

***Who Are We Now?- God's People in 2022  
A Lenten Service of Word and Prayer grounded  
in Luke's journey through the Passion***



***An Introduction to this Resource***

This service order and resource is provided for the congregations of the Nebraska Synod. It has been curated (and in some ways created) by Deacon Timothy Siburg, Director for Mission, Innovation and Stewardship in response to questions that have emerged from congregations and leaders across the synod at this particular time. As with any resource, please adapt and use as might be helpful in your context.

This resource calls the faith community and individual disciples to ponder, reflect, and wonder. We come together as God's people, remembering first of all who God is and what God has done, will do, promises to do and continues to do for all of God's beloved. This is why this series centers around the Gospel of Luke and takes a look at different parts of Luke's passion story of the fuller sense- from the moment Jesus enters Jerusalem with the full of joy and shouts of Hosanna on Palm Sunday, to his final breath and burial.

It is intended that this series would be used for mid-week Lenten gatherings, hence the suggested worship order as adapted from *All Creation Sings* includes a basic "Service of the Word" outline, with some added elements around the theme and focus. It is divided into five weeks to correspond to the five mid-weeks of Lent that happen following Ash Wednesday and the First Sunday in Lent through the last mid-week before Palm Sunday and Holy Week. Hymn and song suggestions are included as well, with some being suggested to be sung each week, and others specifically for a given week given its scripture and question themes. (Please note, that most elements found in *All Creation Sings* are available as well now through *Sundays and Seasons* online.)

Though no outside sermons will be offered as part of the series, questions for conversation, teaching, and preaching will be offered to dig into the centering questions for each week, with the hope that the faith communities of the Nebraska Synod together will reflect on questions like these to have a better sense of what God might be up to now as we remember God's life giving work for us; as well as what God might be calling forth now, and inviting us all into in our own congregation, communities, and the synod as a whole.

These are offered for wide use in whatever way(s) they might most benefit or be of use in your congregational context- whether it be worship, faith formation, Sunday School, forums or conversations in-person or online, etc.

***References and Resources:***

*All Creation Sings: Evangelical Lutheran Worship Supplement*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2020). *Note: The Service of Word and Prayer that is adapted from in the following resource comes from pages 42-45.*

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**GATHERING**

***Greeting***

L: The love of God poured into our hearts, the saving grace of Jesus Christ, and the abundant life of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**C: And also with you.**

***Opening Prayer***

L: Let us pray. O God, rich in mercy, full of kindness, out of your great love, you raise us up from sin and death and make us alive together with Christ. Write your word upon our hearts and restore in us the image of your love that, by your Spirit, our way of life may become the way of Christ, through whom we pray.

**C: Amen.**

***Silence for Reflection***

***A Lenten Litany***

L: We come to you Gracious God, for healing, reconciliation, peace, purpose, and guidance.

**C: It feels like these past couple of years are a blur. It feels like in these past couple of years that everything has changed. And yet, it feels like nothing has changed.**

L: We come to you Saving One, for presence, hope, pardon, and assurance.

**C: It feels at times like we may be lost in the wilderness, the dark of night, uncertain of who we are now and where we are going.**

L: We come to you Giver of all Life, for life, love, and salvation.

**C: It feels at times like we have a million questions and no easy answers. The way things are, are no longer so. The way we thought things were and made sense, are not, and do not in the same ways anymore.**

L: People of God- No matter where you are, our Loving God is with you and with me. God sees you, knows you, loves you, and is with you. Always.

**C: God is with us now and always.**

L: We give you thanks God for being with us. Now open us up to your will, wonder, and life-changing and life-giving love.

