

Conspiracies

BREATHING TOGETHER THE BREATH OF LIFE

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Conspiracies

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TO WHOM ARE WE SPEAKING?

SALLY FRITSCHÉ
MDiv '18



Sally Fristche, MDiv '18 a candidate for ordination in the Unitarian Universalist tradition, preached this sermon as a finalist in the Billings Preaching competition during the weekly HDS Noon Service on April 11, 2018.

There is a certain way of speaking, and of writing, that you may have come across here at graduate school. Wait let me rephrase that, and maybe you'll see what I mean. There is a linguistic epistemological praxis, a reification of ostentatious expression, that the thinking subject may encounter in this particularized milieu. Sound familiar? I wish I were exaggerating, but there are times I face my assigned readings and feel utterly overwhelmed by unrecognizable vocabulary. It provokes some combination of insecurity and frustration. One part feeling stupid for not understanding, and one part angry at those who refuse to speak plainly. Theology is the practice of faith seeking understanding, but sometimes "understanding" seems to come at the cost of being understandable. I don't think I'm alone in this feeling, and this is what I want to talk about.

A couple summers ago, a survey went around online. Maybe you remember it. It mapped the accents and dialects of the US. It asked questions about whether you say "sir-rup" or "see-rup," whether you say "soda" or "pop," "firefly" or "lighting bug," then mapped out where your linguistic patterns best fit within the country. I can't help but feel that if someone were to map out the use of words like "hermeneutics," or "reification," the map would show a narrow scattering of university campuses, and not much else. So who are we talking to? When we use this language, who are we talking to?

It's not valueless. When we do intend to reach an academic audience, having just the right words brings us authority, clarity. We want to be as clear as possible, so we use words that were invented to discuss the specific phenomena we need to talk about. "Hermeneutics," "intersectional," "postmodern." There are certain conversations that can only take place when we lean on the shorthand

that academia lends us.

I think we also use these words sometimes just to prove we know them, prove we belong. Particularly those of us who have been made to feel inferior, unintelligent, un-authoritative: women, people of color, and anyone who's too often had to prove their belonging in academia. We seek to treat our creeping Impostor Syndrome with the mastery of jargon. It does give us real strength, a voice where we might otherwise be unheard. So I'm not interested in condemning any particular type of language as wrong. I love words, and they all have their uses, even the obscure, even the pretentious ones. I only want to speak up on behalf of what is lost when we unthinkingly adopt this way of speaking, of being.

Randall Munroe, a webcomic artist, once illustrated a blueprint of the Saturn 5 rocket, the rocket that successfully got us to the moon. This blueprint is labeled with explanations of the function of each part, and here's the twist: the explanations use only the thousand most common words in the English language. The blueprint is titled, "the Up-Goer Five," because neither "saturn," nor "rocket" are on the list of common words. The image includes, for example, gas-tanks labeled "things holding that kind of air that makes your voice funny," and an arrow pointing to the thrusters with a note, "This end should point toward the ground if you want to go to space."

It's an exercise meant to be a bit silly, but, to be perfectly honest, it's also the only reason I can now tell you how helium functions in the launching of a rocket. This stitching simpler words together to form a concept rather than reaching straight for technical terms, has value. Taking the longer path toward meaning, has value.

I have adored the Up-goer Five ever since I first saw it, each component neatly labeled, simply explained. It takes something so far beyond my grasp—space travel, advanced aeronautics—and makes it accessible to me. And I know it's meant as a joke, but it feels more like a gift. Like someone has done

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this for me. Someone who loved the Saturn Five so much that they took the time to share it with those who otherwise would never have been able to see what they love, or understand it.

This is what I want to do. I am driven to study the things that I love—God, faith, people—and if I ever want to speak about them, to show my loves to the world, I need to learn to speak with care and simplicity. Learn to drop the anxiety of proving my belonging, my authority, and say the words I actually mean. Words that will mean something to those who need them.

It's sometimes hard to believe, but I came to divinity school because I didn't want to go into academia. Coming here was, for me, a step away from my undergraduate background in sociology. A step toward religion, an attempt to find a different way, to communicate more closely with communities who most need to be heard.

The draw of religious community, of my call to ministry, rests so much on that ability to communicate. On the reach, the scope of the spiritual. That people who will never attend a colloquium, never read an academic journal, never know or care what I mean by "praxis," will come together week after week, to do the work. To think and feel deeply about what it is that this world needs most. Will come seeking a salvation that can be applied to the lives they live. Will not hesitate to speak powerful truths in plain language.

Religious life has a way of mingling the ordinary and sacred, of using common words to say uncommon things. Our faith doesn't need perfect terminology to be practiced, to be known, to be lived and spoken into the world. Had I become a sociologist, I might have striven to produce the next grand theory of how oppression can best be challenged. But as a minister, as a minister, I might learn to minister to people.

It doesn't escape me that what I am saying today is part of a conversation that would be difficult to have outside of these walls. These references to words only academics have to wrestle with in the first

place, terms I had to look up to make sure I knew what I was saying! This sermon is not one I will give elsewhere. But it is one I believe we need. I struggle, after three years here, to make my words simple, meaningful, a gift the way Up-Goer Five was to me. I am still tangled, caught up in ego and fear, and years of habitually leaning toward lecture. And I know I am not alone.

We can strive nonetheless to remember what brought us here. The desire for change, or community, or meaningful connection that brought you here. Every time we put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, every time we speak with the authority this degree grants us, we can remember who we are talking to, where we hope to be heard.

We can put forth the effort to make our words into gifts, and reach out beyond the narrow confines of our imposing walls and impressive vocabularies. We are not here, at Harvard, to prove we belong here. We are here to learn to be somewhere else. This place, these classrooms, are not our destination, but a part of our paths elsewhere.

We are here to learn to be somewhere else. All I ask, of myself and others like me, is that we remember where we are going, and speak that destination into these halls. May we go forth in community and courage, speak truth in love and simplicity, and may we use common words to say uncommon things.



Photo Credit: Kristie Welsh

CRUISING THE BODY OF CHRIST

WILSON HOOD
MDiv '19



Wilson Hood, MDiv 19 and Chaplain Intern in the HDS Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, presented this paper in the annual HDS Stendahl Symposium in April 2018. This symposium, sponsored by the HDS Student Association, features the outstanding academic work of four students.

“You Host?”

My eyes, dry and exhausted from hours of course reading, linger over the stranger’s familiar message glowing on my smartphone’s screen, a variation of a type I receive semi-regularly on gay dating and hookup apps like Grindr. The question, while just two simple words, is brimming with embedded meanings which straight readers, lacking context or access to the symbolic vocabulary of queer digital sex lives in the contemporary United States, might miss entirely. Out of courtesy to these readers, a translation: by using the word “host,” this man asks if I am willing to invite him, as a perfect stranger, over to my apartment for a hookup, an erotic encounter. Thus, implied in his message is also a general inquiry into my possible desire for him and my willingness to assume the high physical and psychological risk in co-creating a space of pleasure, a makeshift sanctuary in which the utter psychological and political tyranny of straight culture might be disrupted, even if just for a little while.

