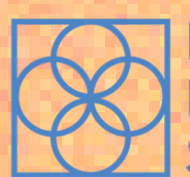


Designed for worship, study, and action, this resource equips faith leaders and communities to resist injustice and build a movement for abundance, dignity, and liberation for all.

2026 Lenten Devotional

Struggle & Lament

with Freedom Church of the Poor



NEW
DISABLED
SOUTH

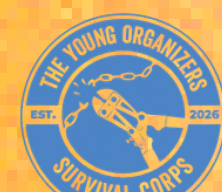


NATIONAL UNION
OF THE HOMELESS

La Iglesia
del Puebl

Freedom Church
of the Poor

FREE
FAMILIES



United
Workers

REPENTANCE & REDEMPTION

The Season of Struggle and Lament with the Freedom Church of the Poor

2026 - Feb. 18 (Ash Wednesday) - April 5th (Easter Sunday)

The season of Struggle and Lament (Lent & Easter) is a time to remember Jesus' ministry and how it ultimately led to direct confrontation with the dominant forces of his time. For Christians, it is a time to call for individual and collective repentance (turning away) from the violence and destructive ways of our world and to recommit (redemption) to following a new-old way that is built around a commitment to justice and abundance for all of creation. The emphasis during this season is not on personal shame and sinfulness, but confessing and turning away from a world of violence and death, and committing together to struggle for the world of abundance God promises.

This year, we lament a society where hundreds of thousands die each year from poverty. Where a pandemic exposed whose lives are deemed expendable. Where tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed and countless more endure hunger, displacement, and siege. Where cuts to Medicaid and other lifelines threaten the lives of our neighbors. Where the state continues to take human life in our streets with near total impunity, most recently in Minneapolis and across the country, where federal immigration enforcement operations have escalated, including fatal shootings and mass arrests by ICE and border agents that have shaken communities and sparked protest and grief.

And where right now, families are being detained – children locked away, parents torn from loved ones, and family detention centers like Dilley standing as monuments to a system that cages and expels people seeking safety.

These are not accidents.

They are policy choices.

They are the wages of systemic sin.

This year, we lift up the [Free Families](#) campaign – anchored by the faith engagement working group of the National Coalition to End Family and Child Detention and the Kairos Center for

Religions, Rights and Social Justice – to declare that detention and deportation will not become normal.

We refuse silence.

We refuse numbness.

We refuse letting our neighbors disappear without resistance.

In this Lenten season, we gather in the spirit of repentance and redemption to remind one another that every life bears sacred worth—and that we belong to one another.

Repentance - In Greek, *meta-noia* - to change one's mind, or in Hebrew, *teshuvah* - turning back. In both words there is this sense of turning away from something false and life-taking, back toward the truth and that which helps life thrive - God.

Redemption - In Latin, *redemptio* - to buy back or ransom. Turning towards God in a world that has turned away from God will not be easy, neither on a personal or a social level. It will mean confrontation with a system that is not of God, a lying, deceptive system that hides and diminishes the suffering of our people, that lies - saying war and violence and the supremacy of a few will lead to peace and prosperity for all. Indeed a sacrifice, a ransom will need to be paid in order to turn us toward and keep us turned to God. The ways of the world, as they are, where the few possess the resources of life and decide who receives those resources, who dies, who lives, who thrives and who suffers, contradict the will of God. Redemption will be active and ongoing, meeting constant resistance. It is a state of being steadfast leaders - clear, committed, connected, and competent.

How to use this resource

This guide is divided up into eight sections, one section for each of the 7 weeks of the Struggle and Lament season, including one extra section for Ash Wednesday. Use them as study guide for your community's leaders, as a template for worship services, as a resource for planning and carrying out public actions, and as a guide for keeping ourselves and our communities turned toward the sacred and in the struggle for justice and liberation of our people.

**Note: This resource draws primarily from the account of Jesus' last week as it is written in the Gospel of Mark and also borrows elements of the analysis presented in "[Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Final Days in Jerusalem](#)," by Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg.*

Freedom Church of the Poor Mission Statement

The Freedom Church of the Poor is a spiritual and political home for movement leaders. We believe in the fundamental dignity and value of all life and in a world of abundance where all can thrive. We gather as a community of faith to support and care for each other. We commit to realizing the abundant world God promises by identifying, developing, and uniting leaders who will build a movement to end poverty led by the poor. In this community and through our commitment to this struggle we also seek to re-discover and share a vision and practice of religion that is rooted in truth, justice, and love.

Freedom Church of the Poor Season Statement - Struggle and Lament

Our faith traditions and the Bible lift up expressions of longing, mourning, even anger at the way things are. Over 700 people die every day in the United States due to poverty. Millions of people in the U.S. die each year from inadequate healthcare. Crises of pandemics, state sanctioned violence, storms and other disasters disproportionately affect the poor and people of color. In the richest country in human history, there are 140 million people who are poor or one emergency from economic ruin. These are our people, our leaders, our families and we must mourn and wail and cry out to God for justice. The season of “Struggle & Lament” parallels the season of Lent in many Christian traditions and, also, is a season in which the poor and dispossessed lament our struggles and call for the repentance of those who pursue policies and systems that are killing us.

