

# *Daily Feast*

MEDITATIONS FROM  
FEASTING ON THE WORD®

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✿ YEAR B ✿

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# Introduction

When we opened the first volume of *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* and began reading, we knew that the contents were consistent with the title. As teachers and preachers, to have four perspectives on the lectionary in one volume truly satisfied our hunger for rich engagement with biblical texts. With the publication of each additional volume in the twelve-volume series, we became excited about the possibilities for the ways these essays could be resources for other spiritual practices.

This book is designed to give you a chance to step back and focus on a smaller piece from some of the essays from the *Feasting on the Word* commentaries. Whether you are a pastor, educator, church member, or lay leader, let these reflections on biblical texts be a daily feast for your continuing formation in the life of the Christian faith.

Consider the ways that *Daily Feast* might be used:

- **Daily meditation:** Begin or end your day with a reading and reflection on one of the texts for the week.
- **Journaling:** As you read, think, and pray, journal in response to the thoughts that are evoked for you. Some find that journaling with words works best. Others find that using markers, crayons, or watercolors invites a different kind of imaging in response to text.
- **Preparing for preaching or worship leadership:** Have a copy of this available to give to liturgists and choir directors, all those involved in worship leadership. As staff or worship teams work on liturgy and prepare for worship leadership, this book can become a resource for meditation and prayer, and may even be adapted for use in worship.
- **Preparing for teaching:** Use in your own meditation during the week as you prepare your heart and mind to teach all ages of God's children.

- **Reaching out beyond the church:** Use in a variety of settings where a pastoral presence is invited to participate, such as social agencies, health-care facilities, hospitals, prisons, mission trips.
- **Beginning or concluding an adult class in the church school:** Read a selection and a prayer as a time of centering.
- **In committee meetings or staff meetings:** Use a *Daily Feast* selection as an opening meditation.

Note that portions of the texts for each Sunday are presented, beginning on the previous Monday, so that you can spend the week reflecting on the Scripture passages for the coming Sunday. Each weekday and Saturday will feature reflections on one of the four passages—Old Testament, Psalm, Epistle, and Gospel—along with a response and a prayer. Sundays and special days such as Christmas Eve and Holy Week will contain reflections on all four of the texts. (See “A Note from the Publisher” for more information about the Revised Common Lectionary and an explanation of how Feasting on the Word follows the lections during Ordinary Time.)

Included here are brief excerpts from each of the Scripture readings, but we encourage you to have a Bible handy so you can read the complete passage.

As we have read texts and the reflections on these texts from the four perspectives, we found ourselves slowing down, taking time to read Scripture, and connecting with these essays in new ways. We anticipate that the variety and depth of the perspectives on biblical texts of the authors of the essays will enrich your own spiritual practices.

We hope that our experience will be yours. So take some time. Read the text. Read the reflection. Consider your response, and be in prayer. May this resource be a daily feast for you.

Kathleen Bostrom and Lib Caldwell

## *A Note from the Publisher*

This devotional is a part of the series *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, a twelve-volume commentary series for preaching and teaching. The uniqueness of the approach in the *Feasting* commentaries is in providing four perspectives on each preaching occasion from the Revised Common Lectionary. The theological, pastoral, exegetical, and homiletical dimensions of each biblical passage are explored with the hope that preachers will find much to inform and stimulate their preparations for preaching from this rich “feast” of materials.

*Feasting on the Word* follows the readings in the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) as developed by the Consultation on Common Texts, an ecumenical consultation of liturgical scholars and denominational representatives from the United States and Canada. The RCL provides a collection of readings from Scripture to be used during worship in a schedule that follows the seasons of the church year. In addition, it provides for a uniform set of readings to be used across denominations or other church bodies.

The RCL provides a reading from the Old Testament, a Psalm response to that reading, a Gospel, and an Epistle for each preaching occasion of the year. It is presented in a three-year cycle, with each year centered around one of the Synoptic Gospels. Year A is the year of Matthew, Year B is the year of Mark, and Year C is the year of Luke. John is read each year, especially during Advent, Lent, and Easter. The RCL offers two tracks of Old Testament texts for the Season after Pentecost or Ordinary Time: a semicontinuous track, which moves through stories and characters in the Old Testament, and a complementary track, which ties the Old Testament texts to the theme of the Gospel texts for that day. Some denominational traditions favor one over the other. For instance, Presbyterians and Methodists generally follow the semicontinuous track, while Lutherans and Episcopalians generally follow the complementary track. To

appeal to an ecumenical audience, the readings in this devotional follow the complementary track for Year A, are split between the complementary and semicontinuous tracks for Year B, and cover the semicontinuous stream for Year C.

