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A Lenten Devotional

Wandering Heart

Figuring out faith
with Peter



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Art, reflections, &
poetry for the
season of Lent





Tune my heart

Tune my heart.
 Like an old violin,
 Like a worn down piano,
 I have been left out in all manners of weather,
 I have been left alone for far too long.
 So like a concert master
 with a steady hand,
 tune me up.
 Listen and learn
 the cracked keys,
 the broken strings.
 Memorize the forgotten intervals
 That even I did not know.
 And then, when we're ready,
 When this creaky heart is tuned,
 teach me a new song.

*Poem by
 Rev. Sarah Speed*



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Read John 21:1-19 **From the Artist** | Rev. Nicolette Peñaranda

As a mixed media artist, I wanted to try something I've never done before—perhaps the silliest decision someone with a deadline could make. This entire piece²⁸ (with the exception of the three hearts) is made of yarn. For some reason, the feeling of a sheep's wool kept sticking out to me everytime I read this text. We refer to Jesus as both *el Cordero de Dios*²⁹ and the shepherd. So why not lean into sheep imagery?

This post-resurrection story concludes the wandering for Peter so the subject of this piece sits in front of the Adinkra symbol, *Nkyinkyim*,³⁰ for life's twisted journey. We have seen the ins and outs of his ministry as he accompanies Jesus, which brings us to this dialogue between the two. In this piece, the two of them are portrayed as sheep, Peter being at the right hand of Jesus. The sheep are branded with *Agyinduwura*³¹ at the center of their chests. They carry with them a symbol of loyalty and faithfulness. The face of each sheep is the symbol *Kokuromotie*³² to represent cooperation and harmony. Jesus asking Peter to feed his sheep demonstrates the faith that Jesus has in Peter to do this work. This value of cooperation is also present in the *Mpatapo*-shaped³³ flowers in the field. They are symbols of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Above the sheep sits *Kojo Baiden*.³⁴ God has traditionally been represented as the sun in various cultures, which brings us to this omnipresent symbol operating as such in this piece. And to the left we see *Akoma*,³⁵ or hearts. While we interpret the heart as love, it is also a symbol for endurance and patience.

Here's my heart. Here are the things I care about so deeply. And you—someone who makes mistakes, doesn't follow directions, and sometimes even betrays me—you are so loved and trusted enough to keep this good work going even after I'm gone.

This is a message to all of us. It doesn't matter how poorly you may think of yourself or how others may view you. To Christ, you are beautifully and fearfully made. And Christ believes in you in spite of it all.

28 The original is a 24" x 48" canvas.
 29 Spanish for "Lamb of God."
 30 View the symbol and learn more about it here: adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/nkyinkyim/
 31 View the symbol and learn more about it here: adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/agyindawuru/
 32 View the symbol and learn more about it here: adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/kokuromotie/
 33 View the symbol and learn more about it here: adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/mpatapo/
 34 Also known as Abode Santann. Learn more here: adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/abode-santann/
 35 View the symbol and learn more about it here: adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/akoma/



Feed My Sheep | Nicolette Peñaranda
Yarn and paper collage on canvas

This Lent, we are focusing on the life and faith of one of Jesus' most famous disciples. In Peter, we see a person who is both steadfast and unsteady, a dear friend and a betrayer, a follower and a wanderer. In Peter, we often see ourselves. By following Peter's journey, we watch the story of Jesus unfold through the eyes of a very normal human trying to figure it all out—just like us.

As we were studying Peter's faith journey, the lyrics of "Come Thou Fount" came to mind. It's as if Peter himself wrote this song. And so, for each step in Peter's journey, we have selected a phrase from this hymn. As we follow Peter's story, we will sing our way through Lent, binding our wandering hearts to God.

In this devotional and series, we want to affirm that faith is a constant journey of steadfast pursuit, one that ebbs and flows. We want to affirm the ways Peter keeps going: he drops his nets, he walks on water, he runs to the empty tomb, he swims to the shore to meet the risen Christ. He keeps searching and yearning and loving, even after missteps or mistakes. Ultimately, in Peter's story, we are reminded that God loves imperfect people—in fact, time and again, that's precisely who God claims and calls.

We encourage you to engage in the weekly art and reflections at your own pace, looking for the ways your own story may be reflected in Peter's faith journey. As we wander through Lent, let us tune our hearts to sing God's grace. May we rest in streams of mercy, never ceasing.

Artfully yours,
The Sanctified Art Creative Team

Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity
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Hannah Garrity
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Rev. Anna Strickland

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Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

FOUNDER | CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF SA

Lisle Gwynn Garrity (*she/her*) is a Pastorist (pastor + artist), retreat leader, and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. She founded A Sanctified Art with the conviction that, in order to thrive, the church needs more creative expression and art-filled freedom.

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DIRECTOR OF BRANDING | FOUNDING CREATIVE PARTNER OF SA

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Rev. Anna Strickland

OPERATIONS SUPPORT | CONTENT CREATOR

Anna Strickland (*she/her*) looks for the Divine in the everyday like treasure in clay jars and first encountered God in the integration of her spiritual self and artistic self. She is a former teacher and college minister, a proud Texas Longhorn and graduate of Iliff School of Theology, a Baptist to the core ministering in ecumenical spaces, and a lover of chaos anchored by the belief that the Spirit is most active in the spaces between us.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER Wandering Heart: "Here's my heart"

Read John 21:1-19

Commentary | Dr. Karoline M. Lewis

In this fourth resurrection appearance in the Gospel of John, Peter has decided to go back to his day job—fishing. At daybreak, Jesus, the light of the world, appears to the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and his presence leads to an abundant catch of fish. It is in this abundance, in this moment of grace upon grace (John 1:16), that the disciples recognize Jesus. Coming ashore, they find that Jesus has made breakfast for them, a meal of bread and fish, which would have recalled the abundance of the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus, the bread of life, comes to his disciples to call them once again to the work of the harvest (John 4:31-38). With the reference to Nathanael of Cana (John 21:1), we are meant to recognize this scene as a second call narrative for the disciples—a call to do greater works than these (John 14:12) because Jesus will ascend to the Father. It becomes our call story as well—how will we offer witness to the world of the love of God in Jesus after the events of the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection? How will our testimony sound different on this side of the empty tomb?

It is in this context that we need to hear the conversation between Jesus and Peter. There is neither shaming nor blaming, nor does Jesus forgive Peter. Instead, Jesus knows that what he will ask Peter to do is something Peter could not fathom before. Only now, in this renewal of relationship with the resurrected Jesus is Peter's trust affirmed and Jesus' trust in Peter confirmed. Jesus needs Peter to be the good shepherd now—to provide pasture, to protect the sheep from wolves, thieves, and bandits so that the sheep may have abundant life (John 10:10).

That's a tall order. But how can God so love the world without us? We are not just called to do loving things, but to be the very presence of love, the "I AM" in the world when Jesus cannot be. We give our hearts and our whole selves to Jesus so that John 3:16 might really come true.