Additional Resources:

- Full Playlist of Freedom Church of the Poor’s 2025 Holy Week reflections <https://bit.ly/HolyWeekReflections25>
- Free Families Resources (prayers, actions, songs, and many more resources for resisting and building community in these times of crisis) <https://bit.ly/FreeFamiliesToolkit>
- [We Pray Freedom: Liturgies and Rituals of the Freedom Church of the Poor](https://weprayfreedom.org) and weprayfreedom.org (check out Lenten Resources on the [Liturgical Calendar](#))
- [A Matter of Survival: Organizing to Meet Unmet Needs and Build Power in Times of Crisis](#) by Shailly Gupta Barnes and Jarvis Benson (<https://bit.ly/AMATTEROFSURVIVAL>)

Week 1: ASH WEDNESDAY

Framing

In mainstream Christian Ash Wednesday Services, the ashes used to anoint the forehead of the parishioners are ashes used from the previous year's Palm Sunday. The ashes are meant to represent one's penance when entering into the season of Lent, reminding people that they will return to dust without God, and to dust they will return.

Here at Freedom Church of the Poor, we reject a doctrine of sin that teaches us that we are inherently worthless, incapable, or innately bad. Too often this doctrine is used to make us feel like we are not worthy to be leaders, teachers, or live a full and meaningful life. Yet, in following The Way, we hold onto Jesus' mandate of building God's Kingdom ON earth as it is in heaven, and we commit to living and experiencing God's kingdom here, now.

At Freedom Church of the Poor, we believe that we are all worthy children of God, and thus we are worthy to live in a system that treats us like Children of God. To us, the ashes of the Palm leaves from Palm Sunday reminds us not of our sin, but about the story of a revolutionary leader entering the capital city of Jerusalem in the final week of his organizing drive, and of his life. Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was an act of civil disobedience that directly countered the Roman Procession into Jerusalem that was happening at the same time. Entering Jerusalem on a donkey, surrounded by poor folks from Galilee and beyond, Jesus was coming into Jerusalem to directly confront a system of denomination. So, at Freedom Church of the Poor, the ashes on Ash Wednesday remind us of past struggles for justice, bringing forth the legacy and lessons of our ancestors. Today the ashes mark their blessings on us today as we proudly and boldly re-commit to the struggle for justice and dignity for all.

Song:

The Cross, by Prince with Steff Reed - <https://bit.ly/TheCross-Reed>

As we enter Ash Wednesday, we're often taught to see the cross only as a symbol of personal suffering or private redemption. But the cross was first and foremost a tool of empire, a public instrument of terror used to enforce domination and silence those who threatened the powers of their day.

Tonight, when we look at the cross, we're invited to remember the many crosses our communities are carrying right now – crosses born of poverty, racism, militarism, detention, and systems that profit from suffering. These are not accidents. They are the work of empire.

Lent calls us not to glorify this kind of suffering, but to reject it — to refuse the cross of empire and, like Jesus, recommit ourselves to building a world rooted in dignity, justice, and liberation. As we listen to

"The Cross," may it open us to that truth, and to the courage it takes to choose life over domination, and love over empire.

Anointing Ritual

Speaker 1: Now, we ask folks to grab the olive oil that you brought with you for tonight's service.

Olives, olive branches, and olive oil have had deep meaning and have been used in ritual for generations. Olives and olive branches are symbols of peace and a symbol of life and divine presence. Tonight, in the place of ashes, we will ask folks to cross themselves with a drop of oil, connecting you to each other in this sacred space, and the thousands of ancestors before us who have struggled and lamented towards a different kind of world. Oil has often been used in the process of anointing, where individuals are anointed with an oil that reminds them of God's presence in their lives, and their commitment to the Way of Jesus and God.

Speaker 2: Now, we will move into a communal imposition of the ashes using the oil, and we'd like to invite each of you to come on screen, if you are able. Also, if you could all please raise your hand by using the raise hand option on zoom, this will help us keep track of who has gone. After receiving your blessing, please cross yourself with your olive oil, and please lower your virtual hand so we know you've gone.

Speaker 1: [I] will start by calling on someone, then that person calls on someone else. We will call on each other, reminding one another that The Way has been revealed to each and every one of us, and that we are all agents of God striving to transform this world. We invite you to think about how you will commit to *The Way* this season while you cross yourself with your oil; after the ritual we will have some time as a large group to share some of our reflections. How will you commit to The Way this season?

Person 1: [name] the Way has been revealed to you. You are an agent of God's mercy for transformation.

[nombre] el Camino te ha sido revelado. Eres un agente de la misericordia de Dios para la transformación.

Speaker 2: Close in prayer - Gracious God, we close out this service with a prayer that begins with gratitude – gratitude for you, God, and how you move in our lives, shaping us and calling us closer to you. We also give gratitude for each other. And thank you God for each and every person in this room, and thank you God, for those who wanted to be in this space but couldn't

be here tonight, and thank you God to our beloved siblings who have passed into the next life. Thank you, God, for the gifts that every one of us bring here to each other, and thank you God for the commitment that we all show to each other and to this movement.

We know, God, that we are in troubling times, and we know the Way we must follow is not always easy. It can feel scary, isolating, and difficult. And yet we know God that by following The Way, it is the only way that the true light and love of God will be revealed to us all. And so we ask you God, for strength, love, and courage every single day. We ask that you put yourself on our hearts and minds every morning we wake up, and every night that we go to sleep. May you hold and walk with each and every one of us on this path, and may you hold and walk with those who aren't here tonight, those who are in hospitals, in prisons, in war-torn countries, in tent cities, and anywhere where we are crying out for the love and courage of our God.

In this season of Struggle & Lament, hear our cry, God. Hear our cries as they take our homes, our children, and livelihoods. Here our cry, God, as we lament those that we have lost too soon to poverty and violence. Hear our cry, God, as we struggle against systems and oppressors that feel too mighty or strong to defeat. And hear our cries God as we also cry out for justice. Hear us as we come together as a movement to fight for one another, care for one another, and remind us all that no matter who we are or where we come from, we are beloved children and leaders of God.

