



THE RADIX PROJECT

small groups / deep roots

EASTER 2021:
CENTERING WOMEN'S VOICES



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL



Dear friends,

The Radix Project: Small Groups/Deep Roots is an opportunity to be part of a small group that meets over the course of six weeks. This is the fifth iteration since the project was launched in early 2020. The pandemic did not slow us down, and, in some ways, connecting via Zoom has afforded an opportunity for some to participate who otherwise would not have. A small group is a cohort of people who gather to get to know one another against the backdrop of shared stories, scripture, and prayer. This is not a working group; there is no task to be accomplished. It is about knowing one another, and being known, as we are known by God. And that is the root of spiritual transformation.

The name for this communal effort—The Radix Project—draws on the Latin word for “root,” which is *radix*. Jesus modeled small group relationships in his life and ministry, and the early Church was structured on small groups who worshipped, prayed and cared for one another. Those are our roots, and in our time, when so many pressures of modern life leave us feeling alone and isolated, Christian community offers us a tangible way of entering into relationships rooted in trust and mutuality.

The root word, *radix*, also gives rise to the oft-touted word we hear a lot these days—radical. A radical is not one who goes their separate way, doing their own thing. A radical is one who is so well-grounded with deep roots that they are able to stretch out to the fringes of existence and offer us all a different way of being in the world. We speak of radical hospitality or radical welcome because we claim our deep roots of this life in Christ, and we are willing to claim a radical vision for our lives and for the world.

We don't always agree—politically, theologically, and we have different life experiences—but we care for one another, we pray for one another, and the blush of life is more full because of those relationships. It is our hope that as you reflect on these stories, you might discover how God's graceful activity is revealed in your own life as well, and in those of your group members. ♦

THE RADIX PROJECT PLANNING COMMITTEE

Martha Craig
The Rev. Canon Jennifer King Daugherty
Julia Logan
Lynne Markova
Emily Meeks
The Rev. Canon Nancy Ross
The Very Rev. Steve Thomason

Special thanks to Carrie Kahler for assistance with the visual art interpretation.

Please feel free to contact anyone from the Planning Committee if you have any questions or concerns along the way. Thank you for your participation!

OVERVIEW FOR SMALL GROUPS

Small groups are designed to gather people of faith in settings that foster trust so that our relationships with God and one another are strengthened. When we meet each other for earnest conversation, sharing and prayer, we deepen the bonds of affection by which we learn how to love ourselves, each other and God more fully. In this way, small groups are intentional about providing space for prayerful support and accountability, guided by the One we know as Jesus the Christ.

For our purposes in the Radix Project, we have designed a process for guiding 6–10 people in their season together, designed as six 90-minute sessions, with a plenary gathering before the first session. Each small group gathering is structured to open with prayer, to have time for check-in, scripture reading and reflection, sharing of stories, and check-out with prayer.

SMALL GROUP SESSIONS

In addition to the six small group meetings (which will convene at various times), there is a plenary gathering to which all who participate in the small groups are invited. So the flow of the season looks like this:

OPENING PLENARY

Centering Women's Voices

Sunday, April 25, 2021

7–8:30 p.m., via Zoom

The Opening Plenary will begin with a presentation by members of the Radix Project planning committee. This presentation is open to anyone, whether or not they are participating in the small groups. Following this presentation, the groups will meet individually for the first time in break-out sessions.

- SESSION 1: DEBORAH** week of April 25, 2021
- SESSION 2: MARY OF BETHANY** week of May 2, 2021
- SESSION 3: JUDITH** week of May 9, 2021
- SESSION 4: TABITHA** week of May 16, 2021
- SESSION 5: HANNAH** week of May 23, 2021
- SESSION 6: THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN** week of May 30, 2021

WHY ARE WE CENTERING WOMEN'S VOICES? WHY NOW?

We have learned anew in the last year that there is great diversity of experience in our culture and in our history, and that often only the stories of the dominant and powerful get told. That's true of Scripture, too. It is eye-opening and life-giving to ask, "Whose story have we not heard?" and go look for the ones that are hidden in plain sight. We saw that, for example, in the way *The New York Times* dedicated space to how women have been doing in the pandemic and what their voices have to say. Women have always had a particular experience in culture and this is valuable for all people to understand.

