

Making the Road

Walking through Lent

WEEK 1

Sunday, March 6 Luke 3:1-6

John the Baptist typically kicks off the season of Advent, proclaiming our need to repent in preparation for the birth of Christ. But I turn to Luke 3 to begin our 2022 Lenten journey. This devotion series is based on the Spanish poet Antonio Machado's poem "Walker." Machado writes: "Walker, there is no road, the road is made by walking."

This line resonates because it feels as if there is no road in front of us. The soil of our well-worn Lenten path has been overturned by the pandemic. If we want to follow Christ this Lent, we'll need to prepare the way and make the road. We'll need to rethink and recreate our Lenten practices.

The poem's phrase, "The road is made by walking," suggests that there is no road forward until we take the steps to create it. It's up to me, the walker, to forge the path. So, we will walk with Jesus this Lent, keeping in mind that faith was never meant to be a destination, but a journey — a never-ending, creating and recreating, dying to the old and rising to the new, walk with Christ. Let us step forward this Lent, doing the spiritual work of straightening the crooked paths, filling in the valleys of despair, removing the rough and mountainous obstacles so that, come Easter, we shall see the salvation of God.

God our Companion, the future is uncertain, and we stand poised before this season of Lent, unsure of this journey that feels altogether new. As we step into this 40-day journey, help us make a road that is straight and sure and free of obstacles. Help us make a road for ourselves and others that leads us to the salvation you offer to all weary travelers. Amen.

written by
TERI MCDOWELL OTT

Monday, March 7

Luke 1:78-79

Brian McLaren writes in *We Make the Road by Walking*, "[Faith] was to be a road, a path, a way out of old destructive patterns into new creative ones." There are many roads we can choose to make: roads of anger, hate, and violence; roads of disrespect and exclusion; roads of obstinance and arrogance. On life's journey, when we come to a fork in the road, we need a guide to advise which path, which choice, would best serve us and those around us. Christ is that guide, positioning our feet in the way of peace.

Living God, when there is a choice, steer us in your way and guide our feet in the path of peace. Amen.

Tuesday, March 8 ☞ Luke 9:1-3

To set out on a journey with nothing – no luggage, no snacks, no cash or credit cards, just your faith in the One you follow – sets a high standard for discipleship. The days when I felt comfortable traveling without a cellphone are long behind me. But the road Jesus encourages us to follow won't be made by the things we cling to for comfort or security. We must be willing to take risks, to step forward despite anxiety and fear.

You call us, Jesus, but we hesitate to follow. Fill our hearts with the faith necessary to step forward with you. Fill our hearts with courage, knowing that despite what we must leave behind, your promise of what lies ahead is worth the journey. Amen.

Wednesday, March 9 ☞ Luke 9:57-62

We long to walk the new road with Christ, but the people, places and memories to which we are emotionally attached can keep us looking back. We cling to beliefs, ideologies and worldviews taught to us by family or handed down with authority, but that can keep us from new ideas and discoveries. We are a part of a living Christian tradition. We can honor our past while remaining open to the new road Christ's Spirit leads us along.

Living Christ, help us not get so stuck in the old ways that we fail to see value in all that is new. Free us from past attachments so we can follow you down the road of your future. Amen.

Thursday, March 10 ☞ John 14:5

Was Thomas' doubt born of healthy skepticism? Of curiosity and a desire to learn? Or did his doubt emerge from cynicism, a dismissive denial? If it was the latter, then Thomas wasn't going to get far in making a new road with Christ. If he had already concluded Jesus was crazy and his way was not the way, then Thomas was going to miss out. The wisest among us are those who know how much we don't know, are open to being proven wrong and open to the epiphanies that await down Christ's strange and wondrous new road.

Lord, we believe. Help us in our unbelief. May our doubt not be a closed denial but an open curiosity towards a new road and new discovery. Amen.

Friday, March 11 ☞ John 14:6

Bidding farewell to his disciples, Jesus reassures them that his death is not the end. Jesus is our way, our road, our path forward. These words are not meant to exclude other religions. Rather, John is reminding his faith community of their particular and distinct identity in Jesus Christ. In a world full of religious expression, Jesus is our way. We are not wandering lost without direction. We are not alone in the wilderness without a guide. We will make this road with Jesus.

