

LENTEN JOURNEY

KITTAMAQUUNDI COMMUNITY CHURCH

COLUMBIA, MARYLAND | OUR JUBILEE YEAR 1969-2019

March-April 2019



A PEOPLE OF FORGIVENESS

The heavens and the earth and all who live in them were completed.² On the sixth day God completed all the work that (s)he had done, and on the seventh day God rested from all the work that ze had done. ³ God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all the work of creation.

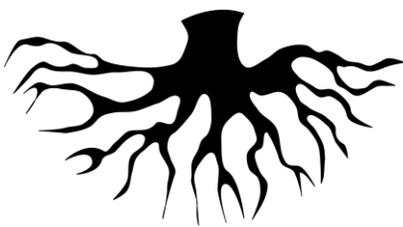
-Genesis 2:1-3 (adapted from Common English Bible)

JUBILEE

An English variation of the Hebrew word *jobel*, which means "ram's horn," the curved horn used as a trumpet to signal the year of the Jubilee.

RADICAL

Late Middle English (in the senses 'forming the root' and 'inherent'): from late Latin *radicalis*, from Latin *radix*, *radic-* 'root'.



Introduction – On Sabbath

God rested and invited us to learn the same. Sabbath teaches a seventh-day sigh. For as important as our work may be to secure our daily bread, we cannot afford to miss the deep pause that opens us to the goodness of the earth and the goodness within us. *Imago dei*, we are created in the image of God down to our every exhalation.

This was a lesson relearned in the wilderness as Moses led former slaves into new standards and commandments for living together. The warning that came alongside God's provision of manna was not to gather it on the Sabbath (Exodus 16).

When tribes later secured a farming life on land, Sabbath extended so that beasts of burden and the fields themselves were furloughed every seventh day, and miraculously, unworked every seventh year. The people were to eat whatever could be gathered not according to the latest work of their hands, but according to what the earth produced more wildly. For in the Sabbath year, the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus outline for us the practice of **radical forgiveness** of an agrarian people—of allowing land to go fallow, debts to be cancelled, and slaves to be freed.

After seven cycles of seven, a super turnover, a "Jubilee," brought the same Sabbath year expectations for Israelites on the Day of Atonement. Along with the land, debts, and slaves liberated, all lands that had changed hands by sale in the last forty-nine years were to be returned to their original families for **year fifty**. Talk about a revolution. This measure was meant to prevent cycles of crisis poverty for those who experienced natural disaster, tribal tragedy, predatory practices, and foreign threat. Land was to return to original proprietors with the acknowledgment that the earth and everything in it is God's, including its need—our need—to lie fallow.

As we approach our fiftieth year, we are invited into the rhythm of God's restoration. We anticipate that this season of Sabbath can renew our hearts and spur our spiritual imaginations for the days yet coming.

THE QUIET CENTER

We too know the draw to remain in motion. Sometimes we do not feel we can afford the luxury of stopping when we see the needs of our neighbor and world or feel personally the pinch of scarcity and illness. However, when we can and do pause, the Spirit sighs with us that same holiness rest that completed creation.

It is likely that our capacity for productivity increases when we put down our pens and plowshares. Although most of us are now divorced from the farming rhythms of the land, we each can name the modern activities of our lives that the Spirit would beg us to limit or let lapse in favor of a renewing Sabbath breath. And in that opening, perhaps there is some regular spiritual practice that draws you into the quiet center of sunrise or sunset—when the prospect of a new day invites forgiveness for that which has been done and left undone.

FLOWING FROM OUR ROOTS

Lent dawns before us. We often consider a sacrifice of “giving up” something or “taking on” a new practice in this forty days that interrupts the larger flow of life. Such an interruption leaves room for the Spirit to bring about unexpected movement alongside our already established root systems.

