



THE RADIX PROJECT

small groups / deep roots

WINTER 2022:
DOING JUSTICE,
LOVING MERCY



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL



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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 to share stories, study scripture, and pray for one another. This is the seventh iteration since the project was launched in early 2020. The pandemic has not slowed 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

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Please feel free to contact *radix@saintmarks.org* 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 a small group of 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

OPENING PLENARY:

DOING JUSTICE, LOVING MERCY

Sunday, January 23, 2022

6:30–8 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 a small group.

SESSION 1:

MICAH 6:1-8 week of January 23, 2022

SESSION 2:

JACOB AND ESAU week of January 30, 2022

SESSION 3:

WISDOM OF SOLOMON 7:24-8:1 week of February 6, 2022

SESSION 4:

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON week of February 13, 2022

SESSION 5:

PSALM 51 week of February 27, 2022

SESSION 6:

THE BEATITUDES week of March 6, 2022

RADIX 7: DOING JUSTICE, LOVING MERCY

*“What does God require of you but to do justice, love mercy,
and walk humbly with your God?”*

—Micah 6:8

Many will recognize this oft-cited verse from the prophet Micah. Our theme for this Radix series draws inspiration from this verse, which is cited as a sublime summary of true religion (what it means to be faithful), but by adapting the verb forms—doing justice, loving mercy—it is our hope that the prophet’s charge comes to us in present form, alive, stirring us to an active consideration of the question.

Justice takes many shapes in the scriptures, and in our modern society, and not all for the common good. Ancient kinds and modern courts mete out justice, but not always in ways that make moral sense. What are we to do with that? To be sure, we are invited to consider a divine system of justice that extends beyond a simple quid pro quo where the obedient are rewarded for their obedience; the disobedient are punished for their disobedience. There is a thread of that thought woven into parts of the scriptures—Hebrew and Christian—but to leave it there disregards a much more nuanced expression of justice grounded in the covenant with God, whose steadfast love keeps God showing up seeking to restore the relationship even when divine jurisprudence might dictate otherwise. Which is where we see mercy in the stories, time and again. Mercy is a gift—by definition, it is undeserved, and yet it lays the ground for a better future. A new start. The patterns are there for our lives as well, which is why we wrestle with these six scripture passages. They are not exhaustive, but they offer beautiful insight into what it means to do justice and love mercy. May your Radix journey be one of rich blessing.

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 the 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. Zoom resources are available at support.zoom.us

SMALL GROUP MEETING FORMAT

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 QUESTION	.....	10 minutes
SCRIPTURE REFLECTION	.....	20 minutes
GROUP DISCUSSION	.....	30 minutes
CHECK-OUT INCLUDING PRAYER REQUESTS	..	10 minutes
CLOSING PRAYER/WORSHIP	.....	10 minutes

IDEAS FOR CHECK-IN QUESTIONS

Pick one for each week.

- ◆ If you weren't participating in Radix right now, what might you be doing during this day/time slot?
- ◆ What is something you have read recently that you recommend?
- ◆ What is a prayer practice you use or would like to develop?
- ◆ What is something you are grateful for today?
- ◆ What is something about yourself that others may be surprised to know?
- ◆ What time of day do you feel the most energized or focused?
- ◆ If you could be anywhere today, where would you be and why? Who would be with you?
- ◆ What advice would you give to your younger self?

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYERS/CHECK-OUT

Leading one another in prayer is a responsibility that is meant to be shared among the group—it's not just for the facilitator. Decide how your group will share taking turns with opening and closing prayers. Prayers 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
- ◆ A poem that connects to a theme in the scripture selection
- ◆ 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/>
- ◆ The Work of the People
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/visual-liturgy>

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

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

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.

SCRIPTURE STUDY GUIDES



WEEK 1: MICAH 6:1-8

SCRIPTURE *Micah 6:1-8*

God challenges Israel

1 Hear what the LORD says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

2 Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD,

and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the LORD has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

3 “O my people, what have I done to you?

In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,

and redeemed you from the house of slavery;

and I sent before you Moses,

Aaron, and Miriam.

5 O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,

what Balaam son of Beor answered him,

and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,

that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”

What God Requires

6 “With what shall I come before the LORD,

and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,

with calves a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,

with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,

the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good;

and what does the LORD require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness,

and to walk humbly with your God? ◆

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. This passage ends with a verse that is well-known and oft quoted. What in the first seven verses stands out to you? What word or phrase brings you up short?
2. Walter Brueggemann has written that God isn't interested in "our stuff." Why do you think a deceptively simple "ask"—to be just and kind and walk humbly with God — feels so much more difficult?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. We humans seem to easily fall into the trap of trying to bargain with God. "If you will just do this one thing, God, answer this prayer, then I'll [...fill in the blank...]." Think of a time when you tried this. How did it work out?
2. How do we best "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God"—in our own lives, in our communities and in our world?
3. God in this passage presents Israel with a challenge. When has God presented you with a challenge?