Lord, we are not lost. Christ is our compass and our guide. Thank you for showing us where to place our feet when life's paths feel so uncertain. Thank you for showing us the way. Amen.

Saturday, March 12 ☞ Act 9:2

The earliest Christians were called "people of the Way." Here in Acts, we read how these Christians lived in community, sharing possessions, land, and homes, caring for each according to their need. Their distinctive, small yet growing group stood apart. Now, as a majority religion, Christianity is no longer as distinct. But the way we live and how we care for others should still set us apart as "people of the Way." The road we create must include a way to embody Christ's ministry, to live as Jesus lived, and love as God loves.

Savior God, you have called us to a unique path. You have called us to a way that often counters the ways of the world. Help us make a road that is faithful to all you expect from us. Amen.

Sunday, March 13 ☞ Luke 4:1-13

The wilderness is a place every Christian knows. It's not a physical place like the dry, desolate desert where we imagine the Spirit leading Jesus. Our wilderness creeps into our everyday lives, taking up residence in our mind, our mood, our soul. The wilderness is a spiritually dry space, devoid of inspiration. It takes all our effort to survive and thrive in the wilderness where we are tempted to stray from Christ's path at every turn.

Maybe the wilderness crept into your life during our long period of pandemic isolation. Maybe you attended worship with your community via video or Zoom at first but grew dissatisfied with all things virtual. It was easy to ignore your church's worship, to power down your community's connection.

So much has been revealed through this pandemic. We learned more about each other than perhaps we ever wanted or was good for us to know. The behavior of some in my community has angered and irritated me. Stones have been thrown in every direction. We've witnessed and been tempted by greed, self-righteousness, and a flagrant disregard for neighbor and stranger. An evil disease has wreaked havoc on our lives — disorienting, tempting, and corrupting.

This Lent is our chance to spiritually reboot. As we make this road with Jesus, we follow the One who was tempted as we are tempted. Jesus willingly followed the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by power, greed and glory. Jesus knows where we are and he knows the way out. This is the good news. We don't have to make this road alone. We have an experienced spiritual guide. Jesus made it through. With his help, we can too.

God of grace, the wilderness is a frightening, disorienting place where we risk losing ourselves and our way. As we make this road through Lent, guide and direct us. Keep our eyes fixed on Christ, who was tempted as we are tempted yet without sin. Thank you for staying by our side. Amen.

Making the Road Walking through Lent

WEEK 2: WALKING IN
THE WILDERNESS

written by
TERI MCDOWELL OTT

Monday,
March 14

Exodus 13:17-18

I volunteer in a men's prison where men have told me that, growing up, they had to choose between "the best of bad options." The wilderness was the Israelites' escape, but 40 years of perilous, exhausting wandering can be its own form of slavery. Who in your life or your community is living with limited options? The dad sacrificing time with his kids because he works three jobs to keep them fed. The domestic abuse victim fleeing to protect herself who loses her financial support. The parents who hospitalize their adult son to help his addiction. God does not abandon us in the wilderness. God guides us even in our worst circumstances.

God of mercy, you are with us as a guide and support. Help us to be here for each other, recognizing the difficult and perilous journey some have no other option but to take. Amen.

Tuesday, March 15 ☞ Exodus 16:2

“Are we there yet?” “How long is this trip?” “My feet hurt.” “I’m hungry.” “I’m thirsty.” “I’m tired of manna for breakfast.” “Stop touching me.”

I’m not sure how Moses and Aaron put up with 40 years of wilderness travel complaints. We all need our grievances to be heard and acknowledged. Too much complaining, though, wears down those seeking to do right by us. There is a fine line between needing to be heard and being a negative and destructive burden.

God of the weary traveler, the road isn't always easy or smooth and we aren't always easy to journey with. Help us honestly acknowledge the difficulty of our road while also checking ourselves before we burden others with complaints. Amen.