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 Web site at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu> for a list of readings for the current year.

Originally designed to be a twelve-volume set of preaching commentaries, the series has now grown to include several other related projects in addition to this devotional. A full church school curriculum program is now available at [www.feastingontheword.net/curriculum](http://www.feastingontheword.net/curriculum). A three-volume set of worship resources to complement the commentaries is now in development, as is a guide for preaching the children's sermon. A major new undertaking using the four-perspective approach, *Feasting on the Gospels*, a seven-volume series of commentaries on the entirety of the Gospels, will be published, beginning in 2013. Information about these projects can be found on the *Feasting on the Word* Web site, [www.feastingontheword.net](http://www.feastingontheword.net).

Finally, we would like to thank all who were involved in the original *Feasting on the Word* series, including our partner, Columbia Theological Seminary; general editors David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor; editorial board members Charles L. Campbell, Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, Gary W. Charles, Allen Hilton, Cynthia A. Jarvis, E. Elizabeth Johnson, Thomas G. Long, Kathleen M. O'Connor, Marcia Y. Riggs, George W. Stroup, Emilie M. Townes, Richard F. Ward; project manager Joan Murchison; and project compiler Mary Lynn Darden.



THE WEEK LEADING UP TO THE

✻ *First Sunday in Lent* ✻

*Genesis 9:8–17*

God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” (vv. 12–13)

*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.  
Do not let those who wait for you be  
put to shame. (vv. 1–3)

*1 Peter 3:18–22*

And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him. (vv. 21–22)

*Mark 1:9–15*

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” (vv. 9–11)

➔ **MONDAY** ⬅

*Genesis 9:8–17*

**REFLECTION**

The biblical flood narrative is not merely a story of the return to primordial chaos; it also contains a story of deliverance and of relationship with God. God directed Noah, the only one who found favor with the Lord, to build an ark so that he and his family and some of the animals might escape the punishing waters of the flood. From this small community God then fashioned a new human family and established a covenant with that family and with the world as a whole. This is a story of deliverance and new beginnings.

DIANNE BERGANT

**RESPONSE**

Where and with whom is God's covenant making needed today?

**PRAYER**

God of Creation, as I move more deeply into each day of Lent, remind me of my own experiences of deliverance and the new beginnings you always provide. Amen.

## ➔ TUESDAY ✦

### *Genesis 9:8–17*

#### REFLECTION

Think about it. In the scene depicted in today's reading, God binds God's own self to humanity, and indeed to all the world, in a new and different way. God is no longer only the creator; God is now also the protector, committed to refrain from punishing humanity or destroying the world. This is the import of God's choosing to hang his "bow" in the heavens as a sign of this covenant. Ancients, including the Israelites from whom we inherit these Scriptures, conceived of lightning as God's arrows (Ps. 7:12–13) fired from a mighty bow. Thus the rainbow serves as a reminder not simply of the beauty of the earth after a rainstorm but of God's refusal ever again to take up the divine bow against humanity or the world. Further, by binding God's self to the fate of humanity, God becomes inherently invested in the fate of humanity and in this way keenly vulnerable, even exposed. God cannot simply sit back oblivious to the fate of humanity, much as the Greek or Roman gods might. Rather, God's fortunes are now bound up with those of humanity, as God is not simply committed but deeply invested in the fate of God's creation.

DAVID J. LOSE

#### RESPONSE

In what ways do this text and reflection expand your understanding of God's immanence with creation?

#### PRAYER

God who creates and protects, whenever I see your bow in the sky, I will remember your promises to all creation. Amen.

## ✿ *Ash Wednesday* ✿

### *Joel 2:1-2, 12-17*

Yet even now, says the LORD,  
return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
rend your hearts and not your clothing.  
Return to the LORD, your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,  
and relents from punishing. (vv. 12-13)

### *Psalm 51:1-17*

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin. (vv. 1-2)

### *2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10*

We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.  
For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in  
him we might become the righteousness of God. (5:20b)

### *Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order  
to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your  
Father in heaven. . . . Do not store up for yourselves treasures  
on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves  
break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in  
heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where  
thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is,  
there your heart will be also.” (vv. 1, 19-20)

