

THE RADIX PROJECT  
*small groups / deep roots*

# HOLY MOVEMENT

*Journey & Pilgrimage in Scripture*

SPRING 2024



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL



# THE RADIX PROJECT

*www.saintmarks.org/radix*

Since early 2020, Radix has offered the opportunity for small groups to meet over the course of six weeks to share stories, study scripture, and pray for one another.

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, *radix*, is the Latin word for “root.” 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](mailto: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 created 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

## OPENING PLENARY

Sunday, April 21, 2024  
7–8 p.m., online via Zoom only

## SESSION 1:

**GENESIS 12:1-9** . . . . . week of April 21, 2024

## SESSION 2:

**GENESIS 28: 10-22** . . . . . week of April 28, 2024

## SESSION 3:

**PSALM 121** . . . . . week of May 5, 2024

## SESSION 4:

**LUKE 2** . . . . . week of May 12, 2024

## SESSION 5:

**LUKE 15:11-32** . . . . . week of May 19, 2024

## SESSION 6:

**ACTS 9** . . . . . week of May 26, 2024

*\*Sunday groups begin April 28 and conclude June 2.*

## RADIX 12: HOLY MOVEMENT: EXPLORING JOURNEY AND PILGRIMAGE IN SCRIPTURE

Our Scriptures abound with stories of holy movement—people guided by the Spirit’s call to strike out on a journey to discover God, discover oneself anew, and to see the world with fresh eyes. Some of our biblical ancestors were consciously connecting their travels as discerned response to a divine beck and call, to move to new-found-land and be forever changed by the journey.

Others have less lofty impulses that prompt their sojourns—Jacob the trickster, for example, flees for his life having betrayed his brother, only years later to meet his brother on the road in a reconciling moment of tenderness. Would the reconciliation have happened if he had not made the pilgrimage? The authors of Genesis say Jacob meant it for evil, but God used it for good.

Some biblical folk flee war, or submit to an imperial census, or go to visit relatives—journeys that could occur in any generation in any culture—which is to say, these are the stories of our common humanity, but as they are imbedded in the biblical narrative of God’s engagement with humanity, the characters come to see their plodding travels of mundane intent through the lens of sacred movement, and they unfold to blessings on the way.

Our Christian tradition holds dear the spiritual practice of making pilgrimages that profoundly shape our understanding of what it means to follow Christ. One need not travel across the globe to do so; one need only be open to the holy experience of learning, conversion and transformation on the way. Long before people were known as Christians, they were called “People of the Way.” This life in Christ is about being on the path, the road, the way to new life; it is our earthly pilgrimage.

The shape of this Radix series is designed to mine the scriptures for inspiration as pilgrims, to marvel at our forebears’ courage in making the journey, to bear witness to how it changed their lives, and by extension, all who have followed in their footsteps as people of faith. As Jesus said to the first ones to follow him as people of The Way: *Come and see...*so are we invited to join on this journey together this Eastertide. *Come and see...*

# 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. Zoom resources are available at *support.zoom.us*

## 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 groups, which are designed to meet for 90 minutes each week:

<b>GATHERING</b> . . . . .	5 minutes
<b>OPEN IN PRAYER</b> . . . . .	5 minutes
<b>CHECK-IN QUESTION</b> . . . . .	.10 minutes
<b>SCRIPTURE REFLECTION</b> . . . . .	.20 minutes
<b>GROUP DISCUSSION</b> . . . . .	.30 minutes
<b>CHECK-OUT INCLUDING PRAYER REQUESTS</b> . . . . .	.10 minutes
<b>CLOSING PRAYER/WORSHIP</b> . . . . .	.10 minutes

# IDEAS FOR CHECK-IN QUESTIONS

*Pick one for each week.*

1. Describe a memorable meal on a trip you've taken. What are the smells, tastes and sounds you remember?
2. Think about a travel, journey or pilgrimage experience you have had. Share about someone who accompanied you or whom you encountered on the way. How did you first come to know them?
3. Where besides your "home base" do you feel most centered or grounded? Why do you think that is?
4. Describe a special place that you visited or traveled to as a child. What influence or connection to that place can you make with your journey or where you are now?
5. How do you process or reflect on a journey experience?
6. When have you been completely lost in your travels?
7. When you are visiting new places, how do you integrate spiritual practices?
8. Share a time when you experienced corporate worship in another context. What was familiar? What was new?
9. The BCP has a prayer for travelers:

O God, our heavenly Father, whose glory fills the whole creation, and whose presence we find wherever we go: Preserve those who travel [in particular \_\_\_\_\_]; surround them with your loving care; protect them from every danger; and bring them in safety to their journey's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

How do you mark God's presence in a new place?

