

Deep Roots Groups - Week 3

Welcome to Week 3, friends.

“Renewal” is a loose theme for this week, as we visit a few “greatest hits” scripture passages and draw on many possible paths to a more life-giving experience of God. You may, of course, draw different themes out of these passages and exercises, as they are rich and full of powerful images and stories. But if renewal is something you’re looking for this week, we can find it here too.

March 3 - Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17

Today’s passage is the giving of the 10 Commandments. God blesses the newly liberated community of Hebrews with these “*shalls*” and “*shall nots*” that are designed to shape the bedrock of their new community. 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. This story invites us to consider how to be free *and* be God’s people. God had brought the Hebrew people out of Egypt and into freedom - but wandering in the desert wasn’t exactly the kind of liberation they had in mind. They were free from one kind of life, but hadn’t yet learned what they’d been freed *for*. The 10 Commandments form the bedrock of their new way of being and worshiping God; they provide a structure and guidance for how the people are to *use* their freedom.

We claim liberation as part of our faith in Jesus, and what that means is different for all of us. How do *you* experience freedom in Jesus? What are you freed from? Freed for? And does this freedom come with a sense of lightness, a sense of responsibility, both, or neither? Can you access a sense of freedom in Jesus today?

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 19, which you'll read later this week.

Breathe in slowly and pray: You endure forever,
Breathe out slowly and pray: You revive my soul.

March 4 - Praying in the wild

In his sermon on Sunday (February 28), Rev. Alex mentioned some stories of people who take scripture and their prayer life out into public spaces - not to put their faithfulness on display, but to put scripture and prayer in conversation with their neighborhood and their neighbors in new ways. We invite you to put that into practice today, whether that's by going for a 10-15 minute masked walk in a safe place, sitting outside, or setting up shop next to a window.

During your prayer time try one of the following if you'd like:

1. Pray a stream of consciousness prayer, during which you practice narrating what you notice around you. This intention of describing the scene and the community, helps to ground your focus, and you may notice things you never did before. If you like to journal, this can be a great exercise. Trying to capture the scene or the experience with precision can be revealing.
2. Meditate on the word "neighbor." Pay attention to those around you, noticing details about people you encounter that you might not otherwise focus on. In your mind, name each person you see as a neighbor.
3. Choose a favorite passage or verse of scripture or a hymn and repeat it to yourself; it's ok to be a friendly person humming a quiet tune out in the wild! How does bringing these reflections of your faith out into the world shed light both on the world and on the scripture or hymn?

March 5 - Matthew 6:7-14

This passage isn't part of the lectionary this week, but it is the scripture text for the sermon on March 7 so we'll sneak it in. We say the Lord's prayer all the time; and lately we've been using different words when we say the prayer together during worship. If the 10 Commandments are a summary of guidelines for how to be free God's way; the

Lord's prayer is a summary of how to pray. 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. Reflect on the line, "give us this day our daily bread." After they were liberated from Egypt, the Hebrews wandered around in the wilderness and received enough manna (bread) for each day and no more (except for the sabbath). How does it feel to ask God for what you need just for each day? Instead of asking God more generically for wisdom, peace, and love, can you reframe your prayers to ask God for enough of what you need for *today*? Enough love for today? Enough courage for today? Enough resilience for today? Enough support for today? How do you imagine that that specificity could impact your prayer life?

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 19, which you'll read later this week.

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March 6 - Song

In some Christian traditions, people are encouraged to not say "hallelujah" during Lent. We are to save up our hallelujahs for Easter, and focus on the repentance work of Lent instead of "skipping to the good part." If some of you ascribe to this practice, I hope you forgive me, because - this year especially - I think it's extra valuable to find and name praise wherever we can. There are many shades of praise, and they range from the bright and joyous to the awestruck to the quiet and grief-tinged.

This piece of music written by composer Eric Whitacre captures so many colors of praise in this 10-minute meditation on the word "alleluia." At times it's resonant, and dissonant; different voices take the lead, carrying the story of praise for the group. it's

melancholy and reverent and soaring all at once. At least, that's how I experience it. See what you think (and feel), and while you listen, and consider journaling about times when praising God has taken different forms in your life. If you're a doodler, doodling to music can be a relaxing exercise and help your brain focus more clearly on the music.

Eric Whitacre, "Alleluia": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rak_rJLG49k

March 7 - Psalm 19

The Psalm this week may feel like a breath of fresh air amidst the other "Lentier" Psalms we've read thus far. It starts with creation and moves through to the praise of God using beautiful language with resonances of renewal. 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. No matter what your routine has been like during the last year, I'm guessing that renewal has been hard to come by. Do you see a path to renewal that you recognize somewhere in this Psalm? Does renewal feel like the poetry of nature that speaks without words? Does it feel like an intellectual delight in "the wisdom of the decrees of the Lord?" Does the path to renewal have a sensory element for you; do you need to taste honey to imagine what is sweeter?

Reflect on what a path to renewal looks like for you, and either journal about it or go do it for 5 whole minutes! Stand still outside and shoo your to-do list away, write or sketch about time when you felt renewed, plan to have a treat that you truly appreciate, find grounding in God who is "sure" and "right" and "clear" and "enduring." Five minutes is not enough to counter all of the last year, but it is something you can give yourself today, as inspired by this Psalm.

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 Psalm.

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March 8 - 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

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 9 - 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The passage today comes from Paul, in the opening section of his first letter to the church in Corinth. He's talking about some of his favorite subjects, including the paradox of the cross. 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. Among the many other things Paul is doing in this passage, he emphasizes the centrality of Christian witness in our experience of faith. We don't "logic" our way all of the way to faith, no matter how much we would like to. We draw our energy and our community and our call to live a different kind of life from our personal and collective *experience* with Jesus. In other words, we encounter the grace and presence of God in these stories and among others who read them and live them with us.

In what ways have you experienced the "wisdom of God" that counters the "wisdom" of the world? What have you witnessed that keeps you coming back to worship God and grow as a disciple who seeks justice and righteousness? How do the experiences of and witness of others carry you when the wisdom of God is hard to find?

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 19.

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Outline for group meetings (March 4 - March 10)

Gathering time and greetings (5 min)

The Lord's Prayer is/was the subject of the sermon on March 7. Do you look forward to praying the Lord's Prayer every week? Do you use it in your own prayer time? Do you remember when you learned it? Does it function as a meaningful part of your faith? Why and/or why not? (10 min)

Many of the questions for the scripture passages this week drew on themes of renewal. Whether you used those prompts or not, what are some paths to renewal that you have access to right now? What are some paths to renewal that you miss the most right now? (10 min)

What other 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)