**C: Fill us, guide us, and lead us. Open us to big questions without easy answers, and help us to wonder, wrestle, imagine, and follow you. Amen.**

**SONG:**

*Sing either "Beautiful Things" ACS 925 or "Through the Night of Doubt and Sorrow" ELW 327 or another hymn or song which connects to your context to ground the faith community in a space of holy conversation and question time.*

## WORD

### Reading(s)

Week 1: Luke 19:29-48: *Palm Sunday and Temple*

Week 2: Luke 20:1-8, 34-40: *Authority/Children of God/Resurrection*

Week 3: Luke 21:1-19, 34-38: *Widow's offering/Predictions/Be on Guard*

Week 4: Luke 22:14-23, 50-53, 66-71: *Words of Institution/You Say that I Am*

Week 5: Luke 23:39-56: *Crucifixion Narrative (or Luke 22:50-71)*

### Reflection on: Who are we now as God's people in 2022?

Week 1: Why? What is our purpose?

Week 2: Where is God in this?

Week 3: Who are we called to be?

Week 4: How do we get there? What's next?

Week 5: What does this mean? What does this mean for us?

*[See pages 5-12 of this resource for more thoughts, prompts, and ideas about how to consider these questions in your context.]*

### Silence for Reflection

### Song of the Day

Week 1: My Song is Love Unknown ELW 343

Week 2: Christ is Made the Sure Foundation ELW 645

Week 3: My Lord What a Morning ELW 438

Week 4: O Living Bread from Heaven ELW 542

Week 5: Were You There ELW 353

## PRAYER

L: In Christ Jesus we meet the God who knows our weakness and bears the wounds of the world. Therefore, let us be bold as we pray, trusting that God draws near to those in any kind of need.

*Local petitions may be offered, or the congregation may sing "Watch, O Lord" ACS 996 in place of spoken prayer petitions. Then at the conclusion of the song, the prayer may end:*

L: God of all compassion, gather our prayers in your mercy and grant to us what you know we need, that we may walk in the life and peace of your Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our hope and our salvation

**C: Amen.**

L: Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**C: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...**

## SENDING

Silence

**Sending Song:** “Ask the Complicated Questions” ACS 1005

### ***Blessing***

L: Christ Jesus dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love, strengthened by the Spirit, and filled with all the fullness of God.

**C: Amen.**

### ***Dismissal***

L: Go in peace. Christ is with you.

**C: Thanks be to God.**

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*Service Notes: Depending on your context and the reality of COVID and other health protocols and concerns, it might be meaningful and appropriate to include the **laying on of hands or healing service with oil** at some point during a mid-week Lenten service in this series. If so, following the prayers, at the conclusion of the blessing, or following the reflection mid-way through may be a particularly appropriate space and time for such a practice in this series. (If COVID does not allow for the public laying on of hands, perhaps a blessing of open hands can be done, and a little bottle of oil can be presented to each family or household so that individual family and/or household units can anoint each other.)*

*Additionally, if helpful in your context you may adapt the Litany or prayers to add words like this: **We name especially the events of the blizzards, floods, and this on-going pandemic as things weighing on our hearts and minds. Things which may not have changed us. But things that may well have changed us or somethings around us.***

*If receiving an offering during this worship, an offering time with an additional song and prayer could be added between the song of the day and the prayers, or between the prayers and the Lord's prayer; alternatively the offering could be received during another hymn during the service depending on your context or could be done as a stationary offering space during or before or after worship.*

*This order of service has been adapted from “Service of Word and Prayer” found in All Creation Sings (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2020), 42-45.*

## **THOUGHTS, PROMPTS, AND IDEAS FOR REFLECTION, PREACHING, AND TEACHING**

**By Deacon Timothy Siburg**

### **WEEK 1: Luke 19:29-48- Why? What is our purpose?**

Before we can get to the questions of why and what is our purpose, we need to put things in their proper order. To remember what God has done for us, and all that God does for us through Christ Jesus our Lord which is central to our Lenten focus and discipline which we see most fully through the cross itself. So in opening this series an acknowledgement towards this point is essential, as is highlighting the overarching question for this Lenten series, “Who are we now, as God’s people in 2022?”