In historical terms, his question, which might first appear as unhelpfully coy or rudely simplistic, actually represents a linguistic *expansion* of many queer erotic communicative practices. Indeed, what this stranger asks me in actual words might, in another time or setting, have been encoded within a dense nonverbal ritual vocabulary of physical gestures: a shy passing glance, a demure nod of the head, a hand left lingering on a thigh, a jolt of electricity between passing fingertips. This practice

of communicating desire in fleeting signs, often in public places like parks or restrooms, is referred to in many queer spaces as “cruising.” Due to its historically critical role as an organizing practice of queer sexual life, cruising has long been a prevalent feature of both queer subcultures and straight-dominated representations of those cultures. These latter representations, as infamously exemplified by director William Friedkin’s unfortunate crime drama *Cruising* (1980), have often served primarily to simultaneously titillate straight audiences with the perceived “deviance” of queer lives and reinforce existing presumptions of the innately “natural” and “secure” character of heterosexual erotic practices in comparison.¹

However, what most strikes me when I receive this simple question from a stranger on my screen- “*You Host?*”- is neither its transcription and compression of a long queer history of public cruising into private digital language, nor the (tragically forgettable) personality of its speaker. Instead, what grips my theological imagination is a mere typo, a presumably thoughtless human error. “*Host*” is capitalized. In the sacramental tradition of the Eucharist, the Host (also capitalized) has been the customary designation of the consecrated bread, the real presence of the Body of Christ.² “*Host*” derives from the Latin *hostia*, a term originally referring to a generalized “sacrificial victim,” which itself stems from *hostis*, also Latin.³ *Hostis*, a peculiar term famously explored by Jacques Derrida in his cultural history of “hospitality,” bears the fascinating capacity to connote either “friend” or “enemy” depending on the context in which it is deployed.⁴ What allows *hostis* to occupy such a bizarre middle ground between these assumedly opposing connotations is its association with the concept of the “stranger” or “foreigner,” one whose status as either “friend” or “enemy” is unknown.⁵ Thus, the “host,” in the etymological sense of the term, becomes one who assumes the risk of welcoming the stranger, despite the uncertainty of

¹ Steven W. Thrasher, “Out of the Shadows: Why Cruising had a Cultural Moment in 2016,” The Guardian online, last modified December 29, 2016.

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the guest's ultimate status as ally or foe.

While the exact history of the derivation from *hostis* to *hostia*, from stranger to sacrificial victim, remains



Photo Credit: Justin Knight

largely an etymological mystery, it is precisely within this gap that the profound resonances between queer erotic practices of cruising and sacramental theologies of the Eucharist must be mutually interrogated, two bodies of diverse ritual practice and thought joined in a surprising and transgressive embrace. In this paper, I will first draw on Augustinian semiotics to argue for a reading of cruising as an inherently sacramental practice, an organizing principle of queer erotic life which shares profound methodological resonances with this central rite of the Christian tradition. I will further argue that these echoes are not simply mechanical, but instead represent a mutually-illuminating crystallization of the contradictory forces simultaneously present within the sacramental acts of both cruising and Eucharist: the friend and the traitor, utopia and dystopia. I will argue that this queer theology of the sacrament, a "cruising" of the

body of Christ, therefore compels a sacramental *ethics* grounded in a ritually-cultivated discipline of *seeing* the dual presence of utopia and dystopia as always already manifest in a material world not only of bread and wine, but also of queer "strangers" whose very existence challenges imperial logics of value, difference, and safety. To properly "cruise" Christ's body is therefore to bear a sacramentally queer witness to the comingled beauty and danger of the everyday *and* to choose to engage in corporal acts of kindness, pleasure, and hospitality with these strangers *anyway*, to play the "Host" even (and perhaps especially) when such acts entail personal risk and radical trust.

Novelist Garth Greenwell has publicly offered the following reading of cruising: "Poems are a kind of communication that occurs in public speech. And I think cruising is that too: a training in reading occult codes; a way of seeing a significance in the world that most people don't see."⁶ Greenwell situates cruising as a uniquely semiotic act of both reading and performing erotic speech, particularly in spaces in which such speech is violently foreclosed by both structural and interpersonal violence.⁷ His comparison between poetry and cruising is helpful, though a critical difference between the communicative acts remains: while the poet's language can only occupy public speech in such a way as to represent a greater reality *beyond* the page, cruising operates simultaneously as a *sign* of queer desire and as an embodied, physical *deed* of its expression in material space and time. Notice that "cruising" never implies that the erotic speech act must be genitally consummated to be fully realized; indeed, when queer subjects cruise, it is enough to say that they both represent their desire and represent it, transforming the reality around them by the mere opening of a space in which these desires

2 "Host," in The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, 3rd Rev. Ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 2005).

3 Ibid.

4 Jacques Derrida & Anne Dufourmantelle, Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 45.

5 Ibid.

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can be made fully manifest in the material world between bodies. To open this locus of mutual erotic expression is itself enough to fully realize the sign; a shared glance and a shared touch are differences of degree, not type.

Similarly, in his *Commentaries on John*, Augustine refers to the actions of Christ in the gospels- deeds performed between bodies in this same social world of the everyday- simultaneously as “sacraments” and “visible words.” For example, of Christ’s embodied interactions with the material waters of baptism, Augustine writes: “the word is added to the elemental substance, and it becomes a sacrament, also itself, as it were, a visible word.”⁸

As Matthew Potts has noted in his sacramental reading of Cormac McCarthy’s literary corpus, what is crucial in Augustine’s exegesis is not only his emphasis on Christ’s actions, but also his insistence that these acts both signify *and* incarnate redemptive divine presence; indeed, they are semiotic acts which *do* what they *say*.⁹ Thus, per Augustinian conceptions of the sacramental act as a “visible word” which “does what it says,” to cruise is to participate in a kind of queer erotic sacramentality- or, perhaps more provocatively, to engage in the Eucharistic sacrament is to cruise the Host and chalice, to turn a queer gaze upon the material bread and wine on the altar. But in a world all too eager to betray, break, and ultimately consume queer bodies, what does this sacramental resonance mean in practice? What does it mean to sacramentally recognize the utopian, a queer God, as present within a violent dystopia?