This was Jesus' way, too. He often centered his stories on people who were undervalued or outcasts. He gathered a great diversity of people to himself, especially those who were scorned or not seen as important in his day.

Some of us first learned these stories in a very different world, one in which women were primarily valued for their piety, helpfulness, and submission to authority. But that is more about the culture in which they were interpreted rather than the culture from which/for whom they were written. We want to see them told and discussed in a new way, where the women's individuality, power, and agency are considered.

We want to look for diverse women's experiences and diverse stories of faith. A female character can often be one- or two-dimensional—the love interest or the antagonist or the sidekick. But in these scripture stories, there is a richness, a range of ages and locations and complexity to each of their stories.

RESIST BINARY THINKING & REDUCING SOME OF THE STORIES TO FEMALE VS. MALE.

There is potential for conflict within a group where a woman's or man's reaction that manifests in a particularly energized way might create challenges for others. These stories can bring up narratives we may have or have been taught about women, and about women and men, such as the place of women in leadership and what it means for a woman to be a leader. Other narratives might include the vulnerability of women and how that can be exploited, or the idea that if a woman has power, it is because a man has been disempowered some way. But, for women, these stories can be thrilling for the reversal of power that in a longstanding archetypal expression.

We want to name this potential and remind people to hold space for each other and that we're all in this together. Radix is not a setting in which we are trying to convince or prove to anyone a particular way of thinking. If these stories are uncomfortable, remember that part of our practice will be praying for each other, listening and caring for each other throughout the process—listening to people say what they need to say—it is all related.

It is also important to remember that hearing the stories and voices of the women within the Church is not solely “women's work.” It is the work of all people across the entire Church.

ESTABLISH GROUP NORMS

In order to grow in trust, it is important for groups to agree to norms for their time together and revisit them periodically as needed. It is important that everyone agree to abide by the same expectations for their time together. Here are some aspects of relational group culture that all groups will want to discuss as they begin their work.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- ◆ What is allowed to be shared outside the group?
- ◆ What may be shared on social media?

RESPECT AND MUTUALITY

- ◆ Let others finish without being interrupted.
- ◆ Resist the temptation to problem-solve.
- ◆ Mutual respect is essential.
- ◆ Give everyone a chance to speak.

LOGISTICS

- ◆ What are expectations about beginning and ending on time?
- ◆ ...about informing others of an expected absence?

ATTENDANCE

- ◆ Be punctual.
- ◆ Commit to regular attendance and participation.

PREPARATION

- ◆ What, if anything, are group members expected to do to prepare for their meetings?

COMMITMENT TO PRAYER

- ◆ What are expectations that each group member commits to pray for the others daily during this time as a small group?

ZOOM ETIQUETTE

Keep your microphone on mute when not speaking.

Take responsibility to practice using the technology ahead of the meeting, and ask for help as needed.

FLOW OF THE SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

A key to the flourishing of small groups is some consistency week to week so folks will know what to expect. A group facilitator will encourage the group to stay on track, but everyone has a part in making that happen. Here is the suggested format for all Radix Project groups which are designed to meet for 90 minutes each week:

GATHERING	5 minutes
OPEN IN PRAYER	5 minutes
CHECK-IN QUESTION10 minutes
SCRIPTURE REFLECTION20 minutes
GROUP DISCUSSION30 minutes
CHECK-OUT INCLUDING PRAYER REQUESTS10 minutes
CLOSING PRAYER/WORSHIP10 minutes

IDEAS FOR CHECK-IN QUESTIONS

Pick one for each week.

- ◆ Share a memory about your first visit to Saint Mark's Cathedral.
- ◆ What is your favorite water sport or hobby (swimming, boating, showering, etc.)?
- ◆ Where do you do most of your praying? (Or what's your go-to prayer style?)
- ◆ What is the most adventurous trip you've ever taken?
- ◆ What are you most looking forward to when the pandemic ends?
- ◆ What is one important thing you've learned about yourself in the past year?

