

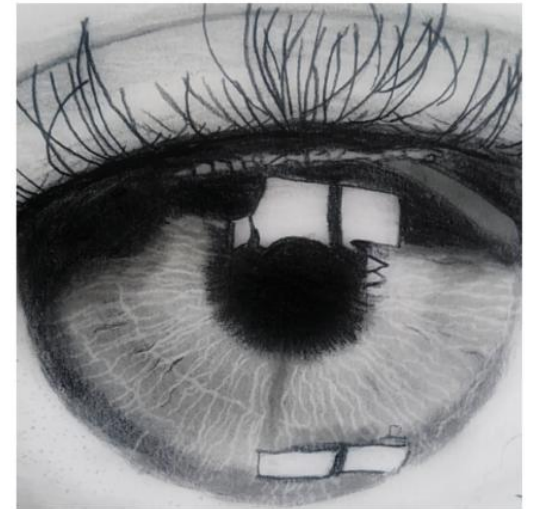
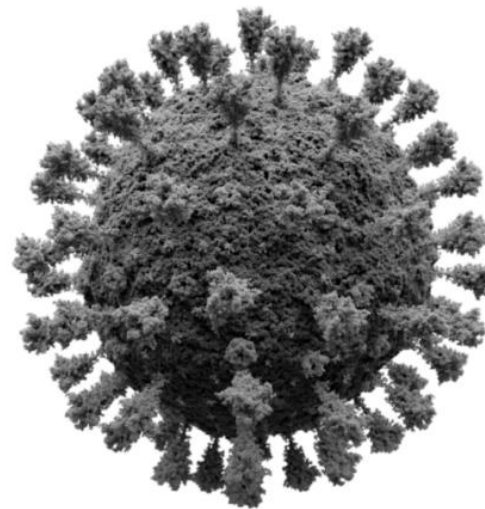
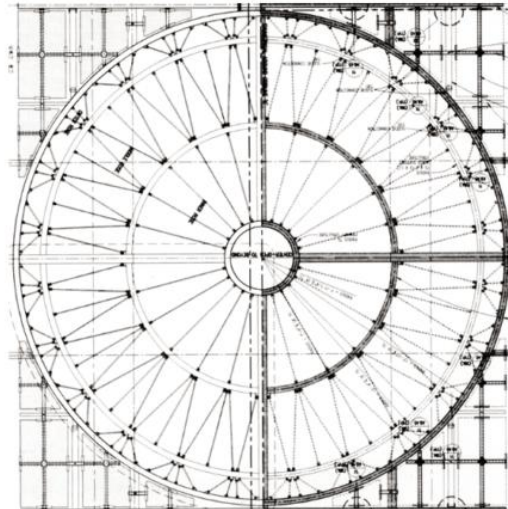


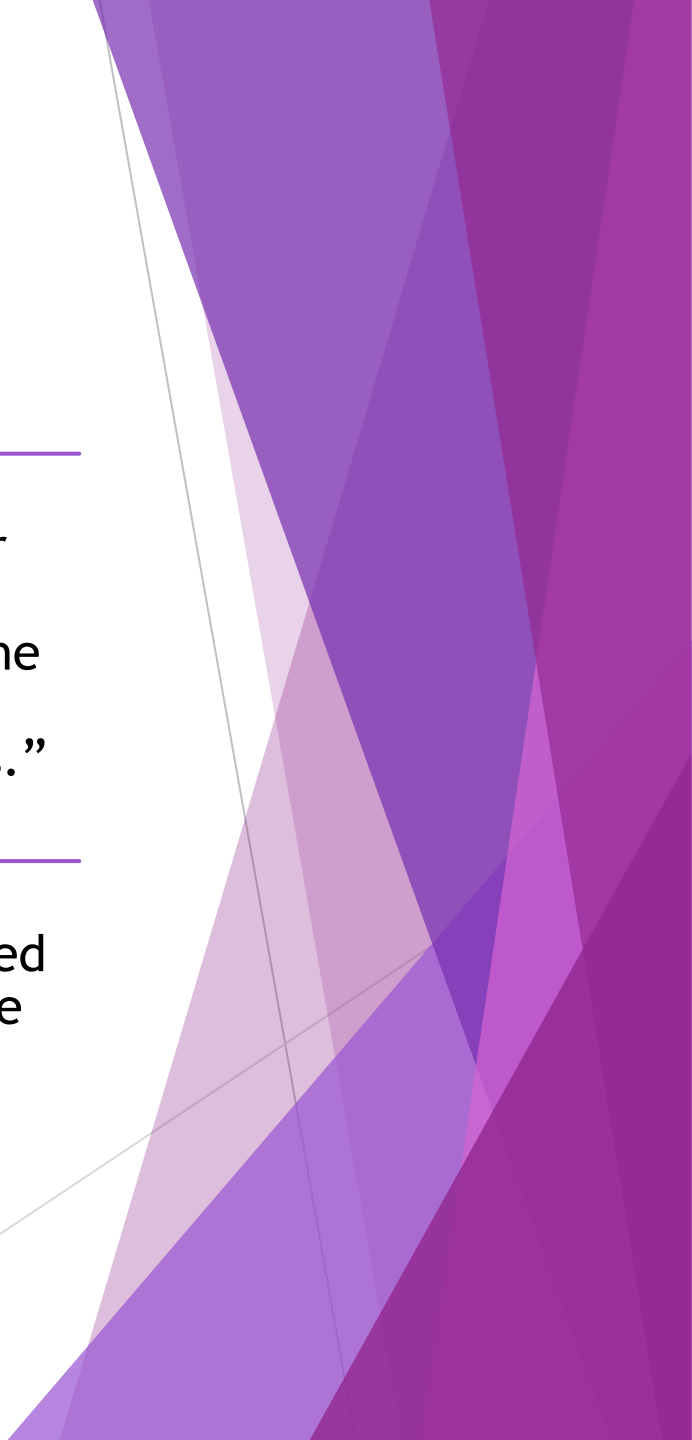
Opening Plenary: Suffering and Solidarity

