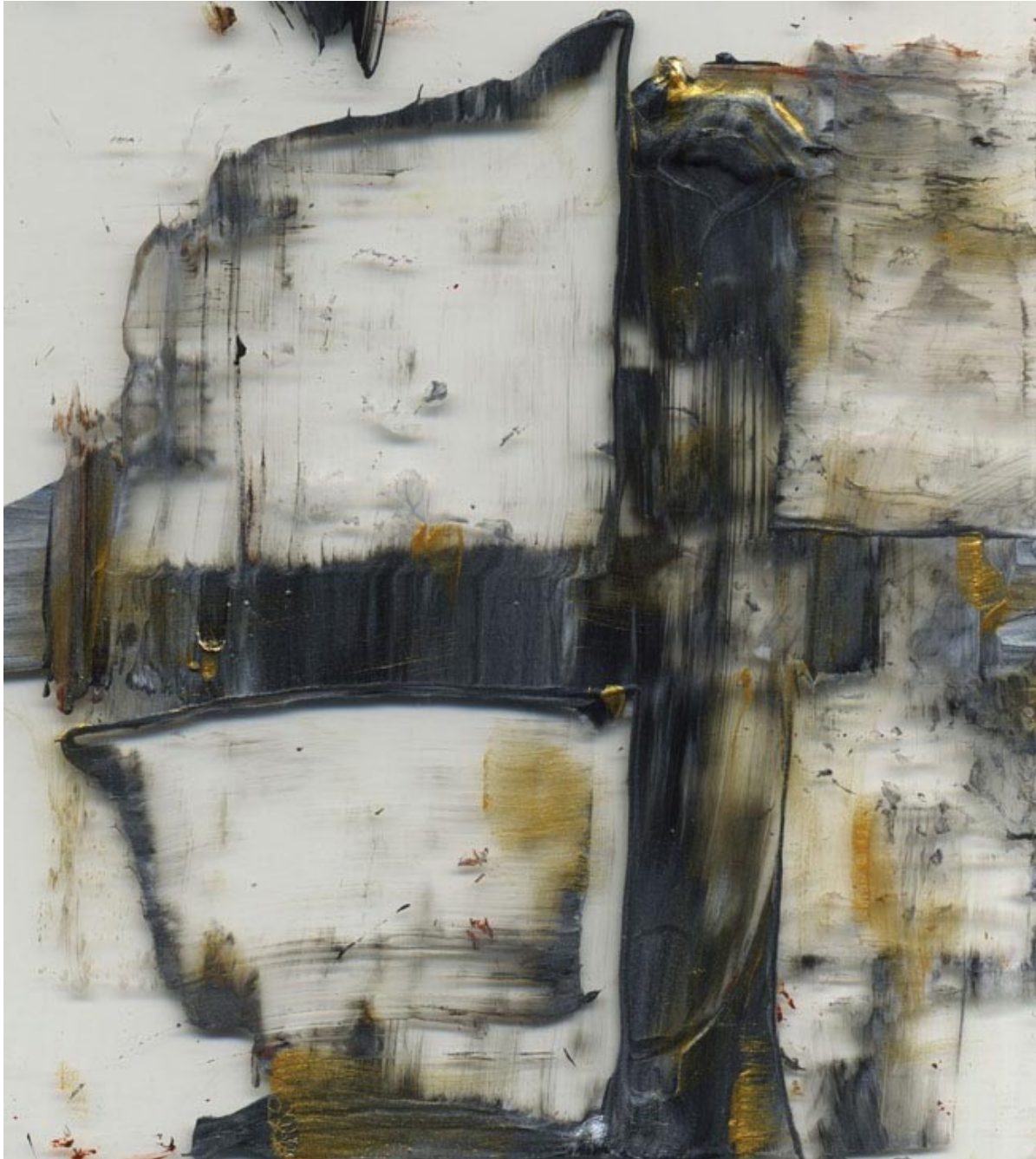


ZION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OF TREMONT

February 14, 2024

Ash Wednesday – the beginning of the Lenten journey

A Service of the Word



*Image: Blessing the Dust, by Jan Richardson, Jan Richardson Images – Illuminating the Landscape of Faith,
<http://janrichardsonimages.com>*



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

a just world for all

February 14, 2024

Ash Wednesday – the beginning of the Lenten journey
A Service of the Word

*Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls
as well as a quantitative change in our lives.
Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

WE GATHER IN COMMUNITY

**please stand as you are able*

Welcome

Prelude – Adam Petrosino

***Call to Worship**

One: Friends and neighbors, in the middle of our busy week, we pause to observe
Ash Wednesday together as a faith community.

