



PREPARING TO BECOME THE  
**BELOVED  
COMMUNITY**

LENT - YEAR C

# Preparing to Become the Beloved Community

**Year C**

**Lent 2022, 2025, 2028**

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Prepared by the Program Group on Ecumenical and Interreligious Life in the Diocese of Los Angeles and The Episcopal Church's Racial Reconciliation Team, in consultation with the Rev. Fred Clarkson, the Rev. Phil Hooper, the Rev. Jean Mornard, Mildred Reyes, and the Rev. Pat White Horse-Carda.

Learn more about Becoming the Beloved Community and The Episcopal Church at [www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation).

Share reflections and queries by writing to [reconciliation@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:reconciliation@episcopalchurch.org) or on social media using [#belovedcommunity](https://twitter.com/belovedcommunity).

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# WELCOME

*And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. —Mark 1*

This Lent, the Diocesan Community is invited into a journey to commit in new ways to becoming Beloved Community and growing loving, liberating, life-giving relationships across the human family of God. We make the journey not only as individual Christians and congregations, but as a whole church. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and President of the House of Deputies Gay Clark Jennings and their supporting officers share “Becoming Beloved Community,” a new vision document that lays out the Episcopal Church’s long-term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation, and justice. A second resource — “Becoming Beloved Community Where You Are” — details many ways for individuals and congregations to take concrete steps toward change and healing. The Program Group for Ecumenical and Interreligious Life has adapted this resource from its original Advent setting to a Lenten one.

## **The journey is framed around the labyrinth. Why?**

In the ministry of racial healing and justice, none of us walks a straight line. We enter the labyrinth wherever God has provided an opening – telling the truth about our church’s story around race; discerning and proclaiming God’s dream of Beloved Community where we are; learning and practicing Jesus’ way of healing and love; and bravely working to transform systemic racial injustice. We keep moving from one quadrant to another and back. No one is ever really finished. That is the way of ongoing spiritual formation. As you “walk” sections of this labyrinth, gather a group, and together engage the scriptures, reflections, and activities.

## **Beginning the Journey...**

Designate a facilitator who will carefully preview the session. Set aside at least 45 minutes for each session, and consider these **Conversation Tips**:

*Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.*

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry regularly welcomes us to live not just as the church but as the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement: the ongoing community that follows Jesus into loving, liberating, life-giving relationship with God, each other, and creation.

May God bless and grow us into vibrant embodiments of the Christ we welcome and follow, this Lent and always.

Prayerfully offered,

The Program Group on Ecumenical and Interreligious Life in the Diocese of Los Angeles  
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# LENT I

## Becoming the Beloved

The civil rights movement in the United States that Dr. King led was a movement that began in the Church. It was the biblical imperatives lived by people of faith that gave the movement its foundation, fire and perseverance to not turn back. Today our work is not done. This Lent you are invited to reflect on how you embody the Beloved Community and how you are incarnating God's agape love in your life and in your community of faith in meaningful and steadfast ways to help a challenged world.

The core value of the quest for Dr. King's Beloved Community was agape love. Dr. King distinguished between three kinds of love: eros, "a sort of aesthetic or romantic love"; philia, "affection between friends" and agape, which he described as "understanding, redeeming goodwill for all," an "overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative"... "the love of God operating in the human heart." He said that "Agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people... It begins by loving others for their sakes" and "makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both... Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community" (King's 1959 Sermon on Gandhi).

### The Collect

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Read the Scripture Together: Luke 4:1-13

**4** <sup>1</sup> Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, <sup>2</sup>where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. <sup>3</sup>The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup>And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. <sup>7</sup>If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup>Jesus answered him, "It is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,  
and serve only him.'"