Russian Orthodox icon of the prophet Micah (18th century)
Iconostasis of Transfiguration Church, Kizhi Monastery in Karelia, Russia

1. What details in the icon stand out to you?
2. What might we learn about the artist or their culture from its details?
3. Notice the text on the scroll. What do you think the Cyrillic words mean?

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WEEK 2: JACOB AND ESAU

SCRIPTURE *Genesis 33:1-11*

The story of Jacob and Esau is found in Gen. 25; Gen. 27; Gen. 29-33; and Gen. 35.

Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. 2 He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. 3 He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

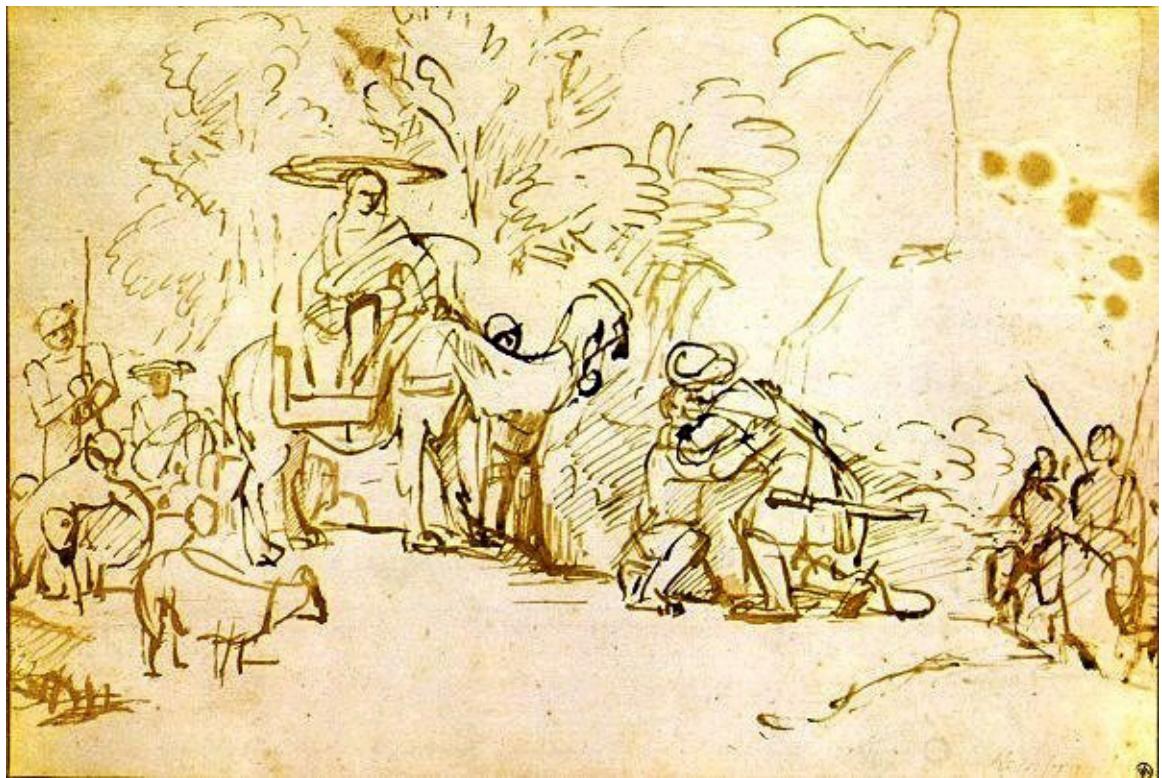
4 But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. 5 When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, “Who are these with you?” Jacob said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” 6 Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; 7 Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. 8 Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?” Jacob answered, “To find favor with my lord.” 9 But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” 10 Jacob said, “No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor. 11 Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.” So he urged him, and he took it. ◆

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Share a word, a phrase, or an image that jumps out to you from the text.
2. The context of this story is important: The brothers are facing each other after decades of estrangement sparked by Jacob stealing his brother's birthright and blessing and Esau's subsequent threat of violence against Jacob. In the previous chapter, Jacob wrestles with an angel and prevailing, he sees God "face to face"; in this passage, he sees God in the face of his brother. How does seeking or granting mercy transform us?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe a time when you received unexpected mercy.
2. Before they are reconciled, Jacob offers restitution to his brother (Gen. 32:13–20), which Esau reluctantly accepts. What is the role of making amends or reparations in restoring relationships? What is the role of reparations in restorative justice?



The Reconciliation of Jacob and Esau (1655)

Rembrandt (1606–1669)

Rembrandt van Rijn was born in the town of Leiden in the Netherlands. His work was popular in Amsterdam but a series of difficulties resulted in bankruptcy and no money for his own grave. He lost his longtime partner to an epidemic in 1663 and his only surviving child to another epidemic in 1668. Rembrandt used light, shadow, and subtle gesture to convey feelings.