**Many: We come to remember that God made us from fragile, blessed dust and breathes
through us the breath of life and love.**

One: From dust we are created in God's image and to God's good dust we shall return.

Many: With dust and oil we claim the mark of God's beloved creature.

One: Today we begin our 40-day Lenten journey to discover who we are created to be as
God's beloved.

Many: In daily practices of prayer and service we will embark upon this Lenten journey.

One: We follow Jesus, God's Beloved Child, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh in whom
we see God's image most clearly.

**Many: So come, let us pray for strength and imagination to follow Jesus wherever
he will lead us this Lent.**

***Evening Prayer**

**Your Word reveals to us a simple truth,
that sin entered this world
through human folly**

in believing we could be like you,
and permeated history
through envy, selfishness and greed.
Yet sin, which holds us tight
within its grasp
cannot resist a heart that is touched
by your grace through Jesus Christ,
cannot contend with Living Water
pouring into hearts and souls.
Your Word reveals to us a simple truth,
that sin is defeated
and we can become
the people we were always meant to be,
by your grace through Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The Lord's Prayer – using “debts” and “debtors”

*Gathering Hymn: NCH 99 – “Abide With Me

Abide With Me”

Author: Henry F. Lyte, 1847; alt.

Tune: EVENTIDE 10.10.10.10.

Composer: William H. Monk, 1861

Reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE #A-736636. All rights reserved.

**1 Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
The shadows deepen, Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.**

**2 Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Christ who changes not, abide with me.**

**3 I need your presence every passing hour.
What but your grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like yourself my guide and strength can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.**

**4 I fear no foe, with you at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting? where, grave, your victory?
I triumph still if you abide with me.**

First Reading: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Little is known about Joel, a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah. Most scholars date the book after the exile to Babylon (586 B.C.E.). Joel calls the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem to lament and return to

God during a time of national disaster. A locust plague has destroyed both wine and grain. The dominant theme of the book is the "day of God." This describes a time when the presence of God brings judgment and/or deliverance and blessing, depending on the circumstances. Therefore, although the "day" results in destruction for the nations, it can also be seen as a time of salvation for God's people. God remains a refuge in the chaos of judgment. If the whole community would cry out to God and look to God—not merely with external actions but in sincerity and commitment—then judgment may be prevented. However, God is not bound by the acts of the community. It is God's decision to either send or withhold the destruction by the locusts, just as the army is at God's command. The reason God will turn from judgment to blessing is to express God's covenant-keeping character. God's promise to dwell in the midst of the people is prominent not only in Joel, but also throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. God restores what the locusts have destroyed and protects Israel so that the people will know God's presence.

1 Blow the shofar (ram's horn) in Zion!
Sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the people of the land tremble!
For the Day of God is coming, it is near—

2 a day of murkiness and gloom,
a day of fog and dense clouds.
A vast and countless horde appears
like soot spread over the hills;
it is like something never known before,
nor will it be seen in ages to come.

12 "But know this" says YHWH:
"Return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, weeping, and mourning;
13 Tear open your heart,
and not your clothes!"
Return to YHWH your God,
who is gracious and deeply loving as a mother,
quick to forgive, abundantly tender hearted –

and relents from inflicting disaster.
14 Who knows? God may come back, relent,
and leave a blessing behind -
grain and drink offerings
for YHWH, your God,

15 Blow the shofar in Zion!
Order a fast!
Proclaim a solemn assembly!
16 Gather the people!
Purify the community!
Assemble the elders!
Gather the children -
even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his bedroom,
and the bride her canopied bed!

17 Let the priests, the ministers of YHWH,
stand weeping between the portico and the altar
and say, "Spare your people, YHWH!
Don't let your heritage become an object of ridicule,
a byword for the nations!
Don't let the peoples say, 'Where is their God?'"

Psalm Response: Psalm 51:1-17 (Responsively)

This Psalm is a plea to God for forgiveness from their sins, for the psalmist acknowledges they have gone wrong. They are laying it bare before God, knowing that God knows all, and there is nothing that can be hidden. The psalmist wants to be cleansed from their sins, to have a new heart and right spirit.