<sup>9</sup>Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, <sup>10</sup>for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,  
to protect you,'

<sup>11</sup>and

'On their hands they will bear you up,  
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

<sup>12</sup>Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" <sup>13</sup>When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

## Reflection

Lent is a time for self-examination. It should be a time to look into all of the corners of our life to see where our faith is being tested. But it's also a time for action. It's a time to face those tests head on, using Jesus' temptation in the wilderness as our guide. It is through facing and overcoming these forces, following in the path of our Lord, that we come closer to becoming the Beloved Community that God wants so much for us to be.

Being tempted isn't a sin. Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet did not sin. The temptation came first, and his response to was not to fall into sin. We can do that, too, and by the same means Jesus used. If it was a foregone conclusion that Jesus wouldn't fall for Satan's wiles, why bother putting it in the Gospel? There had to be doubt, so that there could be choice. Jesus was fully human as well as fully divine. His example is one that we should follow, and one that we CAN follow.

So this Lent, let's follow Jesus into the wilderness. Practice saying no to temptations, both big and small. Practice turning to God for the strength to turn away from the pull of disdain for the other, of the easy road of following the mob, of the doubts that arise when persuasive people try to lead us away from God and our Beloved Community. Trust that God will be right there with us in that wilderness. Jesus wasn't left in the wilderness to fend for himself—the Holy Spirit was with him and is with us in our trials and temptations, too.

- The Rev. Jean E. Mornard

## Make It Real

Gather in groups, ideally of no more than eight people. Share **Conversation Tips** from the welcome letter.

Now invite people to pause and recall a particular time and place when you felt beloved of God. A time you knew God's love for you. What was this like?

Next, recall a particular time and place when you have not felt God's love. When do you most notice this love feeling elusive?

Share your experience with a partner. Then reflect in the small group. What did it feel like to share about being beloved? Disconnected from God's love? To hear someone else's story?

## What Did You Learn?

Now as a whole group, using the conversation tips, share stories. Then recording the elements of agape you discovered and record them together on a large piece of paper.

- What Gospel texts come to mind of experiences of Jesus showing agape love? What are the elements that made it agape love?
- When did you experience agape love extended to another or group of people either in your own experience or in a story you read or heard in the news. What elements were present that made it an agape love?
- When did you experience agape love extended to you by another? What were the elements that made it agape love?
- Recall a particular time and place when you experienced being a part of Beloved Community.

## Wrapping Up

How do you feel as you recall and share these realities? Where do you see possibilities for incarnating agape love more intentionally in your life? Name them together.

**Closing Prayer**

You may wish to give thanks for God's grace, wisdom, and abiding love, and for the honesty, courage, and vulnerability people demonstrated. You may return to the promise of forgiveness and new life that we receive in Jesus Christ.

# LENT 2

## Telling the Truth about Our Churches and Race

### Baptismal Question

*Celebrant:* Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

*People:* I will, with God's help.

### Core Questions

Who are we? What things have we done and left undone regarding racial justice and healing?

### Pray the Collect for This Sunday

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Read the Scripture Together: Luke 13:31-35

**13** <sup>31</sup> At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." <sup>32</sup> He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work.' <sup>33</sup> Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' <sup>34</sup> Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! <sup>35</sup> See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

### Reflection

'Horrible History': Mass Grave of Indigenous Children Reported in Canada

*The New York Times - By Ian Austen - Published May 28, 2021*

*"An Indigenous community says it has found evidence that 215 children were buried on the grounds of a British Columbia school, one of the many in Canada set up to forcibly assimilate them.*

*"A National Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up as part of a government apology and settlement over the schools, concluded that at least 4,100 students died while attending the schools, many from mistreatment or neglect, others from disease or accident. It found that in many cases, families never learned the fate of their offspring, who are now known as the missing children."*

It was a shock to hear of the tragic role played by boarding schools run by various church denominations in the life and death of Indigenous children in Canada and the United States.