Wisdom School at Saint Mark's
Steven L. Thomason
September 16, 2026

THE WISDOM SCHOOL

AT SAINT MARK'S CATHEDRAL





What is the Wisdom School?



Our mission is to Offer a balanced path for spiritual transformation grounded in prayer and practice, drawing on the Christian contemplative tradition while respecting the diversity of experiences born from contemplative practices of other traditions.”



The space for reasoned discourse, lifelong learning, and spiritual renewal is held sacred for all seekers, whether they worship at the cathedral or not.

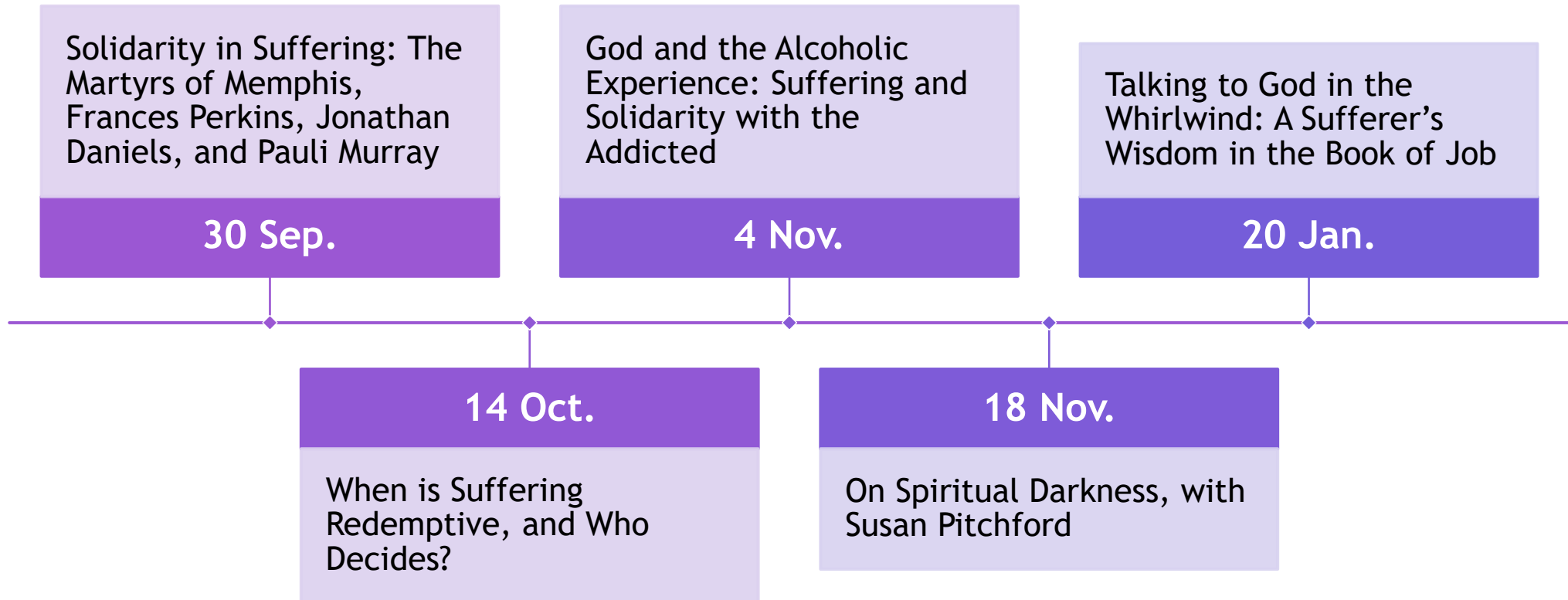


Wisdom School Themes in Prior Years

- ▶ Crossing thresholds
- ▶ A Spirituality of Hope and healing
- ▶ A Spirituality of Place (Home)
- ▶ Embodied spirituality
- ▶ A Spirituality of Desire
- ▶ Path of descent as path of transformation
- ▶ Everything belongs
- ▶ Unitive worldview & Nondual consciousness
- ▶ A Spirituality of Incarnation



Upcoming Wednesday Wisdom School: Cathedral Commons





Keynote Wisdom School Events

- ▶ **Co-reactors or Co-creators?: Christic Life in an Unfinished Universe, with Ilia Delio**
 - ▶ Saturday March 13, 2027, 9am-3pm
- ▶ **Sacred Words: Writing as a Healing Practice, with Debie Thomas**
 - ▶ Sat. April 24, 2027, 9am-12:30pm
- ▶ **A Brush with God—An Icon Workshop with the Suffering Christ, with Peter Pearson**
 - ▶ May 20-22, 2027



Pilgrimage as Sacred Journey of Transformation

Following in Footsteps of Paul

October 8-19, 2026

Led by Steve Thomason

*Following in Footsteps of Jesus:
A Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*

Tentative: Lent 2028

To be led by Steve Thomason



Center for Spirituality and Action



► At the heart of the Center's offerings are yearlong cohorts—small, intentional groups that gather regularly for prayer, study, mutual support, retreats, and service. The first cohort launched in Fall 2024. Two more began in Fall 2025. The current cohort began this month.

Theme for the Year:
