

# *Everyday* Connections

*Reflections and  
Practices for Year C*

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*Edited by* Heidi Haverkamp

**WJK** WESTMINSTER  
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# A Note from the Publisher

This devotional resource is part of the series *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship*. *Connections* embodies two complementary convictions about the study of Scripture. First, to best understand an individual passage of Scripture, we should put it in conversation with the rest of the Bible. Second, since all truth is God's truth, we should bring as many "lenses" as possible to the study of Scripture, drawn from as many sources as we can find. The essential idea of *Connections* is that biblical texts display their power most fully when they are allowed to interact with a number of contexts, that is, when many connections are made between a biblical text and realities outside that text. Like the two poles of a battery, when the pole of the biblical text is connected to a different pole (another aspect of Scripture or a dimension of life outside Scripture), creative sparks fly and energy surges from pole to pole.

Based on the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), which has wide ecumenical use, *Connections* offers hundreds of essays on the full array of biblical passages in the three-year cycle. Two major interpretive essays, called *Commentary 1* and *Commentary 2*, address every scriptural reading in the RCL. *Commentary 1* explores connections between a lectionary reading and other texts and themes within Scripture, and *Commentary 2* makes connections between the lectionary texts and themes in the larger culture outside of Scripture. These essays have been written by pastors, biblical scholars, theologians, and others.

During the seasons of the Christian year (Advent through Epiphany and Lent through Pentecost), the RCL provides three readings and a psalm or canticle for each Sunday and feast day: (1) a first reading, usually from the Old Testament; (2) a psalm or canticle, chosen to respond to the first reading; (3) a second reading, usually from one of the New Testament epistles; and (4) a Gospel reading. The first and second readings are chosen as complements to the Gospel reading for the day.

During the time between Pentecost and Advent, the RCL includes an additional first reading for every Sunday. There is the usual complementary reading, chosen in relation to the Gospel reading, but there is also a "semi-continuous" reading. These semicontinuous first readings move through the

books of the Old Testament more or less continuously in narrative sequence, offering the stories of the patriarchs (Year A), the kings of Israel (Year B), and the prophets (Year C). *Connections* covers both the complementary and the semicontinuous readings.

Because not all lectionary days are used in a given year, depending on how the calendar falls, you may not need some of the readings here until a subsequent lectionary cycle. Check the official RCL website at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu> for a list of readings for the current year.

We want to thank the many talented individuals who made *Connections* possible: our general editors, Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby, and Carolyn J. Sharp; Psalms editor Kimberly Bracken Long and sidebar editors Bo Adams and Rachel Toombs; the esteemed members of our editorial board; our superb slate of writers; and our indefatigable project manager Joan Murchison. Finally, our sincere thanks to the administration, faculty, and staff of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, our institutional partner in producing *Connections*.

We are deeply grateful to Heidi Haverkamp for her exhaustive editorial and creative work developing *Everyday Connections* for the spiritual enrichment of every Christian who desires to delve deeply into Scripture. This insightful volume pairs weekly texts and reflections with prompts, prayers, and practices to spark connections between the Bible and everyday life as well as nurture one's own connection with the Divine.

Westminster John Knox Press

# How to Use This Book

In this book, you will find a panoply of modes and methods for reflection on the Sunday readings of the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C. Some are serious, some are playful, some are personal, some are relational, some are pastoral, some are prophetic, some are practical, some are poetic; all are centered in Christ's radical call and love for us. Whether you want to deepen your prayer life, your grasp of Scripture, your small-group discussions, your sermon preparation, or some other aspect of your Christian life and relationship with God, I hope you will discover in these pages a wide variety of resources, information, ideas, questions, and spiritual practices to support you.