In selecting this passage though, there are distinctions to draw. So often we end our reading of these words like on Palm Sunday (if not engaging in “Sunday of the Passion”) with the theme of celebration. The triumphal entry (Luke 19:29-40). But we leave it there, and let the joy and celebration sit without remembering that Jesus didn’t just party. He got to the work of justice, and mission of reconciliation and caring for the poor and downtrodden. It wasn’t always popular. It’s the truth the prophets know well. But if we read this passage and include the rest of chapter 19, we see the picture of Jesus entering the temple, chasing out those selling things in it like a market, and can easily imagine this Jesus also turning over tables in the process.

So what might this mean for us now? For who we are, now? As God’s people in 2022?

On the one hand, perhaps we are a people who need to remember that it’s okay to celebrate and have hope and joy like the people did as Jesus entered the Holy City. Perhaps your faith community needs a reason to throw a party- or to at least find a reason to have some hope and joy and laughter in the midst? It could be pretty easy given the floods, blizzards, pandemic and so much more of the past couple of years where nothing seems to be fully normal anymore, that it may be hard to celebrate. For some congregations who used to have at the heart of their DNA the art of hospitality and potlucks, the muscle memory for that might be a little waning at this point. So might we lean in, and find a reason to remember there is hope in the midst, even in the darkest days of Lent? And we remember that we find hope because we too, like the stones might shout out, and we too like the people gathered in Jerusalem sang and shouted, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” (Luke 19:38, NRSV).

On the other hand, perhaps you and your congregation have the celebration down, but perhaps you might need to remember that we celebrate not because of ourselves at all, but because of who God is and what God has done? Perhaps we need to remember that our purpose as disciples is to follow, to lean in, and share God’s love through all that we say and do? That’s a great mission and purpose which guides us and calls us into often hard conversations. To doing work that may be uncomfortable at times. And to listen, wonder, and imagine about what it is that God might be inviting and calling forth.

Sometimes that work is pretty apparent. Is there injustice and brokenness in the world? Jesus saw it. He went to the temple and chased out those misusing God's house. What might be the hurt and brokenness in our communities that God is calling us to open our eyes to- to name, to witness, and hopefully, to join in the work of finding a better way for all of God's beloved? Naming that openly in your faith community might be a powerful practice this Lent.

Martin Luther was famous for asking the question in the *Catechism of* "What is this?" Or as we might better know it, "What does this mean?" This could be a good question for our Lenten practice this year too. There is a both/and to our life as God's people now and always. A reality of trust, faith, hope, and life grounded in gratitude and joy for all that God has done for you and for me. And an acknowledgment that through our very baptisms we are called into the life as a disciple- invited, empowered, and equipped to be part of God's work in the world. So to start this Lenten series in your context- naming all of this may be good, as would inviting the congregation to name aloud, in comments, in written form for all to see, or in other ways what each person might see as a sign of God's work being done here and now through someone or some people. To make the connection between our daily lives and vocations, and God's call and work for us, and our work and response of discipleship that we are all a part of.

Reflecting on questions like these will keep the "why" (God's work, God's love, God's promises...) central and open God's people up to wondering about our response or purpose and what that uniquely might be now in the current context we find ourselves in.

## **WEEK 2: Luke 20:1-8, 34-40- Where is God in this?**

Our story picks up where it left off last week. Jesus is teaching in temple, and those in power continue to try and trap him in his words and actions. Jesus sees their attempts and doesn't give into their game and fall for their trap (Luke 20:1-8). Within chapter 20, Jesus does quite a bit of teaching through parables and there are more and more examples of those in power trying to trap Jesus in his words. For the sake of time and topic, I haven't included those here, but you could certainly include all of chapter 20 as your reading for this week if your context would be okay with readings of that length. (If you were to do this, I would recommend doing the same for weeks 3, 4, and 5; and to thus read all of Chapter 21 in Week 3; all of Chapter 22 in Week 4; and all of Chapter 23 in Week 5.)

The second suggested inclusion (Luke 20:34-40) isn't always the easiest to understand, but it highlights Jesus teaching about the resurrection. This is central to our Lenten practice and discipline rightfully so. For we know that the resurrection can only happen through/after death. As the cross looms large, we know what lies ahead and Jesus is teaching the people to know that death (in whatever form it might be in) is not the final word.