1 O God, have mercy on me!
Because of your love and your great compassion,
wipe away my faults;
**2 wash me clean of my guilt;
purify me of my sin.**
3 For I am aware of my faults,
and have my sin constantly in mind.
**4 I sinned against you alone,
and did what is evil in your sight.
You are just when you pass sentence on me,
blameless when you give judgment.**
5 I was born in sin,
conceived in sin—
**6 yet you want truth to live in my innermost being.
Teach me your wisdom!**
7 Purify me with hyssop until I am clean;
wash me until I am purer than new-fallen snow.
**8 Instill some joy and gladness into me;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice again.**
9 Turn your face from my sins,
and wipe out all my guilt.
**10 O God, create a clean heart in me,
put into me a new and steadfast spirit;**
11 do not banish me from your presence,
do not deprive me of your holy Spirit!
**12 Be my savior again, renew my joy,
keep my spirit steady and willing;**
13 and I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
**14 Save me from bloodshed, O God, God of
my salvation—
and my tongue will acclaim your justice.**

15 Open my lips, YHWH,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 **Sacrifice gives you no pleasure;
were I to present a burnt offering,
you would not have it.**

17 **My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
you will not scorn this crushed and broken heart.**

***Prayer of Confession**

One: On this night, we begin our journey to Easter.
Before we can take the first step,
we must admit how we have not been faithful to our God.
Let us pray together, saying,

We have trouble telling the truth, God of broken hearts, yet we must admit on this night how we have trouble being your people. We may not trample those who are poor, but we sometimes walk right past them. We don't receive bribes, but we are more privileged than many around us. We trust more in ourselves than in you, and spend far too much time patting ourselves on the back, rather than holding out a hand to others.

Where can we go for forgiveness but to you, God of the ashes? When we are greedy, you promise to be gracious. When we have trouble confronting injustice, you stand at our side. When we struggle to seek good, you point us to Jesus, our Brother, our Savior, who shows us how to turn our back on evil to follow him. Amen.

- *Silent Prayer* -

***Assurance of Pardon**

Leader: God refuses to stand far off, but comes close to us – to hear our prayers, to touch our hearts with forgiveness, and to walk with us during this holy season and beyond.

Unison: We have no need to go any place else, but into the comforting and restoring heart of the One who loves us. Thanks be to God! We are forgiven. Amen.

***Imposition of Ashes**

Just yesterday it seems, the palms were
fresh and green, held tight in hands
as we reenacted Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

But then they dried, shriveled, became
almost too fragile to touch, until
we burned them into the ashes for tonight.

Yet, by the grace of our God,
with the Spirit resting upon them,
they are mixed with oil and placed
on our heads or hands,
the dust of life resting upon us

as a sign that by sharing the gifts
of peace, reconciliation, justice, and generosity,
we will live into the people we long to become.

(A period of silence will follow. Those who wish to do so at the Chapel, may come forward to have the sign of the cross placed on their foreheads or hands; those at home, may mark their forehead or hand with the sign of the cross. The ashes are from palm branches used at Palm Sunday services in the past, mixed with oil).

Leader: Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

**Unison: As we are touched with this mark,
God of all moments,
remind us that just as you
shaped humanity from earth's dust,
so, from the ashes of repentance and denial,
that grace which is gifted to us
through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer,
will shape us into faithful followers. Amen.**

A READING OF THE WORD

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10

Paul urged the church in Corinth to be reconciled to God in these verses of 2 Corinthians 5 and 6. Paul used his ministry as an example—he and his companions suffered, but no one could complain they were not living into Christ's ways because of it. Paul urged the church in Corinth to do the same. He and his companions told the truth, shared the Gospel, cared for one another. Some thought them to be false witnesses of the Gospel, but there was nothing that Paul and his companions did that could be disputed or used against them.

5 20bTherefore we implore you in Christ's name: be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake, God made the One who was without sin to be sin, so that by this means we might become the very holiness of God.

6 1 As Christ's coworkers we beg you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For God says through Isaiah, "At the acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you." Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!

3 We take pains to avoid giving offense to anyone, for we don't want our ministry to be blamed. 4 Instead, in all that we do we try to present ourselves as ministers of God, acting with patient endurance amid trials, difficulties, distresses, 5 beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger. 6 We conduct ourselves with innocence, knowledge, patience and kindness in the Holy Spirit, in sincere love, 7 with the message of truth and the power of God, wielding the weapons of justice with both right hand and left—8 regardless of whether we are honored or dishonored, spoken of favorably or unfavorably. We are called impostors, yet we are truthful; 9 we are called unknowns, yet we are famous; we are said to be dying, yet we are alive; punished, but not put

to death; 10 sorrowful, though we are always rejoicing; poor, yet we enrich many. We seem to have nothing, yet we possess everything!