Your conversation partners for each week's reflections are excerpts from the Connections preaching and worship commentary series, also published by Westminster John Knox Press. The series is a treasure trove of background and insights, with essays on each Scripture passage written by Bible scholars, theologians, and pastors. They are easy to read but offer significant historical and linguistic information, theological reflection, connections across the biblical text, and connections from the text to social and cultural realities in our world. Choosing a single excerpt from so many of these essays was incredibly challenging. There are great riches to be found in the full commentaries, for those seeking more.

There are many ways Everyday Connections can guide and strengthen your Christian life, leadership, and community, depending on what works best for you, your group, or your congregation in any given week:

- Personal reflection: use for prayer, study, meditation, and journaling
- Sermon or worship preparation: explore ideas, get inspired, and prepare to preach or plan worship
- Small groups: see the appendix for a suggested format to use Everyday Connections as a curriculum or study text
- Teaching: study and reflect as you prepare to teach a Bible study or class of any age
- Meetings: use an excerpt as an opening meditation or discussion for staff or committee meetings

- Beyond church: use on visits to individuals or groups in a hospital, assisted living facility, prison, or other social agency, or as part of a mission trip, retreat, or conference

Here are some other suggestions to get the most from this devotional:

**Use alongside a Bible.** Since this book offers only short excerpts from Scripture for the sake of length, reading the full passage in your Bible will expand your perspective.

**Choose what to study.** Each week of reflections offers multiple options and ideas for engagement with the texts. Focus on whatever is speaking to you that day. Or, over time, you may discover certain exercises or modules work best for you. Do not feel that you need to interact with every single entry, every single week.

**Choose what order.** Reflections have been laid out in a certain order, but you can use them in any order you like.

**Choose what frequency.** You may want to use this book every day, studying one or two entries at a time, or just once or twice a week, studying several or most of a week's entries at once.

The material for each week is divided into these sections:

- 1. A Scripture Overview.** On the first page of each week, a selection of verses excerpted from that week's readings gives you a sense of what to expect. (Excerpts from psalms and canticles are omitted in the season after Pentecost in order to accommodate excerpts from the two Old Testament tracks.) Then, a shortened form of **Lectio Divina**, Latin for "holy reading," is suggested, as a way to begin to reflect on the week's Scriptures: choose a phrase or a few words that speak to you, then listen in prayer or meditation for what God might be saying to you through those words. Benedictine monks have prayed in this way for centuries.
- 2. Themes from This Week's Writers.** Two themes, drawn from the week's commentary essays, are suggested for study, reflection, or sermon preparation. Brief quotes from the essays that support the theme are provided. See if the commentators' words inspire you or other connections emerge for you. A **Spiritual Practice** associated with the themes or liturgical season is also suggested. The practice

can be done on your own, as a family, with a friend or prayer partner, or as a small-group activity, and on any day of the week.

3. **First Reading, Canticle, Second Reading, and Gospel.** A deeper dive into four of the week's readings (five for Palm/Passion Sunday and six for Easter Sunday) includes a verse or two of Scripture, an excerpt from a commentary essay, some reflection questions, and a brief prayer. These reflections will invite you to make connections that (usually) go in different directions from the two themes. You could read one each day, read them all at once, or pick just one or two to read, depending on the week.
4. **Weekend Reflections.** Choose a way to wrap up the week's study and Scripture connections, perhaps on the day you are sitting down to write a sermon or plan worship. First, a **Further Connection** is offered: a quote from a source outside of Scripture and the commentary essays, which may speak to you in a new way or deepen a connection you have made with a theme or reading already that week. Full sources and citations for these quotes are available in the appendix. **Making the Connections** invites you to consider one of four questions (repeated each week) to focus your reflections and connections from the readings to a conclusion, sermon, or final theme for the week. **My Connections** provides extra space to write your own notes.
5. **Sabbath Day.** These exercises are meant to be done on a day you consider the end of the week or a day off. The **Scripture of Assurance** is meant to offer solace—and sometimes a little humor—to a weary soul. The **Weekly Examen** is adapted from the daily examen of Ignatius of Loyola. It can be done on your own, as a family, with a friend or prayer partner, or in a small group.