Reflect

How can God so love the world without us? How can you be the very presence of love in the world?

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Wandering Heart: "Here's my heart"

Inspired by "The Lanyard" by Billy Collins⁸



Here's My Heart

As a child I made a nativity set for my mother—
 pinch pot clay, uneven angel wings,
 hair made with the help of a garlic press,
 Joseph's staff rolled out like I was God
 and it was an earthworm.
 There was nothing beautiful about it,
 nothing whispering of talent, but I made it for my mother!
 So I wrapped that questionable piece of art in a box
 and gave it to her like I was handing her a Picasso.
Here, mother, you carried me in your womb. You bandaged my knees when I fell. You made soup when I was sick. You rocked me to sleep as an infant and sewed my costumes by hand. In return, I made you this haphazard nativity!

And in my childlike mind, I thought that the small white lamb, molded from a lumpy piece of clay, could somehow make us even, could somehow balance the scales, could somehow pay her back.
 And bless my mother, because in her grace, she smiled and she displayed that hodge-podge nativity set on the mantel as if it were her pride and joy. *(I believed that it was.)*

Maybe that's the way it is with God.
 I say, *Here's my heart* and God smiles. And God takes it.
 And despite the ragtag nature of my human-hearted faith, whatever I can give always ends up on God's mantel. Whatever I can give always calls for pride and joy.

Poem by Rev. Sarah Speed

⁸ "The Lanyard" from *The Trouble with Poetry: and Other Poems* by Billy Collins. (Random House, 2005).



About Our Guest Contributors
Guest Writers

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EASTER SUNDAY Wandering Heart: "And I hope"

Read Luke 24:1-12

From the Artist | Hannah Garrity

"But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened" (Luke 24:12).

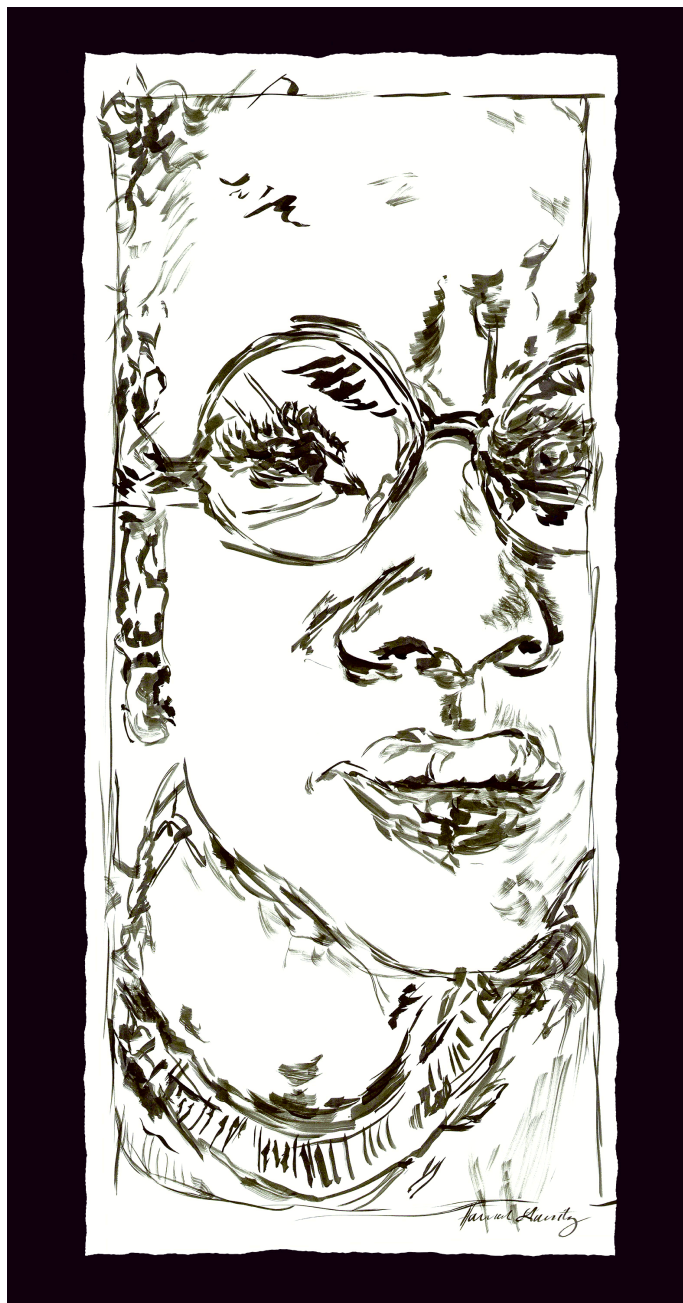
Painted in ink on paper, Peter's expression here is inquisitive with a touch of concern. He's tired, but hopeful. He has just gotten amazing news. Joanna, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James relayed the message and Peter dared to believe it. The prophecy is coming true.

So many of the things that Jesus foretold have happened over the last few days. The most heavy on Peter's heart are his repeated denials. Fear took over.

In contrast, now hope and joy begin to bubble up inside. He will see Jesus again! Jesus has overcome death! The prophecies have been fulfilled! Truly, God is in this place.

As I was imagining my pieces for this series, I immediately saw the emotions of the human experience reflected in Peter's story. In order to share the energy and perspective of each emotion, I chose to brush ink on paper. On this Easter Sunday, Peter's face peers through the sketched frame holding both a full expression and tension. Intentionally loose, the brush strokes suggest a face in motion—a glance, the beginnings of joy written in the depths of the eye, the twitch of a smile.

Jesus is risen! Peter is here for it!



Where? | Hannah Garrity
Ink on paper



holy week

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All this time

I put my headphones in.
 I walk quickly.
 I look toward the ground.
 I create one million barriers
 of independence,
 but still God seeks after me.
 God leans a rainbow over the sky.
 God sends sun after the rain.
 God blankets the earth with wildflowers.
 God allows music to carry,
 and laughter to rise,
 all so that I might notice.
 And when I do notice,
 the unfurling that begins in my soul
 is slow and holy and burning.
 I am not alone.
 God has been chasing after me
 all this time.

*Poem by
 Rev. Sarah Speed*

Read Luke 24:1-12

Commentary | Dr. Karoline M. Lewis

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women go to the tomb and find it empty. This is good news! But is it? Through the messengers at the tomb, the women remember Jesus' assurances and return to the disciples with the news. And what do the disciples say? Not just words of disbelief but downright dismissal. While translations will render their reaction as "an idle tale," "foolish talk," or "nonsense," the real meaning of the Greek word is "garbage." The women announce Jesus' promises fulfilled and the response—from the ones who were closest to Jesus—is, "yeah, well, that's a bunch of rubbish."

There is so much truth and honesty in this reaction. After all, the good news frequently seems too good to be true. If the tomb is empty, if Jesus has been raised from the dead, then life as we've known and expected it is no longer. The world has been turned upside down (Acts 17:6). And if the world has been turned upside down, how do we even know how to live? If the disciples thought the resurrection was a pile of trash, what are people going to think when we confess belief in the resurrection?