In this season, God, open our minds, hearts, and spirits to you. Reveal yourself to us in the moments of pain and fear, but also in the moments of joy, courage, and celebration of our strength for we know that when we fight together, we are fierce and strong.

Everyday we grow, God. Help us all as we continue to grow and change into the leaders, fighters, and thinkers we were meant to be. Give us grace, God, for our mistakes and shortcomings, and help us to give that grace to ourselves and the leaders around us as we all are on a path of learning. Never let us forget God, the community and church right here as we grow and change together, and help us God to turn to one another for love, grace, encouragement, and hope.

And finally God, in this sick society, we ask that you deliver us, Oh God, from this season into the next. May we remember that everyday and every moment to do your will is a blessing. We lift our hearts and hands towards you as the never ending work of justice and love continues.

Additional Ritual: Imposition of the Ashes By Rev. Pat Dupont

<https://bit.ly/AshWedWPF-PDF>

Song:

Never Again, Para Nadie, by emet ezell. Shared by Joshua Blaine

<https://bit.ly/NeverAgainParaNadie>

Never Again Para Nadie was written by poet and songcatcher, emet ezell, the night before a big Never Again Action and Cosecha march in Boston the summer of 2019. The organizers expected a few hundred to show up but more than double that number turned out and nearly a thousand marched through the streets that day singing this song all the way to the ICE detention center to protest family separation and child detention.

We've got ancestors at our backs
We've got generations forward
We've got land and spirit in our bones
Never again para nadie
Never again free Palestine

Additional Resource: Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis for the Unbound Lenten Series

<https://bit.ly/UnboundAshWed>

Week 2: Palm Sunday

Text: Mark 11:1-11

Songs:

Liberation Today, Adapted by Min. Ciara Taylor, Pauline Pisano, Steff Reed and Min. Dr. Charon Hribar of Songs in the Key of Resistance

<https://bit.ly/LiberationToday>

This song was adapted from a traditional folk song, Bele Mama. Likely of Cameroonian origin, it's been passed down through oral tradition. "Bele Mama," translates to "Call Mother" in the Oroko language of Cameroon, referring to calling one's mother to join a celebration. The song has been adapted in movement spaces to be a calling for liberation. In the context of Palm Sunday, we use this song to call our community into the work of building a movement for liberation.

Hey na na, hey na na, hey na na yeah...

You only get what you're organized to take

Hey na na, hey na na, hey na na yeah...

Liberation today

Hey na na, hey na na, hey na na yeah...

I need you to survive

Hey na na, hey na na, hey na na yeah...

We need to organize

Hey na na, hey na na, hey na na yeah...

You only get what you're organized to take

We Get There Together, Josh Blaine <https://bit.ly/WeGetThereTogether>

Joshua Blaine wrote this song in 2022 as part of a We Cry Justice artists collective project and was inspired by Daniel Jones's chapter from We Cry Justice, "A Mixed Multitude." He also drew

from the poem by Aurora Levins Morales, “Red Sea,” in which she calls on the lessons from the Passover story to ask us: What happens this time if we all cross together?

No one is getting left behind this time
No one is getting left behind
No one is getting left behind this time
We get there together or never get there at all

Summary/Key Themes

- Jesus enters Jerusalem on the Sunday before the Jewish celebration of Passover for a pre-planned subversive political demonstration.
- The counter-procession he leads is a challenge to the imperial procession, which is overseen by the Roman governor (Pontius Pilot) as a way to assert Roman domination and prevent unrest that often arose during Passover when the people retold the story of liberation from Pharaoh’s Egypt.
- The counter-procession puts forth the leadership/kingship of Jesus and the poor, which is defined by peace and prosperity achieved through, truth, justice, and love. It is a direct challenge to the Kingship of Rome/Caesar and its use of violence to control and dominate.
- The crowds recognize Jesus as a different kind of Messiah (anointed leader), one who challenges Roman authority and its domination system, the Pax Romana, which devalues life, limits who prospers, and seeks “peace” through violence and death.

Litany: A Litany of Hosanna and a Cry for Justice with Min. Kelly Smith and Rev. Dr. Jessica Williams in *We Pray Freedom* <https://bit.ly/PalmSundayWPF-PDF>

Prayer: "God who sides with the poor and marginalized, as Jesus entered Jerusalem, a king of peace, help us to follow in His footsteps. May we reject violence and domination, and instead embrace love and seek justice in all we do. Teach us to challenge the powers of oppression in our world, and bring your kingdom of peace to life in us. Amen."

Reflection: Min. Tammy Rosing, Put People First! PA & the National Union of the Homeless (Lancaster, PA), <https://bit.ly/RosingReflection3-9-25>

Discussion/Action Prompt: Which “way” are we following? What is the “way of empire” in our times? What would it mean to follow the way of Jesus in these times? What would provoke

the empire in the way Jesus' Palm Sunday procession did? What stories of liberation can we draw on the way Jesus and the disciples used Passover and the Exodus story?

Song:

Faith Calls Us to Love Out Loud, by the Peace Poets + Green Faith. Adapted by Songs in the Key of Resistance, <https://bit.ly/FaithCallsUsSKOR>

The original version of this song was written for stopping fossil fuel extraction and remixed by The Peace Poets and Songs in the Key of Resistance (SKOR) for Free Families campaign. It is a public declaration that our faith is shaped by love, freedom, and justice, not by empire, domination, or control. It is a reminder that faith must be lived and sung out loud.