Wednesday, March 16 ☞ Exodus 16:3

When our circumstances don't live up to our dreams or expectations, it's tempting to desire a return to the past. The Israelites had the promise of a better future to keep them going. But sometimes we need something more tangible. Couples slip wedding rings on each other's fingers as a physical symbol of their vows. God delivered manna from heaven and water from a rock at the most difficult moments in the wilderness journey. We can't go backwards. We must make this road, keeping watch for the tangible signs that God offers in order to make a difficult journey more bearable.

God our Provider, help us recognize the signs you offer to keep us moving forward, to keep us making this road. Amen.

Thursday, March 17 ☞ Exodus 17:2-4

When we feel unsettled, hungry or thirsty, when our schedules are disrupted or a journey drags on, we can get irritable and quarrelsome. Oftentimes, the people to whom we are closest receive the brunt of our bad moods. Moses sacrificed everything to liberate his people, yet here they are ready to stone him. When we feel ugly and upset, it serves us to check in with our emotions to discern their root source. The wilderness is a place of big feelings. But it can also be a place to discover how we react and why.

Savior God, grant us the wisdom to change what we can, to let go of what we can't, and to not take our problems out on those who love us most. Amen.

Friday, March 18 ☞ Exodus 20:1-17

When we traveled with our young children, my husband and I always tried to keep to the kids' schedule of eating and sleeping. It helped our kids keep their bearings when everything was new and overstimulating. Adults also benefit from structure and clear expectations. God's commandments, delivered in the wilderness, helped a journeying people keep their bearings. These commandments continue to serve us as we make this road through Lent. God's expectations are clear. God has shown us the way. We step forward with this clear map.

God our Parent, thank you for not leaving us to wonder and wander without a road map. Thank you for showing us the foundational stones we need to build our road. Amen.

Saturday, March 19 ☞ Exodus 32:1-6

The temptation to worship idols, to prioritize a thing, an ideology, a person above God is even stronger when the journey takes longer than we expected. COVID-19 and its variants refuse to go away, and our anxiety builds over an uncertain future. But no money, power, nation, or selfish self-pursuit will serve us as well as the God who liberates us. Our minds and hearts are easy prey to idols seeking to enslave and divert us from the good and just path. Christ is our way to freedom.

Living God, help us keep our focus on Christ as we make this road through Lent. Guide our feet in the path of righteousness, avoiding the pitfalls of idolatry. Amen.

Sunday, March 20 Romans 8:26

This Lent, we make the road by walking prayerfully and mindfully, attentive to every step that brings us closer to Christ.

Congregations often assume that prayer comes easy for pastoral leaders, but everyone struggles with this spiritual practice, and it's important to find a prayer practice that works for you. We can seek the Spirit through *Lectio Divina* or Centering Prayer. We can practice breath prayer, walking prayer, or wind our way through a labyrinth, feeling that God is with us in our journey. For years, I practiced a version of fixed-hour prayer, praying in the morning, at noon, and before bed. Writing, though, is my favorite spiritual practice and the one I always return to when struggling for inspiration. Free-writing in response to Scripture (or writing a devotional series such as this) is my surest path to epiphanies.

Essentially, prayer is the practice of attending to the ways God's Spirit moves and communicates with us. Sometimes this happens through words; other times, as our passage from Romans highlights, the Spirit must intercede for us with "sighs" or, as this Greek word can also be translated, "groans," when our words are too shallow and limited.

Simone Weil wrote beautifully about attention as a contemplative practice through which we are deeply rewarded and by which we can be transformed. In her book, *Gravity and Grace*, Weil writes, "Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. ... If we turn our mind toward the good, it is impossible that little by little the whole soul will not be attracted thereto in spite of itself." Or, as adrienne maree brown puts it, "What we pay attention to grows." This Lent, let us turn our minds to what is good and what is God, let us grow in prayer through an intentional practice of attention.

Holy God, we do not know how to pray as we ought. Thank you for your Spirit's intercession and this Lenten opportunity to grow in prayer. Amen.

Making the Road Walking through Lent

WEEK 3: WALKING IN
PRAYER

written by
TERI MCDOWELL OTT

Monday,
March 21
Luke 11:1-4

When my husband leads worship and it comes time to recite the Lord's Prayer, he backs away from the microphone. With no one voice dominating, our voices are a collective hum. I love this sound, the recitation of prayer in community. I love that my children know this prayer by heart from growing up in a pew. I love that I can invite people to pray with me at a graveside or beside a hospital bed and it comes readily to our lips. When Jesus gave his disciples this prayer, he gave it to all who seek communion with him and with each other as the one body of Christ.