"Could it really be true?" is the question I think Peter asked himself, and with hope on his heels, he ran to the tomb to see for himself. Peter goes home wondering and it's in that wondering that the meaning of the resurrection lies. The resurrection only makes sense when we remain amazed, marveling and wondering at the love of God that reversed death itself. We are not asked to explain the resurrection, offer proof for the resurrection, or make a case for the resurrection. Instead, like Peter, we live in wonder—for how belief in the God of resurrection truly can change the world.



Reflect

What fills you with wonder and awe today?

Read Luke 5:1-11 | Psalm 25:1-10

Commentary | Dr. Terence Lester

Amid the global pandemic, we faced uncertainties and fear. The world was gripped by a new, invisible foe. I lead a nonprofit named *Love Beyond Walls* that advocates for the unhoused. During COVID-19, Demetri—whose name is forever etched in my memory—walked into our center. He was a community member and friend, but he seemed different. We asked what was on his mind, and he replied, "I believe I'm going to die because I have nowhere to wash my hands. How am I supposed to wash my hands when I don't have anywhere to go?"

His words showed the harsh reality for those experiencing homelessness: over half a million people held the same fear. COVID-19 was an awakening to the longstanding disparities within society. The term "social distancing" was jarring for people who had long known social distancing.

Demetri's story fueled a national campaign we called "Love Sinks In" to provide handwashing access for those without it, enabling us to connect more deeply and stand with our community. As others focused on hand hygiene and quarantine, we provided basic sanitation for those experiencing homelessness. Many debated toilet paper and confinement; we stood with individuals without soap, water, or shelter.

Just as Jesus sought out the Galilean fishermen, we sought out people suffering on the streets. Galilee, now modern-day northern Israel, hosted a diverse community and some struggled with poverty. Fishing was commonplace, and for many, a means of subsistence. Those whose fishing did not succeed often became destitute. Just as Jesus called the fishermen, he calls us to seek the marginalized, to become "fishers of men." Demetri's plea echoed Peter's response to Jesus' call: "I'm afraid." But it was also a call to action.

Peter had a wandering heart. Jesus was always there to catch Peter, to walk beside him, to wash his feet, and to offer love. In Peter's story, we find Jesus. Peter's wandering faith ebbed and flowed, pushed away and pulled close. But he was always tethered to the love of God. This Lent, we're joining Peter in figuring out faith. We will wander alongside him, glimpsing Jesus through his eyes.

Read John 19:1-30

From the Artist | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

This refrain from a well-known Gospel song dances in circles in my mind as I wonder where Peter is when Jesus is crucified. We know that Peter follows Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest. We know he warms himself by the fire when, again and again, he denies being one of Jesus' disciples. Then Jesus is dragged away—to be tried, sentenced to death, and finally, killed. But where is Peter?

Since we have to fill in the gaps of the story with our imaginations, this image functions like visual Midrash⁷ of Peter's experience when Jesus dies. I imagine Peter is frozen—with guilt, rage, and regret—still standing by the fire. I imagine he remains there for hours, unable to move, paralyzed by fear. I imagine he mourns privately, pleading for a miracle, praying the worst will not come, crying out again, "God forbid it!" (Matthew 16:22) In the background, the shadow of a cross flickers like flames rising from the charcoal fire.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

For Peter, the answer is "no." He has left the God he loves.

In this image, God's river of grace flows out from the cross and spills out before a bereaved Peter. Even in this moment of deep despair, God's abundance rushes to greet him. Peter's nets may feel as empty as the day Jesus crawled into his boat (Luke 5:5a), but we know that an abundant feast—around another charcoal fire—shall soon come (John 21:9-14).

⁷ Midrash, as a method of interpretation, focuses on what is said and unsaid in a text, using imagination to derive additional narratives to stand alongside the scripture as it is recorded.



Were You There? | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Acrylic painting on canvas with digital drawing

When we allow ourselves to be afraid and vulnerable, God’s love washes our wandering hearts. We washed hands during COVID-19, but God’s love showers us with calm, connection, and belonging amid upheaval. In the midst of fear and uncertainty, Jesus brought calm. He reminded us that God is with us. Jesus formed a community willing to follow. “Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (Psalm 25:1-10). In despair, we found hope; in fear, we found peace.

As we contemplate Luke 5:1-11, let us hold Demetri and others like him in our hearts. In crisis, *Love Beyond Walls* responded with compassion and love, and so, we too were found by the Divine, and the narrative of our lives became a testament to God’s grace.



Reflect

Dr. Lester writes, “Just as Jesus sought out the Galilean fishermen, we sought out people suffering on the streets.” In your own community, who is God seeking out? Who might God be calling you to seek out?

Read John 18:12-18; 19-27

From the Artist | Rev. T. Denise Anderson

I love portraiture and textiles, but until now, I've never married those two things. At the time of this piece's creation, I'd been doing a lot of sewing, particularly of stoles and vestments. When it came to choosing a medium for this collaboration, fabric would not let me go! It makes sense that, as we consider the interweaving of Peter's own story with that of the crucifixion, the medium for this piece would itself be woven. What must Peter have felt in those fateful moments of betrayal?

Here, I try to capture Peter's initial paralysis when he's first asked if he's one of Jesus' disciples. When Jesus was arrested, Peter had only begun to see the full extent of the empire's cruelty. "Would they do to me what they've done to him?" he must have asked himself. Maybe he could be so zealous for Jesus in the past because it was all an abstraction. Now, things have gotten frighteningly real.

From there, Peter descends into more fear—the kind that does not help us to be our best selves. I depict him going from stunned to defensive and then to belligerent, navigating the full spectrum of the fight, flight, or freeze responses to a perceived threat. By the time the cock crows as Jesus predicted (see if you can make out the bird's faint silhouette in the lower right-hand corner), Peter probably no longer recognizes himself. He must feel deflated and ashamed. At the end of his descent he is different, so I depict him differently from his three prior denials. He has much less fire in his countenance and can't even open his eyes to face what he's done.

The flames recall the fire where Peter warmed himself, but they also represent purification and illumination. Peter is forced to see himself as he truly is—as Jesus had already shown him. Who will he choose to be after this? When we are confronted with who we truly are, who will we choose to be after that confrontation? As we look at Peter's journey, it's my prayer that we will consider and meditate on our own.



River of Grace | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Acrylic painting on canvas with digital drawing



The Descent | Rev. T. Denise Anderson
Cotton, appliqué

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT **Wandering Heart: "Jesus sought me"**

Read Luke 5:1-11

From the Artist | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

"Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8)

As we begin Lent, this desperate confession introduces us to Peter, the disciple whose story—and wandering heart—we will follow for the next 7 weeks. Peter was a commercial fisherman based in Galilee. He was most likely bilingual, speaking Aramaic and Greek, culturally influenced by both Judaism and Hellenism. His business would have been under oppressive control of the Roman government, which arbitrarily imposed harsh rental and harbor fees, fishing licenses, and taxes on domestic fishermen. He was likely a blue-collar worker daily constrained by tides and taxes.