1. What stands out most to you in this sketch?
2. How visible is Jacob? What do you notice about the embrace with Esau?
3. Have you experienced a physical reunion with someone before? Were you alone or with others? How did it feel?

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WEEK 3: WISDOM 7:24–8:1

SCRIPTURE *Wisdom 7:24–8:1*

FOR wisdom is more mobile than any motion;
because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.

25 For she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;
therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.

26 For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of his goodness.

27 Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;

28 for God loves nothing so much
as the person who lives with wisdom.

29 She is more beautiful than the sun,
and excels every constellation of the stars.
Compared with the light she is found to be superior,

30 for it is succeeded by the night,
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

8 She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other,
and she orders all things well. ◆

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. This reading is drawn from the Wisdom of Solomon, also known as The Book of Wisdom. As you listen to Solomon's description of wisdom, what reaction do you have? What word or phrases stand out to you?
2. Who are some of the "holy souls" in the Bible who were inspired by wisdom?
3. What role does wisdom play in mercy and justice in the Bible?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. The reading describes wisdom as "...[passing] into holy souls, making them friends of God and prophets." What do you imagine this process to be like? Is this something you would seek after yourself? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever had an encounter where you listened or disregarded your own inner wisdom? What was the outcome?
3. What would wisdom's "renewing all things" look like in our world today? How would that impact mercy and justice?



Icon of Holy Wisdom (c. 1670)

1. What stands out to you in this icon?
 2. What symbols do you notice?
 3. In this icon, the figure of Holy Wisdom is depicted with Mary, the Mother of God and John the Baptist to either side and Jesus, seated above. What does that say about how the church views wisdom?

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WEEK 4: THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

SCRIPTURE *Luke: 15:11–32*

THEN Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

25 “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe

and sound.’ 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31 Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” ◆

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus explores God’s profound and abiding love for human beings, despite our failings. What do you think this parable teaches us about the nature of God’s capacity for forgiveness and mercy?
2. The son who stays home has been faithful and morally upright. Yet he feels his virtue has been undervalued by his father and that he has not been treated fairly. What is Jesus telling us about God’s justice? How does it differ from our human conception of justice?
3. How does this parable remind you of other stories throughout the bible that show God’s love, mercy and compassion? What’s similar or different?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been in a situation where your steady, faithful efforts have been overlooked while someone else, who in your eyes was less deserving, received all the praise? What did you learn from it?
2. What impact has mercy had on your life? Has it ever been difficult to believe in and accept God’s mercy?
3. How have you experienced God’s mercy and justice? In what ways have you tried to be an instrument of both?



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The Return of the Prodigal Son (1661–1669)
Rembrandt (1606–1669)

Rembrandt was a Dutch artist and storyteller who used mediums of painting, printmaking and drawing. His works depicted a wide range of subjects including more than 300 works inspired by the bible. He often used the visual effect of light through a technique called chiaroscuro, the strong contrast of light and darkness. His ability to spotlight a subject is still referenced across mediums today, including photography, known as “Rembrandt lighting.”

1. Which elements do you notice first?
2. How does Rembrandt’s use of light help tell the story in the painting?
3. What is a word that comes to mind when you look at the painting? Is this an image that you could connect with in your prayers?

WEEK 5: PSALM 51

SCRIPTURE *Psalm 51*

HAVE mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgement.

5 Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

6 You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

- 14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
 O God of my salvation,
 and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,
 and my mouth will declare your praise.
- 16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;
 if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased.
- 17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
 a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- 18 Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
 rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
- 19 then you will delight in right sacrifices,
 in burnt-offerings and whole burnt-offerings;
 then bulls will be offered on your altar. ◆

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word, phrase or verse stands out to you?
2. This psalm is spoken by all in the Ash Wednesday service immediately after having ashes imposed on our foreheads. It is a lament psalm addressed to God about one's own spiritual pain, rather than lamenting about the injustice done by others. Does anything jar you here, leave you unsettled or uncomfortable? Why do you think that is?
3. Did you notice the turn in the final five verses: a broken and contrite heart is acceptable to God, and praise is on one's lips? What strikes you about that transition, and do you agree or disagree with the premise?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe a time in your life when you have experienced a heart humbled by your own sense of sin.
2. Why do you think we pray this particular psalm on Ash Wednesday?
3. How is God's mercy the healing/cleansing catalyst to renew a right spirit and a clean heart?



Danaid

Modeled 1885, enlarged 1889; carved before 1902

Auguste Rodin (1840–1917)

Auguste Rodin is considered to be the founder of modern sculpture. He grew up in a working-class family and worked as a craftsman for over twenty years before the world began to notice his sculptures. Rodin focused on the particular physicality of his models, rather than trying to create an idealized human figure. Originally the statue featured above was part of a design for a doorway titled *The Gates of Hell*.