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz offers a reading of Heidegger and Ernst Bloch to suggest a queer politics of “cruising” for utopia amid the oppressive and violent conditions of the everyday: “Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment,

but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds...Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future.”¹⁰ Note that Muñoz situates the mechanics of queer utopia in the performative semiotic *acts* of seeking (cruising) for it in the material conditions of the present, rather than in the distant inevitability of a triumphant “arrival.” By suggesting, as Muñoz does earlier in his argument, that “queerness is not yet here,” and yet simultaneously locating this queerness in acts of seeking potentiality for utopia in the “prison house” of the *present*, Muñoz finds an intellectual companion in Archbishop Rowan Williams. In his examination of the Eucharistic tradition, Williams writes:

We do not encounter God in the displacement of the world we live in, the suspension of our bodily and historical nature...God acts in emptiness by bringing resurrection and transforming union, not by lifting us to ‘another world.’ ‘There is another world, but it is the same as this one.’ All sign-making is the action of hope, the hope that this world may become other and that its experienced fragmentariness can be worked into sense.¹¹

To read Muñoz in conversation with Williams is to suggest that the utopian presence of a queer God may indeed be “here,” but that this presence can only be made known in practices of sacramentally cruising an honest and unblinking assessment of the full brokenness of the world as it exists, the dark depths of our queer dystopia. Indeed, it is not enough to cruise the holy Body in the Host, but specifically to cruise the Body within a *broken* Host.

Luther’s notion of perceiving God *sub contrario*- that

⁶ Alex Clark, “Garth Greenwell,” The Guardian online, last modified March 26, 2016.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Augustine of Hippo, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 55-111 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 117.

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is, God's revelation under God's opposite- is helpful at this juncture for thinking through the relationship between queer dystopia and sacrament.¹² Luther derives such a theological epistemology vis-à-vis his "theology of the cross," his deep insistence that any inquiry into God's presence must begin at the site of God's utter absence and abjection, the cross of Calvary.¹³ Here, another useful point of fascinating etymological resonance: the word "cruise" derives from the Dutch verb *kruisen*, "to cross or sail to and fro," which itself derives from the Latin *crux*, "cross," also related to the definitive moniker of the Christ event itself, "the Cross," *crucifixion*.¹⁴ Thus, the etymology of "cruising" itself gestures provocatively toward those elements which should be the *focus* of our queer, sacramental gaze, the character of the bodies we are called to center and remember in the Eucharistic act. A queer sacramental theology compels us to cruise, *sub contrario*, those very bodies which are most often rendered broken by our dystopic, imperial regimes of violence- queer bodies, trans bodies, bodies of color, poor bodies. The very representations of cruising in the dominant straight imaginary, positioning the bodies engaged in these erotic acts as "deviant" or "unnatural"- indeed as dangerous "foreigners" to the comparatively "natural" and "healthy" domain of white, middle-class heterosexuality- recall the ambiguity of the Latin *hostis*, the stranger. By positioning his very body as the consummate (and consumable) Host, *hostis*, the eternal stranger, in the Eucharistic act, Christ both signals and anticipates his radical solidarity with these bodies at Calvary, assuming certain risk at the hands of the state to definitively cross- cruise- the presence of God as imminent even in the abject depths of despair and violence. Indeed, when we cruise the broken Host, we are called to sacramentally see once again the utopian presence of God in solidarity with those queer subjects most battered by imperial dystopia, to lock eyes with the queer stranger across the park and see Christ returning our gaze.

This repetitive, ritual recognition and remembrance

of Christ's death in the Eucharist- his movement from *hostis* to *hostia*, from signaling solidarity with the stranger to embodying that solidarity to the point of breaking his own body in ritual sacrifice- serves as the precondition for our own capacity to see God, *sub contrario*, in our dystopic world. It also serves as the foundational principle of the queer sacramental ethics which our cruising of Christ's body necessitates. We return, again, to Augustine's



Photo Credit: Kristie Welsh

emphasis on the redemptive *action* of sign- making, rather than the material recipients of signification themselves, as the essential locus of the sacramental moment.¹⁵ Indeed, when we collectively cruise Christ's body around the Eucharistic table, it is our embodied actions, both toward the elements and toward one another, which *truly* determine the sacramental character of the encounter. Moreover, as Ronald F. Thiemann argues in *The Humble Sublime*, the theological legacy of the Reformers, themselves prefigured by the socially-engaged mendicant Catholic orders, was a "sacramental realism" which read the Eucharistic act as a *culmination* of, rather than ritual *counterpoint* to, the presence of the divine "in, with, and under" the material reality of the everyday.¹⁶ This "sacramental

9 Matthew Potts, Cormac McCarthy and the Signs of Sacrament: Literature, Theology, and the Moral of Stories (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 11.

10 José Esteban Muñoz, Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

11 Rowan Williams, On Christian Theology (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 207.

12 Matthew Potts, Cormac McCarthy and the Signs of Sacrament, 10.

13 *Ibid.*

14 "Cruise" in The Online Etymology Dictionary, ed. Douglas Harper, last modified January 22, 2018.

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realism” therefore extends Augustine’s emphasis on sacramental *action* to the ethical demands of daily life. A queer sacramental ethics requires us to cruise the body of Christ in the bodies of the “strangers” all around us not only be ritually re-presenting Christ’s presence within them, but also by performing the corporal acts of mercy, hospitality, and solidarity which these acts of renewed seeing require. As in the queer art of cruising, performing these moments of *crossing* between bodies- acts of rebellious care and pleasure carried out even in the face of oppression- implies an assumption of risk. Indeed, we cannot know if the *hostis* before us is a friend or a foe, nor if our actions will illicit disciplinary and even mortal violence from the state apparatus.

circle; indeed, because Christ functions as *hostia* (sacrifice) in solidarity with the *hostis* (stranger), a paradox emerges when we consume the Host. By finding ourselves as *recipients* of Christ’s hospitality, his embodied and sacramental act of crossing, our own position is *also* marked as particular, precarious and, in some sense, strange. Any presumed “normalcy” or “natural” status of our own experience is obliterated. *We* suddenly become the stranger whom we have so easily presumed only to serve, the body in which Christ is *also* sacramentally manifest. Indeed, even as we presume solely to cruise for Christ in the body and blood of the sacramental elements and of the stranger, *Christ cruises us*. Per Luther’s theology, these multiple and dynamic sacramental acts of cruising- these transgressive, bodily crossings- are crystallized at the Cross and disclosed at the table of Eucharist, our queer sacramental ethics now undergirded with a radical new form of empathy. When we assume the risk of welcoming the queer stranger, we are now forced to recognize that they also assume a risk in welcoming us.