Throughout Lent we are preparing ourselves to experience Jesus' cross. Those who endangered our children's lives did not lead lives appropriate to that cross. They, in fact, played the tragic role of Jerusalem by killing innocent children. We have to take time to examine our own hearts as we journey with Jesus. In seeking reconciliation and justice for the missing children, we need to reflect on the attitude we are harboring. Jesus wants to gather the people in Jerusalem into his love and protection, "as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." God never gives up on us. He lives among us everywhere. We pray that our hearts become like his

and we look on the needs of people and hear the cries of people like he does. As speaker and author Katerina Katsarka Whitley said, “We can never understand suffering, but we can look at Gethsemane and the cross.”

- The Rev. Patricia White Horse-Carda

### **In the Labyrinth: Telling the Truth about our Churches and Race**

We cannot become what God created us to be unless we also examine all the things we think we know about life and community. Who do you say that you are as a church community? To whom do you need to listen to learn ways that you deny the truth about others? What do you, as a church, have to lose in order to include those who have felt excluded?

### **Make it Real: Inside/Outside Exercise**

Gather in groups, ideally of no more than eight people. Share the Conversation Tips from the welcome letter. Now invite people to pause and recall a particular time and place when you felt welcome, as if your voice, ideas, and presence were valued (if it has never happened, imagine it in detail). Pair off and tell the story to a neighbor, for about one minute each.

Next, recall a particular time and place when you felt unwelcome, as if your voice, ideas and presence were not valued or received. Share with the same neighbor. Then reflect in the small group. What did it feel like to share about being welcome? Unwelcome? To hear someone else’s story? What did you learn?

Now as a whole group, take a large sheet of paper and draw a circle within a circle.

- What racial, cultural, and ethnic groups experience their voices, presence, and ideas as valued and welcome in your congregation today?
- Which groups have been welcome and shaped your church’s story since its founding? Write those groups in the inner circle.
- What racial, cultural, and ethnic groups are not present and/or not welcome in your congregation today, although they are in the same or a nearby town, area, or region?
- What groups have been unwelcome or on your church’s margins in the past? Write those groups in the wider circle.

How do you feel as you recall and share these realities?

Where do you see possibilities for growing into Beloved Community? Name them together.

### **Closing Prayer**

You may wish to give thanks for God’s grace, wisdom, and abiding love, and for the honesty, courage, and vulnerability people demonstrated. You may return to the promise of forgiveness and new life that we receive in Jesus Christ.

# LENT 3

## Proclaiming the Dream of Beloved Community

### Baptismal Question

*Celebrant:* Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

*People:* I will, with God's help.

### Core Questions

How can we publicly acknowledge things done and left undone? What does Beloved Community look like in this place? What behaviors and commitments on our part will foster reconciliation, justice, and healing?

### Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Read the Scripture Together: Luke 13:1-9

**13** <sup>1</sup> At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

<sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' <sup>8</sup> He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

### Reflection

In a world that sees faith as, perhaps, a nice optional accessory for life, Jesus' words, "But unless you repent, you too will all perish," come as a rude awakening: in truth, as rude an awakening as the COVID-19 pandemic was when it struck in 2020. Suppose we remember that the word "repenting" means turning back to God. In that case, the first part of the lesson offered by this passage is the understanding that we as human beings can choose between God and life, versus a myriad of deaths, some faster and some slower than others. The second part of the lesson from this passage comes from the man who takes care of the vineyard. This man is intimately familiar with every plant that grows there. He has developed a relationship of sorts with each plant, and he feels that he knows each one's potential. He intercedes on behalf of the fig tree and offers to do what is necessary to help it bear fruit. In short, he has a relationship with the tree and offers to help it grow. It is there that God touches the fig tree, through the relationship which the man has and chooses to cultivate further. In the parable, the fig tree will not bear a nourishing fruit as it would naturally do so until someone nourishes it. We are no different, for it is in our relationships with others that we encounter God, and it is in cultivating them that we find life and choose life, in the words of William Stringfellow, "instead of death." Similarly, as with the tree, life-giving relationships are not the easiest ones we readily choose, but they are the relationships that we ultimately discover we need in order to grow.