10. If it were easily accessible, would you go on pilgrimage to outer space? Why or why not?
11. What do you consider a traveling essential?
12. What helps you feel more comfortable in a new place?

# 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:

- ◆ Thanksgivings, BCP, p. 836–841
- ◆ 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>  
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/be-still>
- ◆ 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.

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# SCRIPTURE STUDY GUIDES

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# WEEK 1

**SCRIPTURE** *Genesis 12:1-9*

**T**HE CALL OF ABRAM

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot and all the possessions that they had gathered and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran, and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east, and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb. ♦

### **QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

1. What word or phrase resonates with you? What questions do you have about this passage?
2. God says that Abram (later Abraham) will leave his “country,” “kindred,” and “father’s house” – a threefold connection of identity. What might it mean for him and for Sarai (later Sarah) to give this up without knowing for certain what is next?
3. What are some of the spiritual practices or markers of Abram’s journey that you notice in this passage? Why may these be important?

### **QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Describe a time you have experienced a new beginning. What emotions came up for you between “departing” and “arriving?”
2. What are some of the spiritual practices or markers of your comings and goings?
3. Verse 1 uses the word “kindred” which can describe connection to family and relatives. Unlike in Abram and Sarai’s time, it is more common in modern American culture for people to live apart from their extended family. What are the opportunities and challenges that distance brings to relationships?



*To Be a Blessing*

Paper lace and pencil over oil paint on paper

Hannah Garrity

Inspired by Genesis 12:1-4a



*Artist's statement:* “As I began to study this text, the motion we are in as a human species came to mind. God calls Abram. She tasks him with relocating; she’s not really explicit as to why. Contemporary theologian Norman Wirzba speaks of our current ability to rely on global positioning systems, or GPS, to travel without needing to know where we are. What do people carry when they are forced to begin again? Medicine and technology, that’s what people are carrying across borders right now as they sustain and navigate life through the journey ahead. How did Abram begin again? He was wealthy. He was called, not forced. He traveled with his entourage. In this image, the globe subtly depicts the route that Abram and his wives, his children, his servants, and his animals took... How do we begin again? Through the paper lace, the book of Genesis overlays a canvas. The text is hard to read, clouded by oil paint. How do we begin again? Listen through the haze, through the clouded reality, for God’s call. God is calling as we begin again.”

1. What do the lines across the globe signify to you?
2. Look closely in the corners – do you see the stars? What might they represent?
3. Can you recall a time in which you had to use a tool for navigating or finding your way? What was that like for you?

A blessing inspired by the artist:

*Dear God, it doesn't feel like much of a blessing these days. We carry on in this journey, beginning yet again. We are called, like Abram—to navigate, to persevere, to be a blessing.*

## NOTES

## WEEK 2

**SCRIPTURE** *Genesis 28:10-22*

### JACOB'S DREAM AT BETHEL

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a stairway set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring, and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house, and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you." ♦

### **QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

1. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you? What questions do you have about this passage?
2. Jacob's story throughout Genesis is one of movement, beginning with the act of grabbing his brother Esau's heel as he follows him out of their mother's womb. Next, he flees from his brother's anger after stealing his birthright, reversing the journey his grandparents Abram and Sarai (Abraham and Sarah) made in the preceding scripture passage, dreams of angels on the move, engages in a wrestling match with God, and finally reconciles with his brother across distance both literal and figurative. What "movements" track the journey of your life?
3. The ladder of angels is where heaven and earth intersect. How do you imagine such a place?

### **QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Jacob stops where he does randomly because he couldn't travel further in the dark. Tell about a memorable stay in an unplanned location. What made it special?
2. Jacob declares upon waking, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it!" Where have you been surprised to discover the Holy? What were the signs that God was in that place?
3. The vow that Jacob makes reiterate God's promises to him and promise another journey, back to the place where he encountered God. What is a place you return to for the purpose of an encounter with the Divine?