Suffering and
Solidarity





Wendell Berry Wisdom

- His poem “the Morning News” published in 1971 in *Farming: A Handbook*.

*“It is man, the inventor of cold violence,
death as waste, who has made himself
lonely
among the creatures, and set himself aside,
so that he cannot work in the sun with
hope,
or sit at peace in the shade of any tree.”*



We bring our wounds with us... And healing is a hard journey

- ▶ What we do with our pain matters...
- ▶ Rohr: If we can see our “wounds” as *the way through*, as Jesus did, then they would become sacred wounds rather than scars to deny, disguise, or project onto others.
- ▶ *Only healers who have fully faced their wounds are able to help heal anyone else.*
- ▶ *If we don't transform our pain, we will transmit it.*

“What are we to do about the troubles of the world? Well, Jesus calls us—his brash and troublesome disciples who question, doubt, and continually fail him—to take up the mantle of prophecy, to discern the signs of the times, and to be an ever-present balm in a troubled world...”

-Barbara Holmes





The Crucified God: A Theology of Suffering and Solidarity

Moving from Divine Apathy to
Radical Solidarity and
Eschatological Hope

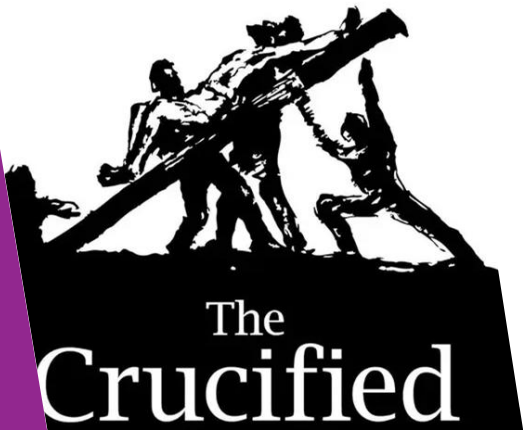


The Haunts of War: Jurgén Moltmann (1926-2024)



WITH A NEW FOREWORD BY MIROSLAV VOLF

- ▶ **The Catalyst:** Drafted into the German Army at age 16; witnessed the devastating firebombing of his hometown, Hamburg (best friend died beside him).
- ▶ **The Prison Camp Experience:** Held as a British Prisoner of War (POW) from 1945-1948. Experienced profound survivor's guilt, despair, and the horrific news of the Holocaust promulgated by his people.
- ▶ **The Cry of Dereliction:** Encountered Christ not through majesty, but through Jesus's words in Mark 15:34: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*".
- ▶ **His lifelong goal:** To construct a theology that speaks directly to a broken, suffering world with hope.



