

Healing Justice and the Paschal Mystery:
Theological Resources for Restorative Practice from the Liturgies of Holy Week

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Holy Week—and especially the “Triduum” services of Maundy (or Holy) Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and the Great Vigil of Easter—forms the centerpiece of the church’s liturgical calendar. The liturgical “remembrance”¹ of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection offer an entry point into the “paschal mystery” at the center of Christian theology. These dramatic liturgies can also offer an entry into restorative justice practices. In this paper, I will explore the specific connections between the services of Holy Week and aspects of restorative justice or “healing justice,”² understood as not only a response to crime and harm but also a daily way of living. The Maundy Thursday services provide an invitation to community, in the traditional welcoming of penitents, and then provide the community with practices of table fellowship and service that increase their experience of mercy towards one another. The Good Friday services are a space for truth-telling, in the forms of lament for harm experienced and confession of harm done. The silence of Holy Saturday offers a ritual space for closure at the end of a restorative justice process, even if complete healing has not yet occurred. And the new light of the Great Vigil of Easter presents the ultimate hope of forgiveness and reconciliation that underlies restorative work.

Theology and the practice of justice mutually inform each other: the theological claims of the Holy Week services provide, for Christians, a metaphysical basis and set of guiding narratives that structure the work of “living restoratively,”³ while interpreting the events

¹ See Robert Atwell on the role of remembering in liturgy: “The Passion in Christian Liturgy,” in *Engaging the Passion: Perspectives on the Death of Jesus*, ed. Oliver L. Yarbrough (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), 109.

² I am using this term as it is used by Jarem Sawatsky in *The Ethic of Traditional Communities and the Spirit of Healing Justice: Studies from Hollow Water, the Iona Community, and Plum Village*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009. See further discussion below.

³ Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: Restorative Justice for Our Times* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2005), 257.

commemorated in Holy Week in light of the insights and practices of restorative justice sheds new light on ancient traditions.

“Healing Justice” and the role of ritual

Restorative justice is most commonly associated with a response to crime aimed at restoring relationships that have been violated by “[searching] for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation, and reassurance,”⁴ beginning especially with meeting the needs of victims.⁵ In practice, restorative justice is most closely associated with practical interventions after a specific incident of harm, such as victim-offender conferencing, which brings together those who have been harmed and those responsible for the harm in a facilitated conversation, or circle, to discuss the harm done, the impact it had on them, and to “decide together what will be done about it.”⁶ However, a foundation for restorative justice does not begin only when a crime has been committed or harm has been done. The place where liturgical resources have the most to offer restorative justice is in the context of developing ongoing practices and community structures that support a restorative approach to harm. This aspect of restorative justice is also sometimes called “healing justice;” Jarem Sawatsky, in an ethnographic study of healing justice in particular communities, describes it as a “holistic vision of justice that is embedded in a particular way of life,” particularly in connection with practices of justice in traditional or indigenous communities.⁷ Sawatsky identifies certain practices that help develop healing justice in close-knit communities. The practices are ongoing, independent of a particular case of harm, such as “[recognizing] the enemy as a brother or sister” as a prerequisite belief, creating space

⁴ Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 183.

⁵ Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 193.

⁶ Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 161.

⁷ Sawatsky, *The Ethic of Traditional Communities and the Spirit of Healing Justice*, 37.

for not just circles in response to harm but also “pre-emptive peacebuilding circles,” and “[shifting] the focus from harms to root causes” in order to “create conditions to break the patterns of unhealthy relationships by creating conditions for healthy relationships.”⁸ These practices of developing openness to the other, making space to meet communally, and building healthier relationships even outside the context of a particular harm are the types of places where the church’s communal practices can support the ongoing development of healing justice.

Of particular interest to my project is the connection between healing justice and the ritual practices of a community. Sawatsky identifies as another characteristic of communities that support healing justice that they “conduct ceremonies and feasts.”⁹ He writes: “What would restorative justice look like if it was open to the possibility that the Spirit was the source of healing? ...How can restorative justice participants touch what some say is the very source of healing and allow their imaginations and their every step be transformed by such an encounter? This is the function of ceremonies in the communities which practice healing justice.”¹⁰ Amy Levad puts it this way: “Our ritual lives in church communities ought to shape Christians to become just people in response to the vision of God’s reign conveyed in worship. [Theologians supporting this view] draw upon the work of virtue ethicists over the last century who have argued that the moral life cannot be reduced to important moments of decision about what is good and right, but also includes the time between those moments in which our consciousness is formed to make these determinations.”¹¹ Liturgical rituals help us develop the ongoing practice of justice that makes specific restorative justice responses to harm possible.

⁸ Sawatsky, *The Ethic of Traditional Communities and the Spirit of Healing Justice*, 271–2.

⁹ Sawatsky, *The Ethic of Traditional Communities and the Spirit of Healing Justice*, 272.

¹⁰ Sawatsky, *The Ethic of Traditional Communities and the Spirit of Healing Justice*, 272.

¹¹ Amy Levad, *Redeeming a Prison Society: A Liturgical and Sacramental Response to Mass Incarceration* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 90.

The Holy Week services also function to provide an ongoing remembering or *anamnesis* of the events of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, as telling a story that continues to affect us in the present. As Robert Atwell writes about the remembrance of the passion in the liturgy: "To remember means to put something back together that has become disconnected. To truly remember requires that we turn back to past actions and events and recognize our place within what has happened."¹² The *anamnesis* of liturgy, Christians believe, really makes present to the congregation the events that are recollected. How could these liturgical rituals also make truly present healing justice, "putting back together what has become disconnected" when harm has been done?

Maundy Thursday: Invitation to community and the practice of mercy

Maundy Thursday (called Holy Thursday in the Roman Catholic Church; I am using the Anglican terminology here in accordance with the tradition I know best) begins the most intense portion of the Holy Week remembrance. Traditional elements of the Maundy Thursday liturgy, throughout church history, include "the commemoration of the Last Supper, the Blessing of the Holy Oils¹³... and the Public Reconciliation of Penitents,"¹⁴ as well as the practice of footwashing.¹⁵

The concepts of forgiveness and reconciliation run throughout any discussion of restorative justice—and also throughout the liturgies of Holy Week. While I identify the theme of reconciliation/forgiveness primarily with the culmination of the liturgical drama at the Easter

¹² Atwell, "Passion in Christian Liturgy," 109.

¹³ For baptism; many churches have now moved that rite out of the Maundy Thursday liturgy to another day earlier in Holy Week, and I will not address it here.

¹⁴ Atwell, "Passion in Christian Liturgy," 90.

¹⁵ See, for example, the rubrics for footwashing in *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 274.