*Jacob's Dream: A Luminous Path 2016-2023*

Benjamin Bergery and Jim Campbell

Grace Cathedral, San Francisco

## NOTES

Jacob's Dream is a temporary, site-specific art installation comprised of a ladder of light with moving figures ascending and descending it, set against the soaring stone wall of the Gothic cathedral. If you are able, watch this YouTube video of it in action: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98rkf68wXiE>

The installation was created by artists-in-residence Benjamin Bergery, a cinematographer, and light artist Jim Campbell. A cathedral brochure describes the installation, "*made of rungs of LED lights and rises 55 feet from base to top. The LED rungs acts as a fragmented screen for low-resolution moving images of enigmatic figures that ascend and descend the ladder. The installation speaks not just to the Bible story, but also to the cathedral's theme for 2016, 'Home', to the connections between the visible and invisible and to our own personal journeys on the ladder of life.*"

1. What do the "enigmatic figures" on the ladder suggest to you?
2. How might the installation illustrate the theme of "Home"?
3. What connections do you make between this installation and the story of Jacob's dream with your own spiritual journey?

## WEEK 3

**SCRIPTURE** *Psalm 121*

**A**SSURANCE OF GOD'S PROTECTION: A SONG OF ASCENTS

I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.  
He who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
The Lord is your keeper;  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day  
nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.  
The Lord will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time on and forevermore. ♦

### **QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

1. What word or phrase stands out to you or resonates with you? What questions do you have about this passage?
2. This psalm uses anadiplosis, or the repetition of a prominent, often the last word in one phrase at the beginning of the next. Writers and orators use anadiplosis to emphasize a concept, persuade an audience, introduce a sequence of steps, or create a rhythm. In what way is the use of this device effective in this psalm?
3. What specific assurances in this psalm feel timeless? Which can you most vividly imagine or even feel? What would you add or subtract?

### **QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Recall a pilgrimage, retreat, vacation, or road trip that held special meaning for you. What songs, albums, playlists, chants, or prayers were a part of that experience? Why have they stayed with you?
2. Think about a time you were about to embark upon a journey, be it physical, emotional, spiritual...any big, life-changing step. What did you fear? What reassured you enough to take the first step of the journey?
3. What do you miss most when you are far from home? What worries you when you are not in your comfort zone? How does this psalm's assurance of God's protection and constant presence land, when you think about and place yourself in those areas of potential discomfort, loss, or fear?



*View of The Cascades from Mount Rainier National Park*  
Dylan Lees Photography



To accompany the photograph, here is a song by American Gospel artist Richard Smallwood, a paraphrase of Psalm 121.

*Total Praise*

Lord, I will lift my eyes to the hills  
Knowing my help is coming from You  
Your peace You give me in time of the storm  
You are the source of my strength  
You are the strength of my life  
I lift my hands in total praise to You  
You are the source of my strength  
You are the strength of my life  
I lift my hands in total praise to You  
Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen  
Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen  
You are the source of my strength  
You are the strength of my life  
I lift my hands in total praise to You  
Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen  
Amen, Amen, Amen, Amen

If you are able, listen to a recording of this song: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGgt\\_NKqJoo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGgt_NKqJoo) or <https://open.spotify.com/track/3eGrTHQnpSEoLRrNrMxMRr>

1. What are the resonances you experience between the song and the psalm?
2. How do the photograph and the song speak to each other?

## WEEK 4

### **SCRIPTURE** *Excerpts from Luke 2*

#### **T**HE BIRTH OF JESUS

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

#### **T**HE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said

to him, ‘Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.’ He said to them, ‘Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor. ♦

#### **QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

1. What word or phrase stands out to you or resonates with you? What questions do you have about this passage?
2. Why are birth stories so compelling, even if uneventful? Do you know your birth story?
3. Have you ever lost sight of a child or someone for whom you were responsible? What did you feel?

#### **QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. The relative isolation Joseph and Mary experienced on the journey to Bethlehem is contrasted with the masses with whom they traveled to Jerusalem twelve years later for the Passover Festival. How do you think they experienced these two journeys considering that difference? How do you think these experiences changed Mary and Joseph? How do you think they changed Jesus?
2. There is a lot of “movement” in Luke’s second chapter (see also the shepherds, the circumcision, and the Presentation in the Temple). How are these various movements “pilgrimage” of a sort?



*The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple, 1854-1860*

William Holman Hunt  
Birmingham Museum

Unlike many other pieces that capture the boy Jesus holding court with the teachers, this depicts the moment at which his mother locates him while the teachers are still engaged.

1. What do you make of the angle and orientation of Jesus' body in relation to his mother and the teachers?
2. How do you interpret the emotional exchange between mother and son? What about the exchange between father and son?
3. What impact do you imagine this encounter with a wise child had on the teachers in the Temple?

