

Deep Roots Groups - Week 2

Greetings, friends. I'm so encouraged to hear that many of you have found meaningful engagement with at least some of the scriptures and exercises from our first week. Many of the scriptures in the lectionary this week involve stories about water - which is so convenient, given that the theme for our groups is "deep roots." Whether your attention is drawn towards the water imagery this week or not, I hope you find things here to nourish your spirit.

Feb 24: Scripture: Genesis 9:8-17

This passage comes right after the flood narrative, with Noah and the ark. It's a beautiful example of covenant, God's promise of blessing and commitment to remember all the life that God created. After you have read it twice, preferably once out loud, reflect/journal on one of the following:

1. As you read the passage a third time, note the word, phrase, or verse that is holding your attention or curiosity. Write it down in your journal.

As yourself why that word or phrase is jumping out to you. Is it giving voice to a feeling you have? To a need you have? To a question you have? Does it seem out of place? Or are you curious about what it means? Do you feel God calling you to respond in some way? All responses are valid. Be honest with yourself. Take a few moments to reflect and jot down your thoughts.

2. In this story of covenant, and in most examples of covenants in the Bible, God gives the people a sign of the covenant, a symbol of the promise and the blessing. What symbol most closely represents your experience of promise and blessing, or your identity in relationship to God? You may find that a traditional Christian symbol speaks powerfully to you, or you may find that an abstract symbol or something from the natural world comes to mind. Reflect about why this symbol is powerful for you, and if drawing is a centering activity for you, consider sketching in your journal.

As you close in prayer, offer the observations and stirrings of your heart to God, or offer the following breath prayer for 10 cycles of breath. It's based on themes from this passage, and from Psalm 25, which you'll read later this week.

Breathe in slowly and pray: You see me,
Breathe out slowly and pray: You remember me.

Feb 25: Prayer

Those of you choosing the more open-ended *lectio divina* exercises may be increasingly familiar with the practice of reflecting on a single word or phrase. However, this practice can be a helpful centering prayer practice on its own, apart from scripture. If a centering word for prayer time today comes to mind on its own, go ahead use that word! If not, try one of the following:

1. Look at a photo of someone you love or admire, or recall a favorite memory of a loved one, and distill a word of reflection from the experience of contemplating that relationship.
2. Look out a window and really pay attention to what you see: What's the light doing? Are there people, animals, or plants? Is it a beautiful day? A dreary one? Is it bustling and chaotic, or peaceful and still? Distill a word of reflection as you consider your reaction to the scene outside the window.
3. Recall a strong emotion you've had recently; any emotion, "good" or "bad." Use a word related to that emotional experience to center you in a time of prayer.

Once you have a word, take at least 5 minutes and meditate on that word. If meditation doesn't come easily to you (generally, or in this specific moment!), try one of the following:

1. Doodle the word in your journal, or write it once and trace it repeatedly
2. If walking is comfortable and available to you, walk around, inside or outside, and let your steps set a rhythm for repeating the word.
3. Close your eyes and place your palms together. Slowly glide them past each other, switching direction when the fingertips of one hand reach the heel of your other hand. Use this rhythm to repeat the word, and the movement to help focus your attention.

Feb 26: Scripture: Psalm 25:1-10

This Psalm is a subtitled "Prayer for Guidance and Deliverance" and is attributed to David. You're welcome to read the full Psalm if you'd like, but the first ten verses are what's included in the lectionary. After you have read it twice, preferably once out loud, reflect/journal on one of the following:

1. As you read the passage a third time, note the word, phrase, or verse that is holding your attention or curiosity. Write it down in your journal.

As yourself why that word or phrase is jumping out to you. Is it giving voice to a feeling you have? To a need you have? To a question you have? Does it seem out of place? Or are you curious about what it means? Do you feel God calling you to respond in some way? All responses are valid. Be honest with yourself. Take a few moments to reflect and jot down your thoughts.

2. Lent is sometimes a season when we hear a lot about shame. Here, the Psalmist seems to be talking about being shamed as in “defeated by enemies,” but modern readers probably associate different kinds of experiences with the feeling of shame. So many of us carry potent memories of the “warm wash of shame,” as Brene Brown describes it. Reflect on the following questions, making note of your thoughts if that is helpful:

When you find yourself feeling shame or reliving painful memories of shame, what is the path that brings you back to God? Who can you rely on to help you recover your sense of “God’s steadfast love”? What routines or activities help you reclaim your belovedness? Which voices help you to drown out the lies that you are not lovable, or less lovable, by God and/or by others?

As you close in prayer, offer the observations and stirrings of your heart to God, or offer the following breath prayer for 10 cycles of breath. It’s based on themes from this passage, and from Genesis 9:8-17, which you read earlier this week.

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Breathe out slowly and pray: You remember me.

Feb 27: Song: O Love, that wilt not let me go (words: George Matheson; music: Albert Lister Peace)

Take a few centering breaths and enjoy this beautiful rendition of an older hymn. Depending on your reflections earlier in the week, you may notice some resonances with the themes from the first two scriptures from this week. I recommend you listen to it twice: once while watching the expressive performance, and once while following along with the words as shared below, especially if they are unfamiliar. Plan to sit in stillness for a few minutes afterwards if you can as you pay attention to your response to the music, and offer a prayer.