Vigil, there is also an element of reconciliation connected to Maundy Thursday, which was traditionally the day on which those undergoing public penance during Lent were reconciled to the community. Atwell describes the ancient (and, sadly, mostly obsolete!) rite by which penitents were given “green branches as tokens of their reception back into full communion with the Church.”¹⁶

Such reconciliation to the entire community represents a first step in any restorative justice process. Restorative justice processes depend upon participation of the entire community for accountability and healing. Zehr writes: “Many restorative justice advocates believe that restorative justice is incomplete unless the community is fully represented in restorative processes.”¹⁷ The public reconciliation of penitents to the community within the Maundy Thursday liturgy is not the end of the process of justice, accountability, and reconciliation, but rather its beginning. Miroslav Volf describes this as the “will to embrace” which must precede any attempt at judgment or at reconciliation—even if justice and safety do not allow complete reconciliation to actually occur.¹⁸ In his work on building more authentic and transformative communities, Peter Block identifies invitation as an essential element of a restorative community; he writes: “Hospitality, the welcoming of strangers, is the essence of a restorative community...Our hospitality begins with an invitation. The invitation is to those who have an interest in the future you are imagining—all who have that interest, whether like-minded people, strangers, stakeholders, adversaries, or someone who is not known, yet.”¹⁹ Block is speaking in a

¹⁶ Atwell, “Passion in Christian Liturgy,” 90. He notes that for this reason the day is known as Green Thursday in Germany.

¹⁷ Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 232.

¹⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 29.

¹⁹ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2018), 118.

broader context than that of penance, but his emphasis on invitation presents an important connection between the traditional rites of penitence and the transformation that occurs through a restorative process. The initial act of forgiveness by which penitents are welcomed back into the community is an invitation to the process towards reconciliation which proceeds over the following days. Penitents are invited back into the restorative community, and join with the community on the journey towards greater understanding and justice that begins on Maundy Thursday. Levad writes that “both restorative justice and [the sacrament of] Reconciliation recognize the communal context of wrongdoing... [and] build upon the recognition that wrongdoers need community support and guidance in order to bring about internal reform and reintegration into community;”²⁰ James M. Donohue similarly emphasizes the “penitent’s solidarity with others in sin and redemption” and the “social nature of sin and the importance of the intercession of the community for the penitent” in the sacrament of Reconciliation.²¹ The process of justice and accountability is communal, and begins with invitation.

After the invitation to community, the community as a whole, on Maundy Thursday, turns toward practices aimed at making them more merciful. Trudy D. Conway describes one aspect of forgiveness as “transforming anger,” “a reduction in our negative emotions and attitudes in response to wrongdoing.”²² For clarity, I describe this “emotional” side of forgiveness as “mercy, “understood as a property that we can cultivate through practice. One ongoing aspect of healing justice is for us all to learn to be more merciful. Two essential rituals

²⁰ Levad, *Redeeming a Prison Society*, 116.

²¹ James M. Donohue, “Reconciliation,” in *Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice*, eds. Trudy D. Conway, David Matzko McCarthy, and Vicki Schieber (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017), 193.

²² Trudy D. Conway, “Harm and Healing,” *Redemption and Restoration*, 165.

on Maundy Thursday center this practice of mercy: the table fellowship of the Eucharist and the rite of footwashing.

The Eucharist is especially connected with the remembrance of the Last Supper in the Maundy Thursday liturgy, making Maundy Thursday the paradigmatic eucharistic service. At some parishes, including mine, the service of holy communion is emphasized by being placed in the context of an entire “agapé meal”²³ shared during or after the service. In our parish, we hold the Eucharist on Maundy Thursday in the parish hall, sharing communion with one another seated at tables, and then eat the meal together after the Eucharist before proceeding to the church for the ritual of footwashing. The practice makes evident the communal nature of our journey into the rest of the Holy Week liturgies.

How does the ritual table fellowship of the Eucharist help members of the congregation develop merciful impulses? Minister and theologian Patricia Efiom explored this in a study for her D. Min. dissertation. In an African-American congregation harmed by previous conflict, Efiom explored the question “Can a theology of table bring healing and reconciliation in a wounded African American Congregation?”²⁴ Her practical study involved a group of congregational leaders in a Bible study about the roots of holy communion, culminating in a “table experience”:²⁵ a luncheon to which participants brought a favorite dish and explained its significance to them, and for which the invited guests were all people with whom the participants in the study had had previous conflict within the congregation.²⁶ In interviews with participants

²³ “Book of Occasional Services 2018,” accessed online 20 November 2019 at episcopalchurch.org/files/lm_book_of_occasional_services_2018.pdf, page 84.

²⁴ Patricia A. Efiom, “Can a Theology of Table Bring Healing and Reconciliation in a Wounded African American Congregation?” D. Min. diss., (Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2014), 4.

²⁵ Efiom, “Can a Theology of Table Bring Healing and Reconciliation in a Wounded African American Congregation?”, 83.

²⁶ Efiom, “Can a Theology of Table Bring Healing and Reconciliation in a Wounded African American Congregation?”, 82.

after the event, Efiom concluded that the experience was felt as healing by those involved.²⁷ She writes that, in fact, “setting the table, not the presence of guests, was the act of love,” and that “it is the love extended through loving hospitality that opens the door of healing and reconciliation.”²⁸ She continues, “my hypothesis was that with an understanding of their responsibility in receiving Holy Communion and the work of planning for others, project participants would begin the communal process of healing,”²⁹ and she explicitly notes the “concern” and care her participants showed for the guests.³⁰ As Efiom’s study shows, the practice of hospitality and care for others in the context of a “table experience,” whether a real shared meal or the ritual one of the Eucharist, can form the basis for merciful responses to conflict.

In addition to the practice of hospitality and mercy in the table fellowship of the Eucharist, on Maundy Thursday the congregation goes deeper into the practice of mercy in the ritual of footwashing. In the Episcopal tradition, the following anthem is used during the footwashing:

The Lord Jesus, after he had supped with his disciples and had washed their feet, said to them, "Do you know what I, your Lord and Master, have done to you? I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done."

Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.

I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have

²⁷ Efiom, “Can a Theology of Table Bring Healing and Reconciliation in a Wounded African American Congregation?”, 85.

²⁸ Efiom, “Can a Theology of Table Bring Healing and Reconciliation in a Wounded African American Congregation?”, 86.

²⁹ Efiom, “Can a Theology of Table Bring Healing and Reconciliation in a Wounded African American Congregation?”, 88.

³⁰ Efiom, “Can a Theology of Table Bring Healing and Reconciliation in a Wounded African American Congregation?”, 88.

loved you.

*Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with
you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.*

By this shall the world know that you are my disciples: That
you have love for one another.³¹

The text of this anthem reveals two aspects of the cultivation of mercy: First, Jesus exhorts and commands the disciples to follow his example and “love one another as I have loved you” and promises that their love will be the sign of discipleship—reminding us that mercy is something we *practice* so that we learn to be more merciful. Second, Jesus promises the gift of peace in the refrain. The anthem presents Jesus not only commanding love and mercy, but also giving the disciples peace as the foundation for their practice of mercy. The peace which he gives them prepares and empowers them to act mercifully and lovingly in service to one another. Our practice of mercy is always founded first on the gracious gift of peace from God.

What do these practices have to do with “restorative justice” per se? Maundy Thursday calls us to widen our view of justice to a “healing justice” grounded in our ongoing care for one another. Efiom writes that in the context of her “table experience” event, participants felt healing without addressing the specifics of the conflicts, and that for some this was a relief: “‘Martha’ talked about how she does not deal well with conflict and this offered an alternative to having to confront people.”³² The practices of invitation, hospitality, and merciful care for one another also provide a basis for the difficult work of truth-telling which is at the center of a more typical restorative justice process. Block talks about the importance in community organizing of “[bringing] a new possibility into being” without clearly envisioning it first.³³ I see the practice

³¹ *Book of Common Prayer*, 274–5.

³² Efiom, “Can a Theology of Table Bring Healing and Reconciliation in a Wounded African American Congregation?”, 84.

³³ Block, *Community*, 82.

of mercy as a way of making space for the “possibility” of healing and reconciliation which may come about in more specific ways in connection with later parts of the process.

However, the end of the Maundy Thursday service—as the narrative drama moves from the Last Supper to Jesus’ agony in the Garden of Gethsemane—reminds us that inculcating the practice of mercy does not, by itself, accomplish true restorative justice. The liturgy transitions to the confrontation with the truth of harm done which is central to the commemoration of Good Friday. The Episcopal liturgy for Maundy Thursday can end with the “stripping of the altar,” in which the decorations and paraments are removed from the church, usually to the chanting of Psalm 22. This final piece of the liturgy provides a transition to the Good Friday service on the next day. (In fact, the stripping of the altar is specifically described as occurring “after the Maundy Thursday liturgy”³⁴ rather than as part of the liturgy proper—perhaps because it is a foreshadowing of the Good Friday service to come.) I will address Psalm 22 and the role of lament in restorative justice in connection with Good Friday, below.

Good Friday: Lament and confession, the practices of truth-telling

The role played by Good Friday in a restorative-justice understanding of Holy Week is as the day for “truth-telling.”³⁵ Naming harm done—by the person harmed and the person responsible—is a frequent part of a restorative justice circle process.³⁶ The Good Friday liturgies of various denominations provide multiple rites which image such truth-telling.

Perhaps the oldest tradition preserved in many Good Friday liturgies is the veneration of the cross, which “can be traced back to the fourth century and may have been inaugurated by St.

³⁴ “Book of Occasional Services,” 83.

³⁵ Zehr uses this term throughout *Changing Lenses* in connection with restorative justice.

³⁶ Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 161.

Cyril of Jerusalem himself.”³⁷ The veneration of the cross centers on the act of *seeing the truth*—of clearly identifying what is occurring in the mystery of the crucifixion. This is evident from the anthem traditionally used during the ceremony when the cross is lifted up or brought into the congregation: “Behold, the wood of the cross, on which was hung the Savior of the world.”³⁸ In one traditional practice dating back to the middle ages, all the crosses in the church are veiled during all of Lent, and then one is unveiled at the moment of this veneration—as Atwell describes it, “The purpose of the liturgical drama is to confront the faithful with the reality of the cross and to invite them to meditate on the universal significance of Christ’s saving death. The faithful look up at the cross and *witness* the very act of redemption.”³⁹ The liturgy becomes a moment of witnessing to the truth—of God’s action and of the harm we do to one another.

One essential form of truth-telling in biblical tradition is lament. Walter Brueggemann describes lament as a central form of worship, one which is necessary for the church to “raise and legitimate questions of justice in terms of social goods, social access, and social power.”⁴⁰ Lamenting is an essential step in seeking interpersonal and systemic restorative justice; Zehr notes that “when an offense has occurred...the ritual of lament...is appropriate,”⁴¹ and that “‘crime victims’ cries of anguish are much like the cries of anguish found so frequently in the Old Testament.”⁴² Lament is also closely tied to the Good Friday liturgies, as David Gambrell has studied, primarily through the place of Psalm 22 in liturgies of the passion. As I mentioned

³⁷ Atwell, “Passion in Christian Liturgy,” 92.

³⁸ Atwell, “Passion in Christian Liturgy,” 93.

³⁹ Atwell, “Passion in Christian Liturgy,” 93, emphasis mine.

⁴⁰ Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (1986), 62.

⁴¹ Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 209.

⁴² Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 193.

above, Psalm 22, which Gambrell calls “a paradigmatic example of lament,”⁴³ is used in the Episcopal Church in connection with the stripping of the altar which leads the congregation from Maundy Thursday into Good Friday. It is also used in Gambrell’s own Presbyterian tradition in Good Friday liturgies.⁴⁴ Beyond the liturgical use of the psalm itself, the traditional liturgical reading of the passion narrative forms part of the tradition of lament, through Jesus’ quotation of Psalm 22 from the cross—and in fact Gambrell suggests that, in Jesus’ words from Psalm 22, “there is a song of lament at the heart of the gospel and the crux of the Christian faith, a cry of pain that shatters pious pretense and shakes the foundations of the world.”⁴⁵ Lament—the naming of harm done—is central to the passion liturgy. (Although, interestingly, in the *Book of Common Prayer*, the appointed passion gospel is always from the Gospel of John,⁴⁶ which does not include the quotation from Psalm 22.)

Considering the role of the cross as a sign of solidarity with those who suffer shows how the reading of the crucifixion narrative itself can be a form of lament, especially for those who are harmed by systemic sin. James H. Cone writes: “another type of imagination is necessary—the imagination to relate the message of the cross to one’s own social reality... Because God was present with Jesus on the cross and thereby refused to let Satan and death have the last word about his meaning, God was also present at every lynching in the United States. God saw what whites did to innocent and helpless blacks and claimed their suffering as God’s own. God transformed lynched black bodies into the recrucified body of Christ.”⁴⁷ With this type of “imagination,” the liturgical use of the passion narrative from the gospels can become a lament

⁴³ David Gambrell, “The Song of the Cross: Psalm 22 and the Good Friday Liturgy,” Ph.D. diss. (Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2013), ii.

⁴⁴ Gambrell, “Song of the Cross,” 1.