Again, choose what speaks to you; do not feel you need to engage every single section. The options in this book were designed to be used in different combinations to suit the needs of different readers, contexts, and schedules.

A few sections use slightly different formats:

**Christmas Week.** For this busy holiday time, a single week of reflections draws on the Scriptures from both Christmas and the Sunday after Christmas, since many of the readings and themes overlap and complement one another.

**Weekday Holy Days.** Five significant holy days always or usually fall on weekdays: Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Ascension of the Lord. Each has a separate, shortened entry (appearing before the start of the week leading up to the following Sunday) that includes Scripture quotes, excerpts from the commentary essays, a reflection question, and a prayer.

**All Saints'.** There is a full week of entries for All Saints' Day (November 1) or All Saints' Sunday (the first Sunday following November 1). Note that your congregation may celebrate Proper 26 or Proper 27 instead, depending on whether All Saints' is commemorated in your tradition or perhaps celebrated on November 1, proper, rather than the Sunday following.

May God bless you richly as you explore, study, connect, and pray your way through the pages of this book and God's Word as it is proclaimed in the lectionary cycle of Year C.

Heidi Haverkamp

*Everyday*  
Connections

*The Week Leading Up to the*  
**First Sunday of Advent**

Jeremiah 33:14–16

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. (v. 14)

Psalm 25:1–10

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.  
O my God, in you I trust;  
do not let me be put to shame;  
do not let my enemies exult over me. (vv. 1–2)

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. (vv. 11–12)

Luke 21:25–36

“People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory.” (vv. 26–27)

LECTIO DIVINA

Underline a word or phrase that especially grabs your attention. Pray from that word or phrase and ask God to help you connect to its particular invitation for you this week.

# *Themes from This Week's Writers*

## THEME 1: *Waiting*

### Psalm 25:1–10

The psalmist waits in trust as long as necessary. His waiting is not passive. To “untwist” his life, the psalmist must relearn and humbly replace his feet in God’s ways.

KIMBERLY L. CLAYTON

### 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

At the root of Paul’s eschatological vision—however soon or delayed the redemptive completion of all things may be—is this claim: God holds the future, and God is pulling us, even now, toward that future.

THEODORE J. WARDLAW

### Luke 21:25–36

This is a Jesus-shaped present in which we follow his own life of expectation and trust, and his own faith and hope in God. Just as he waited on God, so too we enter his waiting bound up in his work. He is with us in the waiting and in the work, sharing in our challenges but offering us strength.

WILLIE JAMES JENNINGS

## THEME 2: *Is There Good News in Apocalypse?*

### Luke 21:25–36

The good news stands even when everything else falls. . . . For those who trust God and whose trust of God is mirrored in their own faithfulness, the coming of the end is not a calamity to be feared but redemption to be welcomed.

JOEL B. GREEN

### Jeremiah 33:14–16

The vision of a future beyond the contemporary horizon, therefore, calls the people of God to look beyond the present moment, with its violence, disintegration, and failed leadership, to the restorative end toward which the Lord is moving, and so to orient faith and decision making within the context of God’s ultimate power and purposes, rather than the clamoring demands of a paralyzed present.

L. DANIEL HAWK

### 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

Christ has indeed come and brought us the gift of transformed life—abundant life now and the promise of life eternal—yet the transformation is not complete.

CYNTHIA M. CAMPBELL

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO YOU THIS WEEK?

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A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR THIS WEEK

Pray or read by the light of your Advent wreath this week. If you do not have one, simply light any candle and attach a sticky note or other label that says, “Hope.”

# First Reading

Jeremiah 33:14–16

In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. (vv. 15–16a)

## REFLECTION

Early church theologians spoke of God’s kingdom as *autobasileia*, a “self-kingdom”—a kingdom in Jesus Christ himself. God’s righteousness and justice are found in Christ, as well as salvation and safety. This makes it possible for us to live in God’s reign here and now. We can live in the freedom of serving God and receive the blessings of God’s presence with us in Christ. This sustains us and launches us into participating in God’s kingdom in Christ every day!