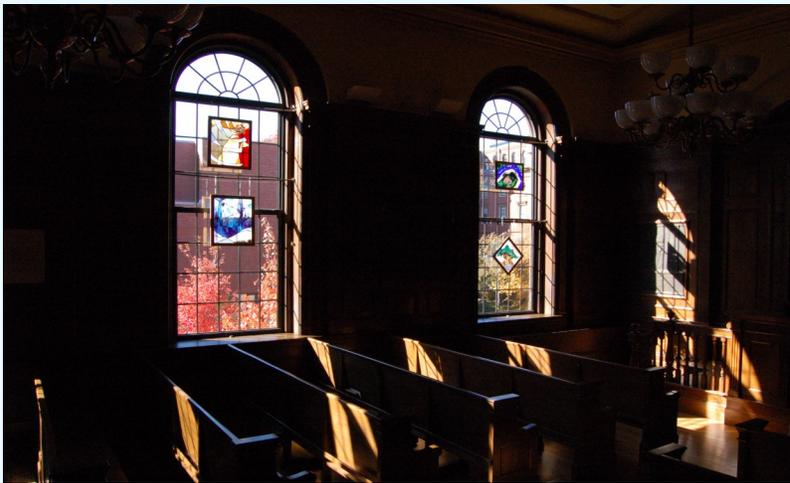


Photo Credit: Kristie Welsh

Nevertheless, a queer ethics grounded in sacramental realism, a reading of the Eucharist which *insists* on cruising Christ in the stranger even when it is inconvenient or risky, runs the risk of further calcifying a tired imperial binary of “same” and “different,” “friend” and “foe,” “normal” and “abnormal.” Here, a complete account of Christ’s body as “Host” in the Eucharistic moment comes full

“You Host?”

The question still lingers on my screen, glowing persistently in the gathering dusk. I close my course books and stare back at it, chewing thoughtfully on my bottom lip. My memory suddenly floods with countless images of spaces once opened for me by queer strangers in small Southern towns far away from here. Musty twenty-something apartments. Public trails drenched in afternoon sunlight. Cars left rumbling in rain-dappled parking lots. A shy glance returned across a smoky bowling alley. A jolt of mutual recognition.

I will never remember many of their names. But in these sacramental refuges, my body and its persistently unruly desires stopped being a stranger.

15 Augustine of Hippo, Tractates on the Gospel of John 55-111, 117.

16 Ronald F. Thiemann, *The Humble Sublime: Secularity and the Politics of Belief* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2014).

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In these ritual acts, in these tangles of skin and hair, interlaced lips and fingertips, bodies pressed against one another or held in tension across a crowded room, I often felt a Presence beyond language. An impossible and persistent Kindness. I hear again the words I heard a priest say over a plate and chalice, long ago. *Behold what you are*. My fingers hover over the touchscreen before finally typing my answer.

“Yes.”

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COMING OUT OF NARROWNESS

RACHEL LEIKEN
MDiv '20



Rachel Leiken, MDiv '20, offered this dvar Torah during the HDS Wednesday Noon Service hosted by the Jewish Students Association during Jewish season of Passover on April 4, 2018. The JSA held a joyful tish, a gathering around a table, in which texts were discussed, songs were sung, and community was celebrated.

The opening words of the hagaddah, the book that guides us through the Passover seder, tell us:

חַיֵּב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת-עַצְמוֹ, כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יָצָא מִמִּצְרַיִם
Chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatza mimitzrayim.

Each person must see themselves as though they came out of Mitzrayim.

Mitzrayim means Egypt, and on Passover, in the story of the Exodus, we read that our ancestors were brought out from Egypt by God. So, if we take this imperative seriously we are supposed to see ourselves as though we are there in the desert, with our ancestors, waiting (and acting) to become a people. But, Mitzrayim can also be translated as “narrowness,” a “narrow place.” In this sense, the statement at the beginning of the seder looks and feels different. We must see ourselves as though we have just come out of a narrow place and are waiting (and acting) to come into our fullness as individuals and in community.

So, I wonder, how do we do that? What does it actually look like to emerge from narrowness into the full expansiveness of ourselves? On Passover, this question is not theoretical.

On Passover, this question is part of our narrative.

We tell and retell the story around our tables. In the repetition, we are intended to internalize the narrative. We experience this story in every one of our senses. We eat maror, tasting bitterness to remind us of slavery. We point at and hold up ritual objects. We sing, bringing together presence, remembrance, and joy.

All of these things are important. But what I want to focus on here is that, as we gather around the seder table, as we tell the story and eat our meal, **we recline**.

This aspect of the seder makes me wonder... what does it feel like to emerge from narrowness into the full expansiveness of ourselves?

On Passover, this question is embodied—

Maimonides, an important Jewish scholar, writes: *One is required to see himself as if he had just now left Egyptian slavery. Hence, when a person eats on this night, he is required to eat and drink while reclining, as a sign of freedom.*

We imagine the constricted bodies of our ancestors and we understand how their struggle and God's has enabled us to be different. We imagine their posture, and we perform the opposite. We perform a stability, a sense of preparedness, a sense that we have time and space to expand into our seats and into the story. To me, this means that reclining is supposed to teach us something, in our bodies.

I want to ask if, just as much as it is a display of freedom, it is a new conditioning of the muscle memory of generations. It is the cultivation of a new memory that is simultaneously rooted and energized. A new memory that we live into year after year. A memory, held in our bodies, of liberation

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- in our past and for our present.

The truth is that the ritual part of Passover, the seder, is beautiful, but it also means nothing if it gets left at the table. This is something I worry about for myself. How do I keep the muscle memory that this holiday is supposed to teach me? How do I hold onto both the sense that I have been taken out of narrowness, and the energy to fight for a sense of fullness and liberation?

This is on my mind in two ways right now. First, because today is the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. There is so much narrowness in the world, and I know that I need to feel in my bones the imperative to fight for justice every day. That is important, and it deserves its own sermon.

Second, and relatedly, it's on my mind in this place and because of my reality as a student at HDS.

Here at HDS, the question of how we emerge from narrowness cannot be theoretical.

HDS is an intellectual place. Sometimes it feels like I'm only here—or, really, only *supposed* to be here—as a scholar, as someone engaged in an intellectual or theoretical pursuit. And as someone whose body is not questioned as fitting in on Harvard's campus, it can be easy to get caught up in thinking that this place is all about my mind.

But that's dangerous.

It's dangerous because it enables a false reclining, the illusion that my thoughts and the ideas in this place are not connected to who I am and how I walk through the world.

Sometimes, this place feels like Mitzrayim. Not even being able to engage with a theory that feels deeply personal and is written by the one scholar of Judaism on the syllabus because the class is taking place during Rosh Hashanah. That's Mitzrayim. Seeing a professor at the front of the room put their own (deeply Christian) ritual onto my pain. That's Mitzrayim. Listening to a professor close a class focused on a Jewish text which I read to be about internalized Antisemitism with a quote from Martin Luther. Mitzrayim. And I know that my friends and colleagues have had other experiences like this, some far too many because their perspectives and bodies are not reflected in/by those who teach here.