So, where is God in this?

I think this might be a give-me week for all Lutheran preachers out there. But, it can't be said enough. God is present. God is in the midst of the trials and tribulations of life. God is there with God's beloved in the good, bad, and ugly- always! God is at work too, bringing life out of death. Bringing resurrection where there has been crucifixion and destruction. Bringing grace to and out of disappointment and brokenness. Bringing dancing out of mourning. And joy out of weeping.

This is who God is and what God does. It does not change the fact that pain, death, and brokenness exist. They do. And Jesus goes through them all to say through his word and deed that God is with you in it all. Many good sermons could end here.

In putting this point then in the larger series of "What does this mean for who we are now as God's people in 2022," a couple thoughts. First, if your congregation is similar to more than 90% of the ELCA and most congregations of any kind, it has experienced some feeling or awareness of a decrease in church participation and attendance over the past couple of years especially. Perhaps too, this has come with some financial concerns. We remember that we are a resurrection people, but we also acknowledge that the resurrection can't happen without the death. Easter can't be real without Good Friday and Holy Saturday. This may not be the most comforting of news to a congregation experiencing such realities, but it's meant to be an encouragement to acknowledge that one's congregation and one's self is not alone in wondering and feeling this way. But it's also truth, that this isn't or doesn't have to be the final word.

Alternatively, perhaps your congregation has wondered about what God might be up to in that there are so many openings for leaders in congregations now- pastors, deacons, Parish Ministry Associates, etc. It's the work of all of God's people to raise up leaders of the faith. So where is God in this? I deeply believe God is at work bringing about something new. New opportunities to lead and serve (for lay members and rostered leaders). New opportunities for creative partnerships between peoples, communities, and congregations. New opportunities to worship online and through other resources that we didn't even have a couple years ago.

This question is an invitation to name openly in your congregation the ways that each person sees or witnesses God doing God's thing. God bringing love into a hurting world. God turning water into wine. God doing extraordinary things through the ordinary. God bringing life out of death. God has always done this, and God continues to do so. What might God be up now and inviting us all into as God's people this year?

An aside- as the Nebraska Synod currently discerns where God is leading it and whom God might be calling to lead and serve as its next Bishop, questions like these and reflection like this could be helpful in this process as well as we hold each other and the whole church in prayer through this time of change and transition trusting that not only God is present, but God is up to something and it is and will be good.

### WEEK 3: Luke 21:1-19, 34-38- Who are we called to be?

Luke 21 features Jesus teaching more in the temple, but there is a noticeable turn towards the end. It begins with the great stewardship observations and teaching about the poor widow's mite (21:1-4) but then moves to signs of the end times in a text that is often read in the last Sunday of Year C (especially 21:5-19) before Christ the King Sunday. So to hear these words within the Passion context that they come in from the Gospel might be timely. In thinking about who we are called to be, at the very least one could draw on the legend of Martin Luther's response to the end times, where if the world were going to end tomorrow, Luther would go and plant a tree.

If including the second portion (21:34-38) without the rest of chapter 21, one might notice an Advent theme here as well of being on guard and alert. And if these words sound familiar, that's probably because Luke 21:25-36 is the appointed gospel for the First Sunday of Advent in Year C which has already come and gone, but again hearing these words during Lent might make for some new observations and connections as well as situating them within the larger passion narrative context that they come in.

There is real urgency to what Jesus is saying and why he is saying it in this passage. He knows the end is near. And he cares, and loves so deeply. This is why he does what he does- going to and through the point of death on a cross and burial in a stone cold tomb for us.