With this backstory in mind, we may hear Peter's response to the abundant catch of fish with fresh ears. There are so many messages within his protest: "I'm not prepared. I'm not capable. I'm not deserving. I'm not faithful enough. I'm not smart enough. I'm not the type you're looking for." Have you ever found yourself saying these things in response to a new calling, or to an abundant gift of grace?

In this image, the bursting nets transform into a river of grace meandering through the composition of Peter's life. The river pours into Peter's hands, but he can't quite grasp the fullness of this gift and calling quite yet, and so most of it rushes right by. As you will see in my other pieces for this series, this river of grace will wander alongside Peter throughout his life. The river represents how his journey with Christ begins and ends: with an abundant catch of fish. It's a visible reminder of the ways God's grace bends and turns and rushes to find each of our wandering hearts.

Despite Peter's resistance, grace seeks him out. His right thumb gets caught in the net. He can't escape the fact that God's goodness and mercy will pursue him all the days of his life (Psalm 23:6). The river rushes in. The question for Peter—and for each of us—is will he follow where it leads?



Rescue Me

I'd rather not need rescue.
I'd prefer a five-step plan
and a quick-fix solution.
I'd prefer stubborn insistence
over honest vulnerability,
because rescue requires
asking for help.
Rescue names
the rising water.
Rescue sees
the tired, treading feet.
Rescue feels
the swell of the wind
and the rain at a slant.
But when the floor falls out
and the world is on fire
and my small hands
cannot fix the hurt welling in me,
the prayer that slips out
is *rescue*
rescue
rescue me.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed

Read John 18:1-11

From the Artist | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

"In disarming Peter, Christ disarms all Christians."

—Tertullian (160-220 CE)

Pressed in by soldiers and religious leaders, surrounded by lanterns, torches, and weapons, Peter does what many of us would do. He responds to the threat of violence with violence. With sword in hand, he tries to take the unfolding narrative into his own hands and cuts off Malchus' ear. Jesus tells Peter to "put the sword back into its sheath" (John 18:11). This is the moment I wanted to capture in this image. I imagine a rush of emotions surge through Peter's body like a bolt of lightning. I imagine he feels the sting of shame after being admonished by his teacher for his violent actions. I imagine he feels the searing grief that comes with the realization that his teacher and friend will in fact die, and he is helpless to do anything about it—perhaps the most painful of all.

Peter had a choice. He could continue down the path of violence, fight the soldiers and religious leaders and protect Jesus from the inevitable, or he could yield, dropping his sword and surrendering to the cup that God has placed before his friend.

In the image, this choice is suspended in time. Is Peter releasing the sword and choosing the way of peace? Or is Peter about to take up the sword and choose the way of violence? On the left in the image, leaves from the garden's olive grove reach out to shade and comfort him. This is the way of peace. On the right, the soldiers are looming with the flames closing in around him. This is the way of violence.

Peter releases the sword as if it was on fire, as hot tears of shame, grief, and helplessness pour down his face.

Which way will we choose?

THE SECOND WEEK OF LENT

Wandering Heart: "Rescue me from danger"



Disarming Peter | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting



Scan to see the hymn
& sing along!

Sing
Into the Waters by Rev. Anna Strickland

Read
Psalm 22:23-31

Write
Who in your family, your community, and the world needs rescuing right now? Pray for those people today.

Handwriting lines for the writing prompt.

Read Matthew 14:22-33 | Psalm 22:23-31
Commentary | Dr. Terence Lester

In January 2017, a neighbor informed us that someone was digging through our dumpster at *Love Beyond Walls*. We came to know this person as Mark. I told the neighbor that we advocate for those experiencing homelessness, providing for people in need. She replied that she was contemplating calling the police. Our volunteers exchanged uneasy glances, sensing the stigma in the air.

Nevertheless, I ventured outside. I found Mark by the dumpster. I inquired if I could help. He replied, "I'm cold, and I haven't eaten in days. I was hoping to find something to eat." Mark held a business degree and had owned his own home. He was utterly hopeless, contemplating suicide. He added that he was crying out to God. We offered him shelter and support. God used Mark's courage to lift him. Mark became one of our most dedicated volunteers at *Love Beyond Walls*, and over time, emerged from homelessness. We even facilitated a reconnection with his children.

Mark's story reminds us that danger is not always physical. Sometimes, it manifests as despair. Just as Mark reached out to us in his darkest hour, we are called to reach out to Jesus in storms. The story of Peter walking on water and sinking isn't just a tale of doubt; it's a narrative of faith. When Peter steps out of the boat, he demonstrates remarkable courage and trust in Jesus. Only when he shifts his focus to the raging storm does he sink. Like Peter, we may sink amid life's challenges. However, as we are sinking, Jesus rescues us.

Sometimes, the danger is of our own making. Sometimes we sink simply because we had the courage to show up. Other times, we sink because we lose sight of what's crashing around us. Often we grapple with what has made us sink without realizing that Jesus focuses on how much he loves us. Jesus extends a rescuing hand—and his love is greater than whatever causes us to sink.

Jesus is the Rescuer. Ultimately, Mark's story demonstrates that God is near, not simply because we have doubted, but because we have had the faith to get out of the boat and start walking at the command of Jesus. I believe that God honors us and meets us in our lowest places.

Read John 13:31-38
From the Artist | Hannah Garrity

In this pulpit parament, drawn with ink on paper, Jesus looks up at the congregation asking, "Really?"

In my unique first glance at this story, looking through the eyes of Peter, I was floored by Jesus' judgment of Peter in this text (John 13:38). Jesus's response to Peter sounds harsh coming from a loving God. I think that that is why I was so surprised as I studied the scripture. So I looked deeper to see what Jesus is actually going through, to see where his perspective may be coming from. Trauma. With this lens, my fragile frustration with Jesus is *really* me centering myself. Jesus is constantly putting himself in harm's way and now he's heading toward the cross. Yet, I am still demanding him to be polite to me, not to call my bluff.

Recent research on ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences)⁵ has caught the attention of many educators and doctors. An amazing TED talk by Nadine Burke Harris⁶ breaks it down simply: a person's health predictors change when they are traumatized as a child. A doctor or an educator can better serve their patient or student with an awareness of their ACE score.

My frustration with Jesus unveils my impatience with being treated in a way I consider rude by a person with a high ACE score. My reaction is to push back, to not have sympathy and deference for the real difficulty he is going through.

I wonder in my daily life whose trauma I am still approaching ineffectively. How can I learn from Jesus' valid impatience with Peter's empty, well-meaning promises?