Rethinking Divine “Apathea”

- ▶ Ancient philosophical tradition that God is impassible (apathetic) and immutable, cannot suffer and still be God.
- ▶ Moltmann (through his prism of suffering and scarred experience):
 - ▶ Where was God at Auschwitz?
 - ▶ How can we believe in God after WWII...or...or...?
- ▶ **The Cry of Dereliction brought low: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**



God after Auschwitz (and Gaza...and...)

- ▶ Moltmann was asked if his Christian theology of a “Crucified God” was informed by the horrors of Auschwitz perpetrated by his people.
- ▶ “This is true. It was for me an attempt to speak to God, to trust in God and speak about God in the shadows of Auschwitz and in view of the victims of my people.”
- ▶ “A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him.”





God after Auschwitz...

- ▶ An "apathetic" (impassible) God who looks at the horrors of the 20th century from a distance cannot be trusted.
- ▶ If God is incapable of suffering, then God is incapable of love, because love inherently requires open relational vulnerability
- ▶ God suffers not from a deficiency of power, but from the absolute fullness of passionate (suffering) love.
- ▶ **Radical new thesis:** The suffering of God is an antidote to the cruelty of the state because the "Crucified God" can meet the prisoner in the camp because Christ has been stripped, condemned, and abandoned.

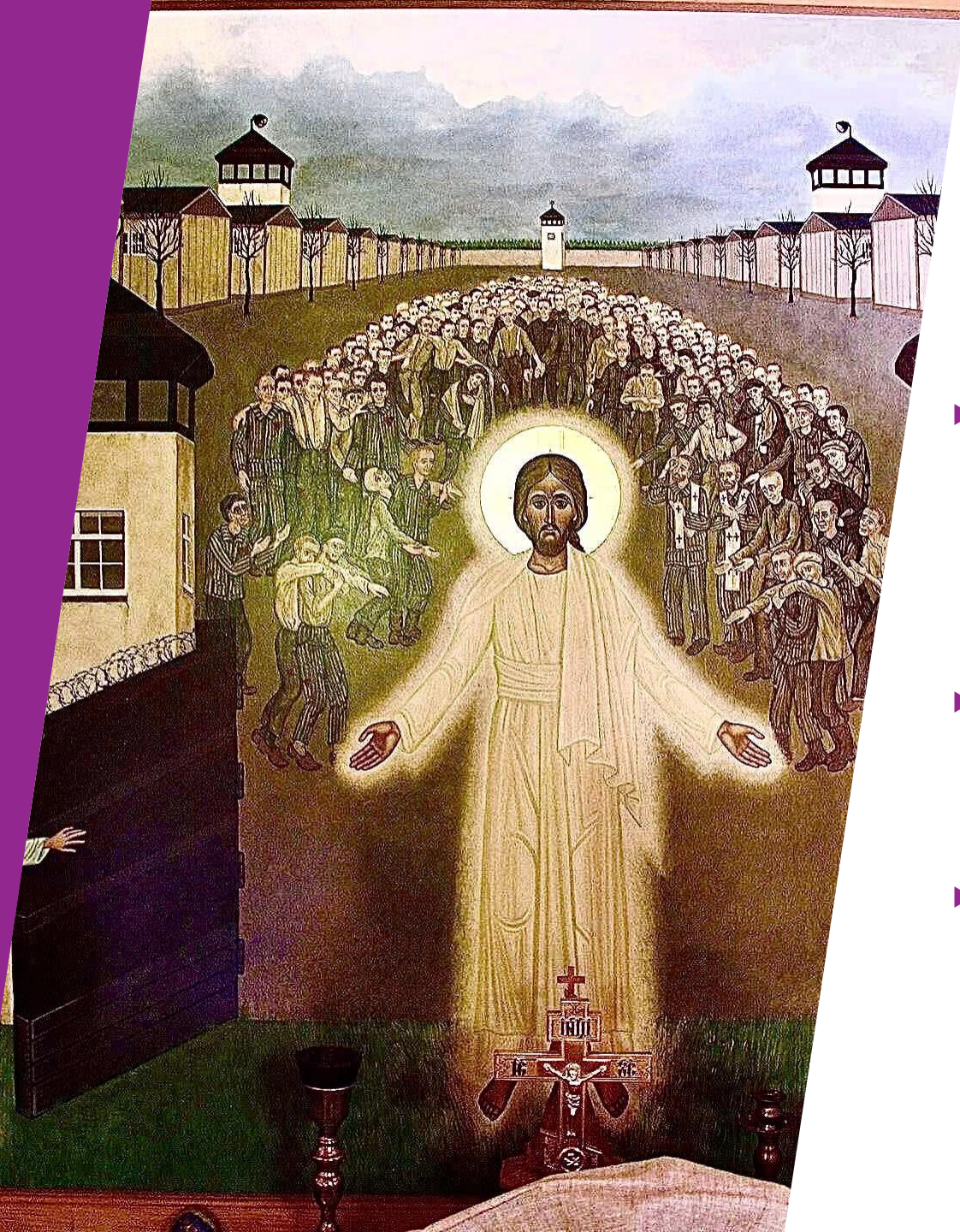


Breakout Conversations

- ▶ How do you hold the weight of suffering in the world?
- ▶ How do you invite others to hold your suffering with you?
- ▶ How do you frame such suffering in context with the nature of God?



Plenary Conversation

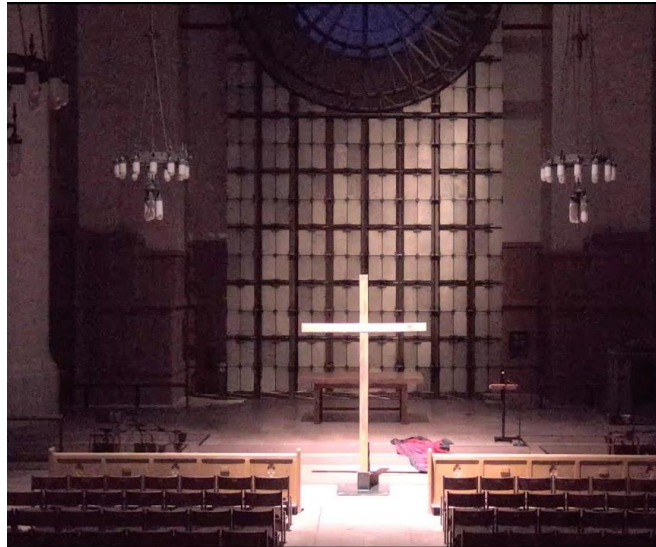


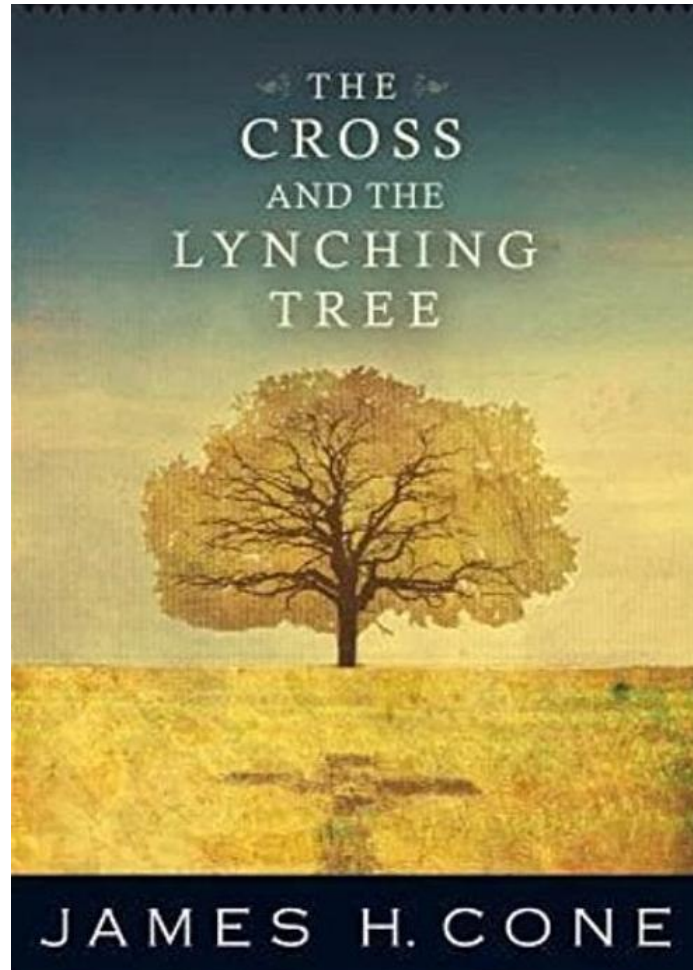
Toward a New Theology of the Cross...