## *Joel 2:1–2, 12–17*

### REFLECTION

The global context for the twenty-first-century congregation is complex, fraught with conflict. The threat of global warming with its ecological and economic consequences looms large. The First World is warring with the Third World over non-renewable energy resources. Terrorism is the preferred strategy of competing religious and political ideologies. Poverty with its accompanying issues of hunger and homelessness continues to grow across the globe, as the gap between rich and poor grows ever wider. In this global context we are invited to hear the prophet's words from a vantage point beyond the cleansing of our individual souls. The Christian community is challenged by the ancient words of the prophet to consider its communal soul as well. It is all too apparent that in the web of life on this earth we are connected globally, economically, politically, and spiritually. We are dependent on one another for our survival. Here the global context connects with the liturgical context. In the intonation of "ashes to ashes and dust to dust," we are reminded that all creation comes from the hand of the same Creator and from the same particles of energy. The universe is truly one and connected within all its parts.

JANE ANNE FERGUSON

## *Psalms 51:1–17*

### REFLECTION

Psalms 51 holds a permanent place in today's readings, and for good reason. While it shows up again in the lections, this is its natural habitat—with the cross-smudged foreheads and raw holiness of Ash Wednesday. Of all the penitential psalms, this is the one that most passionately witnesses to the pain of sin and the hunger for salvation. This psalm is not for reading; it is meant to be wailed. It outlines the paradox of the Lenten journey: our liberation will come through our suffering, not in spite of it.

A young woman came up to me following a Bible study on the campus where I pastor. She introduced herself, told me a little about her relatively new Christian faith, and then thanked me for leading the Ash Wednesday service. It was the middle of October at the time, and I assumed she had her novice liturgical wires crossed. But sure enough, she was talking about Ash Wednesday, almost seven months after the fact. Explaining herself, she said, “A friend made me go—I had never been to an Ash Wednesday service before. My church back home never did anything like that, with the ashes and all, and at first I was pretty freaked out about it. I was surprised at how ashamed and embarrassed those ashes made me feel. I found myself avoiding public places—I almost did not go to class the rest of the day.

“But that whole day was so powerful for me, walking around with that big black mark on my forehead. The more I thought about it, and still think about it, I began to feel so . . . hopeful. I know that sounds strange, but that service felt so honest. I am not the person I want to be, and deep down I know that, but most church services just feel like strung-out apologies. But since that day, I just feel like God can change me. That God wants to change me. And that feels hopeful.” BRIAN ERICKSON

## *2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:10*

### REFLECTION

Preachers who take up this text will look beyond their own understandings of salvation, which Paul uses variously to describe something that has already happened (Rom. 8:24), something that is in the process of happening (2 Cor. 2:15), and something that will happen very soon (1 Cor. 5:5). The far reach of these verb tenses offers preachers an opening to speak of salvation as something that happens in time and transcends it, even as the Ash Wednesday liturgy happens in time and transcends it.

BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR

## *Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21*

### **REFLECTION**

Ash Wednesday is the day Christians attend their own funerals. Whether or not worshipers receive ashes on their foreheads in the sign of the cross, the liturgy reminds them of their own demise: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Even in traditions where ashes are not imposed, the name of the day remains. Everything else that is said or done in the service happens in the presence of ashes, which offers the preacher a rare opportunity to speak of death before death, to listeners who are not preoccupied with mourning the loss of a particular friend or family member.      BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR

### **RESPONSE**

What pains of sin have you witnessed this year? Name them out loud.

### **PRAYER**

I return to you again, O God, with a sign of ashes on my forehead. Bathe me in your love and mercy and wash away my sin. Amen.

## ➔ THURSDAY ◀

### *1 Peter 3:18–22*

#### REFLECTION

A third provocative theological theme in this passage is its multilayered picture of baptism in verses 20–21. At one level, baptism is an ark through which God saves. Amid the floodlike conditions of suffering, baptism communicates to believers the sense of their belonging to God and thereby of making their ways safely through the floods ravaging the present age. At another level, baptism is performed by means of immersion in water. Floods, of course, are water in the mode of destruction. The power of God is so awesome that God transforms the flood water into the means of salvation. From this perspective, 1 Peter's attitude toward baptism is similar to that of the Reformers: Baptism is a sign from God to assure the congregation of God's continuing providence, even amid the suffering that comes from faithfulness.

RONALD J. ALLEN

#### RESPONSE

What has been your most recent experience of ravaging waters? Where was God present in this experience?

#### PRAYER

Creator God, when dams break and raging waters drown all life, I remember a font and the gentle water washing over me, with the promise of your abiding love and providence that surround all creation. Amen.