While not an entire year of lying fallow, this pre-Easter window becomes for Christians a Sabbath time each year to be alongside Christ. He is winding his way among the unclean and outcast to the seats of power in Jerusalem. We follow as nearly as we can the inward Way of the Cross. We recognize in Jesus the coming of new Jubilee, a renewed promise that the oppressed will go free. We see in him a love for all of creation that invites our own spiritual liberation. We hear from him the call to serve the brokenhearted, no matter their nationality, gender, tradition, or creed. We hear him forgive even those who persecute him.

As we approach our fiftieth year, we are invited into the rhythm of God's restoration. We anticipate that this season of Sabbath can renew our hearts and spur our spiritual imaginations for the days yet coming. As Kittamaquondi Community Church we discern what the next half century will ask of us. How might the inward time of Lent ready our hearts for that which awaits?

In our Lenten guide we explore themes that shape us as a people who are ever coming to know forgiveness in relationship to God, to each other, the world, and to ourselves. We find that the turnover of jubilee asks us to prepare our hearts for the outward expressions of God's grace to engage the broken places of our place and time. We ask how God is yet calling us as a forgiven people to utilize our resources. Out of our own brokenness, we are always learning to accept and share the abundance of God's love. Accordingly, our weekly themes and readings highlight facets of radical forgiveness: **sabbath, reparation, compassion, hospitality, equality, hope, love, and resurrection.**

Who knows what kind of sharing we may do together as we pray into this Lenten pause! May we emerge into Easter and Pentecost attentive to the joyful inner and outer work that calls us forward—alongside each other at KC and our broader community.

LENT BEGINS WITH ASH WEDNESDAY

March 6

The Gifts of the Desert Land

Ashes, then, are a sign of love and hope, of God's grace etched upon our hearts. 'Return to me,' says the Lord, 'and I will return to you' (Zechariah 1:3).

Exodus 16:1-30 (Manna, Sabbath)

Luke 4:1-13 (Jesus in the wilderness)

Psalms 51:1-17 (Create in me a clean heart)

Now our journey begins: 40 days in the wilderness just like last year, but it is not last year. We are not where we were or who we were last year. Things have happened in our lives and in our world, for better and for worse. Some of us still have the same old habits we had last year, and some of us have experienced new and unexpected changes. Some of us are like the Israelites in the desert, yearning for nourishment each day as we make our way in a seemingly barren land.

Whatever has happened we are being led by the Spirit into Lent, with all our joys and sorrows, just as Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted by the devil. During Lent, we are invited to experience the wilderness alone and spend time praying, but we are not alone. We are never alone: even in our darkest hour, angels come and minister to us, just as they did to Jesus. Even in our darkest hour, we have each other and the gift that is community. Even in the desert places, the earth is teeming with life.

Ask yourself: what burdens do I carry that I cannot forgive? Sit quietly and allow God to speak to you. Let God carry the burden with you, as you begin the journey from the desert. Perhaps there is the holy breath as you take first steps of release and begin to make space for God in a new way.

What would be a practice which will serve as a reminder of God's grace for you during Lent? What land could go fallow? What imbalance is yearning to be addressed?

There are many spiritual disciplines that will aid in drawing you closer to God. Choose a practice of doing, or not doing, something that will remind you to turn to God. Choose something that is on your heart – prayer, giving your time or money, reading and meditating on God's Word, fasting, perhaps using this Lenten booklet for reflection.

Whatever you choose, may it be a time of renewal that carries you through Lent unto the cross. May it be a time of Sabbath renewal that allows us even as we look into the face of death, to relive the joy and gift of God's grace. May we be people of forgiveness. May resurrection draw us forth unto the radical turnover of Easter and Jubilee celebration as community.

The above adapted from Iona Resources, Wild Goose Publications, 2018.
God of Desert Places: An Ash Wednesday Service of Taking on and Letting Go, © Rebeka Maples.