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYERS/CHECK-OUT

Leading one another in prayer is a responsibility that is meant to be shared among the group. At the close of each week, invite a group member to find and share a brief opening prayer, and another to bring a closing for the following week. These may be extemporaneous, or sourced from the rich variety of resources, some of which are listed below:

- ◆ Daily Devotions, BCP, p. 137–140
- ◆ Compline, BCP, p. 127
- ◆ A brief hymn, chant, or Taizé prayer
- ◆ Lectionary-based Prayers from Vanderbilt Divinity School
<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=154>
- ◆ The Book of Common Prayer Online
<https://www.bcponline.org/>
- ◆ The New Zealand Prayer Book Online
<https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/>
Here are three that might work well:
<https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/138.html>
- ◆ The Work of the People
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/visual-liturgy>
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/be-still>
(Some resources on this site will require a password,
available from Greg, gbloch@saintmarks.org.)

Closing prayer is an opportunity for each member of the group to reflect on the time together, articulating what they learned, and to ask the group to hold them in prayer with special intention. That intention may have arisen in the context of the meeting, or it could be that you are asking for

prayers for some prevailing part of your life (e.g., my child has surgery next week, or I am retiring from work, etc.). The important thing is that the prayers of the group gather all those intentions up as the meeting comes to an end, AND that each person commits to holding those prayers through the week, until you meet again.

In addition to including a prayer from one of the above resources, consider the following:

- ◆ The group may choose to go around and allow each person to pray for the person sitting to their right, with the facilitator opening and closing.
- ◆ Alternatively, after the intentions are named, sit in silent prayer, centered on God's mercy and presence.

SCRIPTURE STUDY GUIDES



WEEK 1: DEBORAH

SCRIPTURE *Judges 4:4-10*

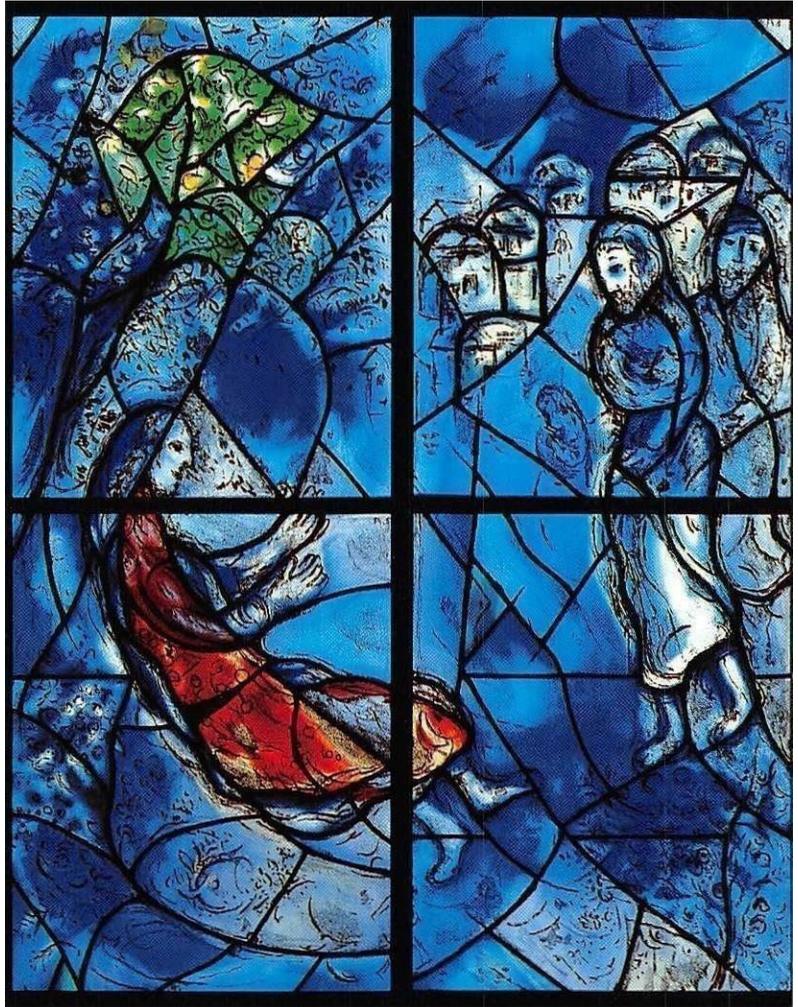
AT THAT time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgement. She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, ‘Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.’” Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” And she said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; and Deborah went up with him. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase stands out to you or jars you? What questions do you have about the passage?
2. Why do you think Barak refuses to do battle with Sisera unless Deborah goes with him?
3. The name Deborah can mean bee or wasp. What in this passage could we connect to this meaning?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Deborah—the only woman judge in Judges—is described as a prophet and as the wife of Lappidoth. This is the only mention of Lappidoth in the Bible. Why do you think it might have been important to record his name?
2. Throughout the Bible, and in much of history, women have been defined by their relationships to men. In many cases, their names have been lost because they are mentioned as someone's wife, daughter, mother, etc. If you had to define yourself only in terms of your connection to another person, who would that be, and why?
3. If you wrote your own epitaph, or your own brief entry in some cosmic encyclopedia, what would it be?