DONALD K. MCKIM

## RESPONSE

Without a sense of safety, a sense of freedom may be impossible. What does it mean to you to live in safety? How is spiritual safety different from physical safety? What safety and what freedom is God offering you in Christ right now?

## PRAYER

O Jesus Christ, no matter what is happening around me, teach me to find safety and freedom in you. Amen.

# *Canticle*

## Psalm 25:1–10

Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;  
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;  
teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long. (vv. 3–5)

### REFLECTION

We are not without hope, because we are not without God.

The psalmist waits in trust (v. 2) as long as necessary (v. 5). His waiting is not passive. To “untwist” his life, the psalmist must relearn and humbly re-place his feet in God’s ways (v. 4). No matter how off-target we become, God’s paths remain open, cleared by truth (v. 5) and marked by steadfast love and faithfulness at every turn (v. 10).

KIMBERLY L. CLAYTON

### RESPONSE

We usually think of waiting as a purely passive activity, rather than as a time to learn, relearn, take steps, or ask for help. The psalmist thinks differently. This Advent, what could an active waiting for the birth of Jesus look like or change in your life?

### PRAYER

God of truth, for you I wait all day long, and in you I trust. Lead me and teach me your paths. Amen.

## *Second Reading*

### 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (vv. 12–13)

#### REFLECTION

The love that creates this community is not simply for the sake of the in-group. The prayer is that they (we) will abound in love “for all.” This Christian community is to show love, compassion, care, and respect not only to one another but also to those who have rejected them. Christian life is not a closed loop or zero-sum game. The beloved community is one that “abounds” and overflows with love, a place where the door is always open and there is always room for more.

CYNTHIA M. CAMPBELL

#### RESPONSE

Sometimes, we long for what C. S. Lewis calls “the delicious sense of secret intimacy.” Community, without hospitality to outsiders, is just an in-group. Consider likely “closed loops” in your own life and communities. How might Christ be calling you to more hospitality? Even to those who have rejected you?

#### PRAYER

Lord Jesus, increase my love and teach me hospitality, even for those who have rejected me. Amen.

# *Gospel*

Luke 21:25–36

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” (v. 33)

## REFLECTION

God’s direction orients us in faith, not in fear toward our world. Even the cataclysmic events (as suggested in vv. 25–26), involving both the environment and nations, should not disorient us but turn us toward God, who has not and will not abandon this world. . . . The words of Jesus outline the order of discipleship inside a politics of reading the signs of the times: see what is happening and continue to do the work.

WILLIE JAMES JENNINGS

## RESPONSE

Meditate on holding fast to faith and the Word of God in the midst of destructive forces, whatever those may be in your life right now. What images emerge in your heart and mind? Draw, doodle, or write a poem based on these images.

## PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God, even though the heavens and earth will pass away, you will not abandon me or your people. Amen.

# *Weekend Reflections*

## FURTHER CONNECTION

There have been many attempts, in recent years, to soften the message of Advent . . . new names for the candles of the Four Seasons of Advent have been proposed along the lines of Peace, Joy, Love, and Hope. This presents quite a contrast with the medieval Advent themes of death, judgment, heaven and hell—in that order! As we have seen, hope is a very meager concept if it is not measured against the malevolence and godlessness of the forces that assail creation and its creatures every day in this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4).

FLEMING RUTLEDGE (1937–), *ADVENT: THE ONCE  
AND FUTURE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST*

## MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Choose one or two questions for reflection:

1. What connections have you noticed between this week’s texts and other passages in Scripture?
2. What connections have you made between this week’s texts and the world beyond Scripture?
3. Does either of this week’s two commentary themes speak especially to your life or the life of the world around you right now?
4. What is God saying to your congregation in particular through this week’s readings and commentaries?