⁴⁵ Gambrell, “Song of the Cross,” 1.

⁴⁶ *Book of Common Prayer*, 277.

⁴⁷ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 158.

for those harmed in “our own social reality.” Cone suggests that the ways the cross is made present in African-American worship and hymnody formed a method of resistance to systemic oppression: “The spirituals, gospel songs, and hymns focused on how Jesus achieved salvation for the least through his *solidarity* with them even unto death. There were more songs, sermons, prayers, and testimonies about the cross than any other theme. The cross was the foundation on which their faith was built.”⁴⁸ Perhaps the visibility of the cross in the Good Friday liturgy across ecumenical traditions can be seen (or productively re-interpreted in liturgical revisions) to take part in this lament-as-resistance. Nikia Smith Robert goes further, building on Cone’s work to suggest that God’s solidarity extends specifically to victims of the modern carceral state: “God acted in solidarity (unity) by assuming a criminal body and making space for criminals to find life amid state-sanctioned persecution.”⁴⁹ These interpretations of the crucifixion narrative show how it makes visible God’s solidarity with those who are oppressed, and thus God’s judgment against oppressors. Seeing the passion narrative in the suffering around us—especially in connection with our broken system of “justice”—is part of the systemic work of restorative justice by which we must make visible and dismantle the racist system of mass incarceration. The presence of the passion narrative on Good Friday offers a ritual opportunity to remind the church of that ongoing work. Of course, too often churches do not draw this connection of solidarity with their liturgies!

The emphasis on visibility and truth-telling, lament and confession, also appears in other places in the services of various denominations for Good Friday. The Episcopal liturgy continues, after the passion gospel, with the “Solemn Collects”—prayers of the congregation for

⁴⁸ Cone, *Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 21.

⁴⁹ Nikia Smith Robert, “Penitence, Plantation, and the Penitentiary: A Liberation Theology for Lockdown America,” *The Graduate Journal of Harvard Divinity School* 12 (2017), 55.

the world. The closing prayer of the Solemn Collects makes the liturgy's emphasis on showing the truth clear: "let the whole world *see and know* that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new."⁵⁰ The exposing of the crucified God is a revelation of the truth of harm and suffering in the world.

The naming of harm we have done is made visible in a rite used in the Catholic and Lutheran liturgies for Good Friday, the "Reproaches" or "Solemn Reproaches." In the Solemn Reproaches, Jesus speaks directly to the church (quoted here from the Lutheran form): "O my church, O my people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me," and then names the ways that God has been faithful to the church, and the ways the church has done harm in failing to respond faithfully:

"I led you out of slavery into freedom...but you have prepared a cross for your Savior... I led you on your way in a pillar of cloud and fire, but you led me to the judgment hall of Pilate; I guided you with the light of the Holy Spirit, but you have prepared a cross for your Savior...
I planted you as my fairest vineyard, but you brought forth bitter fruit...
I poured out saving water from the rock, but you gave me vinegar to drink; I poured out my life and gave you the new covenant in my blood, but you have prepared a cross for your Savior...
I gave you a royal scepter, but you gave me a crown of thorns...
I gave you my peace, but you draw the sword in my name...
I opened the waters to lead you to the promised land, but you opened my side with a spear; I washed your feet as a sign of my love, but you have prepared a cross for your Savior...
I grafted you into my people Israel, but you made them scapegoats for your own guilt...
I came to you in the least of your brothers and sisters, but I was hungry and you gave me no food, thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me, and you have prepared a cross for your Savior."⁵¹

The congregation, speaking these accusations, participates in a form of public confession of their own failures and guilt—and especially of systemic guilt in which we all participate. Other

⁵⁰ *Book of Common Prayer*, 280.

⁵¹ "S462: Solemn Reproaches," in *Sourcebook for Lent and the Three Days* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009).

authors have modified these texts to make the connections to modern systemic sin and injustice even clearer: for example, a version by Kimberlynn McNabb which interposes lines like “yet, you participate in the exploitation of people for your own needs, wants, and luxuries,” “yet, you lead others down your path, and yours alone, eradicating others traditions and cultures,” and “yet, you desecrate the environment and continue to pollute,”⁵² into the traditional couplets to make the specific systemic sins of a particular context—in this case, the Lutheran Church in Northeastern Canada—clearer.

Gambrell, writing from the Presbyterian tradition, considers its similar usage of “Solemn Intercession” and “Solemn Reproaches” on Good Friday. By comparing the Intercession and Reproaches structurally to Psalm 22 (his primary subject), he again identifies them as part of the pattern of lament and confession. He writes that the “parallel patterns [between Psalm 22 and the Solemn Intercessions] demonstrate the continuity between psalms of lament and this ancient and abiding example of Christian prayer.”⁵³ On the Reproaches, he goes even more deeply into their identification with lament, writing that the Reproaches are the “lament of Jesus,”⁵⁴ directed toward the church. But Jesus’ lament directed at the church becomes our confession of our own responsibility. Gambrell notes that the Reproaches can take the place of a confession of sin in the Presbyterian liturgy for Good Friday.⁵⁵ He writes: “In the Solemn Reproaches of the Cross we discover that we are the enemy—through our ingratitude and unfaithfulness to God, our rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah, and our persecution and neglect of others.”⁵⁶ This is where lament and confession come together in truth-telling. The connection to restorative justice is

⁵² “Solemn Reproaches,” accessed online 20 November 2019 at easternsynod.org/ministries/worship/files/2018/03/SOLEMN-REPROACHES.pdf

⁵³ Gambrell, “Song of the Cross,” 212.

⁵⁴ Gambrell, “Song of the Cross,” 216.

⁵⁵ Gambrell, “Song of the Cross,” 171.

⁵⁶ Gambrell, “Song of the Cross,” 219.

even clearer when Gambrell suggests directions for future liturgical study, including understanding the Solemn Reproaches as a place for “those who have sinned to be confronted by the voices of their victims and the consequences of their actions.”⁵⁷ This is precisely the sort of confrontation central to at least some restorative justice processes and to the act of taking accountability.