Deborah
Marc Chagall (1887–1985)
stained glass, 1978–1985
in the church of St.
Stephan, Mainz, Germany

Marc Chagall was born in 1887 in Russia to a Hasidic Jewish family, and lived in Paris, Berlin, Russia, and the United States, as his identity, faith, and politics intersected with WWI, the Communist Revolution, and the rise and fall of the Third Reich. This window was part of a series commissioned by St. Stephan's in Mainz in the 1970s and 80s, and is the only German church Chagall worked with. He intended the series as a sign of Jewish-Christian friendship and international understanding.

Chagall often used a blue color scheme, with contrasting figures in red or green. What effect does that have in this window? Why would Chagall choose Deborah to be red? And why are the other figures less detailed?

NOTES

WEEK 2: MARY OF BETHANY

SCRIPTURE *John 11:18–45*

Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away

the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase stands out to you? Why?
2. In this scripture, Martha confronts Jesus, whose response is among his most essential teachings. How does Mary’s response to Jesus differ from Martha’s? What do Jesus and Mary learn from each other?
3. What can we learn from Mary’s “stillness” and the fact that she doesn’t approach Jesus until he summons her personally?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe a time of great loss when you felt the presence of God. How did this experience make you feel at the time and how has it impacted your faith since then?
2. What does Mary’s relationship with Jesus say to you about intimacy in your relationship with God?
3. The resurrection of Lazarus takes place within the context of Jesus’ relationship with Martha and Mary. It also occurs within the context of the community that surrounds and supports them. In times of loss, how do you look to the Saint Mark’s community for support, and, as a member of the community, how do you offer it?



The Resurrection of Lazarus
Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937)
Oil on Canvas, 1896
Musée d'Orsay

Henry Ossawa Tanner was the first internationally acclaimed African American painter. While he was born and studied at first in Pennsylvania, the racism he endured pushed him to move to Paris in 1891. From 1896 until his death in 1937 he painted a number of affecting and critically acclaimed depictions of Biblical events.

Tanner bathes Lazarus in light, while Christ, Mary, and the community are almost in darkness. What does this say about Jesus' relationship to Mary and the rest of the community? Have you experienced the presence or absence of God in a dark hour?

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WEEK 3: JUDITH

NOTE: If you are not familiar with the Book of Judith, it warrants a read (chapters 8–16) because it is an unusually detailed and complex story about a woman of the Bible! But to understand the passage chosen for our Radix reflection, know this piece of backstory: In the Book of Judith, King Nebuchadnezzar of Assyria has sent his general Holofernes to utterly destroy the Jews in Judaea. Holofernes lays siege to Bethulia, depriving the Jews there of their food and water, bringing them to the point of surrender. But a highly-respected widow named Judith rebukes the elders for their faint-heartedness, insisting that they trust more fully in God. She has a plan to liberate her people single-handedly: “Listen to me. I am about to do a thing which will go down through all generations of our descendants” (8:32). And so, taking only her maid, she sets out for the garrison of Holofernes, praying to God, “By the deceit of my lips strike down the slave with the prince and the prince with his servant; crush their arrogance by the hand of a woman.” (9:10) The women are taken into the camp, where Judith beguiles Holofernes with her beauty and her “true” story of how to conquer the Jews.