So, who are we called to be as God's people in 2022? Based on this chapter a few images or ideas as part of our identity as disciples and the Body of Christ come to mind:

- Truth Tellers- we may not have all the answers, and it is good to say so. We don't know all the number of hairs on each other's heads, but we do know who knows how many hairs on our head (God) and whose we are (God's.) We're also people of the cross. We acknowledge death and know that it is real. We don't hide from it, but see it and name it. And then we look for life that might come through it, while also walking with and supporting the hurt, mourning, and grieving.
- Bearers of Love and Compassion- Jesus sees the poor widow (21:3-4) and has compassion on her. He calls us to see her, and to see all of the poor widows in our lives and our neighborhoods. To open ourselves, to be present with, and to be bearers of love in any and all the ways that we can be.
- Presence- life may be hard. The end times Jesus describes, the sham trial and crucifixion to come, are hard and horrible to put it mildly. But God is present in the midst with God's beloved, and God is with God's beloved every step of the way. How might we be bearers and models of presence in our communities? Especially in challenging and uncertain times like this?

The Gospel message is as true now as it was when it was written down. We're called to live it out, to proclaim it, to lean into it, and to share it widely and abundantly. God's inviting us always to go deeper and be in deeper relationship with God, and to live full and meaningful lives as stewards and disciples. Perhaps a closing question to ponder with your faith



community- is what might this look like in uncertain times? Perhaps connect it to stories or examples from your congregation's history of how the congregation showed up and how God showed up with and through them in the midst of times of storms and tornados or blizzards, death, war, hardship, or great fear and anxiety. Surely this is not the first time of challenge to face your community and faith community. If your congregation is like that of most of the Nebraska Synod, there is likely something to be drawn from a truth that has emerged from celebrating the synod's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. That congregations like yours are generous, resilient, and deeply faithful- trusting deeply that God is with you, for you, and loves you. Always.

#### **WEEK 4: Luke 22:14-23, 50-53, 66-71- How do we get there? What's next?**

Luke 22 brings us to the Passover festival and the story as we know it of Maundy Thursday. As most congregations use the Gospel of John for Holy Week, this story is generally only heard with these passages if read in bulk on the Sunday of the Passion. So if that motivates you to use all 71 verses, go for it. If not, hopefully these three snippets will offer plenty to set the stage and dwell in.

Luke 22:14-23 features Luke's depiction of the Last Supper and includes the Words of Institution. Words of promise and gift, like "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19, NRSV). At the heart of what God does is the reminder and words, "for you." God does what God does, out of deep abiding and abundant love for you and for me. Even so, there is challenge in this. Because at the same time this great moment is happening, Jesus acknowledges his betrayal that is to come (or in fact is already happening at this point). Hopefully this doesn't reflect the level of hurt and brokenness in our own faith communities, but it does give space to name hurt and brokenness which we are called to do around the table before sharing the sacrament. Maybe if using this text for the fourth week in a worship setting, you might choose to add some confession and absolution language leading into a simple communion meal together too?

Jumping ahead in chapter 22, we find ourselves at the Mount of Olives. The response to Jesus' arrest is one of violence. His disciples go for the sword to defend him and "struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear," but this is at odds with all that Jesus has taught and preached (Luke 22:50-51, NRSV). So Jesus heals him and then is handed over without more violence and bloodshed. So often our human response to things is that of violence. But is Jesus showing us another way? A way of conversation, reconciliation, listening, and peace? It's not always easy and it can take a long time, but sometimes this is what it means to be present in the world. To be persistent and show up even when it seems like it doesn't matter or is discouraging. But Jesus is also showing in this part of the story, that he is not some king as the way the world would have you believe. He is one whose kingdom is not of the sword, but of service and love.

The final section included is the closing portion of chapter 22, Luke 22:66-71. Where Jesus is asked, "'Are you, then, the Son of God?' He said to them, 'You say that I am.' Then they said,

‘What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!’” (Luke 22:70-71, NRSV)

It may seem a little odd hearing these words and then coming back to our appointed questions for this week, “How do we get there?” And, “What’s next?” But as we are now God’s people in 2022, we remember who we are and whose we are. And we remember that those first disciples were pretty confused and even feeling lost at this point in the story too. So we’re not alone if that’s where we find ourselves now.