Other practices popular on Good Friday can further support this two-fold emphasis on confronting the truth of harm done. For example, at my parish, Good Friday is the one day of the year when auricular confession (Reconciliation of a Penitent, *Book of Common Prayer* pages 447–452) is offered in the context of the liturgy, at the end of the service. The encouragement of private confession emphasizes the need, in restorative practice, for each of us to be honest and accountable about the harm we have done in specific and concrete ways. Levad also raises the difficulties and potential of using sacramental reconciliation to expand our view of accountability to our complicity in “social sin”: “If we recognize social injustice as the product of social sin, then we may be pressed to discern how Reconciliation could help us seek redemption from the oppression in our midst. This sacrament could help us take public responsibility for social injustice...If sin extends beyond personal sin, then the reconciling work of the church ought also to extend beyond private confession, and in our private confessions, we ought to acknowledge the ways in which we each have been complicit in social sin.”⁵⁸

Furthermore, popular practices such as the Stations of the Cross can function as a form of public lament. The Episcopal cathedral in Springfield, Massachusetts, used to engage in such a practice with their service of “Stations in the Streets.” In that service, the congregation would walk through the downtown neighborhood surrounding the cathedral, carrying a large

⁵⁷ Gambrell, “Song of the Cross,” 330.

⁵⁸ Levad, *Redeeming a Prison Society*, 107–8.

processional cross. At each stop, a traditional Station would be read, but then the clergy would tell a story of something that had happened at that location, often an act of violence or an encounter with people experiencing homelessness, that was somehow related to the event recounted in the Station. This powerful service brought home the connections between Jesus' suffering and the sufferings of those experiencing poverty, homelessness, or violence in modern-day Springfield. It also functioned as a public form of lament for the needs of the city, expressing the injuries of the city within the ritual context of Jesus' passion while simultaneously making the cross—as a symbol of Jesus' suffering in solidarity with the world—visible to the community outside of the church. Its emphasis was on structural and systemic injustices, and the need for a communal response to them. Such a service is a perfect example of the sort of lament supported by the Good Friday liturgy.

In these and other ways, the Good Friday liturgies provide a paradigm of truth-telling in the forms of confession and lament. These practices of truth-telling are relevant to the specific harms we as individuals have committed or experienced. But they are also relevant to our communal experiences and perpetration of harm. The truth-telling, revelation, and remembering of such experiences is part of the process of healing and justice. By providing an image of truth-telling at the personal and communal level, Good Friday makes space for varied forms of truth in pursuit of healing.

Holy Saturday: Rituals of imperfect closure and remaining

Holy Saturday marks the liturgical space between death and resurrection, the day when Christ is dead in the tomb. In both Roman Catholic and Episcopal practice, the Eucharist is not

celebrated on Holy Saturday.⁵⁹ Thomas Carroll, writing shortly after the Vatican's 1950s decision to move the Easter Vigil to the evening and reclaim space for Holy Saturday between Good Friday and Easter, emphasizes the silence of the day, saying that the appropriate form of prayer is contemplation, as the church "tarries at the Lord's tomb, meditating."⁶⁰ The *Book of Common Prayer* service for the day emphasizes this waiting: "as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day."⁶¹ Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, in his interpretation of Holy Saturday, goes even further into the depths of the Holy Saturday silence, writing that on this day "when the Son, the Word of the Father, is dead, then no one can see God, hear of him or attain him."⁶² He calls Christians on Holy Saturday to a striking form of waiting: "being dead with the dead God."⁶³ The *Book of Common Prayer* mirrors this, encouraging use on this day of an anthem from the funeral service which begins, "in the midst of life we are in death."⁶⁴

What does this have to do with practices of healing justice? The silent waiting of Holy Saturday, in the presence of death, provides a pause for silence or closure at the end of a process of mercy and truth-telling and prevents a rush to reconciliation. Zehr notes endings as a point in restorative justice processes where ritual is needed: "As justice is done—whether complete or approximate—we also need rituals of closure. ... Such rituals provide an arena in which the church could play a particularly important role."⁶⁵ Holy Saturday is a location perhaps ideally suited for such a "ritual of closure." Whatever resolution has been reached, or not reached,

⁵⁹ See, for example, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 283.

⁶⁰ Thomas J. Carroll, "The Lost Day of Holy Week," *Worship* 31:5 (April 1957), 268.

⁶¹ *Book of Common Prayer*, 283.

⁶² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 49.

⁶³ Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 181.

⁶⁴ *Book of Common Prayer*, 492.

⁶⁵ Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 209.

through the practices of invitation, mercy, and truth-telling, the burial of Christ in the tomb represents a moment of rest and closure.

But this view of Holy Saturday as a “ritual of closure” is deepened and complicated by Shelly Rambo’s work, based in the realities of trauma. Rambo notes that trauma is not easily harmonized with the concept of closure, but that instead trauma “encompasses the return of [a traumatic] event, the ways in which the event is not concluded.”⁶⁶ Rambo reads Holy Saturday through trauma theory to describe it as the “middle”—“the figurative site in which death and life are no longer bounded,”⁶⁷ in which the trauma of death continually breaks through into the surviving life. In this “middle” she identifies the important movement as that of “witness” or “remaining:” “testifying to the movements of life in the aftermath of death.”⁶⁸ She identifies this witness particularly with the Holy Spirit, which she calls the “middle Spirit,” which “remains and persists where death and life defy ordinary expression.”⁶⁹ Rambo finds in the silence of Holy Saturday a way of witnessing to “truths that often escape articulation.”⁷⁰ This fairly theoretical conceptualization is relevant to the work of restorative justice in part to remind us of the needs for rituals that recognize that our speech does not exhaust the possibilities for healing. Often, our conception of restorative justice is focused on a conversation or encounter between victim and offender and their story-sharing. Rambo’s interpretation of Holy Saturday suggests that its “rituals of closure” might also function as rituals of remaining, of resting in the silence of the imperfect conclusion of any process of restorative justice. It calls us to ways of being present to those who have been harmed and done harm even in the messiness of the healing process.

⁶⁶ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 7.

⁶⁷ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 7.

⁶⁸ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 97.

⁶⁹ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 114.

⁷⁰ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 40.

Holy Saturday thus is an appropriate occasion for rituals of imperfect closure in the context of restorative justice. Rituals of closure, drawing on the silence of “tarrying at the Lord’s tomb,” can play an essential role in healing, yet that closure is not complete but instead a “remaining” in the presence of trauma, where healing is occurring at its own pace. The community’s presence alongside those who grieve in the complicated healing process is ritualized on Holy Saturday.

The Great Vigil of Easter: Forgiveness as prolepsis of the joy to come

Remaining in the “middle” may be the best outcome we can hope for in a restorative justice process. The place of forgiveness or reconciliation in restorative justice is contested. Clearly, victims can be placed under no obligation to forgive. Forgiveness and reconciliation transcend the justice process that we can participate in or control. Perhaps the “remaining” that Rambo identifies with the Spirit (who she sees as “[witnessing] to what cannot yet be envisioned as life”)⁷¹ is the best we can hope for. Forgiveness is, perhaps, the promise of life that Rambo says cannot always “yet be envisioned” from the aftermath of trauma and harm.