**NOTES**

## WEEK 5

**SCRIPTURE** *Luke 15:11-32*

**T**HE PRODIGAL SON AND HIS BROTHER

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the wealth that will belong to me.’ So he divided his assets between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant region, and there he squandered his wealth in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that region, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to his senses he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ 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. 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.’ 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. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 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. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 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.’” ♦

### **QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

1. What word or phrase stands out to you or resonates with you? What questions do you have about this passage?
2. The text—and it is worth noting that this parable does not appear in any of the other gospels—does not actually have an official name or title. It is best known as “The Parable of The Prodigal Son”. New Testament scholar, Dr. Amy-Jill Levine (in her book, *Short Stories by Jesus*), suggests that the parable might be renamed “The Father Who Lost His Son(s)”. She adds, “On my more cynical days, I am inclined to call the story the parable of ‘The Absent Mother’”. What are some titles you might suggest for this parable?
3. Within the paradigm of pilgrimage, there are at least three distinct movements in the parable: a.) the journey to a

distant region (“the far country”) b.) the return home c.) the transition from “lost” to “found”, from “dead” to “alive”, from rift to reconciliation. From your reading of the parable, who is on a journey, and why?

### **QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Families and family dynamics can be challenging to navigate. Some families of origin can be toxic. For example, queer children can be forced to leave their home, or choose to do so for reasons of safety. Sometimes family ties are severed or strained. These journeys can be painful and often lonely. In time, some find or build a family of choice among those who honor one another with mutual respect and love. Describe a time in your own life when navigating family relationships brought you through a journey.
2. In addition to the theme of growing up and leaving home, and the equally poignant theme of returning home, there is the universal theme of longing for home—the desire for a place of true belonging. This is a lifelong pilgrimage. What makes a place or people feel like “home” for you?
3. All three of Luke’s “lost” parables (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son) end on a note of joy, an occasion for rejoicing, a celebration. Some scholars and readers conclude that this parable is “all about the party!”—which, when you think about it, sounds very much like Jesus. What examples come to mind when you reflect on Jesus being the life of the party? What gives you cause for rejoicing?





This is an acrylic mural painted in 2010 by Sister Francis in the chapel apse of the Monasterio de la Conversión in Becerril de Campos, Palencia, Spain, the home of a community of Augustinian nuns. The style is heavily influenced by the Ecuadorean artist Oswaldo Guayasamín.

1. As you study this mural, which elements of the artwork stand out to you?
2. What do the hands and feet tell you about the story and these characters?
3. How would you describe the tears? Are they the same for both father and son?

## WEEK 6

**SCRIPTURE** *Acts 9:1-22*

### **T**HE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before

Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” All who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?” Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah. ♦

### **QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION**

1. What word or phrase stands out to you or resonates with you? What questions do you have about this passage?
2. How did Paul’s journey to Damascus prepare him for the many journeys that followed?
3. Paul is not the only one who makes a pilgrimage. What strikes you about Ananias’s journey?

### **QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. Paul's journey begins with one intended purpose and ends with its opposite. When have you embarked on a journey, only to completely reverse course? What did you learn from this experience?
2. Ananias provides help and guidance at a pivotal moment in Paul's journey. When has someone helped make your journey possible? When have you helped someone else on their journey?
3. What pilgrimage do you hope to make in the future? What do you hope to experience along the way?

**NOTES**



*The Conversion of Saint Paul (1600/1601)*

Italian: *Conversione di Saulo Odescalchi*

Caravaggio

Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, also known as Michele Angelo Merigi or Amerighi da Caravaggio), September 29, 1571 – July 18, 1610, was an Italian painter active in Rome for most of his artistic life. His paintings have been characterized by art critics as combining a realistic observation of the human state, both physical and emotional, with a dramatic use of lighting, which had a formative influence on Baroque painting.

Caravaggio biographer Helen Langdon describes the style of *Conversion* as “an odd blend of Raphael and clumsy rustic realism,” but notes how the composition, with its jagged shapes and irrational light which picks out details for their dramatic impact, creates “a sense of crisis and dislocation [in which] Christ disrupts the mundane world.”

1. What do you first notice when you look at *The Conversion of Saint Paul*?
2. How does Caravaggio use light to tell Paul’s story?
3. What do the facial expressions add to the narrative?
4. What is the mood of the painting, and how does it impact your understanding of Paul’s journey?



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