Jesus, thank you for teaching us to pray and for gifting us with a prayer we can all learn and carry in our hearts. Amen.

Tuesday, March 22 ☞ Proverbs 1:7

The Hebrew word for “fear” in this passage conveys a mixture of fear and awe, a feeling experienced in the presence of something our minds cannot fathom. I know many scientists who are people of faith. They, perhaps better than others, are acutely aware of the limits of their knowledge. Scientific discoveries continually stretch these limits, but there remains an infinite boundary between what we know and what we don’t. The appropriate prayer for mortals as we approach that boundary is one of awe and reverence. We don’t know what we don’t know. God does.

We are humbled, Awesome God, by all that is you and all we do not know of you. May we be wise in approaching you in fear and reverence. Amen.

Wednesday, March 23 ☞ Psalm 6:6

The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is believed to be the Western Wall of the Second Temple of Jerusalem. Jews and other pilgrims pray – and often wail – before the wall, slipping petitions written on paper into its cracks. The divine presence, it is believed, never departs from this Wailing Wall.

God’s name comes to our lips when we are suffering. Our prayers of lamentation, our wailings, serve us better than ignoring or avoiding our emotions. God is our compassionate listener and receiver of our pain. God weeps with us in our grief and suffers as we suffer. Do not be afraid to wail.

Loving God, you are here for us in our pain. Thank you for sitting with us and holding our grief as your own. Amen.

Thursday, March 24 ☞ Psalm 100:1-2

I embarrass my teenagers by singing loudly in church. But my noise brings God and me joy. I’ve missed singing hymns in community during COVID-19. The blending of our voices (even those that are out of tune) is a prayer practice we do in unity as the Body of Christ and a tradition from our ancestors in the faith.

The melodies of our church hymns stay with me long after worship has concluded. I find myself humming, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and its righteousness,” on the drive home, cleaning the lunch dishes, and working through Sunday afternoon chores. The joy of being with God lingers long after worship is over.

God of life’s melodies, we worship you with gladness and sing to you with joy. Amen.

Friday, March 25 ☞ James 5:16

“I’m sorry.” “I made a mistake.” “I was wrong.” “Please forgive me.”

These are simple confessions but powerful in their ability to heal and restore relationships. Unacknowledged shame or hurt festers and spreads, damaging the wrongdoer as well as the injured one. Nothing could be more poisonous to a relationship than an unwillingness to admit when we are wrong. The same is true of our relationship with God. Our prayers of confession should honestly acknowledge how we have sinned or fallen short. God freely and graciously forgives, but without this honest acknowledgment our confession lacks its power to heal and restore.

Merciful God, we have sinned and fallen short of your expectations for us. Forgive us, again, we pray. Amen.

Saturday, March 26 ☞ Psalm 22:1

“Why, God?” “Why have you forsaken me?” “Why are you so far from me?” “Why won’t you help me?”

Throughout the Scriptures, people pray their questions to God. Maybe we won’t get an answer. Maybe we will. But the assurance that we can question God, that even Jesus asked, “Why?” on the cross, gives me peace. God receives our questions without flinching, without turning away, without judgment. Even without receiving an answer, articulating what we don’t understand can serve as a cathartic, healthy release, surrendering what we can’t know, to what we can — that God hears us and receives us.

Loving God, thank you for hearing and receiving our questions, no matter whether we can hear and receive their answers. Amen.

Sunday, March 27 ☩ Luke 4:14-19

In the late 1960s, White Australians grew increasingly aware of the impact their country's racism and colonialism had on the lives of Aboriginal people. These White Australians began approaching Aboriginal people, asking "How can I help you? What do you want?" Aboriginal activists grew frustrated, recognizing persisting colonial biases and attitudes in these offers of support. Activist Lilla Watson responded with a challenge: "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

As we make this road through Lent, we must recognize Jesus' call to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. We are Jesus' hands in this mission, but we must also recognize how we ourselves are poor, held captive, blind, and bound by systems of oppression.