Faith calls us to love out loud
Spirit speaks we hear the sound
Of all creation rising now
To free our families, we're freedom bound
For all our children, Freedom now!

Additional Resources:

Reflection on the Plagues: Becca Schuchat, Freedom Shul of the Poor
<https://bit.ly/PlaguesFreedomShul>

A Palm Sunday Liturgy with We Pray Freedom
<https://bit.ly/PalmSundayLiturgyWPF>

Week 3: Turning Over Tables

Text: Mark 11:12-19

Summary & Key Themes:

- The day after the Palm Sunday procession (Monday) Jesus and the disciples return to the Temple in Jerusalem for more acts of protest and resistance.
- The disciples ride into Jerusalem teaching along the way. They arrive in the morning to ensure maximum impact of their demonstration.
- At the temple complex Jesus drives out the merchants and money changers. This is a symbolic act of shutting down the temple system, which had become a place of exploitation rather than worship.
- The Chief priests and scribes (elite religious and political leaders) saw that the “crowd” was spellbound by Jesus’ message and start to look for a way to have him killed, because they are afraid.
- Jesus and disciples, leave Jerusalem and return to Bethany (house of the poor).

Songs:

Set It Off, adapted and performed by Rev. Leslie Oliver <https://bit.ly/SetItOff-FCOP>

Based on Rev. Erica Williams’ chapter “Jesus Came to Set It Off” in We Cry Justice, this song centers Jesus as a poor, brown-skinned Palestinian Jew and a freedom fighter. His ministry challenged empire, stood with the oppressed, and modeled a faith grounded in radical love, revolutionary compassion, and speaking truth to power.

We Are Not Afraid, by the Peace Poets

<https://bit.ly/ImNotAfraid-PPC>

“We Are Not Afraid” by the Peace Poets is an anthem of courageous, nonviolent resistance, echoing the spirit of Jesus’ return to Jerusalem after the Palm Sunday procession. Like Jesus and the disciples entering the city at dawn to maximize the impact of their protest, the song carries the steady rhythm of a movement rising together with purpose. Its refrain — “we are not afraid, we will live for liberation, ’cause we know why we are made” — mirrors the boldness of Jesus driving the merchants and money

changers from the Temple, a symbolic shutdown of a system that had turned worship into exploitation.

Reflection: Dan Jones, Freedom Shul of the Poor (Jeremiah 7, what is the “house of the Lord”?) <https://bit.ly/JonesReflection3-16-25>

Prayer: "God of justice, cleanse our hearts and our institutions. Help us to see when our faith is being exploited for power or profit. May we work toward a world where all people are treated with dignity, and where our worship reflects the love and justice you desire. Amen."

Discussion/Action Prompt: What system or structure of oppression in our world today needs to be “cleansed,” disrupted, and/or transformed? What acts might provoke people to see this? What prevents the people(crowd) from seeing it and being moved? What are the new ways/acts of resistance that are called for in our times?

Additional Resource: *A Prayer from an Immigrant*, Rev. Raphael Esparza, CP, Passionist Missionary, Birmingham, AL
<https://bit.ly/ImmigrantPrayer>

Week 4: Battle For the Bible

Text: Mark 11:20-13:37

Summary & Key Themes:

- Tuesday is a **very full day** - 115 verses
- Went back again to stay the night in Bethany (house of the poor)
- On their way back they pass by the withered fig tree and compare it to Jerusalem, which is not bearing fruit, not giving life.
- Jesus enters the temple (not the inner sanctuary) and begins teaching and is engaged and challenged by the chief priests, scribes, and elders. This is during Passover, so likely very crowded.
- Jesus tells the parable of the tenants - the vineyard is Israel - tenants are the authorities of Jerusalem/Israel/Rome. God will judge them for not caring for God's creation, God's people. The stone that was rejected will be the cornerstone of a new way, new leadership poised to emerge - leadership of the poor.
- Herodians and Pharisees (conservative Jewish movement) ask Jesus about taxes to Caesar, raising questions of authority. Jesus asks them for a Denarius, which many Jews wouldn't carry because of the prohibition of images/idolatry. Denarius has an image of Caesar and an inscription that says Caesar is God. Exposes these leaders as idolatrous, and reminds people that all belongs to God. Leviticus 25:23 - "we are all tenants of God's creation."
- Next Jesus engaged by the Sadducees, Jewish sect that believed there was no afterlife, no resurrection. Also only accept the Torah, not the Prophets. Mainly high priests and elite families. Sadducees raise the custom of a wife being passed to the husband's brothers if the husband dies. Pose the question, "who will be married to the wife in the afterlife?" Jesus counters the trap by emphasizing that God's kingdom is about life, not death, not about what happens when we die. "God is God not of the dead, but God of the living"
- Widow gives all she has to the temple, modeling discipleship. Not that we give and then the church saves us, but lifting up the authority and leadership of the poor and dispossessed.
- Elites continue to challenge Jesus, What is the greatest of God's commandments (What is the character of God?). Jesus replies with the traditional Jewish *shma* - love god with all your heart. (Everything belongs to god, soul, strength, joy, suffering) and adds, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Prayer: "Lord, your teachings challenge the systems of power and privilege. May we hear your call to live with justice, mercy, and humility. Help us to confront what is wrong in the world and stand up for those who are marginalized and oppressed. Guide us to seek the kingdom of God in all we do. Amen."