Gospel Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Jesus warned against making one's faith practices for show in Matthew 6, because then it wasn't about drawing closer to God but looking better in front of others. Instead, Jesus taught a practice of humility, of not drawing attention to one's self, but instead to give in secret, to practice fasting and private prayer that gave attention to God.

6 1 “Beware of practicing your piety before others to attract their attention; if you do this, you will have no reward from your Abba God in heaven.

2 “When you do acts of charity, for example, don't have it trumpeted before you; that is what hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets, that they may be praised by others. The truth is, they've already received their reward in full. 3 But when you do acts of charity, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; 4 your good deeds must be done in secret, and your Abba God—who sees all that is done in secret—will repay you.

5 “And when you pray, don't behave like the hypocrites; they love to pray standing up in the synagogues and on street corners for people to see them. The truth is, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to God who is in that secret place, and your Abba God—who sees all that is done in secret—will reward you.

16 “And when you fast, don't look depressed like the hypocrites. They deliberately neglect their appearance to let everyone know that they are fasting. The truth is, they have already received their reward. 17 But when you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. 18 Don't let anyone know you're fasting except your Abba God, who sees all that is done in secret. And Abba God—who sees everything that is done in secret—will reward you.

19 “Don't store up earthly treasures for yourselves, which moths and rust destroy and thieves can break in and steal. 20 But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can destroy them and thieves cannot break in and steal them. 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be as well.

Ash Wednesday Meditation — The Rev. Scott Rosenstein

WE RESPOND

***Hymn of Response: NCH 207 – “Just As I Am”**

Just As I Am

Author: Charlotte Elliott, 1836; alt.

Tune: WOODWORTH L.M.

Composer: William B. Bradbury, 1849

Reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE #A-736636. All rights reserved.

**1 Just as I am, without one plea
but that your blood was shed for me,**

and that you called inviting me,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

2 Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

3 Just as I am, you will receive,
will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

4 Just as I am, your love unknown
has broken every barrier down;
Now to be yours, and yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

***Prayer for Ash Wednesday**

Creating God, still Center of the world you have made, we come to you in this season of turning and returning. We do not know how to seek you with our whole hearts, but we know you are our source and our destiny. In the midst of life, we return to you, we turn toward you. We thank you that you receive even the broken heart, the troubled conscience, the conflicted spirit. Seeking you in secret, may we turn around to honor you among humanity; through Jesus Christ, our path homeward to you. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

One: As recipients of the generosity of God,
let us share our generosity with each other and the community.

The Offertory – *Adam Petrosino*

***Presentation of Offerings - Doxology**

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

***Prayer of Dedication**

For the wondrous ways this offering
will bless this community
and the world,
we dedicate these gifts.
For the ways it'll help us nurture
caring relationships with our neighbors,

we dedicate these gifts.
Let this offering,
and the works of our hands and feet,
help us build where all seems broken.
Amen.

***Parting Hymn: NCH 191 – “Before Your Cross, O Jesus”**

Before Your Cross, O Jesus

Author: Ferdinand Q. Blanchard, 1929; alt.

Tune: ST CHRISTOPHER 7.6.8.6.8.6.8.6.

Composer: Frederick C. Maker, 1881

Reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE #A-736636. All rights reserved.

**1 Before your cross, O Jesus,
our lives are judged today;
the meaning of our eager strife
is tested by your way.**

**Across our restless living
the light streams from your cross,
and by its clear, revealing beams
we measure gain and loss.**

**2 The hopes that lead us onward,
the fears that hold us back,
our will to dare great things for God,
the courage that we lack,
The faith we keep in goodness,
our love, as low or pure,
on all, the judgment of the cross
falls steady, clear, and sure.**

**3 Yet humbly, in our striving,
we rise to face its test.
We crave the power to do your will
as once you did it best.
On us let now the healing
of your great Spirit fall,
and make us brave and full of joy
to answer to your call.**

***Commissioning and Benediction**

One: Blessings, like God’s love, are not one-way experiences.

**Many: As we have been blessed with the mark of God’s love
we are now called to go forth from
this time and bless others.**

One: May the God who created you create opportunities of serving others.