The corrections officer shackling the prisoner must emotionally distance himself from this soul-sucking work. By depriving himself of emotion, he is dehumanized within a system that dehumanizes others.

The straight, cisgender teenager is free to use his assigned restroom without harassment, but they are also trapped in a binary world that shames diverse bodies and identities.

The wealthy executive with a nice suburban home where her kids can attend the best schools is segregated from neighbors trapped in urban food deserts, enduring long commutes on public transportation. Generational inheritance, real estate redlining, drug "wars" targeting Black and Brown communities, and White supremacy have benefited the executive while oppressing others. But she is also trapped — deprived of truth and the rich wisdom diversity offers.

No matter our economic status, identity, race, or religion, we are all bound by systems of oppression. As we walk with Jesus this Lent, let us make this road with others, partnering in the work of mutual liberation.

God of the captives, help us recognize our need for liberation and value the salvation Jesus offers. Help us make this road with those whose liberation is bound up with ours. Amen.

Making the Road Walking through Lent

WEEK 4: WALKING WITH
OTHERS

written by
TERI MCDOWELL OTT

Monday,
March 28
Luke 6:32-36

In her book *All About Love*, bell hooks writes about the dangers of "dominator" culture where superiors trump inferiors and conversations become competitive debates. Much of hooks' work is grounded in an ethic of love, lived out through care, commitment, respect and knowledge. "The choice to love," hooks writes, "is the choice to connect — to find ourselves in the other." Approaching our enemies with an ethic of love, maintaining a radical openness, allows each person the chance to be heard and values every voice for their unique perspective. Grounding our road in this ethic of love leads to personal and social transformation.

Merciful God, let us behave as children of the Most High. Help us to walk this road with our enemies, seeking to love, not dominate. Amen.

Tuesday, March 29 ☞ Luke 7:36-50

Jesus loves and forgives the woman forever condemned by others, accepting her confession and welcoming her faith. After this encounter, will this woman's community accept her and welcome her back? Or is this grace offered only from Jesus? As we make this road through Lent, we undoubtedly walk with sinners shunned by society as irredeemable. Some are seen as "wrong" by those of us whose lives fit neatly into our culture's mold. Who do you know who could benefit from a word of welcome or a new chance? Who is begging for grace from God because they cannot find it among us?

Welcoming God, forgive our lack of forgiveness and grace. Help us welcome and love the sinners at Jesus' feet. Amen.

Wednesday, March 30 ☞ Luke 10:25-36

Although his identity is unknown, Jesus' audience would have assumed the robbers' victim was Jewish. The Samaritan's help shatters expectations, defying a longstanding enmity between Jews and Samaritans. As we make this road through Lent, we travel with people of various ethnic identities and religious traditions, people who appreciate Jesus but do not worship him as Messiah and Savior. These fellow travelers are still our neighbors. We are to walk with them as partners in good, merciful work. Jesus calls us to make roads that break from the familiar fault lines of human borders and biases, roads that all can travel safely.

Eternal God who moves beyond all boundaries and borders, help us make our road safe and welcoming for all our neighbors. Amen.

Thursday, March 31 ☞ Luke 17:11-19

Entering a village, Jesus is met by ten lepers banished to the margins of their community. They were the unseen, the problem-ridden, the diseased who knew to keep their distance from Jesus while they cried out for recognition. Along our road are marginalized people calling to us — those victimized and oppressed, those sidelined by mental illness or addiction. What happens to the soul of a traveler who consistently passes by without acknowledging their humanity? Jesus offers those who approach and engage the lepers the same healing that he gifts to the sick men. When we humanize others, we humanize ourselves as well.

God of us all, we cry out to Jesus to heal us and set us free from actions that demean and dehumanize. Amen.

Friday, April 1 ☞ Luke 18:35-43

In classic literature, the blind are often portrayed as people of inner wisdom, prophets who can "see" more clearly than the sighted. The blind man Jesus met along the road to Jericho knew the Son of David was approaching and had the power to heal. This encounter occurs after the disciples are told explicitly who Jesus is and what will happen to him, but they do not understand. As we walk this road through Lent, what can we see through the eyes of those whose abilities and lives are vastly different than ours? How might your path, or your church's path, change if you viewed the journey through another's eyes?