➤ **FRIDAY** ◀

*Mark 1:9–15*

**REFLECTION**

And as in so many other transformative religious experiences, “Spirit” is shown here to be at once gentle and dovelike, yet acting with awesome, disruptive effect—descending without warning from a heaven “torn apart,” reorienting one’s self and world, and setting one on a new and revolutionary spiritual path. In time, such a recipient of “Spirit,” such a religious revolutionary, is bound to confront the world with his or her own special vision and claim—the urgency of the inbreaking reign of God for Jesus in Mark’s Gospel—and to encounter the world’s resistance and rejection. Such is the transforming power of Spirit in the Bible. When Spirit comes, one is changed and, in Mark’s theology, set on the road of discipleship to a cross and beyond.

RODNEY J. HUNTER

**RESPONSE**

How is God’s Spirit disrupting your life? In what ways has she reoriented your world?

**PRAYER**

Your Spirit’s presence, O God, challenges, renews, and reorients my life of faith. Amen.

## ➔ SATURDAY ◀

### *Mark 1:9–15*

#### REFLECTION

As often as Christians use phrases such as “kingdom of God,” “repentance,” and “good news,” few compare notes on what they mean by those words. Could that be because no one has ever asked them? Like many other words central to Christian faith, these words are entirely abstract. They have no weight, no smell, no shape, no temperature—no direct reference to lived experience. . . . Of all the words that come out of Jesus’ mouth this Sunday, “good news” may be the one most in need of refreshment at the beginning of Lent. What is the good news for this particular congregation at this particular time in this particular world? Can the preacher forget what the phrase is supposed to mean long enough to uncover the meaning that listeners are dying to hear?

BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR

#### RESPONSE

Take some time this day to reflect on the ways you have experienced the meaning of these phrases: “kingdom of God,” “repentance,” and “good news.”

#### PRAYER

Refresh my understanding of the good news that is needed in my community of faith this week. Amen.

## → SUNDAY ←

### *Genesis 9:8–17*

#### REFLECTION

What does the body of Christ look like in the light of the rainbow? What would it mean for a Christian community to put God's "rainbow in their house"? God's bow in the heavens is the sign of the first covenant that God makes with humankind and with all creation. It is a sign that God is a changed (and changing) God. . . . Taken seriously and intentionally, it would profoundly change a faith community. Not into a utopia, but into a place where people were willing to let their hearts be remade in the image of God's heart; a place where people would let their hearts be broken open, with grief over their own hard-heartedness and the hard-heartedness of the world and its chaos. And when their hearts were broken open the people would be moved to partner with their Creator through patient, forgiving, loving, and prophetic action for the renewal of all creation.

JANE ANNE FERGUSON

### *Psalms 25:1–10*

#### REFLECTION

To read of the psalmist's troubles is helpful to the contemporary church. The psalmist sought to learn of God's ways, not in a time of comfort, but in the midst of difficulties. The poet's depiction of God as a God of salvation (v. 5) is a reminder of the roots of that concept in the OT. The word originally had a concrete, this-worldly connotation of God's intervention in danger and distress. That emphasis enables the contemporary Christian to understand God as active in life now.

CHARLES L. AARON JR.

## *1 Peter 3:18–22*

### REFLECTION

Our text reminds us that our Lord suffered terribly before he died on the cross. Yet his suffering was not caused by God; rather, it was the result of Christ's faithfulness to his mission of reconciling us to God. . . . Hispanic theologians like Roberto Goizueta describe the work of Jesus Christ as "accompaniment." Through his life, suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus has become the one who walks with us.

SHAWNTHEA MONROE-MUELLER

## *Mark 1:9–15*

### REFLECTION

Jesus' baptism marks for him the end of the old world and the beginning of a new one, as is made clear as soon as he arises from the Jordan and sees the heavens themselves being torn apart. The image is both violent and hope-filled. The only other place Mark uses this word for ripping and tearing is in the description of the events that take place at the moment Jesus dies on the cross, when the veil of the temple is torn in two, from top to bottom. In both cases, God is doing the ripping. . . . As the heavens are being torn apart, Jesus also sees the Spirit coming down from heaven, like a dove, not just upon him, but into him. This is the same Spirit of God that moved over the face of the waters of the deep at the creation of the world. The descent of the Spirit signals that God is now remaking the broken, sin-filled creation.

STANLEY P. SAUNDERS

### RESPONSE

What images are evoked for you in your reading of these texts and reflections? Meditate on them.

### PRAYER

God, you accompany me in all the days of my life. In you I place my trust. Amen.