- *A Prayer Train for Tired, Angry Ones* by Laura Jean Truman from the book "A Rhythm of Prayer" <https://bit.ly/TiredAngryPrayer>

Songs & Poetry:

They Didn't Know We Were Seeds!, with Rev. Savina Martin, National Union of the Homeless
<https://bit.ly/MinMartinPoem3-23-25>

None Of Us Are Free, by Arnaé Batson with Songs in the Key of Resistance (SKOR)
<https://bit.ly/PreviewNoneOfUsSKOR>

Arnaé Batson's "None of Us Are Free," inspired by Fannie Lou Hamer, echoes Jesus' confrontations in the crowded temple, exposing unjust power and lifting up the poor. Like the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone, the song proclaims collective liberation: we are all God's tenants, and none are free until all are free.

Reflection: Rev. Alba Onofrio, Soulforce - preaching on how we can be like Jesus, "as cunning as serpents and as innocent as doves." <https://bit.ly/RevOnofrioReflection3-23-25>

Discussion/Action Prompt: How is the Bible and religion used to support and justify empire and systems of injustice and violence in our time? Eg. How has the greatest commandment, "to love your neighbor as yourself," been twisted/hidden to justify the current terrorization of our immigrant community in the US?! What are some of the common cultural and religious texts and ideas that keep us divided and subject to the rule of the elites? How can we challenge these? Who is best positioned to make these challenges?

Week 5: Discipleship

Text: Mark 14:1-11

Summary & Key Themes:

- Now just two days before the beginning of Passover.
- Pressure is starting to build, authorities making moves against Jesus as they see the people responding to his message, waking up.
- Jesus and other disciples/movement leaders gather for a meal at a leper's house, in Bethany (house of the poor).
- While there an unnamed woman anoints Jesus, some of the disciples interpret this as waste and point to better use of the money, to feed the poor.
- Jesus counters them and lifts up the widow as a model of belief and discipleship, not because of her worship of Jesus, but of the way he is teaching.
- The anointing is also an anointing before death, acknowledging what is at stake in following this way, direct confrontation with Jerusalem and the violent power of Empire.

Prayer: "Gracious God, we know that you have sent us here not to temporarily fix problems of injustice, but to rebuild this system and society so that all are cared for in the abundance of your love and grace. Help us as we face the intense oppression and suppression that comes from building out your kingdom here on earth, and help us God to develop ourselves and others to face this oppression with courage, humility, and boldness. Guide us to live in the example of leaders like the woman in Bethany in all that we do. Amen."

Oración:

"Dios misericordioso, sabemos que no nos has enviado aquí para arreglar temporalmente los problemas de injusticia, sino para reconstruir este sistema y esta sociedad para que todos sean provistos en la abundancia de tu amor y gracia. Ayúdanos mientras enfrentamos la intensa opresión y represión que surgen al construir tu reino aquí en la tierra, y ayúdanos, Dios, a desarrollarnos a nosotros mismos y a otros para enfrentar esta opresión con valentía, humildad y determinación. Guíanos para vivir siguiendo el ejemplo de líderes como la mujer en Betania en todo lo que hacemos. Amén."

Songs:

Mi Compromiso, By Oona Valle, Songs in the Key of Resistance (SKOR) and the Peace Poets

<https://bit.ly/CantoMiCompromisoSKOR>

This is a song of commitment shaped by embodied love. It reminds us that discipleship is not passive belief but active accompaniment—standing with one another in radical love and collective care as we struggle together for justice in the present moment.

Canto mi compromiso
De caminar contigo,
Porque tu vida es sagrada para mí,

Con el viento grito,
Porque te necesito
Porque tu vida es sagrada para mi....

Por todas las familias
Chinga la Migra
Porque tu vida es sagrada para mi!

Love, You Are a Part of Me, written and performed by Rev. Chris Wylie aka DJ Pastor Rock
<https://bit.ly/LovePartOfMeFCOP>

Reflection:

- **Yolanda Torres, *La Iglesia del Pueblo***, Faith and the Unnamed Woman's Anointing of Jesus <https://bit.ly/TorresReflection3-30-25>
- **Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, *Kairos Center***, The Poor Will Be With Us Always? <https://bit.ly/RevTheoharis3-30-25>

Discussion/Action Prompt:

- A movement becomes a threat when it wakes people up and moves them to act together against the Powers that Be. Who/what is helping to wake us up today?
- What are the risks to waking up today?
- In this part of the story Jesus teaches how charity will never end poverty, that we need to build a movement. This means resistance and protest, but also building leaders, community, and power. How are we doing this today?
- In Jesus' story the poor and dispossessed are the agents of change and leaders of the movement to end poverty. How do we understand this leadership in our times?

Benediction:

Free Families Promise

We are alive - **we were made for these times**
We are the people - **all of us are powerful, all of us are equal**
We are community - **when some attempt division, we build unity**
We are compassion - **when our people are in pain, we take action**
We are the movement - **for every single human**
We have come to love - **we have come to win**
we have come to heal - **we have come to sing**
Because we are the song - **where we all belong**
We are ocean - **falling and rising as one**
We are sky - **our eyes shining with sun**
We are land - **abundant for everyone**
Because Liberation - **Is the destiny of creation**
We are a promise of protection - **for dignity**
For justice - **for peace**
For all our families - **to be free**
For today, for tomorrow - **forever after**
We are living our commitment - **to ALL our children's laughter**