FIFTH WEEK OF LENT

April 7 | Radical Equality

Isaiah 61:1-11 (Proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor)

Luke 4:14-30 (Jesus as Jubilee; quoting Isaiah 61)

Psalm 85 (Prayer for Restoration of God's Favor)

During the Jubilee year, leases were annulled, private debts were canceled, and property that had been sold was returned to the family who originally owned it. This redistribution of wealth brought everybody "back to square one" and minimized the separation between rich and poor. Today, we are in a time when the gap is widening between the rich and poor and there is no "reset" button.

Likewise, other non-financial inequalities are rampant—racism, ageism, sexism and other areas—where groups of people are not treated equally even though the Constitution says that all are created equal. Jesus did not mince words about the rightful place of every human being at the table.

Rev. Martin Luther King, so filled with this notion of Radical Equality, that he put his life on the line for racial equality in the United States. Mother Teresa saw in each human being the presence of God and was moved to care for all of God's children. The members of the LGBTQ community seek to be included fully in all walks of life. Radical Equality is only possible if we say "yes" to forgive (more than just debts) and see every human being as deserving of equal rights and God's Love.

- Where do you feel less than equal? More than equal?
- Where have you seen (or heard) someone being treated unfairly? What did you do about it? What could you have done about it?
- How do your answers inform your attitudes about equality/inequality with others? Is there one shift you might make toward greater Radical Equality in yourself? In others?
- In our little corner of the universe, how do we, at KC, live and practice Radical Equality? What more could we do?

Invitation: Share a prayer for Jubilee equality here.

For Further Reading

"Just As I Am: Against the Odds, Transgender Christians Persevere" by Austin Hartke. *Sojourners*, June 2017. <https://sojo.net/magazine/june-2017/just-i-am>

The Equal Justice Initiative

<https://eji.org/racial-justice>

On Equality and Equity

Kuttner, Paul, "The problem with that equity vs equality graphic you're using." Cultural Organizing: Working for justice at the intersection of art, activism, education and culture.

<http://culturalorganizing.org/the-problem-with-that-equity-vs-equality-graphic/>

SIXTH WEEK OF LENT

April 7 | Radical Hope

Isaiah 26:1-6 (Entering the gates of freedom)

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29 (Gates of righteousness)

Luke 19:28-40 (Entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem-Palms)

During Jubilee, one thing that abounded was hope—hope for a better future with the wealth redistributed, hope for just and equal treatment under God’s law, hope for freedom from personal debt. Today, many people hope for stability and security for our country, or maybe peace and good health throughout the world. As Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem shows us, hope is at once powerful (it brings the people out to cheer) and fleeting (think of Jesus’ trial and the people calling for Barabbas’s release). It’s a mistake to sink your hope in earthly things instead of heavenly things.

- What are you hoping for this year spiritually? Physically? Socially? Intellectually? Financially? Any other way that’s relevant to you?
- What do you hope for KC? Our nation? The world? How can you help bring these hopes about?
- Where do you look to get hope? (There may be more than one place.) Why? What do your answers tell you about your faith? Yourself?

Invitation: Share a prayer, sketch, or poem on hope here.

Further Reading

“That’s right. My dear brother Jeffrey Stout, a great philosopher of our day, says, “Hope is not a mood; it’s a virtue.” We have a right to be in as dark a mood as we want, because things are indeed bleak. But hope is a virtue — which is to say, it’s an excellence that we aspire to. No matter how dark your mood is, you still have a responsibility to aspire to the virtuous. Hope is the refusal to succumb to despair and nihilism.”

— **Cornel West**, “Prisoner of Hope: Cornel West’s Quest for Justice.”

Sun Magazine Interview, Judith Hertog, September 2018.

<https://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/513/prisoner-of-hope>

“We have to make ourselves available to one another, or we can’t experience goodness. It’s not so much us seeking God, tracking Her down with a butterfly net; it’s agreeing to be found. The Old Girl reaches out to everyone and wants to include us in this beautiful, weird, sometimes anguished life. All people: go figure.”