Yet, forgiveness continues to be experienced and desired at least by some people as part of a healing process, and its centrality in New Testament teaching makes it worth at least engaging with. Donohue reads Luke 17:5–10 to suggest that the disciples’ cry to Jesus, “Increase our faith!” is a response to the demand that they forgive those who have harmed them.⁷² Increase of faith is necessary for forgiveness because forgiveness is an act of faith: a proleptic participation, by faith, in the final reconciliation of all things in God. This is why forgiveness can never be demanded or required, but only experienced as an individual, and risky, act of faith. Yet

⁷¹ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 139.

⁷² Donohue, “Reconciliation,” 182.

forgiveness may still be a hope and goal that enlivens restorative justice, which aims at reconciliation and restoration even if full reconciliation can never be achieved. As Conway writes, for Christians, “we are called to forgiveness, but always as a gracious, freely chosen act.”⁷³

Liturgically, forgiveness and reconciliation, as the ultimate hope of a restorative justice process and such a “gracious act,” are represented at the Easter Vigil. Bishop Jeffrey Lee writes: “The Great Vigil of Easter makes it clear that the liturgies of these three days truly are encounters with the living Christ....If the liturgical life of the church is an encounter with the death and resurrection of Christ, then our sacramental celebrations are the means of our incorporation into that mystery. In other words, they make real our participation in the dying and rising body of Christ in the world. The Easter Vigil is the occasion for that participation *par excellence*.”⁷⁴ The Easter Vigil expresses sacramentally our participation in the paschal mystery, of which reconciliation is the culmination. And every concrete act of reconciliation also participates in that same paschal mystery. So the Easter Vigil provides a ritual and sacramental space to illustrate, and thus empower, concrete acts of forgiveness, where they are possible and desired by those who have been harmed. This is, again, not to ever require forgiveness, or to suggest that it is always possible, but instead to recognize the *difficulty* of forgiveness and to provide encouragement for those who seek to forgive by contextualizing the holy struggle of forgiveness within the depths of the paschal mystery.

The eschatological implications of the liturgy of the Easter Vigil are laid out in Massey Shepherd’s book *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse*, in which he suggests that the structure of the book of Revelation was based on the structure of the ancient Easter Vigil. He

⁷³ Conway, “Harm and Healing,” 174.

⁷⁴ Jeffrey D. Lee, *Opening the Prayer Book* (Boston, MA: Cowley Publications, 1999), 91.

illustrates the cataclysms and conflicts of Revelation as perhaps “a commentary upon [the Paschal] liturgy from the vantage point of prophecy”⁷⁵—a way of envisioning the end times in parallel to the sacramental reality we already participate in. In the Easter Vigil, the past events of Christ’s death and resurrection, the present, and the coming events of the eschaton are all simultaneously made present in the liturgy. As the ancient hymn the Exsultet repeats, “This is the night...” and “How blessed is this night when earth and heaven are joined.”⁷⁶ This is the night when past, present, and future are simultaneously and mysteriously present. The Vigil, in other words, is simultaneously an illustration of and a proleptic participation in the final reconciliation of all things. As such, it illustrates the possibility of forgiveness while also recognizing that it may not be reached, or even desired, in any particular concrete situation or process.

Practical implications

How might the theology outlined above help us structure our own devotions during Holy Week and support our own restorative practices? I hope the structure I have outlined above might eventually be able to support Holy Week retreats aimed at healing for victims and perpetrators of harm, perhaps even for those who are incarcerated. As a first step, I have prepared devotional materials for the four services of Holy Week, in line with the theology above (see Appendix). These materials could provide a devotional aid for all Christians interested in restorative justice as part of their Holy Week practice of prayer.

How could the elements of restorative justice that I have identified in these liturgies, such as the practice of mercy and hospitality, making oppression visible, and remaining in witness to

⁷⁵ Massey H. Shepherd, *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1960), 83.

⁷⁶ *Book of Common Prayer*, 287.

ongoing trauma, be used to construct devotional materials aimed explicitly at some kind of restorative or healing justice process in response to systemic racism or other ongoing oppression? How might these rituals be used to support, for example, something like the Truth and Reconciliation work done in South Africa, within our own context, by bringing people together across their differences (mercy/hospitality) for the sake of making visible the ongoing trauma and harm caused by oppression in our political, social, and economic systems, both through storytelling (truth-telling) and perhaps through bearing witness to one another's journeys and struggles even in ways "that escape articulation"⁷⁷?

Another important implication of this work is its ecumenical context. I have drawn from the liturgical practices of a variety of Christian traditions. In some cases, as in the use of Psalm 22 in the Good Friday or associated liturgies, the emphasis on restorative-justice practices such as lament can form a foundation for further ecumenical cooperation. Gambrell discusses how the tradition of intercessory prayer for the whole church on Good Friday already provides such a locus of cooperation, and suggests that "perhaps...the Good Friday liturgy—and the recovery of the practice of lament therein—holds some sort of paradoxical promise of renewal and reconciliation for God's people."⁷⁸ I would suggest that restorative justice can similarly provide a framework which is independent of the specific liturgical practices of particular denominations, so that the structure I have suggested here could be used to develop new ecumenical liturgies among social-justice-focused Christians.

In terms of restorative practice, I am interested in the specifics of the process that arises from the structure I have laid out. Based on the order of the Holy Week services and the elements I have identified in each one, the process takes the following shape:

⁷⁷ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 40.

⁷⁸ Gambrell, "Song of the Cross," 178.

1. Invitation to community
2. Practicing of mercy
3. Truth-telling: confession and lament
4. Closure and remaining
5. Forgiveness and reconciliation (if desired and possible)

Because of the flexibility and variety of processes that fall under the umbrella of “restorative justice,” it may be useful to have a specific process, such as the above, which combines elements of ongoing “healing justice”—such as inviting people into deeper community (“[expanding] the circle” in Sawatsky’s words⁷⁹), practicing mercy, and making space for ongoing healing after trauma (“remaining”)—with specific movements towards truth-telling, accountability, and perhaps forgiveness, as you might find in a circle process. Furthermore, locating the source of the steps in this process in the familiar Christian rituals of Holy Week may provide an entry point for Christians new to restorative justice to experience it.

There are several elements of this particular order/process that I find especially helpful. It prefaces the truth-telling with the involvement of other community supporters and with spiritual/emotional preparation for the empathy needed for a successful circle process. Zehr discusses the need to bring community stakeholders besides the directly impacted parties into a restorative justice process;⁸⁰ Sawatsky emphasizes that healing justice requires that “communities...be in close relationship with those who are suffering in the community.”⁸¹ The steps of invitation of the person who has done harm back into the community and strengthening community ties of mercy and service strike me as essential precursors to a meaningful circle

⁷⁹ Sawatsky, *The Ethic of Traditional Communities and the Spirit of Healing Justice*, 271.