La Promesa de Familias Libres

Estamos vivos - **fuimos hechos para estos tiempos**
Somos el pueblo - **todos somos poderosos, todos somos iguales**
Somos comunidad - **si nos dividen, construimos aún más unidad**
Somos compasión - **cuando nuestra gente sufre, tomamos acción**
Somos el movimiento - **por cada ser humano**
Venimos a amar - **venimos a ganar**
Venimos a sanar - **venimos a cantar**
Somos la canción - **a la que todos pertenecemos**
Somos océano - **nos caemos y levantamos juntos**
Somos cielo - **nuestros ojos brillando sol**
Somos tierra - **con abundancia para todos**
Porque la liberación - **es el destino de la creación**
Somos una promesa de protección - **por la dignidad**
Por la justicia - **por la paz**
Por la libertad y la unidad - **de todas nuestras familias**
Por hoy, por mañana - **por los siglos y los siglos**
Vivimos nuestro compromiso - **por la risa de TODOS nuestros niños**

Week 6: The Kingdom of God

Text: Mark 14:12-72

Summary & Key Themes:

- Passover begins. Disciples gather for a meal and remember their ancestors' story of liberation (Exodus from Pharaoh's Egypt).
- Known as "maundy" Thursday, 'maundy' translates to 'farewell' - the final message of Jesus before he is executed by the state.
- The meeting place was prepared by associates who supported Jesus and the disciples.
- The importance of gathering around the meal - echoes Jesus' ministry of making sure people have enough food, meeting material needs.
- Everyone is welcomed at this table in contrast to the exclusion and supremacy of Empire.
- Prayer, song, ritual are integral elements part of the gathering
- Jesus picks up on the theme of what it will take to be a disciple, to follow the way.
- Jesus is betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, abandoned by the rest of the 12 - the movement had not grown strong enough and need to disperse, hide, regroup.
- Jesus is judged and condemned by the power and authority of the time, "high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes"

Song:

We Are Welcome Here, by the Peace Poets and Canticle Farms <https://bit.ly/WeAreWelcomeAya>

This song was written with Canticle Farm in Oakland California as an opening to weekly ritual. Used to ground us all in being truly welcomed as we are wherever we are on this earth and affirming our commitment to Love.

We are, we are welcome here as we are!
We are welcome under these stars!
We are Welcome Here
And we are clear in Love.

A Force More Powerful, by the Peace Poets with Songs in the Key of Resistance
<https://bit.ly/ForceMorePowerfulDC26>

"A Force More Powerful" by the Peace Poets rises from the Passover table, where liberation is remembered and resistance renewed. In the shadow of betrayal and empire's violence, the song declares love stronger than guns. Rooted in shared meal, prayer, and courage, it proclaims a farewell that becomes a fearless movement.

We have come with a force more powerful than the guns in our enemy's hands.
It's our love for all creation that will liberate this land.

Reflections: Sister Ramona Daily, the fear of Jesus and the disciples on Maundy Thursday.
<https://bit.ly/SrDailyReflection>

Pastor Jordan Jones and Steff Reed <https://bit.ly/Jones-ReedReflection>

Prayer: "Gracious God, we know that we and our movements have and will continue to fall short of what we truly need in these dangerous and unsettling times. We know that we have not yet built the kind of movement that can truly take on those in power, but we ask for your strength God as we continue to try and build this movement. Lead us God, to continue to feed, fight, and organize those who are hurting the most in this society, and help us God to stay on the Way, and guide us back to the Way when we may falter. Amen."

Discussion/Action Prompt: In what ways did Jesus' ministry meet the material and spiritual needs of people? Who/what organizations meet the people's material needs in our times? What about spiritual needs? Is there an overlap? What are we doing in our community to live out this commitment? How can what we are already doing be reoriented or connected to a broader struggle for justice?

Additional Resources:

"Revolutionary Love and the Rituals of Repentance and Redemption" with Min. Ciara Taylor for the Unbound Lenten Series <https://bit.ly/UnboundMaundy>

"Holi Celebration for Holy Week" with Min. Shailly Gupta Barnes
<https://bit.ly/HoliReflection>

Week 7: Good Friday - Participation not Substitution

Text: Mark 15:1-47

Summary & Key Themes:

- Jesus is judged and condemned to death by crucifixion, a punishment reserved for those who challenge or threaten the rule of Rome.
- Jesus is crucified alongside two other rebels. As he nears death, Jesus calls out, “god why have you forsaken me!”
- After he dies, Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy leader in the movement, along with Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus, two other leaders from the movement, take him down from the cross and bury him. All of the other disciples have fled out of fear as the state closes in on the movement.
- Stop with the Substitutionary-atonement!
 - For far too long people understand Jesus' death as what is most important. That it was a holy transaction, God giving his son's life to take away all of the sin of our lives?!
 - “Humankind is redeemed through Jesus' ministerial vision of life and not through his death. There is nothing divine in the blood of the cross.” “As Christians, black women cannot forget the cross, but neither can they glorify it. To do so is to glorify suffering and to render their exploitation sacred. To do so is to glorify the sin of defilement.” (Sisters in the Wilderness, 167)
- There are great costs that we take in a movement to help lead towards liberation and to set our people free. When we follow “The Way,” and fight to heal society, we are giving ourselves to something that is promising liberation and abundance for all.
- The Cross is a symbol of personal transformation, awakening us to a bigger commitment to walk with God in bringing justice and liberation to the world.
- We must honor those who have given their lives to the movement by remembering and uplifting their life, death, and commitment to all of us
- Women and women's leadership has always been central in religious and political movements.