Other times, this place feels like fullness. Reading Calvin with a professor whose framing helps me understand what this text can teach me about my own relationship with and posture toward God. Applying what I've learned here in a lesson I'm teaching at a local Sunday school, that helps the students understand different definitions of justice. Being able to stand up here and preach. These feel like moments of fullness. Moments where I have been able to take the things that root me, in myself, in my Judaism, in my Jewish community that I am here to serve, and to push. To move away from the moments of narrowness (which will always be part of me), and to find more expanse.



Photo Credit: Tony Rinaldo

COMING OUT OF NARROWNESS

RACHEL LEIKEN
MDiv '20

I think that for me, in this moment, in this body, that is what it means to build the muscle memory of Passover. Reclining and expanding into my identity, and pushing. Carrying the embodiment of Passover into the rest of my year underscores for me the importance of showing up for my colleagues in their moments of fullness, so that we can work toward them, together. This is something I have not done as much as I could have in the past, and it is something that I am recommitting to now.

This is what Passover looks and feels like for me now, in this place, in my body.

We end the seder with the words “לשנה הבאה בירושלים” shana ha’ba b’Yerushalayim.” Next year in Jerusalem or, if we take the same approach to the word Yerushalayim as we do to Mitzrayim, “Next year in a place of wholeness.” **The question is, how do we get to that wholeness?** We do it in our bodies, figuring out what we need and what gives us energy to live into it. We do it in community, hoping that we get to learn what it looks and feels like for others. And we do it for community, the ones that are important to us, that are part of us, that we are building, and that teach us how to expand.

PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT ALL FEAR

ISAAC MARTINEZ
MDiv '19



Isaac Martinez, MDiv '19 is a postulant for ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church. He preached this sermon as a finalist in the Billings Preaching Competition at the HDS Noon Service on April 11, 2018. The reading on which this sermon is based in Deuteronomy 34: 1-12.

It is an honor to be preaching with you all. My name is Isaac Martinez, I am in my second year here at HDS. I am also a postulant for ordination to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church. Now words like “postulant” and “seminarian” would have been kind of foreign to me when I was growing up in southwest New Mexico, where the big mountains matched my big dreams of being a missionary for the Pentecostal faith of my loving, tight-knit family. In my predominantly Roman Catholic small town, being Pentecostal marked us as different, but I didn’t mind so much. I loved church too much to let it bother me.

I don’t know how many of you have ever participated in Pentecostal worship but imagine if you can exciting, pulsing music, people jumping and dancing. It was just fun! But my favorite part was when the piano slowed and the beautiful songs about God’s love would start and everyone’s tears would be flowing, mine included.

So I kept on dreaming. In the back of my childhood Bible, and maybe some of you had this too, there was a set of full-color maps and one of them was the journeys of the apostle Paul and I would trace my finger over all the places Paul went to again and again and imagine where my own missionary journeys might take me. But just as my heart was starting to really ache with this sense of call, I was starting to realize I was marked as different in another way. You see of the all many terrible sins my pastor preached against, one of the worst was homosexuality and I could no longer deny that was part of who I was.

But let me tell you, I tried. I would go home after church, fall on my knees at my bed, and beg God to heal me, to fix me. And every time I would get up,

my blankets soaked with tears, and I would still be gay and I thought I failed. I had failed my family, my church, and worst of all, I had failed God. But one night, as I was praying, a question popped into my head. If God made me and loves, why would God make me and separate me from that love? Maybe God loves me just the way God made me. When I realized that nothing could separate me from the love of God, not even being gay, I knew I couldn’t remain Pentecostal. It would take many years and thousands of miles before I found a place where I could both love God and know that God loved me. But over six years ago, I found that place in the Episcopal Church and that is how I am here today, speaking with all of you.

Now, I don’t want to give you the impression that this is a fairy-tale ending and now I’m living in the “happily ever after.” The profound changes in my life, from denial to acceptance, from Pentecostal to agnostic to Episcopalian, from small-town New Mexican to Harvard student, have also come with profound losses, like an impaired relationship with my family back home. But even when I couldn’t see exactly how, I believed and hoped that there was a way that I could reconcile these parts of me, and that faith has sustained me until now.

All change requires loss: it is a truth that the people of Israel are profoundly aware of as they lose their beloved leader, Moses, the great lawgiver. Let’s get reacquainted with the story of Moses: how he grew up thinking he was an Egyptian prince but found out he was actually born a Hebrew slave, how he fled Egypt but encountered God in a burning bush and was told he was the one to free the Israelites from bondage, how he led the people through the Red Sea and how they experienced God in fire and thunder on Mt. Sinai when God chose them to be God’s people, how Moses kept interceding for the people when their faith wavered and they complained. And now, Moses is at the end of his life. Even though he has led the people for forty years in the wilderness, he will not be able to enter the promised land with them. But God allows him to see it from the top of a mountain on the other side of the Jordan River before he dies. And he is buried,

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presumably by God, since no one knows where his tomb is, and the people mourn him and then turn to Joshua, whom Moses picked as his successor, who will lead them into the promised land. Yes, my friends, all change requires loss.

But since we can't stop the change, what do we do with our loss? I think we mourn it. And we mourn by telling and retelling our stories, as individuals and as a community, so that we honor who we are and whose we are. And we try to faithfully identify what is most important, what is most essential, and we preserve it for the next stage of our journeys. This was not just Moses's work, it belonged to all the people of Israel. In fact, all of the book of Deuteronomy is Moses teaching the people how to teach themselves, how to keep the essentials of the law for themselves, how to love God and love their neighbor.

In my brief time here at HDS, I can see how we, like the Israelites are acknowledging our losses, mourning our past, and moving forward. There is much that is still uncertain and unknown, and that uncertainty may make us afraid. I want to tell you that it is natural, it is understandable, to be afraid. But we also know that perfect love casts out all fear. And we find that love here at HDS. We find it in classrooms, we find it when we come together at Noon Service, we find it in many ways. I encourage you to reflect on how you may have discovered God's love here at HDS, the love that allows us to move past the losses of change, into the land of abundance that God has promised us. Amen.



Photo Credit: Justin Knight

RADICAL EMPATHY

JULIA OGILVY
MTS '18



Julia Ogilvy, MTS '19 offered this meditation at Morning Prayers in the Appleton Chapel of Memorial Church on March 7, 2018. An [audio recording](#) of this meditation is also available.

A reading from the Gospel of Luke:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself." "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

It is a rainy day in November 2001 and I am being taken on a tour of a place called Easterhouse on the outskirts of the city of Glasgow in Scotland. This is an area of mass unemployment, known for having one of the *worst* levels of life-expectancy in Britain. For the last 10 years I had lived and worked just over an hour away, running a successful business and living a life of great privilege but I had *never* chosen to come anywhere like this before.