Thankfully we know what’s next. The good, bad, and ugly of the cross and the tomb. We know that death is real. But we also know that through that God does and will do what only God can do- to bring life out of death. So what does that mean for our congregations now? We remember that it is first of all, not our church, but God’s. We remember that it’s not all up to us. But that we are each uniquely called and invited as God’s beloved to be part of God’s work in the world in some way(s). We remember too, that no matter what, God loves us.

Part of asking, “How do we get there,” is to acknowledge that we really don’t know where or what “there” is. Is it the church of the 1950s, or the one we long for from our memories of the past? If so, now would be a good time to confess and admit that is not up to us. But, if “there” is to be more along the lines of a “faith community of God’s people today, grounded in God’s promises and Word, for the sake of God’s beloved of \_\_\_\_\_” (or something of a mission statement like that) we might start to remember again why we exist and then recommit ourselves to be just that. Not a group that is stuck comparing ourselves to others or bygone eras (factual or not), but that is living faithfully as a community of disciples now- loving God and loving neighbor, and leaning into God’s call and promise for each of us. If we can openly acknowledge this tension in our church, we might just invite the creative wondering of each person and individual in our faith community to be present. We might just be able to open ourselves up enough to witness God’s creative work of the Holy Spirit breaking in and calling us forward into whatever “what’s next” might be.

This kind of move is risky. But so was the act of Jesus allowing himself to be handed over too. And we aren’t handing ourselves over to be crucified. (Though there may be moments where we feel like such change and risk is full of ridicule, fear, complaining, blaming and trembling.) But if we end up there as a faith community together, we do so trusting that God’s Word is true. And praying more earnestly in the Lord’s prayer, “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.”

If your faith community would be open to it, this would be a great week to engage in a brainstorming exercise of giving each person present a post-it note and inviting them to write one, two, or three things that they are wondering or imagining might be next that God is inviting their congregation to be, to explore, or at least to think about and perhaps try. This exercise could be enlightening and another interactive element, especially if the post-it notes are shared widely in a common space for all to see, hear, read, contemplate, and pray over.

## **WEEK 5: Luke 23:39-56- What does this mean? What does this mean for us?**

This fifth week moves us into chapter 23, and in our selected reading we find ourselves today witnessing Jesus on the cross. Obviously we have skipped the trial portion with Pilate, and if you wanted to add that portion that would be great. But I trust that will be covered well in a week's time or so in your congregation on Good Friday to come. (Intentionally we do not move to chapter 24 here. We allow chapter 24 to stand on its own for Easter and the Easter season leading up to the Ascension.)

***Side Note for Congregations using Luke 22:50-71 instead of Luke 23:39-56:*** If in your congregational context jumping into the heart of the passion story and crucifixion story the week before Holy Week would not be ideal or if it would seemingly take away from the week itself, Luke 23:39-56 could be replaced with Luke 22:50-71, and then you would adjust the reading for week 4 to only be Luke 22:14-23.

If you were to go this route, for your preaching and reflection consider about what questions the disciples might have asked and wondered about during the events between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday. In moving from celebration to teaching in the temple, and turning over tables, and ultimately to sharing a meal in an upper room, what might the disciples have been thinking. Would they too have been wondering "what does this mean? What does this mean for us?" How did they respond to the energy of the crowd? Did they think in spite of their fears of parading into Jerusalem that things were all okay? (Perhaps like we all thought and felt when we could go back to the building for worship amid COVID's presence and reality in our communities?) A lot could be done here with Luke 22:50-71 as the closing text, and to tie the whole series together in drawing out the contemplation and questions of Palm Sunday to Maundy Thursday.

**If using Luke 23:39-56**, here are things to keep in mind and consider. In Luke's passion account there are some big questions that come on the cross, no surprise. Questions like that of one of the criminals, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23:39, NRSV). We know the rebuke to come from the other criminal who asks Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42, NRSV). And to whom Jesus responds, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43, NRSV).