5 ACEs are traumatic childhood events that can lead to mental, physical, and behavioral health issues. You can learn more here: my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/24875-adverse-childhood-experiences-ace

6 "How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime," by Nadine Burke Harris. TEDMED. September, 2014. [ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime?language=en)



Really? | Hannah Garrity
Ink on paper

We can find hope and salvation, cry out to the Lord, as Peter did, and discover that Jesus has more faith in us than we have in ourselves. Peter's cry, "Lord, save me!" is an acknowledgment of need. What happens next is a beautiful revelation of our Savior's heart—rescue, not shame and guilt.

As we reflect on Psalm 22:23-31, which Jesus quoted from the cross and which speaks of all the earth praising God, let's remember that distress can lead to praise. When we are rescued, we can praise and give thanks to the Lord! The Lord reaches out when we cry out, guiding us safely through storms and tangibly being with us. May we have the courage to step out in faith, trusting in God's power and ability to rescue—not focusing on our doubts and fears, but on our courage to walk toward God. And sometimes God's power meets us—as it met Mark—when we take steps toward Jesus' command to "Come."



Reflect

When have you stepped out in faith? When have you had the courage to walk toward God in the midst of a storm?

Read John 18:1-27

Commentary | Dr. Karoline M. Lewis

After Jesus' arrest in the garden, Jesus is bound and taken to Annas and Caiaphas for questioning, while Peter simultaneously endures his own trial. Just as Jesus foretold, before the cock crows, Peter denies Jesus three times. But there is an important difference in John's Gospel when it comes to Peter's denial. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the question put before Peter is whether he knows Jesus. In the Gospel of John, the inquiry is about Peter's identity as a disciple: "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" (John 18:17) To this question, Peter responds twice, "I am not," a striking contrast to Jesus' self-identification as "I AM." The slave whose ear Peter cuts off, a relative of Malchus, says to Peter, "Didn't I see you in the garden with Jesus?" Peter denies that as well, even though the garden was a place of friendship, companionship, and protection, as Jesus often went there with his disciples (John 18:2). The last time Peter was in that garden, Jesus willingly went out of the garden, giving himself up to the authorities, laying down his own life as the good shepherd, leaving his sheep, his disciples, safely in the fold. In denying his discipleship, Peter is not only disavowing Jesus, but also his own identity and belonging, the intimate community he shared with his fellow disciples, and his role as one of Jesus' very own sheep. Peter renounces who he has been the last three years and who Jesus needs him to be, now and in the future.

A resounding "I am" in response to the question, "Are you one of Jesus' disciples?" comes with great responsibility. Peter will only realize this when Jesus asks him on the shore of the Sea of Galilee three times, "Do you love me?" (John 21: 15-17) During Jesus' passion, Peter could not yet say, "Lord, you know I love you" because the fullness of God's grace upon grace through Jesus had yet to be revealed. Sometimes we need to see more of the bigger picture to embrace the call to follow Jesus—and that is okay. Rather than chide Peter, maybe we accept those times when "feed my sheep" seems too great to bear—and yet Jesus promises to find us, his sheep, again and again.



Lift Off | Rev. Nicolette Peñaranda
Acrylic, ink, paper collage, and mixed media on canvas



Reflect

Are you one of Jesus' disciples? What responsibility comes with your answer?

Wandering Heart: "Prone to leave the God I love"



The Next Line

There are some truths that are like the sun,
 if you look at them too long they may burn you.
 You may never see the same again.
 And yet, nothing can grow without the sun.
 So we summon our courage
 and speak the truth of our lives.
 We sing, *prone to leave the God I love*.
 We let the honesty of those words crack our hearts
 in two.
 We admit it to our fight-or-flight, boomerang nature,
 and before the grief even begins to pass,
 God is there.
 God is turning toward us,
 closing the distance,
 inviting us to sing
 the next line of the song.

*Poem by
 Rev. Sarah Speed*

Read Matthew 14:22-33

From the Artist | Rev. Nicolette Peñaranda

There are no street lights in the ocean. I think about that often. Rarely do we think about how dark and mysterious the night is, even for a veteran fisherman. Nor do we take into consideration the movement of the wind and its roar rumbling off of the waves.

Throughout this painting, we see West African symbols: *Adinkrahene*, *Mako*, *Asase Ye Duru*, *Nyame Dua*, and *Mmusuyidee*.¹ Jesus, the divine, is greater than the limitations of the flesh, the fears we carry like the uncertainty of the water. The ever-present God protected Peter from drowning. We are invited to maintain a hopeful outlook and persevere.

I titled this piece *Lift Off* as a nod to the 2011 Jay Z and Kanye West (ft. Beyonce) song by the same title. There is something about the opening lines, "We gon' take it to the moon, take it to the stars, how many people you know can take it this far?" that lingers in my head. I think it pertains to how Peter must have felt walking on water toward Jesus. Who else was flying this high right then? Who else had dropped everything to live vagrantly with Christ? Before stumbling in his ways, there was something otherworldly happening, which brings me back to the stars.

Living in a metropolitan area, I don't get the luxury of stars but I like to imagine a world where the skies told their own stories. In *Lift Off*, the elements are like main characters, inspiring whimsical fantasy. Cut-out layered clouds build into the horizon of the sea. The forceful wind tunnel blows over the sinking foot of a probably panicking Peter. This is a moving piece that is meant to tell a story in any direction it is turned. Like the theme of this series, the viewer should feel like they are on a journey with Peter. *Lift Off* is intentionally dark with beautiful highlights of color and sparkle. It is because of the darkness that the colors shine bright. These two things are complimentary, not contrasting. The fear that entered Peter with the wind was most likely heightened because it was dark out. Without knowing exactly what was around him, Peter became vulnerable, thus causing him to reach out. The wonder of darkness exposes us and invites us to seek connection. We see that in the reaching hand gently entering the dark sky.

¹ Adinkra symbols originated from the Gyaman people of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Learn more about their meanings and significance here: adinkrasymbols.org



THE THIRD WEEK OF LENT

Wandering Heart: "Praise the Mount"

Praise the Mount

I have stayed quiet before.
I have held my tongue
while passing mountains.
I have slipped my hands deep into pockets,
despite the music that invites me to dance.
I have glimpsed a new moon and a new love
and have acted as if it was something other than
a complete, God-given miracle.
But not today.
Not today.
Today I will dance.
Today I will tap my toes all the way to heaven's gates.
Today I will point out every shade of gold
and periwinkle that we pass.
Today I will talk about my faith like we talk about the
weather—
early and unprompted, comfortable and unashamed.
Today I will tell you that God did such a good job
with freckles, willow trees,
and your entire being.
And I will not be embarrassed by my own conviction.
I will not swallow my praise.
I have stayed quiet before,
but not today.
Today I will sing.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed

MAUNDY THURSDAY Wandering Heart: "Streams of mercy"

Read John 13:1-20

From the Artist | Rev. Nicolette Peñaranda

Within the overall composition of this piece, we see the West African symbol,² *Aban*, which means fortress and demonstrates power and authority. *Aban*³ is the central image of *Golden Hour* and it is duplicated around the perimeter of the piece like a mighty fortress. The gold-plated vessel at the top represents the water Jesus uses to wash the disciples' feet. Around it are miniature *Mpuannum*,⁴ the five tufts of hair. The water drips directly down onto swollen feet, feet that bear no name. The section to the left of the vessel holds a tearful Peter. He refuses Jesus' hospitality and then backtracks when he learns the value of merciful water.