As we drove down the street we passed derelict apartment buildings, with boarded up windows and doors covered in ugly graffiti. We turned a corner and a large brick building loomed in front of us, surrounded by barbed wire and broken concrete slabs with weeds poking through. The building itself was partly burned down, blackened and scarred with rooms open to the elements. I asked my companion if it had been the local prison. There was a moment of silence and then he turned to me and said, 'No, this is the local high school. There had been an arson attack but there was simply nowhere else for the children to go.

I vividly remember the tears that ran down my face that day as I thought of my young children in their cosy, warm classroom, surrounded by green fields and yet only an hour away. How could children have to live like this? How had I failed to notice the lives of my 'neighbours'? This was my turning point, the moment that shook me out of my complacency and the spark that lit a fire inside me. I left my business to work on social justice issues and to begin a journey of self-discovery and what I hope to be radical empathy that continues here at Harvard Divinity School.

I pray that you have had felt that kind of spark. But as I look around the wider Harvard community I am increasingly aware that it is very rare for people to choose to really '**see**' who their neighbour is or to face the truth of our world today. I have attended classes across the river where there seems to be very little awareness of the suffering of others. I find myself talking to people who have no idea what 'stand your ground' laws are or the new 'Jim Crow' of mass incarceration. They seem to know little about the increasing devastation caused by climate change, including the hundreds of thousands of deaths in developing countries from drought, flooding or disease related to global warming, or that there are 260 million migrants in our world today, escaping war and extreme poverty. I could go on and on. I know I am preaching to the converted here. But the fact is that this really scares me, particularly when we contemplate the power of corporations in our world today.

However, it is all too easy for me to judge others when I am so often horrified by my own complacency. If we are to remain turned towards the needs of others, then we all need spiritual practices to help us. We need to be in communities like this one, where talks and prayers orientate us to what matters and to be people who constantly bear witness to injustice. We need to be vulnerable ourselves, to be mindful of the world around us and our impact on it. We need to be willing to be uncomfortable and to learn the skills of

RADICAL EMPATHY

JULIA OGILVY
MTS '18

deep listening. We need to ask those simple questions, 'Where does it hurt?' and 'How can I help?' This is what radical empathy means.

My text this morning was the beginning of the well-known story of the good Samaritan and as Luke went on to write: "A Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds." God calls on all of us to bandage the wounds of the world and to start by loving our neighbour but we can't do that if don't know our neighbour's story or if we fail to really 'see' them.

That day in Easterhouse was a gift of God's grace to me and it transformed my life. So let us all be willing to have that fire lit inside us and to choose practices that can help us keep that fire alive. Let us show the wider Harvard community, on both sides of the river, what it means to love our neighbour and to turn our faces towards injustice and suffering.

Let us pray: Lord, give us eyes to see the pain around us, ears to hear the cries of the suffering, and the voice to share their story with others in our community. Let us find hope and joy in love for our neighbour and in building a world based on your values of justice, love and mercy. Amen



Photo Credit: Justin Knight

THE FEMINIST KILLJOY

HANNAH OZMUN
MDiv '19



Hannah Ozmun, MDiv '19 offered this reflection as part of the HDS Noon Service hosted by WomenCircle on March 7, 2018, the eve of

International Women's Day.

Today I want to offer a feminist reading of a passage from the New Testament, the parable of the sower from the gospel of Luke: "When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, Jesus said in a parable: 'A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.' As he said this, he called out, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'"

If you've heard this story before, you know that it is an allegory about hearing the word of God and producing the fruit of a righteous life. We are to remove the thorns of distraction and the rocks of faithlessness so that the word will take root in our hearts.

Presumably, this parable is for "anyone with ears to hear," yet the imagery is quite gendered. While the sower illustrates the patriarchal transmission of knowledge—the minister at the

head of the church, the professor commanding a classroom—the good soil suggests a patriarchal idea of the perfect woman—someone who is pure, passive, and a good listener, someone who reproduces the seed she didn't ask for without hesitation or complaint.

As women we often find ourselves in institutions that want to use our bodies to reproduce systems of oppression. In academia, we find that we have to cite certain white men to be perceived as credible. We are expected to nurture knowledge that may not nurture us.

Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed writes about the figure of the feminist killjoy, the woman who refuses to go along with the way things are. The feminist killjoy is vigilant and angry. She notices things she is not supposed to notice, and finds knowledge outside of the places where she is supposed to find knowledge.

By identifying problems, we become problems. Ahmed recently quit her job in academia after years of protest against insufficient institutional policies on sexual assault and harassment. She refused to be complicit in her university's inaction, refused to reproduce a culture where women's complaints about racism and sexism were viewed as thorns choking out the seeds of knowledge.

Similarly, right now in West Virginia, feminist killjoy public school teachers are on strike,

demanding livable wages, refusing to let the state exploit their labor. While West Virginia has one of the highest poverty rates in the nation, their governor is a billionaire. These teachers are a beautiful example of rocky soil refusing to accept the condescension and austerity of elite greed.

Women of HDS, my exhortation to you is to be rocky. Be thorny. Trample the seeds of oppression wherever you see them scattered. Find knowledge that nourishes you and tend to it like a garden. And never underestimate what our collective power can accomplish.

BRING YOUR BROKENNESS TO THE SEA

EMILY ROGAL
MDiv '20



Emily Rogal, MDiv '20, offered this dvar Torah during the HDS Wednesday Noon Service hosted by the Jewish Students Association during Jewish season of Passover on April 4, 2018. The JSA held a joyful tish, a gathering around a table, in which texts were discussed, songs were sung, and community was celebrated.

I believe that, when faced with the task of leaving Egypt, I probably would have asked to stay.

I am aware of the Jewish calendar in my bloodstream, and every year, as Pesach approaches, I feel that itch in my skin - the urge to stay in the narrow place not because I am thriving, or happy, but because it is known.

The rabbis say that in the generation of the Israelites who were enslaved in Mitzrayim, there were three types of people. The first were the people whose bodies were enslaved, but their souls were free and yearning towards freedom. The second were the people like Moshe, whose bodies and souls were free, but who stayed in Egypt to liberate the others. The third were the people who were so embedded in darkness and bondage that they didn't even know they were being kept against their will.

The rabbis say that within each of us, there exists each of these types of people: a piece of us that is enslaved, a piece that is free, and a piece that doesn't know that it is not free.

I think about the third type of people when I picture the flight from Egypt in Exodus. Not the people who immediately sprang to their feet, gathered their belongings, and headed towards the sea, nor the people who, aware of their fear, begrudgingly came with.

It's the third type. Those who looked up from their soup bowls, confusion on their brow. "We were

enslaved?" they asked, in a tongue they didn't even know was foreign. "We were kept here?" They do not know that their skin was not lovingly stitched to be bruised and battered. They do not know that their hearts were not made to be poisoned. They do not know that they are worthy of love and wholeness. When you live in constriction, you cannot remember the feeling of stretching limbs. When you exist in darkness, your eyes do not know what they cannot see.