⁸⁰ Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 232.

⁸¹ Sawatsky, *The Ethic of Traditional Communities and the Spirit of Healing Justice*, 254.

process. I find it useful, as well, to suggest the need for rituals of closure beyond the speech in the circle (as Rambo suggests, to make space to “see truths that often escape articulation”⁸²) as well as to understand forgiveness, the possible final step towards reconciliation, as something “beyond” the process proper. Forgiveness cannot be the concrete goal of every restorative process—often the imperfect closure of Holy Saturday is the best that can be achieved—although it is, for Christians, an ultimate image of restoration.

However, the elements in these five steps are hardly as neatly and chronologically separable as the list above and the structure of Holy Week services might suggest. Healing is not a “linear narration of redemption,”⁸³ but a process where the steps interweave and inform each other. The circle process of truth-telling is itself a practice that encourages a more merciful outlook towards the other, as empathy supports mercy. As Conway writes, “Perhaps we can feel a type of love for persons when we see their deep flaws, failings, and suffering, which bring them to inflict harm on others, and in turn themselves.”⁸⁴ And of course, the Holy Week services themselves suggest such overlap and messiness. The lament of Good Friday is anticipated in the stripping of the altar on Maundy Thursday. The mourning of Good Friday carries over into the silence of Holy Saturday. The “remaining” of Holy Saturday is the ground of the possible new life of forgiveness to come. And all the services of Holy Week are carried out in the knowledge and hope of the coming resurrection of Easter. The initial invitation of the person who has done harm into the community prefigures the promise of ultimate reconciliation. At every stage, the process repeats and continues.

⁸² Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 40.

⁸³ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 128. Her argument is focused on ways to escape the “temptation” of the “linear narration of redemption.”

⁸⁴ Conway, “Harm and Healing,” 173.

I am most interested in how the practical and theological inform each other. Levad writes that “restorative justice has the potential of leading Catholics back into our own liturgical and sacramental traditions.”⁸⁵ And, going deeper, what is the effect of “reading” the five-step process above back into the paschal mystery? In other words, how does the death and resurrection of Christ play out theologically as a process of restorative justice?

Extending our view beyond the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection to include his life and ministry, as well as the hope of ultimate reconciliation at his second coming, makes evident further connection between the stages of the practical justice process above and the biblical narrative:

- Christ invites those he encounters in his ministry to follow him and to be part of the new kingdom of God “fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21) (invitation to community).
- Christ’s ministry provides an example of healing and mercy. Delores Williams suggests that it is Jesus’ “ministerial vision of righting relationships” in his life, not his death, that is salvific for us,⁸⁶ placing the practice of mercy at the center of the biblical “restorative justice process” of salvation (practicing mercy).
- Jesus’ passion and death are the judgment of the world (John 12:31), in which evil is revealed as evil in the truthful judgment of God (truth-telling).
- The silence of Holy Saturday when Jesus lies dead in the tomb and in hell, and when the disciples keep the sabbath (closure and remaining).

⁸⁵ Amy Levad, “In response to Kathryn Getek Soltis,” accessed online 20 November 2019 at syndicate.network/symposia/theology/redeeming-a-prison-society/.

⁸⁶ Delores Williams, “Black Women’s Surrogacy Experience and the Christian Notion of Redemption,” *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 30.

- Jesus' resurrection is then the first-fruits of the second coming, the final eschatological reconciliation between humankind and God (cf. Revelation 21) (forgiveness and reconciliation).

In this way, I have come full circle. The liturgies of Holy Week help structure a particular process of restorative justice. That process itself illustrates the historical fullness of the paschal mystery. The historical drama of salvation history, and especially the incarnation, can be read as a restorative justice process, with God in the place of the one harmed, and humankind as the ones responsible. Where we find ourselves guilty (where our unfaithfulness and the harm we have done to one another has "harmed" God), God came in the person of Jesus to initiate this justice process: inviting us into community, practicing mercy towards and with us, showing us the truth of our actions in judgment, "remaining" even in the depths as we found imperfect closure, and then, in Jesus' resurrection, making our forgiveness tangible and bringing us back into reconciled relationship with God.

Of course, it is precisely this paschal mystery of which the liturgies of Holy Week are the dramatization and remembrance. Scriptural narrative, liturgical practice, and concepts of restorative justice illuminate each other for a holistic picture of justice, healing, and restoration.

Appendix: Devotional Materials for Holy Week

Healing Justice and the Paschal Mystery:

A Holy Week Devotional

What is healing justice?

Healing justice, sometimes also called restorative justice, is a way of responding to harm that is aimed at meeting the needs of those harmed and providing a pathway to restoration and healing for those who have been harmed and those who have done harm.

One difference between healing justice and restorative justice is that restorative justice is usually a response to a particular event (a crime, or a particular harm done). But healing justice takes a wider view. Healing justice is based on the idea that justice does not occur only at a particular moment in response to harm, but is an ongoing practice in our lives and our communities.

Practicing healing justice means looking for ways to promote mercy and truth in our everyday lives.

Participating in community rituals can help strengthen our practice of healing justice. This devotional explores how we can grow in healing justice, looking through the lens of the rituals of Holy Week in the Christian tradition.

The Paschal Mystery

When Christians talk about the *Paschal Mystery*, we mean Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection, by which God reconciled the world to God's self. The Paschal Mystery is what we celebrate during Holy Week.

The services of Holy Week are a commemoration of what Jesus did in the last days of his life, and of his death and resurrection. The services form a journey:

- Maundy Thursday (or Holy Thursday) is the service that commemorates the Last Supper. It usually includes, in the church, a service of holy communion, as well as often a ritual of footwashing, to remember how Jesus washed his disciples' feet. It was also the traditional time when those who had sinned and repented were welcomed back into the church.
- Good Friday is the commemoration of Jesus' crucifixion. It usually includes the reading of the Passion Gospel and the veneration of the cross, as well as prayers for the church and the world.
- Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter, is the day when the church remembers Jesus' burial and the fact that he was truly dead and buried. It is a day of contemplation and silent waiting.
- The Great Vigil of Easter (on Saturday evening) is the first service of Easter and the first celebration of the resurrection. This service, developed from ancient traditions, is the culmination of the Holy Week journey. In the celebration of the resurrection, we experience God's forgiveness and anticipate the reconciliation of all things in the new creation to come.
- As we enter together into these services and the Paschal Mystery they represent, we will explore practices of healing justice that they can help us build.