Intentionally included though is also the text that covers what happens after Jesus dies, his burial (23:50-56), and the resting that comes on the Sabbath. This part of the story often gets left as an afterthought. But it's just as important a part of the story. Because this is the people's first reaction and response to seeing their Lord and Savior die. What do they do now? What do they do next? What would we do in witnessing in such a thing? Hopefully we would be as faithful at least as a disciple like Joseph of Arimathea, who in the face of terrible and horrible tragedy at least did what he could to care for Jesus' body and to help the grieving (including himself we would imagine).

In this familiar story- we face all the emotions of life and death. From the joy and cheer of Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem, to the anger at the way the Temple was being treated, to the love of company around a table and a meal together, and to the care for those who were grieving. At the very least, these are all real emotions that we each experience at different points now. They may all reflect the ups and downs of life together as the church as well. So perhaps it's fitting that the life of Christ in his last week on earth is felt in some small ways as the Body of Christ, today?

I wonder if in asking these questions like "What does this mean?" And, "What does this mean for us?" If we are being called back into the deeper why of the story. The why of love and grace. The why of peace, promise, justice, and reconciliation. The why of life abundant and eternal, salvation. If so- we remember again that God's actions here are God's. They are not ours. They are God's. They are not the actions or work of us- of you, of me, of our church. They are God's. And they are done so as free gifts, pure grace that we could never earn or deserve. They are done so and given freely out of God's deep and abiding love.

So, if we remember that, what does this mean for us today?" I think it's an admission that our big questions that we might all be wrestling with are good. It's good and faithful to wrestle and wonder. It's an important part of growing as disciples and serving as stewards. But even the most faithful wrestler and wonderer needs to rest. Otherwise, things would surely not go well. These past couple of years in particular have been hard. So, perhaps this week in closing this series, we provide space for people to name things hard or good that are on their minds, and then let them sit. Perhaps, we take the lesson chapter 23's conclusion about "resting" on the Sabbath to heart and practice it with one another in some intentional way? Or at the very least, perhaps this text moves us to then engage in a ritual service of healing and the laying on of hands with oil in the Wednesday before Holy Week? If that seems fitting and appropriate for your context, run with it! Or, perhaps if a practice of making the sign of the cross on one's neighbor's forehead with baptismal waters and saying "Jesus Loves you" to a neighbor in worship makes the point, do that.

It may seem disappointing that I'm not giving you an easy answer for this last session. But maybe I am? After all, if our overarching question has been, "Who are we now as God's people in 2022?" Then the truth is this- we are God's beloved, whom God walks with, is present with, is for, whom God gives God's self for, and whom God loves and knows more deeply than we could ever love or know ourselves. If we can truly embrace this with one another as God's people, then I deeply believe the rest of our lives as disciples and stewards can and will fall into proper place.

### ***Post-Script from Deacon Timothy***

I'll admit, there's a lot of ideas here. I don't offer them with the thought that any one congregation would use all of these elements. But I do offer them as questions I have heard and with some basic helpful encouragement to dig into the basics of our faith as we journey through Lent together. (Especially for some, as it feels like we have been in this Lenten journey together now for over two years amid this pandemic.) We are all facing big questions about the future. It is good and right to wonder and dig into them. It's faithful to do so. Let us have courage to openly ponder and wrestle with them, to at the very least name them and not let them have the power of driving us to a point of fear and paralysis of action- but by openly sharing them, we invite one another deeper into relationship with God and neighbor, and more deeply into prayer. Turning over what is God's to do, to God, and listening more fully for what it is that God might be inviting us to do and consider now and next. And in the process leaning into hope and trust in the future.

If you find this resource helpful for you and your congregation, I'm grateful. And if more conversation would be helpful, know that all of your partners in ministry who are the Nebraska Synod staff are grateful to be in conversation with you and a resource for you as always.

May your Lenten preparation and journey be blessed.

In Christ's love and service for the congregations of the Nebraska Synod for Lent 2022,  
Deacon Timothy Siburg