Reflection: Rev. Chad Collins, The meaning of the cross and Good Friday in our times,

<https://bit.ly/CollinsFraming4-18-25>

Litany: Litany of the Seven Last Words For a Service of Liberation, Dr. Charon Hribar (Kairos Center)

<https://bit.ly/Last7LitanyText>

<https://bit.ly/Last7LitanyVid>

Song:

Were You There?, Adapted by Min. Dr. Charon Hribar and Min. Moses Hernandez McGavin
Performed by Songs in the Key of Resistance (SKOR) <https://bit.ly/WereYouThereSKOR>

Were You There?, Adapted and performed by John Wessel-McCoy and Min. Ciara Taylor
<https://bit.ly/WereYouThereMcCoy>

These lyrics emerged during Picture the Homeless's Potter's Field Campaign, which fought to confront how the dignity denied to unhoused people in life was also denied in death—through burial in mass, unmarked graves where loved ones could not visit or remember them.

As we reimagine "Were You There," we ask: What are the crosses our people are forced to bear today? What death-dealing realities does empire impose on our communities? This song reminds us that God stands with the poor and oppressed – not to sanctify suffering, but to expose it. It is not a theology of redemptive suffering, but a call to name empire's violence and build a movement that refuses such suffering and strives for a world where dignity and life prevail.

Prayer: *Prayer in the Wake of the Murder of Renee Nicole Good*, by Rev. Dr. Robin Tanner

Rev. Dr. Robin Tanner is a Unitarian Universalist minister, poet, and activist who serves as the Minister of Worship and Outreach at Beacon Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Summit, New Jersey. She helps to lead weekly vigils at the Delaney Detention Center in Newark, NJ and is a leader of the Free Families Campaign.

Yes, Pray.

They murdered a poet,
A mother,
A healer.

Tell us terrorism was armed with a camera, a stuffie, a dog and a beloved.

They murdered a poet,
A mother,
A healer.

Denied the doctor and pushed out propaganda before her body was carried away.

They murdered a poet,
A mother,
A healer.

Blamed the Good, sowing the civil war, and constructing chaos.

They murdered a poet,
A mother,
A healer.

We pray now.
We pray big.
We pray with sacred spaces swelling past capacity for rapid response trainings,
We pray with pots clanging where they sleep-no more.
We pray whistles blowing and phones recording.
We pray breaking bread and passing hand warmers outside the detention camp gates.
We pray in sanctuary watching the doors.
We pray in legislatures willing to protect our people—the people.
We pray in the courtroom – hands shaking before the judge.
We pray huddled in the wake of an abduction, rocking the babies to sleep.
We pray big.
We pray loud.
We pray.

They murdered a poet,
A mother,
A healer.

God help us,
We pray.

Discussion/Action Prompt: What are you personally called to commit to and sacrifice in this world? How do those around you, and the organized struggle of the people for justice and liberation help to clarify and give you strength in your commitments/sacrifices? On Easter, instead of eating candy and going to Church, or maybe even through re-orienting these activities, how do we carry on Jesus' commitment to the struggle (to the point of death)? How can we honor other prophets and freedom fighters through our actions today?

Week 7 (Part 2): Sabbath - A Taste of What is to Come

Texts: **In Mark's gospel there is no mention of what happened on the Saturday (Sabbath) after Jesus' crucifixion and death. These texts offer some ways to reflect on what was set in motion by Jesus' execution by the state and what is to come - mirroring the practice of Sabbath.*

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The Earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. **(Matthew 27:51-53)**

There will be no sword on earth or din of battle, and the earth will no longer be shaken, groaning deeply. There will no longer be war... but there will be great peace throughout the whole earth. ... Prophets of the great God will take away the sword for they themselves are judges of men and righteous kings. There will also be just wealth among men for this is the judgement and dominion of the great God.

Sibylline Oracles **(3:751-55, 781-84 - Egyptian Judaism, 163-145 BCE)**

Summary & Key Themes:

- Mark doesn't mention anything happening on Saturday
- The Sabbath - is a time to live and taste the world that God wants for us (or is already here)
- Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is an indication, a revelation, of the Kingdom that is not just coming but already here.
- The Apostle's Creed describes Jesus descending to hell on Saturday, this is known as the "harrowing (robbing) of hell." Resurrection is part of how God's reign on earth is restored, the renewed world, renewed bodily life, and the raising and vindication of our fallen prophets and freedom fighters, those who have been condemned by this system
- Jesus' resurrection is preceded by that of those who came before, who died in the fight for justice and liberation of God's people. It is an answer to the question, Will God's justice prevail? When the righteous die do they (and their cause) go away for good?

Reflection: Min. Moses Hernandez McGavin, Holy Saturday,

<https://bit.ly/HMGreflection4-19-25>

Song:

A Hard Rain is Gonna Fall, Adapted and performed by Steff Reed & Min. Ciara Taylor

<https://bit.ly/HardRainSKOR>

In this haunting adaptation, Steff Reed and Min. Ciara Taylor carries Bob Dylan's prophetic warning through Holy Saturday's silence. Amid graveyards and hard rain, the song wrestles with injustice and unanswered suffering, echoing the harrowing of hell and daring to ask: will God's justice prevail, and will the fallen rise again?

Prayer: Prayers for the People, Min. Alex Zane - <https://bit.ly/ZanePrayer4-19-25>

Discussion/Action Prompts: Who are the fallen fighters and prophets that give life to you and the community of struggle you are part of? How do we remember and honor them in our work and in the spaces and times in between? Heschel writes that Sabbath is a "foretaste of paradise," of God's kingdom on Earth, what are some sabbath rituals and practices that help embody this? How are these connected to and not separated from the active struggle for justice?