SCRIPTURE *Judith, from chapters 12 & 13.*

[Holofernes said] “Go and persuade the Hebrew woman who is in your care to join us and to eat and drink with us. For it would be a disgrace if we let such a woman go without having intercourse with her. If we do not seduce her, she will laugh at us.”

Then Judith came in and lay down. Holofernes’ heart was ravished with her and his passion was aroused, for he had been waiting for an opportunity to seduce her from the day he first saw her. So Holofernes said to her, “Have a drink and be merry with us!” Judith said, “I will gladly drink, my lord, because today is the greatest day in my whole life.” Then she took what her maid had prepared and ate and drank before him. Holofernes was greatly pleased with her, and drank a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk in any one day since he was born.

When evening came, his slaves quickly withdrew. Bagoas closed the tent from outside and shut out the attendants from his master’s presence. They went to bed, for they all were weary because the banquet had lasted so long. But Judith was left alone in the tent, with Holofernes stretched out on his bed, for he was dead drunk.

Then Judith, standing beside his bed, said in her heart, “O Lord God of all might, look in this hour on the work of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem. Now indeed is the time to help your heritage and to carry out my design to destroy the enemies who have risen up against us.”

She went up to the bedpost near Holofernes’ head, and took down his sword that hung there. She came close to his bed, took hold of the hair of his head, and said, “Give me strength today, O Lord God of Israel!” Then she struck his neck twice with all her might, and cut off his head. Next she rolled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts. Soon afterward she went out and gave Holofernes’ head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag.

Then the two of them went out together, as they were accustomed to do for prayer. They passed through the camp, circled around the valley, and went up the mountain to Bethulia, and came to its gates. From a distance Judith called out to the sentries at the gates, “Open, open the gate! God, our God, is with us, still showing his power in Israel and his strength against our enemies, as he has done today!”

When the people of her town heard her voice, they hurried down to the town gate and summoned the elders of the town. They all ran together, both small and great, for it seemed unbelievable that she had returned. They opened the gate and welcomed them. Then they lit a fire to give light, and gathered around them. Then she said to them with a loud voice, “Praise God, O praise him! Praise God, who has not withdrawn his mercy from the house of Israel, but has destroyed our enemies by my hand this very night!”

Then she pulled the head out of the bag and showed it to them, and said, “See here, the head of Holofernes, the commander of the Assyrian army, and here is the canopy beneath which he lay in his drunken stupor. The Lord has struck him down by the hand of a woman. As the Lord lives, who has protected me in the way I went, I swear that it was my face that seduced him to his destruction, and that he committed no sin with me, to defile and shame me.” ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What sets Judith apart from the leaders of the city under siege? Why is she able to face Holofernes with only her maid by her side?
2. Notice the phrases “by my hand” and “by the hand of a woman.” What does that bring up for the people in Judith’s time? What does it bring up for you?
3. Who does Judith say has struck Holofernes down? What does this say about the people’s faith, who were ready to surrender, and to whom “it seemed unbelievable that she had returned?” About Judith’s faith?
4. What are the measures of virtue in this story of Judith? How does virtue fit in a story of beheading?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Has there been a time in your life when an unexpected person has “saved the day” or come through in a big way – the person least expected to be the one to do so? How did you feel about that person? Have you ever been that person?
2. Think of a time when you had to be the one to step up when others were giving up, or afraid, or unable. How did that feel?
3. Have you ever triumphed, or achieved something important or good, and considered it was God working through you?
4. Have you ever had to be both brave and wily? How did you gather your nerve and your wits? What was the ground of your strength?

ADDITIONAL TIDBITS ABOUT JUDITH

- ◆ The name Judith means “Jewish woman,” and so this account may be one of her representing Israel.
- ◆ Most scholars think the Book of Judith was written around 100 BCE by a Palestinian Jew, and that it is a work of historical fiction (noting a number of telling historical inaccuracies).
- ◆ Like many of the books of the Apocrypha, Judith was part of the early canon in the Christian Bible, but is not part of the Protestant canon.



*Judith Beheading
Holofernes*
Artemisia Gentilschi
(1593–1653)
Oil on Canvas,
1614–1620
Museo di
Capodimonte,
Naples

Artemisia Gentilschi was a gifted 17th century painter who had a long and distinguished career in both Italy and England. She was able to criticize the patriarchal society around her through her treatment of powerful women in Scripture. She was also known for the successful prosecution of the man who raped her at age 17.