- The Rev. Frederick Clarkson

## **In the Labyrinth: Proclaiming the Dream of Beloved Community**

Healing, reconciliation, and justice are big ideas, but they all begin with exploring our stories, shared history, and deepest longings. If you listened closely to your church and your neighbors and civic partners, what might you hear? What experiences have people had around race, ethnicity, and culture? Is there a shared vision of Beloved Community? What collective commitments and behaviors could you all make that would begin to foster Beloved Community?

### **Make It Real: Listening & Learning Session**

Gather in groups of ideally no more than seven people each. Review the **Conversation Tips**:

*Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.*

Ask each participant to tell a story using one of the prompts below. Allow at most two minutes for each story, with a little silence but no discussion between each. Each group should designate a timekeeper who will gently but clearly indicate when each speaker has 30 seconds left, then 10 seconds, and when time is up.

Story Prompts for Group Sharing:

1. When I walk around this neighborhood/town/city/community, I feel...
2. When I look at our neighborhood/town/city/community, I dream of...
3. To me, Beloved Community looks like...
4. I was especially aware of my race when I...
5. I was saddened about race in our neighborhood/town/city/community when...
6. I was grateful for race in our neighborhood/town/city/community when...
7. To foster Beloved Community, I hope to...

Offer everyone the opportunity to share a story. If there is time, go a second round and invite each person to choose a different prompt. Leave 10 minutes to discuss the following questions:

- What surprised you? Did someone's story change the way you view a situation or idea?
- What stories and perspectives do you wish you could hear? How can you humbly invite those voices to the listening & learning process?

### **Closing Prayer**

You may name hopes for deeper relationship with neighbors who differ from the gathered group. You may also acknowledge the dreams each person has shared, and how they resonate with God's dream of healing and wholeness for the whole creation.

# LENT 4

## Practicing the Way of Love in the Pattern of Jesus

### Baptismal Question

*Celebrant:* Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

*People:* I will, with God's help.

### Core Questions

How will we grow as reconcilers, healers, and justice-bearers? How will we actively grow relationship across dividing walls and seek Christ in the other?

### The Collect

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

### Read the Scripture Together: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

**15** <sup>1</sup> Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable:

<sup>11</sup> Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup> When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup> He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" <sup>20</sup> So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup> He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' <sup>31</sup> Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

## Reflection

The parable of the prodigal son is not just about our individual relationship with God but about the power of reconciling love to overcome the patterns of exploitation, mistrust, and bitterness that inhibit the flourishing of beloved community. Jesus offers this teaching in response to those Pharisees and scribes who contest his fellowship with “tax collectors and sinners,” all of whom they deem unworthy of inclusion in any conversation about God’s favor. The challenge that Jesus offers them—and us—is the idea that there is no one beyond the scope of God’s concern. The binaries of righteous and wicked, of insider and outsider, of redeemed and lost, all begin to break down in this narrative, leaving only a fierce, unflinching love that refuses to be drawn into any such dichotomies. There is no them, only us, and until we live as if this is so, we, too, will be lost children searching for home.

- The Rev. Phil Hooper

## In the Labyrinth: Practicing the Way of Love in the Pattern of Jesus

Loving our neighbor takes formation, practice, and commitment. How will each of us learn to be reconcilers, healers, and justice-bearers in Jesus’ name? How could we practice sharing stories, growing relationship across dividing walls, and seeking Christ in the “other”?

## Make It Real: This Far by Faith Exercise

Gather in circles of no more than 15 people. Review the **Conversation Tips**:

*Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.*

Now reflect on ways your congregation or ministry engages in loving your neighbors, within and outside the church. Make a list of the most significant ministries (no more than three). For each...

- Recall the story of how your church took up this ministry. Who had the idea? Why did others say “yes”?
- Describe the process of beginning the ministry. What was hard? What made it work?
- What (and who) did you not know at the beginning that you know now?
- How has God blessed you and your church through these ministries?