The Westminster Chorus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiZ9xXoZ1Mk> (4:34)

O Love, that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;

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I give Thee back the life I owe
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Joy, that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be

O Cross, that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

Feb 28: Scripture 1 Peter 3:18-22 / choose your own adventure

This lectionary passage today picks up in kind of a strange place, right in the middle of a Paul-ish discourse in the book of 1 Peter. Sometimes, the lectionary does this! You are welcome to read it and do the *lectio divina* exercise, and the prompts are reproduced here in item 1. If you'd rather do something *inspired* by the scripture, go to item 2 below:

1. Read the passage twice, preferably once out loud. As you read the passage a third time, note the word, phrase, or verse that is holding your attention or curiosity. Write it down in your journal.

As yourself why that word or phrase is jumping out to you. Is it giving voice to a feeling you have? To a need you have? To a question you have? Does it seem out of place? Or are you curious about what it means? Do you feel God calling you to respond in some way? All responses are valid. Be honest with yourself. Take a few moments to reflect and jot down your thoughts.

2. The passage references the story of Noah, and incorporates references to water and baptism. If jumping into a logical argument part way through isn't the best plan for you today, reflect instead on the vows that are part of the UMC's baptismal liturgy, reproduced below. Reflect on the lines in the liturgy that hold your attention the most, and experiment with setting an intention to recall the gift of baptism whenever you touch water today (or tomorrow).

On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:
Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,

reject the evil powers of this world,
and repent of your sin?

I do.

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
in whatever forms they present themselves?

I do.

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,
put your whole trust in his grace,
and promise to serve him as your Lord,

in union with the Church which Christ has opened
to people of all ages, nations, and races?

I do.¹

As you close in prayer, offer the observations and stirrings of your heart to God, or offer the following breath prayer for 10 cycles of breath. It's based on themes from Psalm 25, and from Genesis 9:8-17, which you read earlier this week.

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Breathe out slowly and pray: You remember me.

March 1: Prayer for others

Look through your journal or think back to prayer requests you've heard named from family, friends, or the church in the last week. If you have trouble thinking of any, choose one person/thing from the following categories:

- A friend
- A family member
- Something from the news
- Something in creation
- Something/someone from church

¹ United Methodist Discipleship Ministries, Baptismal Covenant I, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-baptismal-covenant-i>, accessed 12 Feb 2021.

Hold the people/situations on your list in prayer in turn, reflecting on your relationship with the person/thing, imagining how God's presence, peace, power, and/or love could feel, look, be reflected, or be transformative for them. Take time to listen, too. You may or may not find that you leave this time of prayer with an idea or a way that you can help to support any of the people or situations you held in prayer. Any answer, or no perceivable answer from God is ok.

March 2: Scripture: Mark 1:9-15

This passage is packed with action, which is common for the gospel of Mark. After you have read it twice, preferably once out loud, reflect/journal on one of the following:

1. As you read the passage a third time, note the word, phrase, or verse that is holding your attention or curiosity. Write it down in your journal.

As yourself why that word or phrase is jumping out to you. Is it giving voice to a feeling you have? To a need you have? To a question you have? Does it seem out of place? Or are you curious about what it means? Do you feel God calling you to respond in some way? All responses are valid. Be honest with yourself. Take a few moments to reflect and jot down your thoughts.

2. In six verses, Mark covers three big moments in Jesus' early ministry: his belovedness at his baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, and his proclamation of the good news which is set against the ominous backdrop of John's arrest. Our own lives cycle through these seasons too: seasons of grounding in love, of suffering in the wilderness, of accepting risks by living out our callings. Which of these seasons most resonates with you right now? How are you moving within and in response to this season? Reflect briefly in your journal.

As you close in prayer, offer the observations and stirrings of your heart to God, or offer the following breath prayer for 10 cycles of breath. It's based on themes from Psalm 25, and from Genesis 9:8-17, which you read earlier this week.

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Outline for group meetings (Feb 25 - March 3)

Gathering time and greetings (5 min)

Many of the passages for this week refer to stories involving water. Many of us seek out water in nature as a source of peace, though we're certainly aware of the chaos and destruction that water can cause as well. What are some of your strongest associations with or memories of water? Beyond the stories you've already read for this week, what Bible stories can you think of that involve water? Why do you think water is an important symbol for Christians? (20 min)

What reflections or observations from your scripture reading and prayer time this week would you like to share with the group? Flip through your journal. Have you found yourself continuing to consider or reflect on any of the phrases of scripture you've sat with during the week? (20 min)

Take the remaining time to share joys and concerns with one another and then to pray together. Sometimes it can be difficult to pray out loud in front of a group. That's ok! And also, practice helps. Discuss in your group how you'd like to close in prayer each week. Perhaps group members could sign up in advance, or group members will agree to volunteer at least once over the course of your time together. Or maybe each group member will pray for one other member of the group in the closing prayer. This is more challenging to do in a virtual meeting because you're not sitting in a circle, but can be a nice way to involve all voices at the end of a meeting. In the event that no one offers to close the group in prayer, consider using the Lord's prayer to end your meeting. (15 minutes)