Son of David, have mercy on us and help us to see. Amen.

Saturday, April 2 ☞ Luke 21:1-4

Money and privilege are seductive, skewing our perspective of both poverty and abundance. The wealthy gift-givers would be well served to spend time with the poor widow. They could volunteer at the homeless shelter, screen clients at the non-profit agency helping with utility bills or serve food at the soup kitchen. To be among the poor, to share a meal and get to know their stories is a liberating practice. The poor widow has much to give. Her sacrificial generosity has the power to transform lives.

Lead us, God, alongside the poor so we can be liberated from the seductive, skewed perspective of wealth and privilege. Help us recognize the way our liberation is bound to the poor. Amen.

Sunday, April 3 ☞ Luke 21:5-8

During the bleakest, most isolated times of the pandemic, I turned to dystopian novels for comfort. It feels absurd that these harrowing, sometimes horrific, stories made me feel better, but they gave me fresh perspective. “Well, it’s not this bad ... yet,” I would think. And I began to recognize not just all we had lost, but all that remained.

The characters of dystopian novels are always traveling, in search of food, a warmer climate, a safer shelter, other civilized humans to join for group survival. In Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, a father and son journey on foot after some undisclosed cataclysm. Ash fills the air of this ruined world and the only survivors have turned savage. Pushing their meager supplies in a shopping cart, a motorcycle mirror fixed to the handle to keep watch for marauders from behind, they travel to survive in a cold, colorless world.

The only beauty along McCarthy’s road is the devotion of this father for his son. Their tender intimacy stands in stark contrast to the evil surrounding them and the savagery to which others have turned. Along their journey, the father reminds his son of their purpose, the calling to which they must cling. “My job is to take care of you,” he says. “I was appointed by God to do that ... we are the good guys.”

Chapter 21 of Luke’s Gospel introduces Jesus’ apocalyptic discourse, foretelling the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the second coming of the Son of Man. Jesus warns his disciples not to be led astray during the frightening times that lie ahead, not to be deceived by false prophets or led to believe good people can do nothing or no hope is to be found. No matter how rough the road gets, we are to hold on to what is good and turn to God’s promise of deliverance. The road we walk through Lent may feel dystopian. But we walk with hope.

God, help us to have courage, to do good and to hold on to your hope. Amen.

Making the Road Walking through Lent

WEEK 5: WALKING WITH
HOPE

written by
TERI MCDOWELL OTT

Monday, April 4 Luke 21:9-11

Remember when we were afraid of our groceries? At the beginning of the pandemic I sat on my kitchen floor, laboriously Clorox-wiping every box, bag, and can. I was terrified of the dangerous virus that we then knew so little about. The Greek word for “terrified” in this passage can also translate as “startled.” Jesus does not want us surprised or shaken by terrifying happenings. Great conflicts will arise. Natural disasters will disrupt and destroy. Famines and plagues will haunt us. But as we experience these terrible plot points, God’s narrative still unfolds. God’s promise is on the horizon, soon to be revealed. Keep walking this road. There is hope.

Holy God, when we are startled by terrifying events, ground us, once again, in your narrative of hope. Amen.

Tuesday, April 5 – Luke 21:12-19

These days of pandemic fear, anguish, frustration and despair present Christian disciples with an opportunity to testify, to make Jesus' way known through the evidence of our own words and behavior. We can embody a way that counters selfish individualism, obstinate, hunkered-down division, efforts to control, overpower, and oppress. We can speak and act from our Christian ethic of love, responding to others with respect, radical openness, curiosity, and humility. Does this feel daunting? Do not fear. Jesus promises to give us the words and the wisdom. We just need to embrace the opportunity.

God, you present us with challenges and opportunities. Help us embrace the spiritual resources you offer us to testify to your way of love. Amen.