I picture these pieces within me when I think of the confines of depression and anxiety. I picture my split soul, the part that yearns to be free, and the part that cannot imagine a reality outside of this everlasting darkness. There is no hope, the exhausted, weary, enslaved, horrified, terrified part of me, weeps.

I ask my friend Aron how the parts of us that do not know they are free will leave Egypt. He tells me, with a smile, that the other parts of ourselves will carry them.

I believe that those who could not walk to the sea were carried.

It takes an incredible amount of courage to bring your body to the sea. In order to stand on the shores of hope, you must first believe that you deserve freedom, you deserve goodness, you deserve wholeness. In order to stand on the shores of infinity, you must first convince your own heart that it is a worthy of vessel.

It takes bravery to stand at the place where the world splits, where the places inside of ourselves split, and to choose *life*. To choose the unknown wilderness not because it is more comfortable or more uplifting, because you *cannot exist in the narrowness any longer*.

Perhaps it's my own inclinations as a birth doula, but I see the Exodus as the birth narrative of our people. It is about moving from the constrictive space of the womb through the watery birth canal of the sea and into the wilderness. Valarie Kaur, the Sikh poet and

BRING YOUR BROKENNESS TO THE SEA

EMILY ROGAL
MDIV '20

activist writes, "Who is to say if you are the darkness of the womb or the tomb?"

We decide, whether this is the place that we are born, or where we crumble.

There is a midrash of a man named Nachshon. In the Exodus narrative, G'd tells Moses to spread his hand over the sea. This act will cause the waters to part and allow the people to pass through.

The rabbis say that this is not exactly how it



Photo Credit: Kristie Welsh

occurred. Rather than Moses, in all his power and might, causing the sea to split, it was Nachshon, one of the common Israelites. As the Israelites stand on bank of the sea, wondering if they had been brought out of Egypt only to perish at this moment, Nachshon wades into the water.

The water reaches Nachshon's ankles. It pools around his hip bones, stings his scars from the beatings he has received. "*Mi chamocha, ba'eilim Adonai? Who is like you, O G'd?*" He continues to walk into the ocean, towards eternity, and the

water reaches his chest and his throat. "*Mi kamocho, nedar bakodesh? Who is like You, O G'd, glorious in holiness?*"

It is at this moment, when hope is at its' most bleak, that the sea splits.

Mi chamocha, ba'eilim Adonai? Can we collect the shattered pieces of ourselves and leave? Can we place what Rumi calls the balm of love upon the

hearts of ourselves and our neighbors who live in places of pain? Can we receive news of school shootings and distant bombings and another cry of #MeToo and not allow our heart to harden, as Pharaoh's did? Can you leave the places and the things and the people who do not nourish you? Can the most distant parts of yourselves hear when you call out to them?

Mi kamocho, nedar bakodesh? Can we believe, with all of our heart, and all of our soul, that things can be better? And once we've believed, can we walk into the unknown waters, and call upon something Unknowable and Great to assist us in our journey?

I am leaving Mitzrayim. I am bringing every piece of myself, even the pieces that cling to the ash and dust of a life that is no longer good. In the Sephardi tradition, at the Passover seder, it is traditional to go around the table and and say your name, locate yourself, and offer a question to the person next to you.

It sounds something like this: My name is Emily. I am coming from Mitzrayim, the narrow place where I was broken. I am going to Liberation. Will you come with me?

To you, my friend, existing in darkness, I invite you into this archaic question of our people. I invite you to bring your bedraggled, cracked pieces to the shore, because life awaits you here. Joy is waiting to erupt - the type of bittersweet words that have known the pit and the mountain top. Music is waiting to burst from lungs and strings. Freedom is almost here.

Cup the water in your hands. Breathe in life.

Let the sea split.

And emerge from your narrowness.

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS: A POETIC MEDITATION

MICHELE MADIGAN SOMERVILLE
MTS '19



Michele Somerville, MTS'19, is a poet. The verse meditations are excerpted from "Via Crucis," a long (contemporary poem-in-progress) in 14 parts. On the evening of March 20, 2018, in the Christian season of Lent, the HDS Catholic students held a devotional evening of prayer focused on the Stations of the Cross. The gathering was, led by Michele and by Aileen Fitzke, MDiv '18. Michele offered these verse meditations during the service.

The Stations are a Catholic devotion which commemorates Jesus' last day as a man. Meditation of the stations generally involves a set of 14 images or icons which recall to mind points on Jesus' path to on the "way of sorrows"—the path to the site of his crucifixion.

(Before each station, we say a short prayer, meditate on the image, hear a brief passage and engage in a silent meditation.)

Introductory Prayer

God of power and mercy,
in love you sent your Son
that we might be cleansed of sin
and live with you forever.
Bless us as we gather to reflect
on his suffering and death
that we may learn from his example
the way we should go.
We ask this through that same Christ, our Lord. Amen.

1. Jesus is condemned to death

for love I demand
the release of all prisoners
the chambers of all lock-down hearts be bathed in my radiance
for love I
free henchmen gates of towers wherein kings dwell the keys of grandiose cathedrals into seas
into a froth with radiant
I storm I toss
I part for love I stir
seas I salt
with my tears

Jesus was arrested and condemned to death. We meditate all who undergo torture and punishment. As well we bear in our prayers hopes for justice for all who are incarcerated or imprisoned in any way.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

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2. Jesus Takes Up His Cross

I take you up, compressed and full of tension
Your ligin conducts water
I take you up, durable olive of Solomon's temple, up
Cedar of Lebanon, up dogwood of the second covenant
I take you on citron of Babylon, cinnamon of Malabar
Bloom like a lily, bastard "crux grammata"
I take up your gamma contours and annular rings
O, Sefhirah! I take up the memory of your blossoms
The profligate beauty of your various ramification, I take it up
I take your right angles up, Oriental emblem of benediction
In shadow and in shade I take you up
Cross upon the wombs of the idols of Hittites, I take you up
I leave blood upon your limbs: my kiss upon your mettle
I take you and your Crown of Lombardy metals
Of which lyres are fashioned I lift and hoist you
I carry your dead weight through narrow streets
I take up your perpendiculars of marrow, your coarse bark
Almond of awakening, apple of forbidden, fig of spirit
Stump of seed, I take you up
Tree of knowledge, myrtle of generosity—
Gopher wood of Noah, pomegranate of eternal life,
Garnet almug of Mozambique,
branch of fork lightning, cypress of promise, I take you u.
Given up for you, I take you up.
I take you up and eat of you. I marry you
to my flesh.
We assume the position
We take the shape of a falcon

We pray for all who are burdened. We pray for their strength. We
meditate and honor the cross itself.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