Maundy Thursday

- Maundy Thursday is the commemoration of the Last Supper, when Jesus shared his last meal with his disciples, established the sacrament of Holy Communion, and washed their feet. This is a day to practice *inviting* people into community and then *practicing mercy* in our life together.
- Read John 13:1–17. Jesus, though “in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6) offers his love and mercy to his disciples in service to them.

Invitation to Community

- Traditional liturgies for Maundy Thursday began with the reconciliation of penitents to the community. This practice was in *invitation* to them, and to us, to enter into the mystery of Holy Week more deeply together.
- One pastor developed a profound practice for her congregation, having them write down the name of someone they were in conflict with—and then making those names the invited guests for a special dinner! Try writing (but not necessarily sending) an invitation to dinner, to someone you have had conflict with. What might you write? What words might you use to invite them? How does writing that invitation make you feel? Would you send it if you could?
- What else might the practice of invitation look like in your context? Is there someone you have been excluding or ignoring who you might reach out to on this day?

Practicing Mercy

- Pray this beautiful anthem, which is sung in the Maundy Thursday service, with promises of Jesus:

The Lord Jesus, after he had supped with his disciples and had washed their feet, said to them, "Do you know what I, your Lord and Master, have done to you? I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done."

Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.

*I give you a new commandment:
Love one another as I have loved you.*

Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.

*By this shall the world know that you are my disciples:
That you have love for one another.*

- Think about the person you were in conflict with, who you “invited” to dinner. Imagine sitting down at a table with that person. What might you offer them to eat or drink? Write down a description of your favorite food and what it means to you, and imagine offering it to that person. How does this make you feel? Is it joyful, or is it uncomfortable? Be present to that feeling.
- What other ways can you imagine to practice mercy in your context?

Good Friday

Truth-telling: Lament and Confession

- Good Friday is when we remember the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus' death was the revelation of God's judgment on the ways we harm one another and on all injustice and oppression (John 12:31). On Good Friday, we can practice *truth-telling*. Two important forms of truth-telling are lament, where we express to God and others our pain about injustice and harm done to us, and confession, where we take responsibility for the ways we have harmed others. By the truth-telling of lament and confession, we participate in the revelation of God's truth and love, as they were made visible on the cross.
- Read the traditional scripture reading for this day, the Passion Gospel: John 18:1–19:37.
- Two ancient forms of prayer for Good Friday are the "Solemn Intercessions" and the "Solemn Reproaches." The Solemn Intercessions represent lament for all the ways people suffer and are in need. The Solemn Reproaches are a form of confession for how we have hurt one another.
- In the spirit of the Solemn Intercessions, pray for the whole human family: for the church, for the world and all the leaders of every nation, for all who suffer, for all who have persecuted or harmed others. Pray this closing prayer:
O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
- In the Solemn Reproaches, Jesus speaks directly to the church, of the harm we have caused to one another:
*"O my church, O my people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me.
I gave you my peace, but you draw the sword in my name.
I grafted you into my people Israel, but you made them scapegoats for your own guilt.
I came to you in the least of your brothers and sisters,
but I was hungry and you gave me no food, thirsty and you gave me no drink,
a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me,
sick and in prison and you did not visit me,
and you have prepared a cross for your Savior.*
- Write a *lament*. This can be any description of something that causes you pain or sorrow, whether it is something that happened to you, or something you did, or a conflict with someone, or an injustice in the world that upsets you. What do you feel when you think about that situation? What do you wish you could ask God? What do you wish you could ask another person about what happened? What makes you angriest? What makes you saddest? What makes you most hopeful? What would bring you healing? Pour out your heart to God. Lament is a place to be honest with God, even if we are angry with God.
- What other forms of truth-telling could you imagine in your context? Is there a trusted friend or counselor with whom you could share a story?

Holy Saturday

Closure and Remaining

- Holy Saturday is the day when we commemorate Jesus' burial, the day when he lies silent and dead in the tomb before his resurrection. It is a day for *closure* and *remaining*. *Closure* can mean ritually letting go the harms done to us and things we cannot change, as much as possible. But closure is not always easy or possible. *Remaining* is another way we can find peace in the aftermath of suffering, being present to our own feelings and being present with one another in solidarity.
- Read Matthew 27:57–61. After the burial of Jesus, his disciples kept the sabbath, resting on this day of silent waiting.
- Pray this traditional prayer for Holy Saturday:

*O God, Creator of heaven and earth:
Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb
and rested on this holy Sabbath,
so we may await with him the coming of the third day,
and rise with him to newness of life;
who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

- As a ritual of closure, try taking the lament you wrote yesterday, and destroy it: tear it up or throw it away. Imagine laying Jesus in the tomb as you do, knowing that “it is finished” (John 19:30). How does it feel to destroy that piece of paper? Is it a relief, or is it uncomfortable? Be present and remain with that feeling, whatever it is.
- What other “rituals of closure” could you imagine in your context?

The Great Vigil of Easter

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

- Beginning at sunset on Saturday evening, the Great Vigil of Easter is the first celebration of the resurrection. The church gathers in darkness and silence, then kindles the new light of Easter, remembers the history of salvation, and rejoices in the resurrection of Jesus. Easter Vigil is a time to hope for *forgiveness* and *reconciliation*. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not always possible, and can never be required. But the church's Easter celebration anticipates the reconciliation of all things in God at the end of time. Every act of forgiveness is a moment when we participate in the new creation of God which is coming.
- Pray this ancient hymn for the Great Vigil of Easter:

*This is the night, when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel,
out of bondage in Egypt,
and led them through the Red Sea on dry land.
This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin,
and are restored to grace and holiness of life.
This is the night, when Christ broke the bonds of death and hell,
and rose victorious from the grave.
How blessed is this night, when earth and heaven are joined
and humankind is reconciled to God.*

- "This is the night" when heaven and earth, past and future, are united in God's mysterious reconciliation of all things. Imagine yourself at the moment of Jesus' resurrection. What do you see, hear, feel? Now read Revelation 21:1–22:5 and try to imagine yourself there. What do you see, hear, feel?
- As you are imagining, thinking of the person whose name you wrote down on Thursday, with whom you were in conflict. Imagine them present with you in the scene depicted in Revelation 21:1–22:5. How does this feel different than imagining them at dinner with you as you did on Thursday? Have your feelings changed over the past few days?
- Is there someone you have been wishing to forgive who you can reach out to or write to? Is there something for which you have been wishing to forgive yourself? When you imagine yourself in the heavenly city of Revelation 21:1–22:5, how does that affect your feelings of forgiveness toward yourself and others? It's okay if you do not yet feel forgiveness. Be present to your feelings, whatever they are.
- What other moment or ritual of joy or forgiveness can you imagine today in your context?

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