MY CONNECTIONS

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*Sabbath Day*

SCRIPTURE OF ASSURANCE

Give ear to my words, O LORD;  
give heed to my sighing.  
Listen to the sound of my cry,  
my King and my God,  
for to you I pray.

O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;  
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.  
(Psalm 5:1–3)

WEEKLY EXAMEN

- Take a quiet moment, seek out God’s presence, and pray for the guidance of the Spirit.
- Consider the past week; recall specific moments and feelings that stand out to you.

- Choose one moment or feeling for deeper examination, thanksgiving, or repentance.
- Let go, breathe deeply, and invite Christ's love to surround and fill you in preparation for the week ahead.
- End with the Lord's Prayer.

# *The Week Leading Up to the* **Second Sunday of Advent**

## Malachi 3:1–4

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. (v. 1)

## Luke 1:68–79

“By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (vv. 78–79)

## Philippians 1:3–11

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. (vv. 9–11)

## Luke 3:1–6

During the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. (v. 2)

## LECTIO DIVINA

Underline a word or phrase that especially grabs your attention. Pray from that word or phrase and ask God to help you connect to its particular invitation for you this week.

# *Themes from This Week's Writers*

## THEME 1: *Hope*

### Malachi 3:1–4

In the end, of course, what sustains the church, and all human beings touched by God's grace, lies beyond the words of judgment, in the faithfulness with which God shall complete the loving work of creation.

ALAN GREGORY

### Philippians 1:3–11

For Paul, the second coming of Christ is a day in which all of God's promises will be fulfilled, God's people will be redeemed, and resurrection life will reconcile all to one another and to God (see Rom. 8:18–25). It is precisely the anticipation of that "day" that fuels the joy that pours out of his letter to the Philippians.

CYNTHIA M. CAMPBELL

### Luke 3:1–6

We live in its hope, yet are always edging toward frustration as we wait for a world filled with the sight, sound, and knowledge of God and shaped in the divine rule.

WILLIE JAMES JENNINGS

## THEME 2: *Repentance*

### Malachi 3:1–4

In what ways have we contributed to social and economic conditions about which we so easily become upset—even angry? It is far too easy to blame others (and historically, this has often fallen on foreigners, migrants, and the weak). The prophets often turn the mirror on ourselves. Who, indeed, can "endure the day"?

DANIEL L. SMITH-CHRISTOPHER

### Luke 1:68–79

Although [John the Baptist] appears in the wilderness, he has his eye on the temple and the empire itself. . . . Against these earthly and corrupt powers John, son of Zechariah, appears, preparing the Lord’s way of light and peace (Luke 1:79).

KIMBERLY L. CLAYTON

### Luke 3:1–6

This is fully consistent with the way Luke describes this central aspect of John’s ministry: it is a “baptism of repentance,” that is, a repentance-baptism. This realignment of hearts and lives in relation to God’s agenda is the means by which God’s people “prepare the way of the Lord” and “make his paths straight.”

JOEL B. GREEN

WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SAYING TO YOU THIS WEEK?

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A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR THIS WEEK

Pray or read by the light of your Advent wreath this week. If you do not have one, simply light any candle and attach a sticky note or other label that says, “Peace.”

# *First Reading*

Malachi 3:1–4

But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. (vv. 2–3)

## REFLECTION

The church, therefore, must seek the strange blessing in the words of God's judgment, listening intently to this word that purifies and never flatters. When Christians accept God's calling, it is good news for the world, because the church, when it is willing to bear God's refining, represents the glory of humanity as it exists in God's desire. In the end, of course, what sustains the church, and all human beings touched by God's grace, lies beyond the words of judgment, in the faithfulness with which God shall complete the loving work of creation.