1. What emotions does this sculpture make you think of? Do you ever experience emotion in your body?
2. What details of texture or pattern do you notice?
3. Imagine seeing this sculpture in person at the Rodin Museum. How do you think seeing different angles would change your experience?

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WEEK 6: THE BEATITUDES

SCRIPTURE *Matthew 5:1–11*

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountain and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

He said:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

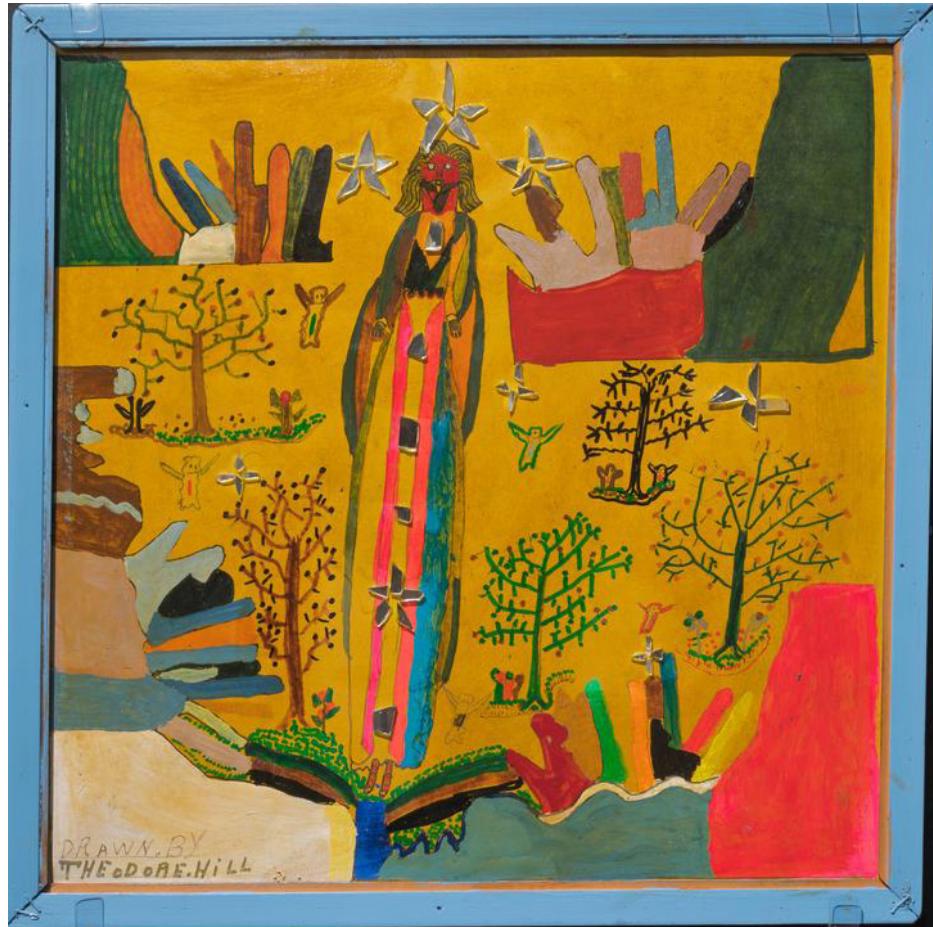
11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you
and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ◆

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What values do you learn about the kingdom of God?
2. In verse 2, Jesus goes up on a mountainside and sits down. What connections or insights do you have about this specific position and posture?
3. In verse 11, do you notice the shift to “blessed are you”? Do you think this changes who Jesus is speaking to? Why or why not?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. If someone asked you, “What does it look like to follow Christ?”, how may these blessings help in your answer? Where do you feel inspired? Where do you feel challenged?
 2. There is a repeated connection between a quality of being and a promise. What might this reveal about our need for God? How may recognizing our own shortcomings or experiences expand our compassion for others?
 3. Jesus is clear that his way is not without opposition. How does your experience of God within a community of faith sustain you?
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Sermon on the Mount (1986)

Theodore Hill (b. 1926)

Theodore Hill worked as a custodian for the city of Atlanta and had a second job as a golf caddy. In his free time, he created mixed-media visual art focused on Christ's life with materials such as paint, cardboard, mirror shards, fabric scraps, metal scraps, and pecans. His assemblages look to the icon tradition and share features with Ethiopian and Coptic practices.

1. What elements stand out to you?
2. Notice the position of Christ. Do you think he is standing positioned or is he floating? How does this position compare to Matthew's description?
3. Hill uses colors and shapes to depict the blessings Jesus shared. What colors or shapes could describe a blessing in your life?

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.

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