of the impetus for change. As Church, this allows us to balance the gap between present and future tense; it enables us to engage in our ministries, our theologies, and our calls to action by listening to the prophecies, especially those voiced by younger folks, and acting in ways that empower those who seek a certain future defined by abundance and justice.

Further Reading:

[Youth in Revolt: Five Powerful Movements Fueled by Young Activists](#)

[The Rise Of Chicago Teen Activists: 'The Voices Of Youth Are Very Powerful'](#)

[Youth Activists in Chicago are Reimagining the Future](#)

[Growing BIPOC Youth-Led Climate Movement Is the Force Occupy Could Have Been](#)

[The Intersection of Youth Activism and Faith-Based Values](#)

² <https://www.latinorebels.com/2019/11/13/puertoricoyouthprotest/>

Maundy Thursday

Scripture – John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Theme – Reclaiming Our Service

Call to Worship – Psalm 116

Turn to the Lord
for God has heard our cries and our prayers.

**O Lord, we are your servants
serving others because you have freed us.**

Offer your thanksgiving to the Lord
in the presence of all God's people.

**All that we do,
we do to praise the Lord.**

Opening Prayer

Sustaining God, as we remember the Last Supper of Jesus, we give you thanks for welcoming us to your infinite table of love. We strive to follow the example of our Lord by welcoming all to this, your table. After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus instructed them to serve others as they had been served. We hear the echoes of that command to this day and ask you to empower us to serve in that same selfless way. Renew our faith, O God, as we live out our faith through love and service of others. Amen

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH414 – Eat This Bread

CH600 – Jesu, Jesu

CH385 – An Upper Room Did Our Lord Prepare

Preaching Prompt

Some years ago, I came across an article by Sandra Marie Schneiders which has been transforming my understanding of service since. "The Foot Washing (John 13:1-20): And Experiment in Hermeneutics" (<https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/jst/134/>) showed me a new way to think about the call to serve others. The cogent segment of the article begins on page 84 and continues through page 88. How does Schneiders' understanding of Jesus' example of service challenge you to think about serving others in a new way?

Good Friday

Scripture – John 18:1 - 19:42

Theme – Reclaiming the Cross

Call to Worship – Psalm 22

O my God, we cry by day, but you do not answer.;

We call out by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy.

Our ancestors trusted you
and you delivered them.

Do not be far away, O Lord.

**You are our help,
come quickly to our aid!**

Opening Prayer

All our hopes and dreams, O God, lay shattered on the ground. We are crushed under the weight of the uncertainty, the confusion, the fear. The cross of Christ is a painful reminder of our mortality, of our sin, of our separation from you and from one another. Be with us, O Lord, as we experience the uneasiness of the unknown and as we seek to keep the spark of hope burning. Fulfill your promise, we pray, and walk with us in this valley of the shadow of death. Amen.

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH198 – Were You There

CH199 – When Jesus Wept

CH200 – What Wonderful Love Is This

CH202 – O Scared Heart, Now Wounded

CH211 – Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley

CH569 - Jesus Remember Me

CH183 – We Meet You, O Christ

Preaching Prompt

Sometimes less is more. In my experience Good Friday is one of those days. The story preaches itself. The suffering of Jesus quite naturally draws us to a place where we understand and can even feel the separation, fear, and doubt. One way we can reclaim the power of the cross is to allow ourselves, and the congregation, to experience the uncertainty of those dark hours following Jesus' execution. Remember that sometimes the most impactful transformations come after we have been stripped of everything. When we realize that our transformation is not something we can manufacture, but it is a gift of God's overwhelming grace.

Easter Sunday

Scripture – John 20:1-18

Theme – Reclaiming Our Call

Call to Worship – Psalm 18

The ROCK WHO GAVE US BIRTH is our rock,
and our fortress, and our deliverer.

**Our God is the rock in whom we take refuge,
our shield, and the horn of our salvation, our stronghold.**

In our distress we called upon GOD WHO HEARS;
to our God we cried for help.

**From God's temple God heard our voice,
and our cry came before the HOLY ONE.**

God reached down from on high, took us,
and delivered us from our strong enemy.

**God brought us out into a broad place,
and delivered us, because God delights in us!**

Opening Prayer

Hymn Suggestions (CH=Chalice Hymnal, CP=Chalice Praise)

CH568 - 'Tis the Gift to Be Simple

CH286 – This Is the Day

CH223 – Woman, Weeping in the Garden

CH53 – Morning Has Broken

CH518 – This Is a Day of New Beginnings

CH562 - Because He Lives

CH216 – Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

CH224 – Christ Arose!

CH226 – He Lives!

CH227 - In the Garden

Preaching Prompts

Pastor Jerome V. Lee

Pastor, First Christian Church (DOC) in Carthage, IL

From Prison To Pulpit: The Transformative Power of God

Growing up in a small town in West Central Illinois without the Lord, I made a series of bad decisions that formed a pattern in my life that would eventually end in prison. As a teen, I began drinking and smoking marijuana and staying out until all hours of the night, worrying my poor mother to death. I was on the honor roll and a three-sport athlete, but that did not slow me down. I graduated high school while my life became a daily party, and the sin began mounting.

My mother passed when I was 19 years old, and I began taking methamphetamine and doing any drug I could find to numb the pain. There was nothing except darkness all around me until I checked into a treatment center at 21 years of age. That was when I first experienced the transformative power of Jesus as I began attending church regularly. However, the enemy tempted me, and soon I was drinking daily and using meth again every month or so.

This pattern continued to follow me throughout the rest of my adult life. I raised two adopted children and managed to always have a good job as I was a college graduate and electrician. However, what appeared on the outside to be good was a bondage that was killing me on the inside.

By the time I was 40 years old, I was divorced, using \$500-\$700 a day of methamphetamine, and lived in constant darkness, lies, sexual immorality, and sin surrounded me. My house was raided in July of 2017, and Jesus Christ began a work in me that will keep me humble for all my days.

Through two wonderful jail ministers, Christ showed me that there was a better way. I did not have to live in bondage and use drugs to avoid my pain. I needed only to find out who I was in Christ, submit, and let Him free me. I was sentenced to two years in prison and worked diligently reading, researching, praying, and doing anything I could to seek His face.

Upon leaving prison, my main focus was listening to the Holy Spirit and following God's will for my life. He would open a door, and as long as I stepped through, another would open. He totally transformed a person that had gotten to the point of having no moral compass and not caring if I lived, died, or how I treated anyone into a man seeking to serve God.

In the three and a half years that I have been out of prison, the Lord has chosen to use all of that garbage from my past to help others by transforming my life completely. By the grace of God, I now pastor the First Christian Church (DOC) in Carthage, IL. I am enrolled in the School of Ministry. I work part-time as a substance abuse counselor. I am the president of the board of directors for Lydia's House, a faith-based crisis center and transitional living home for women battling addiction and domestic violence. And I am a community educator for the Hancock County Addiction Coalition. My life is a testimony of God's grace and His power to transform any life!

Pastor Jerome heard God's call. In much the same way that it took Jesus calling Mary by name for her to recognize him, sometimes it takes a substantial nudge for us to realize God is calling us.

Where is God's Spirit nudging you? Where is God speaking your name so that you can reclaim God's call on your life, on your ministry? Where is God speaking the name of the church so that each and all of our communities of faith can reclaim the call has on our ministries? Remember, Easter is not the end of the story but the beginning of a new chapter. How has God been preparing you for the next chapter of your life, of your ministry? And, how has God been preparing the church to reclaim, restore, and reform the ministries to which we are called?