What role does Judith play in this scene? How do we function as protectors in our various relationships? How do we experience God's protection?

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WEEK 4: TABITHA

SCRIPTURE *Acts of the Apostles 9:36–42*

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, “Please come to us without delay.” So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up.” Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

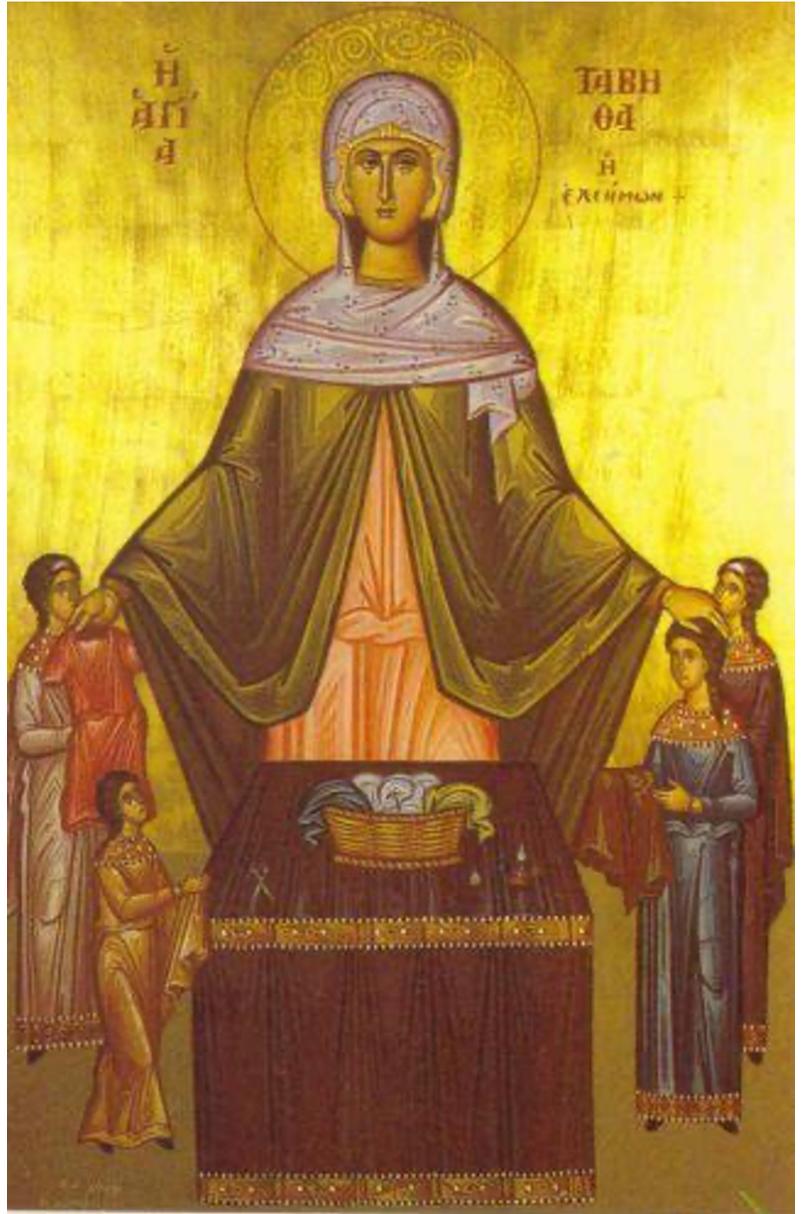
1. What do we know explicitly about Tabitha from the text? What can we infer from her relationships with the other disciples and widows? What role does she seem to have in the community?
2. What do you imagine Peter was thinking when he got up without discussion and traveled the 12.4 miles to Joppa? What do you imagine he prayed as he knelt at Tabitha’s bedside?
3. Who are the “saints and the widows?” How do you imagine the scene as Tabitha appears to them?
4. What do you suppose happened next for Tabitha and her community?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever had the responsibility of breaking sad news to others? What was it like?
2. Have you ever had the experience where someone's death gathers people together in a new way? What happened?
3. Have you ever had your health restored in such a way that it was a new beginning for you? What changed?
4. Who is your community of influence and mutuality—your “saints and widows”?