Across from the image of Peter we see the Eucharist. When orienting this piece in a diamond formation, the cup looks overflowing. But when the canvas is sitting as a square, the wine is tipping out of the chalice, dripping in unison with the vessel onto the *Aban*. The Eucharist is also one of the ways we receive Christ's mercy. Body and blood broken for us. The vessel of water is providing mercy. The swollen feet are receiving mercy. Peter is asking for mercy. The chalice has shed mercy.

There is a particular time of day we refer to as the "golden hour." This is when photographers love to take photos as the sun sits at a particular point, either after sunrise or before sunset, when daylight is redder and softer than when the sun is higher in the sky. When I reflect on the entire Passion story, this might just be the golden hour for the disciples. Jesus and his crew are tucked away, having their Passover meal. They are cleansing themselves and carrying on not realizing this will be the last moment of peace they will have. Sharing a meal with the people you love is one of the most glorious moments anyone could have—before what will end as a night of torture and betrayal. While Peter is tearful in this image, the overall vibe of *Golden Hour* is soft, rich. It feels like it is captured in marble as if nothing can destroy it.

2 Adinkra symbols originated from the Gyaman people of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Learn more about their meanings and significance here: adinkrasymbols.org

3 View the symbol and learn more about it here: adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/aban/

4 View the symbol and learn more about it here: adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/mpuannum/

Read Matthew 16:13-20 | Psalm 19

Commentary | Dr. Terence Lester

Before my journey with *Love Beyond Walls*, I encountered adversity and hardship. Raised by a single mother, I experienced childhood trauma and homelessness. We struggled to find stability. My formative years included gang involvement, depression, and running away. I was searching for somewhere I belonged, a place free from pain, judgment, and disconnection.

At seventeen, I was isolated and a high-school dropout. Then my life took an unexpected turn. As I left the school I had stopped attending, a man called out to me. An inexplicable force compelled me to approach him. He confirmed that he was unhoused. He asked me if I attended the school, and earnestly delivered words that would change my life forever: "Do not stop going to school, because one day you will be a leader." He continued, "You don't want to end up like me—homeless." It felt as though God was speaking directly to me, assuring me of his presence. It was a profound revelation, a moment of feeling truly seen. This motivated me to overcome my struggles, dedicate my life to the Lord, and serve those experiencing homelessness. It all began with a seed of revelation.

In Matthew 16:13-20, we encounter Peter at a crucial juncture in his relationship with Jesus. He has been found, rescued when sinking, and has now experienced a profound revelation. These pivotal moments lead him to declare who Jesus truly is and the purpose behind his coming.

We too are invited to reflect on where we have encountered God and seen God's hand at work. As we explore Peter's confession, we witness the blossoming of a seed that was sown throughout his journey. This confession and recognition of Jesus as the Messiah testifies to the transformative power of faith and God's constant presence. Themes of professing faith and seeing the divinity of Jesus, as well as unwavering devotion to God, all come to the forefront.

Peter, previously known as Simon, son of Jonah, symbolizes our own spiritual journeys. Just as he experienced moments of wandering, uncertainty, and questioning, we too must navigate the complexities of faith. Yet God is continually sowing seeds of revelation, patiently nurturing our understanding of God's presence.

Read John 13:1-20

Commentary | Dr. Karoline M. Lewis

On Jesus' last night with his disciples, the foot washing takes center stage. While the disciples and Jesus share a meal, in John's Gospel it is not the Passover meal and there is no institution of the Lord's Supper. John shifts the chronology of Jesus' death so that Jesus is crucified on the Day of Preparation for Passover at the same time the Passover lambs would have been slaughtered, to which John the Baptist has already testified, "Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) In the foot washing, Jesus shows his disciples once again his abundant love for them. Peter's question is more than apt: "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" After all, Jesus has just had his feet anointed with abundant perfume by Mary. We should be washing Jesus' feet! And yet, could it be that because Jesus has been extravagantly loved by Mary that he can now wash the feet of Peter, the one who will deny him, and Judas, the one who will betray him? It is from being loved himself that Jesus says to his disciples, "you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

While the foot washing is an act of serving one another, it is also an expression of love that sustains and encourages the disciples when Judas abandons both them and Jesus (John 13:30), when Peter's denial is foretold (13:36-38), and when hearing Jesus' words of farewell in the following four chapters (John 14-17). No wonder the disciples' hearts will be troubled (John 14:1), but in the foot washing, love and mercy have been poured out. They will need to hold on to this abundant love fiercely when they watch Jesus be arrested, tried, and crucified. Thinking about all of this, Peter's question sounds more like a plea: "Lord, please wash my feet." Because how can Jesus wash the feet of those who would betray him and those who would deny him? And how can we love one another as Jesus loves (John 13:31-35)? By having already been so lavishly and mercifully loved.



Reflect

When have you been lavishly and mercifully loved?
How did that expression of love sustain you?



Wandering Heart: "Streams of mercy"

With My Outside Voice

We've been taught
to wait our turn,
to ask politely—
we do not want to appear greedy.
We've been taught:
just a pinch of salt,
just a dash of sugar,
nothing in excess.
We've been taught:
raise your hand,
keep your voice down,
no talking in church.
We've been taught to
never make a scene,
but I simply cannot abide.
I am one part questions,
two parts hunger.
I am a million prayers
and deep hope
wrapped up in one.
I am famished and hopeful,
eager and humbled.
I am using my outdoor voice inside.
I am saying,
*Not just my feet,
but my head and my hands!*
I want to go where you go.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed*

Peter's confession is a reminder that faith is not stagnant but dynamic. It's a "mountaintop faith" experience, a moment of clarity, when we profess our devotion to God and acknowledge who God is in our lives. It's a declaration that God is near, guiding us along the path of revelation.

Let us reflect on our own spiritual journeys and consider the seeds of revelation in our lives. They shape our understanding of God and draw us closer to God. Let us echo Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. May our journeys be marked by the continuous growth of these seeds of revelation, leading to an unwavering devotion to our Heavenly Father. Just as Jesus affirmed Peter's confession, may we find affirmation in our faith, as God sees the best version of ourselves and continues to plant the seeds of revelation.



Reflect

What "seeds of revelation" has God planted in your life and faith journey?

Read John 12:12-16

From the Artist | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

In the Matthew, Mark, and Luke versions of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, two unnamed disciples follow Jesus' orders to retrieve a colt. In these accounts, the disciples actively participate in the parade, laying down their cloaks and singing praise. In contrast, John's version of this story provides minimal details and the disciples are hardly mentioned at all. However, the text does a unique thing: it breaks the fourth wall to tell us something important:

"His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered" (John 12:16).