Wednesday, April 6 – Luke 21:20-28

Have you ever considered a posture for hope? Aligning your body to better receive what Jesus offers? A yoga teacher taught me the benefit of mountain pose with a clarifying example. She stood “normally”: slouched, her weight unbalanced. She asked a student to press down on her shoulders. Our class watched as her body crumpled under the slightest pressure of the student's hand. Then she stood tall, feet balanced, shoulders squared, chin raised, and the student applied pressure again. This time, our teacher stood strong. Friends, stand up and raise your heads, because our redemption is drawing near.

Jesus, you are our strength within and without. In the midst of destruction and despair, help us to stand tall in a posture of hope. Amen.

Thursday, April 7 – Luke 21:29-33

If you Google “images of fig trees” you will be delighted by pictures of thick, twisty trunks lush with green, three-lobed leaves. Fig trees grow well in Israel because they love dry, sunny locations with porous soil. Their fruit is extravagant – green bulbs that ripen purple and break open to sweet, crunchy, reddish flesh – a desert luxury. It's no wonder the fig tree is the biblical metaphor for the peace and prosperity of Israel, a sign of God's kingdom to come. God is good — as good as a sturdy tree bearing luscious fruit for all in a dry, desert climate.

God, you sustain us and feed us in a myriad of ways as we make this road. Thank you for your beautiful fruit. Amen.

Friday, April 8 – Luke 21:34-36

We are to travel light as we walk with Jesus, shedding distractions, worries, and habits that drag us down, leaving us far from our best selves. Are we caring for our minds and bodies as we should? Are we mindful of how we spend our energy and resources? Are our lives bloated and burdened with hoarded goods? We are making this road to stand before the Son of Man. What must we shed this Lent to stay faithful and alert on this journey?

Savior, liberate us from the trappings of this world, our idols of food and drink, the things we buy and hoard for our comfort, not our need. We are burdened by too much. Help us lighten our load this Lent. Amen.

Saturday, April 9 – Luke 21:37-38

Biblical forecasts of destruction are intended to call God's people back to their faith. What future devastation could we avoid by listening to Jesus? Jesus' teachings in the Temple have been passed on through oral and written accounts. The road we make today builds upon the lessons we have learned, collectively, as a people of faith. We learn from those times we strayed from the path. This Lent, we repent and return to Christ who guides us. We make this road inspired by the steadfast love of God for humankind in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God of hope, you've called us back to our faith. We repent and return to the way, ready to follow your son into and through this holy week. Amen.

Sunday, April 10 *☩* Luke 19:28-40

As we make this road into the holy city of Jerusalem, we walk alongside Jesus riding a colt, his disciples shouting praises, making a scene and drawing a crowd. Across the city, another powerful leader makes his entrance. In their book, *The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem*, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan describe, in vivid detail, the procession of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria. It was standard practice for governors to show up in cities during major festivals. Pilate wasn't coming to help celebrate Passover, though, but to maintain order and squash any rebellion that might arise among a crowd unhappy with their Roman oppressors.

Pilate's procession into Jerusalem was a showy parade of strength. Pilate led the way on a huge war horse, followed by his calvary, followed by his foot soldiers. According to Borg and Crossan, they'd be dressed in leather armor and helmets, carrying weapons, banners, and golden eagles mounted on poles. It was a display of both imperial power and imperial theology. The Roman emperor was not simply a political ruler. Augustus, the greatest of Roman emperors who ruled from 31 B.C.E. to 14 C.E., was believed to be the son of Apollo. Augustus was referred to as "son of God," "lord," and "savior," and his successors continued to bear these divine titles.

Given this context, Jesus' entry to Jerusalem appears more like a show of planned resistance than a humble parade. The danger and tension rise in this narrative as one "Son of God" enters Jerusalem from the east and another from the west. The road Jesus is making confronts and contradicts the power of the world. Jesus' way is the road of humility and peace, not intimidating strength and terrorizing power.

Son of the Living God, let us not be confused about who you are and the road you lead us down. Let us make our road humble and work for peace. Amen.

Making the Road Walking through Lent

WEEK 6: WALKING
THROUGH HOLY WEEK

written by
TERI MCDOWELL OTT

Monday, April 11 Luke 23:1-25

Jesus has upset the powerful and been betrayed by those closest to him. Pilate's ready to let Jesus go, but the crowd is stoked against him. They want him crucified. Pilate asks, "Why? What evil has Jesus done?" But the crowd is too swept up to hear, think, or respond. They are not individuals, but a crowd with one objective: Kill Jesus.