ADDITIONAL TIDBITS ABOUT TABITHA

- ◆ Tabitha/Dorcas means “gazelle” in Aramaic/Greek.
- ◆ Tabitha's raising from the dead is the first such miracle by one of the apostles.
- ◆ Dorcas Societies, which provide clothing and other material needs for the poor, are named for her. The original society was founded in Douglas, Isle of Man in 1834 in thanksgiving for deliverance from a cholera outbreak, and to replace the bedding and clothing of the poor that had been destroyed as part of the effort to prevent an epidemic.



In the first Russian icon, we see Tabitha depicted in three colors: blue about her head and shoulders, showing her connection to the spiritual; green about her arms showing both her place in the community—someone who gives hope—and also her place in the story as someone who had experienced God’s resurrecting power; and the red dress underneath shows her connection to her earthly life, and to the blood of Christ’s sacrifice.



In this second icon, Tabitha is arrayed almost entirely in white, depicting righteousness, with a little blue around her throat, and a little red on her chest and sleeves.

Why would one icon writer choose to emphasize Tabitha's righteousness, and another give her various roles more equal weight? If you were to dress yourself in three colors, what would you choose, and why?

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WEEK 5: HANNAH

SCRIPTURE: *1 Samuel 1:26–2:10*

AND Hannah said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD.”

She left him there for the LORD.

Hannah prayed and said,
“My heart exults in the LORD;
my strength is exalted in my God.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in my victory.

“There is no Holy One like the LORD,
no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.

Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the LORD is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.

The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.

Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry are fat with spoil.

The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.

The LORD kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.

He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.

For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's,
and on them he has set the world.

“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might does one prevail.

The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered;
the Most High will thunder in heaven.

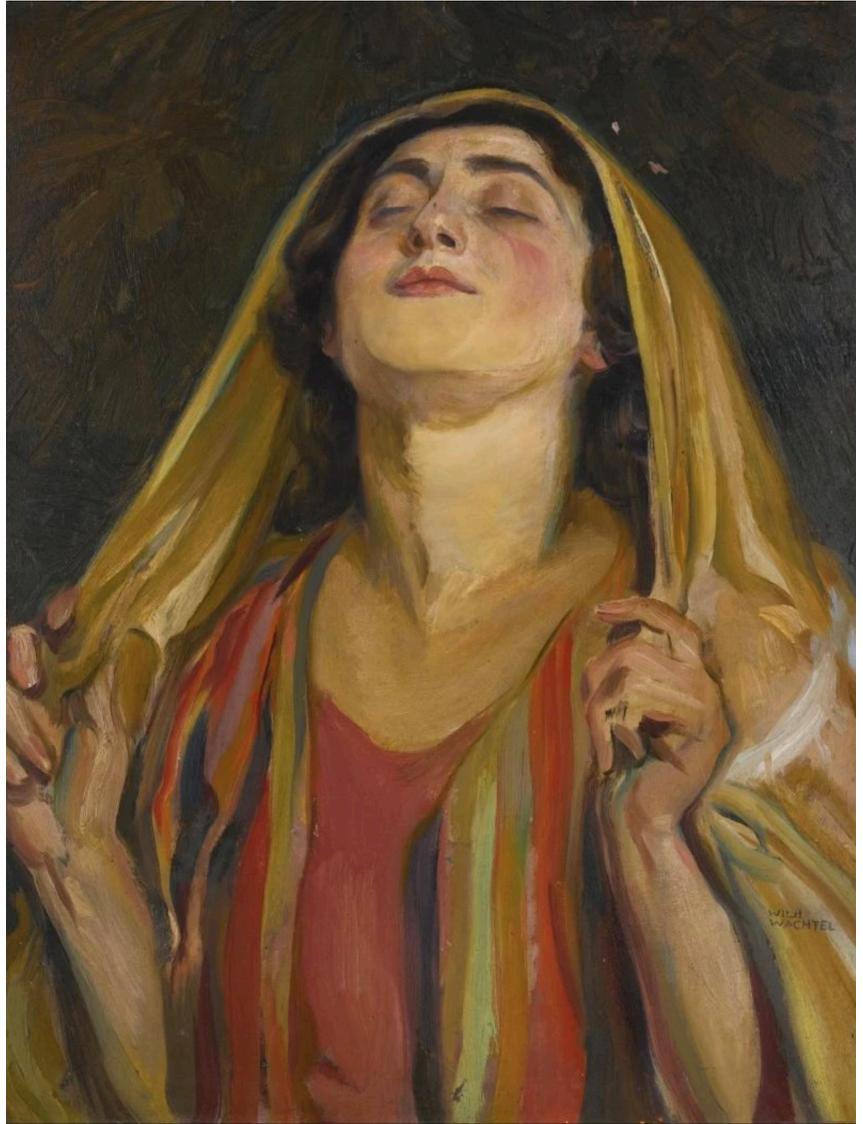
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king,
and exalt the power of his anointed.” ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Hannah's prayer has been described as a song of praise and referenced as the Magnificat of the Old Testament because of its parallels of thanksgiving in Mary's Song (Luke 1:46–55). How does the use of praise reveal Hannah's ultimate source of joy? In what ways does it read like a psalm?
2. The prayer employs the use of contrasts to juxtapose ways in which God is at work. Which contrast stood out to you? What qualities may we learn about God's sovereignty and power, and also about Hannah's values? Do you see these contrasts and qualities at work today?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Hannah indicates that God has answered her prayer for a child in Samuel. Describe a time when you felt God has responded to a continued prayer in you. How does praying over time change how you receive the answer? What shifts in emotion or desire may you experience?
2. Hannah keeps her promise (1 Samuel 1:11) and gives Samuel to the Lord for his whole life. What does it mean to you to make and keep promises? When was it challenging to do so?
3. In Hannah's joy, she acknowledges God first. When you receive blessing, how do you recognize God? What does Hannah's returning of a beloved gift share about her faith?