Is Peter at the parade? Does he lay down his cloak and follow the others? Does he sing songs of loudest praise? Or is he lost in the cacophony of the crowds, confused by and afraid of what is taking place? Maybe he is thinking about the blur of events in the days just before: Lazarus raised from the dead, Jesus anointed in Bethany, the crowds knocking down their doors, the plot to kill Jesus and Lazarus swelling like a darkened, fast-approaching sky.

They didn't understand at first, but then they remembered.

This image attempts to visualize these two locations in time and space. On the left, Peter looks out from the palm procession—his eyes glazed over as he watches Jesus riding into the city where he will surely meet his death. As the crowds sing "hosanna!" for a new, soon-to-be-killed-king, the dissonance of the scene causes Peter to tremble—like a guitar string snapped suddenly mid-tune.

In the top right is Peter's mirror image. In this mirage, we glimpse the future. Peter stands aghast at the empty tomb, waves of hope and relief rushing through him like a river of grace, the remembering happening all at once—like a childhood song plucked from memory, like the refrain of a chorus that won't let you go: *it's true, it's true, thank God it's true.*



Who Do You Say That I Am? | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting

Read Matthew 16:13-20

From the Artist | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

I don't know if this was a moment of clarity for Peter, if he was regurgitating the answer he thought Jesus wanted to hear, or if he was trying to convince himself that dropping everything and following this man was worth it, but I imagine this was a breakthrough for Peter.

I wanted to capture this as a moment of seeing and being seen. Jesus sees him as more than Simon, a fisherman and son of Jonah, and renames him Peter, the blessed foundation through which his ministry would take root and continue to grow. Jesus sees Peter through the eyes of God.

Peter sees Jesus as more than a teacher and companion. He sees through the veil of confusion concerning Jesus' identity. He doesn't see him as the reincarnation of a former prophet, or another contemporary baptizer pointing the way. He names Jesus as the "anointed one," the one his people have so desperately longed for. Peter proclaims Jesus as Messiah and Son of the living God.

In this image I wanted to create a kaleidoscope of perception, imaging the ways Jesus is perceived in the context of this passage, like light broken down into a myriad of shapes and colors. In the gold rays of light Jesus' form is obscured by the metallic shine of God's glory. In the gray and earth-tone rays he is seen in monochrome. Each of the earth-tone rays holds a pattern on Jesus' clothing which represents a misunderstanding of who Jesus is. Starting on the left, honey, locusts, and baptismal waters misidentify him as John the Baptist. Within the next ray to the right, ravens, an empty chair, rain, and fires from the heavens misidentify him as Elijah. On the right, scales of justice and plants being uprooted and planted misidentify him as Jeremiah.

Through the middle of the image, there is a ray of light where the image comes into full color that holds this moment of clarity where Jesus and Peter truly see one another. In this ray, Peter's clothing holds symbols of his new identity: a rock upon which the Church will be built and keys to the kingdom. Jesus' clothing holds imagery—an oil jar and the light of the sun—representing the way Peter sees him as the Messiah and Son of the living God.



Then They Remembered | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Acrylic painting on canvas with digital drawing



Open Hands

We are born with the ability
to wrap our fingers around another,
to hold tight to what we know.
Maybe that's where the instinct comes from—
this clinging,
this sinking,
this holding on.
Maybe that's why Peter cries, "Never!"
when Jesus must leave.
From the very beginning
we've known how to hold tight.
So I pray:
open up my hands.
Uncurl my fingers
one by one.
Loosen the grip
that I hold unyielding.
Remind me that birds must fly
and children must grow
and leaves must fall.
And even though
we are born with the ability
to hold tight,
we can learn how to love
with open hands.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah Speed*

Read John 12:12-16

Commentary | Dr. Karoline M. Lewis

All four of the gospels record Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, with John's version being the shortest. John leaves out Jesus' instructions for his disciples to get a colt and bring it to him. Instead, Jesus finds his own donkey to fulfill the scriptures. Then the story reports, "His disciples did not understand these things at first" (John 12:16a). I imagine myself in the crowd feeling the same. I can picture the disciples in the crowd waving their palm branches, looking at each other and wondering, *Is there something these people see that we don't? What are we missing here?*

Misunderstanding is a common theme in John, and rightly so. We are not supposed to comprehend that God, the great "I AM," came to dwell with us in the flesh of a human body. And at this point in the story, it is not possible to grasp what Jesus' kingship is all about. Yet to come will be his arrest, trial, crucifixion, resurrection, and the promise of his ascension. The fullness of grace upon grace will only be realized once Jesus returns to the Father to prepare a dwelling place for us (John 14:2). No wonder the disciples could not understand as they watched Jesus ride by. I am not sure we would either.

"Then they remembered" (John 12:16b). Isn't that often how things work in life and in faith? As the saying goes, "hindsight is twenty-twenty." But John is not exactly clear as to what the disciples actually remembered. There is a kind of suspension of normal time on this Palm/Passion Sunday. We are looking forward to the events of Holy Week, yet we also know how the story ends, viewing all that happened through a resurrection lens.

"Then they remembered" is the Palm/Passion Sunday invitation to us. Like Peter and the disciples in the crowd waving their branches, we are also witnesses to the meaning of Jesus' ministry and his kingship. What will we remember about this day and about the week to come? Will our "hosannas" still ring out by Good Friday, or will the hard truths of the events we will witness silence our praise?



Reflect

When have you realized or remembered something in hindsight? What became clear in retrospect?

Read Matthew 16:21-23 | Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

Commentary | Dr. Terence Lester

It was one of the toughest nights in my life. I had just received the “Humanitarian of the Year” award from the National Urban League of Greater Atlanta for the work we do with *Love Beyond Walls*. The evening had ended around 11 p.m. after a celebration with friends. As we left, I casually said, “I’ll talk to you later. Be safe!” Little did I know how ironic those words would soon become. My wife Cecilia drove, and I went to sleep. Ten minutes later, I was jolted upright by Cecilia’s screams. We had narrowly escaped a car accident.

The car in front of us had come to an abrupt stop. The driver had become distracted by a child vomiting in the back seat and hit the brakes. Airbags deployed, and then I was on the ground. The impact of the airbag had driven me back into my seat and broken it. Moments later, the EMTs arrived and rushed me to hospital. The pain was indescribable. I discovered that my right hip and pelvis were fractured, and I suffered nerve damage. Emergency surgery followed to place a ten-pound rod in my leg to prevent it from crushing a vital artery.

It was a whirlwind of events. I had gone to receive an award and I ended up in hospital. Previously, I had found worth in my work and believed that God was with me. That belief came crashing down in a single, devastating moment that left me grappling with my faith. Have you ever experienced something like this, where life shatters and makes you question everything? We, too, can encounter upheaval and crisis, and our hearts may wander as we seek answers and meaning.