3. Jesus Falls the First Time

The weight that leads me to
the earth's center draws me toward
its burning core. Gravity, the weight
of wanting to push back away
but gravity pulls flesh
... I go down
□

We hold in our prayers the times Jesus fell on his way to the cross. We bear in mind that people falter and rise

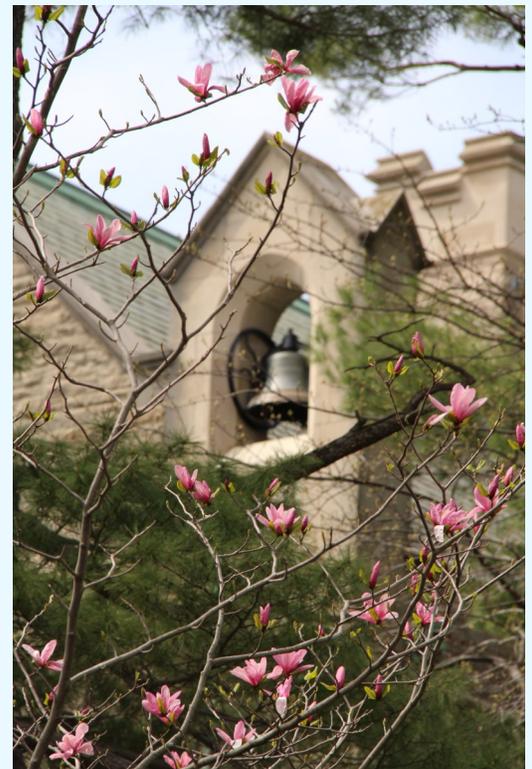


Photo Credit: Kristie Welsh

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again. We pray for those who feel stuck in their falling.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

4. Jesus Meets His Mother

One last time, say Yes.
Observe what you delivered.

Forgive me, Mother,
for you now know what I,
fruit of your womb,

now do,
which, ripened,

now falls not far
from the tree.

When we look at this station and think of Mary, we remember that to give birth is to give death. We recognize the strength and faith of Mary.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

5. Simon the Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

You who came in from the fields
To take up my work will take on
my love. I will have your
back when you are tired.
I will carry your weight,
You have my word.

When we consider the fifth station, we think about those who respond to the call to help others with their burdens. What does this mean? We pray for those who help.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS: A POETIC MEDITATION

MICHELE MADIGAN SOMERVILLE
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6. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Veronica, emboldened,
true enough to see.

Into your hands, into your outstretched arm
and reach, Veronica, my grimace

Into your hands I commend
the lachrymal mix, my salted blood,

my living death
mask in a rag

Take the woven
object from your head

Let your hair trap light

Veronica's gesture is, in a sense, a work of mercy. While small in the scheme of things, it is the part she can do. This station also invites one meditating it to think about the, often undervalued, work of women.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

7. Jesus falls the Second Time

The weight of wanting
to be drawn into
to the fiery core.
Exerts its force

Upon me. I enter
your bottomless
grave...

Should you
get lost on the way,
seek me out. I will find
you because
you are looking for me.

Jesus stumbles under the weight of the cross and the pain his body feels. How do we stumble when we are in pain? How hard is it to rise! We might pray here for those who feel fallen.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS: A POETIC MEDITATION

MICHELE MADIGAN SOMERVILLE
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8. Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

I call you from your kitchens,
I call from within your house
 where you sit at your hearth among children.
I call you as rabbis
I call you as leaders in my new temple,
I call for your strength I call for the strength of
 your mighty blood .
I call you, peace-
 makers, givers of birth
I call you as leaders in my new temple
I call for your strength.
I call for the strength of your mighty blood
 which men fear.
I call you to the altar and book.
I command you, mothers...

I command you to enter and approach my tabernacle
 busy with light --
I call you, sisters, come closer, step into my path
I call you to follow me.
Who fails to welcome this, fails --

We know Jesus prayed with women. Jesus called women. We might pray here for women who are called.

**Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.**

9. Jesus Falls for the Third Time

Vertigo's halo impaled upon my head,
a crown of stars it burns
a brand into my scalp.
My eyes flood
with blood...
Not even my tears are clear.

Mud is all I see. No fields stretching
forth green and waving, various
with luster. No waters gleam.
Neither Gold Crests nor Sylvia Warblers
punctuate the hammering in my head.

Neither lilac clouds, nor cypress trees,
nor pomegranates, nor plums, nor warm
rain in blue mist adorn my world.
No sapphire night nor grape to render me
dreamy, no taste inhabits my mouth dry
with dirt. My flesh shrinks from any hint of

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a touch. I am utterly solitary, impenetrable
and arid in this well-baked terrain. If my
heart operates I have no sense
of it. I feel only down. There is nothing
upward in me, only agony, agony
intensified the certainty that, wasted, I
am well-despised, by all I love, want
nothing more than to die on this forsaken
spot not far from where, for no good reason,
I was born and now
find myself left for dead.

We come close to the end of the Way of Sorrows. We consider what Jesus might have felt. We focus our prayers upon those who are suffering, falling and unable to rise, and for those near death.

**Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.**

10. Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

See before you a man stripped
of everything
dissolved by hatred,
the semblance of a man,
who felt what all men feel
and desired what all men desire and long
to know. Behold this shell of a man-
cold, nude, stripped clean
of his humanity...

The tenth station reminds us that Jesus was beaten, humiliated and rendered naked. We may imagine that He experienced the fear that there was no protection. Let us pray for all who lack clothing, cover and shelter, and for those who are tortured by shame.

**Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.**

11. Jesus is Crucified

Well-driven,
well-hammered
metal pierces ulna, penetrates
radius, shatters the hand that touched
the leper's face --

□

*You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day...*

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS: A POETIC MEDITATION

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MTS '19

Well-made nails
I came to
know as a boy -
I hammered them
myself. Two planes
in place,
two worlds.
Axis mundi...

The light
I love
will come
to pass,
again
an arrow
of light
a sharp
to open
the heart
of my soul
like a womb



Photo Credit: Justin Knight

Jesus is nailed to the cross. We pray for all who endure physical pain. We might pray for all who are, like Jesus, imprisoned and tortured.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

12. Jesus Dies on the Cross

You have me where
you want me
so let me go
for I am
too dry
for tears,
my breath is quashed
my spirit vanquished
my mouth is stopped
Adonai, take me
Into your arms-

Into your love, I
send my spirit

Hear me, O Lord!
I know you can
hear me, because
I call out.

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Grant Him proper rest
in the heights of the holy and pure □

who glow like the bodies of the firmament—

Let us, through charity, remember His soul.

God of mercy grant wings to our Jesus.

Jesus, in this image is at rest. We could pray with gratitude for the peace that comes when physical death puts an end to the suffering of those who are near death. We might even meditate the power of the Resurrection to conquer death.

Leader: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All: Because by your holy cross You have redeemed the world.

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