**Many: May the Christ who teaches us teach us during Lent
how to love all.
And may the Spirit of Gentleness
be our companion along this Lenten journey.
Amen.**

Postlude – Adam Petrosino (please be seated for the Postlude)

* * * * *

Credits

- (1) The Call to Worship, An Invitation to Give, Blessing of the Gifts and the Commissioning and Benediction are adapted from *Beloved Dust to Dust: Service Prayers for Ash Wednesday*, written by the Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel, Conference Minister of the Missouri Mid-South Conference, UCC. Copyright 2017 Local Church Ministries, Faith Formation Ministry Team, United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. Permission granted to reproduce or adapt this material for use in services of worship or church education. All publishing rights reserved.
- (2) The Evening Prayer is adapted from one of the *Prayers for Lent* on the website, *Faith and Worship*, http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Lent.htm
- (3) The Call to Reconciliation, Prayer of Confession, Assurance of Pardon, and Imposition of Ashes (Introduction and Prayer), are adapted from *Ash Wednesday Service with alternate texts*, by Thom Shumann, posted February 16, 2020, on his blog, *Lectionary Liturgies*, <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com>
- (4) The Prayer for Ash Wednesday is adapted from a *Unison Prayer* in the *Resources for Lent*. Reprinted by permission of the publisher from *Touch Holiness*, ed. Ruth C. Duck and Maren C. Tirabassi. Copyright © 1990 The Pilgrim Press.
- (5) The Invitation to the Offering and the Prayer of Dedication are adapted from *Mender of Broken Walls Service Prayers for Lent-Ash Wednesday March 2, 2022 Year C*, written by Rev. Mia M. McClain, the Associate Minister at Myers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC and a member of the Southern Conference UCC. Permission granted to reproduce or adapt this material for use in services of worship or church education. All publishing rights reserved
- (6) Permission to stream the music in this service obtained from ONE License #A-736636. All rights reserved



Words about Ash Wednesday and Lent

Ash Wednesday begins the Christian season of Lent. We will spend the coming days journeying with Jesus toward the cross; toward the death that ultimately brings resurrection life. Many of us will spend these coming days practicing a new spiritual discipline or giving up something that seems to be getting in the way of the life we long to live. And tonight, we come together to mark the beginning of this Lenten journey.

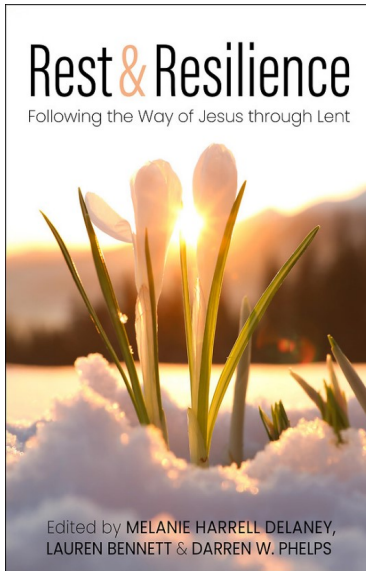
We come together to acknowledge our sin, to acknowledge our mortality. We come to glimpse the Christ who offers forgiveness, who offers everlasting life.

As part of tonight's worship, the imposition of ashes will be offered. This practice may not be familiar to everyone. Ashes have been used in Christian churches to mark the beginning of Lent since at least the 10th Century, and ashes are mentioned in scripture as a symbol of purification and repentance.

We offer the imposition of ashes tonight as a physical reminder of our mortality and sin; an assurance of God's forgiveness and salvation. After the Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon, those who wish to do so at home, may mark their forehead or hand with the sign of the cross. The ashes are from palm branches used at Palm Sunday services in the past, mixed with oil.

Let us begin our time of worship by focusing our minds and hearts on God's presence with us. I invite you to relax into a comfortable position and close your eyes as you take a few deep breaths.

(Wednesday Worship Pieces: Ash Wednesday 2011, Joanna Harader, Spacious Faith, 2012.)



Rest and Resilience **Following the Way of Jesus through Lent**

A daily devotional spanning Ash Wednesday through Easter guides readers through Lent with weekly themes of retreat, prayer, honesty, compassion, creativity, and community

When Jesus was preparing for a new phase of his ministry — or experiencing the final week — he went to Bethany, his holy retreat. Following that tradition, The Bethany Fellowships, a ministry of support for young clergy and congregations, have cultivated an intentional rhythm of life and ministry that empowers community, creativity, prayer, and resilience. This six-week-long Lenten daily devotional follows practices and relationships Jesus models for us throughout his ministry, bringing us to the biblical town of Bethany to encourage retreat, prayer, honesty, compassion, creativity, and community. The diverse contributor based is

comprised of ordained ministers in a variety of denominations and ministry settings, many of whom are in their first few years of congregational leadership.