As I reflect on my journey, I’m reminded of a pivotal moment for Peter. Peter has just declared that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God—a mountaintop experience of unwavering faith. Yet, he immediately faces a reality that challenges his understanding of Jesus and faith itself. Jesus reveals the difficult path ahead—suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection. It seems incongruent with Peter’s vision of a triumphant Messiah who would establish an earthly kingdom. Peter instinctively seeks to avoid the hardship, grief, and struggle. This leads to a rebuke from Jesus: “Get behind me, Satan!” It’s a sharp reminder that sometimes our well-intentioned desires to protect and preserve can become stumbling blocks to fulfilling our calling.

Read Matthew 18:15-22

From the Artist | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

When I’m creating a mandala inspired by a text, I’m able to zoom out and see the bigger picture, and the image itself ends up looking like a bird’s eye view, which I think is a helpful perspective sometimes. In this mandala, I wanted to follow a person through the process of reproof, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration as Jesus describes in Matthew 18. In the center, a person is standing alone, isolated, with their arms crossed in a closed-off posture. If you’re sinned against, Jesus says to go and “point out the fault when the two of you are alone” (Matthew 18:15). When you move to the second ring of the mandala, there are pairs of people shaking hands and finding common ground—or at least attempting to. If this doesn’t work, then you are to bring more people (one or two more) together to provide counsel and witness. In the third ring of the mandala, two people are engaging with the closed-off person, sharing a way forward. In the next ring hyacinth flowers—which represent sorrow, regret, and forgiveness—stretch, bloom, and grow, bringing beauty into the now open arms of the people in the last ring of the mandala, who are embraced and woven into the community. The person from the center goes from being alone and closed-off to embraced and open.

When I was drawing the figures from the center out, it began to look like a dance. Is this the picture that grace paints? Forgiveness cannot happen in isolation and certainly neither can reconciliation nor restoration. The movement toward wholeness is the movement toward one another.

Perhaps craving more tangibility and practicality, Peter asks how many times he should forgive someone who has wronged him, and Jesus says, “Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times” (Matthew 18:22). This piece contains seventy-seven people and flowers to represent the abundance of grace that Jesus calls us into. The gold represents the divine presence of empathy, compassion, grace, and love throughout this dance from isolation toward community, from brokenness toward wholeness, and from guilt and shame toward freedom.



Seventy-seven Times | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting

Peter's faith journey, like my own, reminds us that faith doesn't always shield us from hardship. As we reflect on Peter's journey and the challenges of our own faith, let us remember that unraveling can lead to profound growth. Like Peter, we may have to face inconvenient truths and drop our preconceived notions. Jesus' response to Peter reminds us of the importance of our commitment to God's mission, even when it's difficult. May we learn from Peter and embrace the transformative power of faith.

Sometimes, it is by leaning into grief that we begin the journey of healing in our own lives and in our relationship with God. This is because grief isn't about fixing what has happened as much as it is about learning new ways to navigate the realities that cause us to feel disoriented. Let us set our hearts and minds upon God's grace, trusting that we are always guided by the unwavering love of our Creator, even in the midst of grief and unexpected suffering.



Reflect

When have you faced a hard truth, a reality that was difficult to accept? How did you respond?



Beseeching | Hannah Garrity
Ink on paper

It's about letting go of rigid limits and embracing the limitless possibilities of forgiveness and repair. Just as in Jamil's story, where one act of faith led to forgiveness and transformation, Jesus' teachings remind us of the power of forgiveness to make the community whole.

Peter's encounter with Jesus serves as a poignant reminder of the profound lessons embedded in forgiveness. Forgiveness is a boundless wellspring of grace. Repair is vital, both within ourselves and in our relationships with others. This story encourages us to embrace the transformative power of forgiveness and work toward reconciliation and healing. It inspires us to open ourselves to the expansive grace of God. By doing so, we can create a world where forgiveness mends what is broken, and where the beauty of repair shines through, illuminating our shared humanity.



Reflect

Who in your life needs forgiveness? Is there anything you need to forgive yourself for?

Read Matthew 18:15-22 | Psalm 119:9-16
Commentary | Dr. Terence Lester

One day, Pastor Wesley came to our office. He told us that a church in Madison, Georgia, wanted to donate a 30-passenger bus to *Love Beyond Walls*. His church had declined it, but he asked if we could use it. For some reason, I said yes. Within a few days, the church generously donated the bus to us.

Then, with the blessing of my family and our Board, I decided to live in a tent on top of the bus for 30 days during the freezing winter. I wanted to raise awareness about this bus and to transform it into Atlanta's first mobile makeover unit. I wanted to highlight the fact that the people we serve lack basic amenities like running water and grooming services. I told myself, "This work is too important to let the flame die out." Word spread, and many showed up to help us transform the bus.

We reached out to local barbering schools and met Jamil, who was 27 and had just earned his license. He volunteered at *Love Beyond Walls* almost every week. One day, I asked him why he volunteered. Jamil replied, "My dad is unhoused and I haven't seen him since I graduated 10 years ago. I don't know where he is, and I'm just hoping that one day I'll run into him."

Jamil ended up giving his father a makeover on the streets. His dad had no idea that his son had become a barber, but it became a turning point for him. He entered a program, graduated from it, found work as a chef, and now has his own apartment. Forgiveness happened through an act of faith on Jamil's part. His father wasn't there for 10 years, but Jamil's desire to repair the relationship remained strong.

In Matthew 18:15-22, Jesus teaches about community and repair. Peter, eager to learn, asks him a follow-up question. Jesus gives an expansive answer, emphasizing the abundance of forgiveness. This story shows the importance of asking questions and expanding our faith, especially when we're comfortable not having all the answers and we're open to seeing the world in more nuanced ways.

Jesus' response to Peter's question about forgiveness highlights the ambiguous math of grace. Peter learns about abundant grace.

Read Matthew 16:21-23
From the Artist | Hannah Garrity

"God forbid it!" says Peter to Jesus (Matthew 16:22). In this image, Peter beseeches Jesus to avoid the cross, to not let the prophecies become reality.

After ten years in ministry, I work in a church for the first time. In this text, I feel Jesus speaking directly to me: "You are a hindrance to me, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Matthew 16:23). This is exactly where frustration surfaces for me in my amazing church job. It is when I have set my eye on human things. I worry about the budget. I worry about the email. I worry about the building. So why am I so focused on human things? And the negative ones, at that?

Because I'm human. Because these things matter. But not if I miss the grandeur of this incredible organization sharing the expansive love of God!

With every brush stroke in this ink painting, the humanity of Peter's face deepens, his expression clarifies. He cannot let his beloved friend be murdered. He worries about human things. How weighty and legitimate those things feel. Jesus seems free of those human worries. He focuses with confidence on the path ahead, though Peter's concern causes him to falter.

Perhaps we can each be free of human concerns as well... However, that feels like a pipe dream, and Jesus knows it: "Get behind me, Satan" (Matthew 16:23). He does not blame Peter. Instead, he calls out Satan from within his friend. In doing so, he offers us a much needed reminder to refocus. Thanks be to God.