— **Anne Lamott**, *Almost Everything: Notes on Hope*. Riverhead Books, 2018.



HOLY WEEK

April 14 | Radical Love

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (Love the Lord your God with all your heart)

John 12:1-8 (Mary pours costly oil)

Luke 23:32-43 (“Father, forgive them.”)

Philippians 2:5-11 (Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a servant)

How in the world does the notion of Jubilee connect with Jesus on the cross? Actually, “love is the answer.” The Israelites knew God’s love firsthand—God led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness to a “land of milk and honey.” For them, Jubilee was a chance to give to each other as God had given to them. **Today, our Jubilee carries forward this message with the story of Jesus and his teachings that God’s love for us is unconditional. As Christians, we’re called to live out the love we’ve received.**

- What kinds of love can you think of? (Don’t forget people, places, animate and inanimate objects.) Which are the most significant ones for you? How many fit in with **your** idea of a Christian lifestyle?
- When have you received Christian love? When have you given Christian love to some who’s different from you? How did you feel in each case? If you can’t recall either giving or receiving love, what does that say about your faith? About who you are?
- How can you “put arms and legs” on your love for others? There are many answers to this—some elaborate and complicated, some simple and straightforward—but they’re all worth considering.

For Further Reading

“Of the many radical things said and done by Jesus, his unflinching emphasis on *love* was the most radical of all. Love was the greatest commandment . . . his prime directive—love for God, for self, for neighbor, for stranger, for alien, for outsider, for outcast, and even for enemy, as he himself modeled. The new commandment of love [John 13:34] meant that neither beliefs nor words, neither taboos, systems, structures nor the labels that enshrined them mattered most. Love decentered everything else; love relativized everything else; love took priority over everything else—everything.”

— **Fr. Richard Rohr**, “Our Priority is Love,”
Jesus Modeling an Evolving Faith.
Center for Action and Contemplation. 1/3/2019.
<https://cac.org/our-priority-is-love-2019-01-03/>

“Now, let me say as I move to my conclusion that we've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point in Memphis. We've got to see it through. And when we have our march, you need to be there. If it means leaving work, if it means leaving school—be there. Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together. Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Mountaintop Speech: April 3, 1968, Memphis, Tennessee
addressing striking sanitation workers the evening before his murder

Events

March 9 Living Into the Quiet Center: Lenten Retreat Saturday, 9:00am-3:00pm

Join us for a day of reflection and sharing. In *Call to Commitment*, Elizabeth O'Connor writes that a deep yearning arose in the members of the Church of the Saviour to find a place where the community could gather, outside of the city, to pray, listen to and be with each other. They wanted a respite from the "doing" and time to just "be" with each other and God. If you haven't read the story of how they found and paid for Dayspring, it is worth the read! This retreat will offer an opportunity to just "be" in the midst of others, to reflect quietly and share openly on how God is moving you this Jubilee Year.

We will meet at KC at 9:00am, share a meal together and conclude at 3:00pm.

March 11, 19, 26 and April 2,9 Tuesdays, 6:30 p.m.
Courageous Conversations about Race and Religious Bias
Howard County Faith Communities present:

In Courageous Conversations, we will learn from one another and hear each other's perspectives about how we are living together in our experiences of race and religious bias. Our overarching theme this year is the question "How do we work towards creating a connected community of different people rather than a community that lets different people in?"

This project is a continuation and expansion of Courageous Conversations that were held last year. All are welcome, regardless of whether you participated last year, and regardless of faith affiliation (including no faith affiliation at all).

The small discussion circles will include members of over a dozen faith communities and other interested community members. Participants will be assigned to one of the following 3 locations. Locations: St. John Baptist Church, Beth Shalom Congregation, Dar Al-Taqwa Islamic Center.

April 21 Easter Worship at KC

June 9 Pentecost and Homecoming Jubilee Celebration Sunday 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.