Week 8: Easter Sunday - Pesach

Text: Mark 16:1-8

Summary & Key Themes:

- After the end of the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James and Salome, three leaders in the movement, bought spices to perform a burial ritual for Jesus' body.
- They discovered an open tomb and a missing body, but also encountered a messenger who said Jesus has been brought back to life, and that to find him you must go back to Galilee. Galilee is where the ministry of Jesus began, the continuation of his ministry will mean always starting in those places where people are forgotten, marginalized, and oppressed.
- In one version of the Gospel of Mark the story ends with these three women being afraid. This ending underscores the conditions under which the Gospel of Mark was written, a time of war and violence and oppression of the movement. Going forward in the movement required great courage and the faith that the way of justice and love would endure under such harsh conditions.

Liturgy: Celebrating Resurrection, by Rev. Dr. Jessica Williams for Freedom Church of the Poor, Adapted Easter 2024

Reader 1: The story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as told by Matthew

Reader 2: And Mark

Reader 3: And Luke

Reader 4: And John.

Reader 1: The story of many resurrections and liberation as told by the Freedom Church of the Poor

Reader 3: And New Disabled South

Reader 4: And Adalah Justice Project

Reader 2: And Black Christians for Palestine

Reader 3: According to the Gospel of Mark, Mary Magdalene, Mary the Mother of James, and Salome brought spices to anoint Jesus's dead body. But when they arrived, the large stone had been rolled away. When they entered the tomb, one dressed in a white robe addressed them saying, Jesus has risen. The women were trembling and bewildered, and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone because they were afraid.

Reader 4: Afraid of the authorities of empire

Reader 1: Afraid of death-dealing systems

Reader 2: Afraid of being the empire's next victim

Reader 4: Did they go on to Galilee as the one dressed in a white robe told them Jesus did?

Reader 3: Did they continue Jesus's movement despite and because of their fear?

Reader 2: Will we?

Reader 1: Will we?

Reader 1: In John's gospel, Mary Magdalene stood outside the empty tomb weeping, afraid of what the Roman authorities had done with Jesus's body when Jesus appeared to her and said "do not hold on to me." He then appeared to the disciples and breathed on them to receive the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus appeared to Thomas and told him to believe.

Reader 2: In his appearing, Jesus continued to develop other leaders.

Reader 3: To build a movement.

Reader 4: To point the way toward liberation.

All: Because death does not have the last word.

Reader 2: In the gospel of Matthew, after Jesus appeared to the women at the tomb he met the disciples in Galilee and told them to go and organize all the nations, teaching them to obey everything Jesus had commanded.

Reader 3: To feed, shelter, and provide healthcare for the people.

Reader 4: To cancel all debts.

Reader 1: To end state violence, mass incarceration, and military occupation.

Reader 3: In the gospel of Luke, later in the day after Jesus had risen and after he walked with two other leaders on the road to Emmaus, he appeared to the disciples and said “peace be with you.”

Reader 4: The peace of Christ.

Reader 1: A peace of love.

Reader 2: A peace of justice.

Reader 4: But it is not just Jesus who is resurrected. And resurrections do not just happen on Easter Sunday. Matthew’s gospel tells us that at the moment of Jesus’s death upon the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, there was an earthquake, and the saints who had gone before were resurrected. Even and especially in the midst of violence, destruction, death, and empire, resurrection happens.

Reader 1: Liberation occurs.

Reader 2: Movements continue.

Reader 3: Leaders persist.

Reader 1: Through his death and resurrection Jesus shows us the ways of continuous resurrection by freedom fighters whose lives, teachings, and legacies are sustained through the movements they have built.

Reader 2: This Easter we celebrate all of our freedom fighters.

Reader 3: We celebrate moments of resurrection.

Reader 4: We celebrate movements of liberation.

Reader 1: We celebrate our organizers and leaders.

All: In the midst of the violence, injustice, and death-dealing systems around us, we celebrate all those who organize others toward new life!

Reflection: *What Does the Resurrection Give Us?*, with Rev. Traci Blackmon

<https://bit.ly/ResurrectionBlackmon>

Songs:

We Were Made for These Times, by Angela Gabriel with Songs in the Key of Resistance (SKOR)

<https://bit.ly/WeWereMade4SKOR>

We Were Made for These Times, with Jewish Voice for Peace NMM Choir

<https://bit.ly/WeWereMade4JVPNMM>

Angela Gabriel's "We Were Made for These Times" echoes the courage of Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome at the empty tomb. In fear and hope, they're sent back to Galilee—where justice begins among the forgotten. "Don't give up hope... we were made for these times" becomes a resurrection anthem for dark, courageous days.

Oye Mi Gente/ We Belong Together, with Songs in the Key of Resistance (SKOR)

<https://bit.ly/OyeWeBelong>

This is a song of rooted hope and fierce commitment. It reminds us that our faith tradition insists that death, violence, and domination never have the last word. The Jesus movement was a movement confronting empire, and we are its descendants. We are made for times such as these—to organize for light in the darkness and to fight for liberation in the face of crisis.

Prayer: Jesus, you endured the cross out of love for us and your commitment to realizing God's Kingdom on earth.... May we stand with those who suffer, and may our lives reflect the love you demonstrated on the cross

- A Blessing Over Organizing, Shelby Handler
<https://bit.ly/OrganizingBlessing>

Discussion/Action Prompt: What does resurrection mean in this moment of such violence and death? What lessons can we draw from this story of Jesus' resurrection written during a time of violence and war and the domination of Rome over a new movement? What actions are we taking to get organized, not only to respond to the many crises of our people, but for the long haul. How do we build permanently organized communities, how do we build the Freedom Church of the Poor? Through action, through caring for each other, through art and culture and song and ritual?