- ▶ **Theology of Substitution:** Christ dies on the cross on behalf of humanity to address sin and the limitations of our ability to recompense for that sin
 - ▶ **Penal Substitution:** Christ died as a substitute for sinners to satisfy divine justice.
- ▶ **Theology of Solidarity:** Christ suffers *with* humanity. God establishes absolute proximity (incarnate intimacy) with all humanity, however broken by evil, sin, despair, victimization, or feeling forsaken.
- ▶ **The Companion to the Marginalized:** The "Crucified God" can meet the prisoner in the concentration camp (or wherever) because Christ has been stripped, condemned, and abandoned.

Social Trinitarianism: Solidarity and Perichoresis

- ▶ **Trinitarian Understanding of Solidarity:** On the cross, the Father suffers the loss of the Son, and the Son suffers abandonment. They are bound together by the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ **Perichoresis:** mutual indwelling, equality, and fellowship of the Trinity.
- ▶ We are invited into the dance, too.
- ▶ Reality has a cruciform pattern.





Political and Social Implications

The Cross Becomes a Symbol of Protest Against Unjust Suffering

- ▶ **Resisting Domesticated Faith:** Moltmann critiques the modern church for retreating into individualistic spirituality that ignores systemic suffering, opting instead for an “other-worldly” focus about escaping to heaven.
- ▶ **Crucifixion as Political Subversion:** Jesus was executed by political and religious authorities because he disrupted the status quo.
- ▶ **The Impulse for Justice:** Recognizing God's presence in suffering commands a social responsibility to fight against poverty, oppression, and ecological destruction
- ▶ **A Ministry of Presence:** Provides comfort to those in existential despair by demonstrating that human cries are mirrored in Christ's own cry.



Resurrection Hope: A Suffering God's Promise

- ▶ Jesus agreed to carry the mystery of universal suffering, and he allowed it to change him (resurrection).
- ▶ We are invited to participate in that resurrection. This is hopeful.
- ▶ Christians are called to be the visible compassion of God on earth.
- ▶ *We need not continue the endless cycle of projecting our pain elsewhere or remain trapped inside it.*

Rubber on the Road: Agents of Real Change

CARRY ONE ANOTHER'S
BURDENS, AND IN THIS
WAY YOU WILL FULFILL
THE LAW OF CHRIST.

– GALATIANS 6:2

- ▶ We are called to be the visible compassion of God on earth.
- ▶ To be so, we must choose to not hide from the shadow side of things, but in fact draw close to the pain of the world and allow it to radically change our perspective.
- ▶ When we do, we agree to embrace the imperfection and even the injustices of our world, allowing these situations to change us from the inside out, which is the only way things are changed anyway.
- ▶ We are invited to carry our part of the infinite suffering of God (cruciform shape of reality).



And what
about the rest
of Creation?

Creation Care: A Compassionate Way of Being

- ▶ Wendell Berry saw agrarianism as a comprehensive set of responsibilities for a culture that prioritizes the flourishing of people and land together.
- ▶ critique of the sort of Christianity that walks hand in hand with merchants and conquerors and that is often all too willing to “join the military-industrial conspiracy to murder Creation” (from *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community*, 1993)





A Sacred Creation in which God Dwells

*Come into the life of the body, the one body
granted to you in all the history of time.*

*Come into the body's economy, its daily work,
and its replenishment at mealtimes and at
night.*

*Come into the body's thanksgiving, when it
knows and acknowledges itself a living soul.*

*Come into the dance of the community, joined
in a circle, hand in hand, the dance of the
eternal love of women and men for one
another and of neighbors and friends for one
another.*

Eschatological Hope: A New Heaven and a New Earth

- ▶ Rev. 21: 3-4: And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”
- ▶ v.5: And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”





Breakout Conversation II

- ▶ Do you believe in a suffering God?
- ▶ What does that mean for you as a person of faith?
- ▶ What does that mean for our work in the world?

Upcoming Wednesday Wisdom School: Cathedral Commons