Now consider your conversations over the first two weeks. Think about people groups - racial, ethnic, and cultural, but also socioeconomic, ideological, and theological - with whom your church has experienced separation or even tension. With which of these do you wish your church would develop deeper relationship?

Once the circle has decided, reflect together:

- How could the ministry experiences you described before help you to approach the challenge of forming these challenging new relationships? How are those experiences a gift you can offer?
- What new learning and practice would help you to prepare for relationship across difference and division? Book study? Dismantling racism training? Story-telling training? Pilgrimage? Prayer? (For specific information, check [www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation](http://www.episcopalchurch.org/reconciliation))

## Closing Prayer

You may give thanks for particular gifts of the Spirit that are now or have been present in your church’s life (humility, resilience, generosity, compassion, etc.). You could also ask for God’s gracious accompaniment as you venture into spaces of difference and discovery.

# LENT 5

## Repairing the Breach in Institutions and Society

### Baptismal Question

*Celebrant:* Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

*People:* I will, with God's help.

### Core Question

What institutions and systems are broken near us? How will we participate in the repair, restoration, and healing of people, institutions, and systems?

### The Collect

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Read the Scripture Together: John 12:1-8

**12** <sup>1</sup> Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. <sup>4</sup> But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup> "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" <sup>6</sup> (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) <sup>7</sup> Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup> You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

### Reflection

As we approach the final week in Lent, we read the story of Mary anointing Jesus' feet with the most costly and aromatic perfume. It was believed when a guest entered the home, usually the guest's feet were washed with water and the guest's head was anointed with a dab of oil or perfume. Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet symbolizes an act of loving humility and devotion. In today's society, we have our own internal tug of war over how to fight for justice and be a voice for the voiceless. As we strive to become a Beloved Community, how might we let go of our egos and place in society to humble ourselves for others, especially the poor? We should never forget the poor, because they are all around us; and if we give of ourselves for them in the same way Jesus gave himself for us, God will care for all of us. May we be able to throw ourselves at the feet of the One who loves and cares for us by offering up the very best that we have.

- Ms. Mildred J. Briones Reyes

### In the Labyrinth: Repairing the Breach in Institutions and Society

God came among us in Jesus because of the deep, divine longing to love and repair this world. What social institutions and systems are broken around you? Where do you notice systems and structures that reflect racial injustice? How could we together participate in the repair, restoration, and healing of institutions and systems?

## **Make It Real: In Solidarity Exercise**

Jesus' death and resurrection are so close we can sense him. Dwell for a moment with your own anticipation of the passion. After some silence, as a whole group, sing or speak this hymn:

*Praise the one who breaks the darkness with a liberating light.  
Praise the one who frees the prisoners, turning blindness into sight.  
Praise the one who preached the Gospel, healing every dread disease,  
Calming storms and feeding thousands with the very bread of peace.*

Invite people to pause and silently imagine communities near and far who live in darkness, illness, hunger and fear: refugees, immigrants with or without documentation, prisoners and detainees in the criminal justice system, victims of human trafficking, and many others. What unjust systems and institutions in our society disproportionately target people of color? In a posture of deep prayer, name these systems aloud. Name and capture them.

Once again review the **Conversation Tips**:

*Speak from your own experience. Be genuinely curious about what others share. Imagine you can disagree without someone being wrong. Avoid debate and stay with the story. Seek Christ in others and seek to embody his loving, liberating, life-giving way.*

Now reflect as a group:

- Which of these systems and institutions most intersects with the life of your church or community? Agree on no more than two.
- What efforts can you identify, as a group that contribute to healing and transforming the systems you have named? Research options on the web in real time.
- How could your church actively participate in repairing one of the systems the group identified? Together, set one concrete, achievable goal for engagement in the year ahead.

## **Closing Prayer**

Invite people to name what graces they have experienced in these Lenten sessions. Name the gifts you need, as individuals and as a congregation, to keep walking the labyrinth and becoming Beloved Community. You might finally ask Jesus to dwell richly in you, so that you can share his light and be Jesus Movement people in the world.