Hannah at Prayer
Wilhelm Wachtel
(1875–1952)
Oil on Board, before
1942
Private collection

Wilhelm Wachtel was a Polish Jewish artist who lived in Europe and Palestine from 1875 until 1942, when he immigrated to the United States. Most of his work was lost during WWII.

What emotions do you see on Hannah's face? What is the significance of the drab-colored cloak that would normally cover Hannah's brightly colored dress? Do you ever feel as if you were carrying a riot of color under a plain exterior? How does prayer help us communicate and understand our own emotions?

NOTES

WEEK 6: THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 15:21–28*

JESUS left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly. ♦



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Initially, Jesus treats this woman quite harshly, first ignoring her, and then calling her and her daughter dogs—a deadly insult in first-century Middle Eastern culture. His disciples urge him to ignore her as well. Why do you think they responded the way they did?
2. Despite his unwelcoming attitude, this woman is able to persuade Jesus to change his mind. What stands out to you about how she went about it? How do her responses make you feel?
3. How do Jesus' responses in this story change or shape your view of him?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. The story describes the woman as “shouting after them.” Whose voices are shouting after you in your life? In the life of our community? In the world? What are they calling you and us to do?
2. For what or for whom would you see yourself acting like the Syrophenician woman?
3. Jesus praises this woman for her great faith, but we do not even know her name. Who are some other unnamed figures from your own life who have inspired you?



*Christ and the
Canaanite Woman*
Jean François de Troy
(1679–1752)
Oil on Canvas,
1738–43
Chrysler Museum of
Art, Norfolk VA

Jean Francois de Troy was a French rococo painter who is most famous for his sumptuous depictions of fashionable European nobles. In this painting, however, he eschews rich brocades for simpler fabrics.

What moment of the story do you think is depicted here? Whose faces are lit, and whose cast in shadow? When have you been able to change someone else's mind that resulted in a life-giving outcome? How did it make you feel?

CLOSING DISCUSSION

This is the end of six weeks of study and reflection together. Take time to pray together about next steps, both as individuals and as a group.

NOTES



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

1245 Tenth Avenue East
Seattle, WA 98102

206.323.0300

WWW.SAINTMARKS.ORG