When have you been swept up in a moment or a crowd that has steered you away from Jesus? Reflecting on how that experience felt, what options you had, what actions you could or should have taken, can help when you find yourself in a similar situation.

Jesus, forgive us when we abandon you for the crowd. Help us be clear-minded in following you. Amen.

Tuesday, April 12 ☞ Luke 23:26-31

The road Jesus walks turns from unassuming to humiliating as Jesus is led to crucifixion. He will be hung on a cross on a skull-shaped hill outside Jerusalem's walls, a warning for everyone entering the city — don't rebel against Rome or this will be you. Simon of Cyrene, a visitor for the Passover festival, is dragged out and made to carry Jesus's cross. If Simon refuses, he will likely be crucified too. In Mark 15:21, we learn Simon has two sons. Are they with him for Passover? Do they beg their dad to do as he was told to stay safe?

Lord, help those who get swept up in evil situations. Help us when we participate in oppressive systems. Save us and set us free. Amen.

Wednesday, April 13 ☞ Luke 23:32-38

Who is the most powerful in this scene — those who violently and brutally crucify? Those who scoff and mock? Those who cast lots over a dying man's clothes? Or, does the power reside in the innocent man on the cross who forgives? The one who practices love in the face of hate, who wages peace, not violence? This story isn't over. The ripple effects of Jesus' love and forgiveness remain to this day.

God of glory, your ways are not the world's ways, your power, not the world's power. Help us stand strong in the face of persecution, turmoil, or grief. Help us do the hard thing that is the right thing. Empower us with Jesus' love and forgiveness, so we can faithfully face whatever life brings. Amen.

Thursday, April 14 ☞ Luke 23:39-43

"Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom." These words of Scripture have been arranged into my favorite Taizé hymn "Jesus, Remember Me." The words repeat like a mantra. Singing this hymn together at the end of a Good Friday service, as the last bit of light dies in the darkness, is a powerful experience. In this bleak space we want nothing more than for our Savior to remember us, call us by name, keep making this uncertain road with us. We need to remember this feeling — this longing for Jesus — and use it as fuel for our faith.

Jesus, we remember you and long for you. Remember us when you come into your kingdom.

Friday, April 15 ☞ Luke 23:44-46

Jesus "breathed his last." The breath that fills our lungs and sends oxygen to our body and brain means more to us now that we've experienced a deadly virus that attacks our respiratory system. Jesus's human body relied on this life-giving breath. When his breath ceased, his body soon followed. Being fully human meant Jesus was to experience everything we experience, including death. But still, we are not left alone. The Holy Spirit follows Jesus. The word "spirit" in Greek is *pneuma*, which also means "breath." We are never left without this life-giving support.

"Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love as Thou dost love and do as Thou wouldst do" (Glory to God, #286). Amen.

Saturday, April 16 ☞ Luke 23:50-56

Despite the bustle of Easter preparations, I've always felt that Holy Saturday should be slow and quiet — a day of respectful, hushed grieving as we wait and wonder before the tomb. I imagine Joseph of Arimathea tenderly taking Jesus' broken body from that disgraceful cross, wrapping his nakedness in clean linen, laying him gently in the tomb. Perhaps we can walk through this Holy Saturday as Joseph handled Jesus' body — gently, tenderly, in awe of all God is doing.

Father of Jesus, you grieve today too. Your heart as wounded as ours. We are in awe of your love for us, in awe of the lengths you will go to save us. Hear our whispered prayers of gratitude in the face of a gift we cannot begin to fathom. Amen.

Sunday, April 17 ☞ Luke 24:13-35

The risen Christ meets two despairing disciples on the road to Emmaus, leaving the Holy City behind. When these disciples broke bread with the man, they thought was a stranger, their eyes were opened to the joy of this Easter Sunday. Jesus is alive! Our hearts burn with this good news! These two despairing disciples change course immediately and return to Jerusalem. They have work to do. A new road needs to be made. From this day forward, we walk with the resurrected Christ.

Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Amen!