ALAN GREGORY

## RESPONSE

In what ways are you or your congregation being refined by God's fire or washed with strong soap in this season? What hardships are you experiencing? What hope do you feel? What does "the glory of humanity as it exists in God's desire" look like, as it is being revealed in you?

## PRAYER

O God, you are sending your messenger to prepare the way for us. Purify and refine us, for your love's sake. Amen.

# *Canticle*

Luke 1:68–79

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.” (vv. 76–77)

## REFLECTION

Zechariah, the proud papa, acknowledges the divine differential in his canticle: He begins by praising of the God of Israel who “raised up a mighty Savior” (Luke 1:69) and lingers there for eight verses. Only after the Messiah is lifted up does Zechariah turn his attention to his own child for four verses. As “the prophet of the Most High,” John will go before the Lord, preparing the way, giving knowledge of salvation by forgiveness of sins (Luke 1:76–79).

KIMBERLY L. CLAYTON

## RESPONSE

Listen to Zechariah’s words, and imagine that he is saying them about you. How does it make you feel? What phrases especially stand out to you? Then consider, like Zechariah, “the divine differential”: what you are called to do versus what can only be done by the Messiah.

## PRAYER

Merciful God, give light to us who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and guide our feet into the way of peace. Amen.

## *Second Reading*

### Philippians 1:3–11

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. (vv. 3–6)

#### REFLECTION

There are moments when, in the midst of utter ordinariness, something breaks through; seen with the eyes of faith, that which is rudimentary is suddenly transformed into something holy. Sometimes people of faith are fortunate enough to see all of it, even themselves, with the eyesight of God; the only fitting response to it all is a great, unimaginable gratitude.

THEODORE J. WARDLAW

#### RESPONSE

When have you seen the ordinary transformed into something holy recently? What does it mean, do you think, to see with the “eyesight of God”? What would it mean to see yourself this way? Your neighborhood? Your faith community?

#### PRAYER

Jesus Christ, may our love overflow more and more, remembering one another in joy and prayer. Amen.

# *Gospel*

Luke 3:1–6

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’” (vv. 3–4)

## REFLECTION

We therefore recognize that the repentance John proclaims is marked by baptism but it is not a one-time event. It refers to a continuing journey on an obstructed path requiring ongoing roadwork. God’s people begin the conversionary journey with baptism, but baptism is not so much the arrival at one’s destination as it is the beginning of a journey.

JOEL B. GREEN

## RESPONSE

Have you ever thought about Advent as a season for conversion? It is a season for new beginnings and repentance, as John the Baptist reminds us. What sort of conversion are you longing for in the baptismal journey of your life right now?

## PRAYER

Show me, O God, how to walk in your paths and prepare the way, that all may know the salvation of your love. Amen.

## *Weekend Reflections*

### FURTHER CONNECTION

It is so easy to be hopeful in the daytime when you can see the things you wish on. But it was night, it stayed night. Night was striding across nothingness with the whole round world in his hands. . . . They sat in company with the others in other shanties, their eyes straining against cruel walls and their souls asking if He meant to measure their puny might against His. They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON (1891–1960), *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

### MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Choose one or two questions for reflection:

1. What connections have you noticed between this week's texts and other passages in Scripture?
2. What connections have you made between this week's texts and the world beyond Scripture?
3. Does either of this week's two commentary themes speak especially to your life or the life of the world around you right now?
4. What is God saying to your congregation in particular through this week's readings and commentaries?

MY CONNECTIONS

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*Sabbath Day*

SCRIPTURE OF ASSURANCE

Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back. (1 Kings 18:37)

WEEKLY EXAMEN

- Take a quiet moment, seek out God's presence, and pray for the guidance of the Spirit.
- Consider the past week; recall specific moments and feelings that stand out to you.
- Choose one moment or feeling for deeper examination, thanksgiving, or repentance.
- Let go, breathe deeply, and invite Christ's love to surround and fill you in preparation for the week ahead.
- End with the Lord's Prayer.