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# seeking: honest questions for deeper faith

*A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL*



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Art, reflections, &  
poetry for the  
season of Lent





## a blessing for the seekers

Blessed are you who turn your face up to the sky,  
who open your arms to feel the wind,  
who notice all the things that we should notice.  
Blessed are you who are fluent in wonder  
and familiar with awe.  
Blessed are you who, even now, dream dreams,  
who have not lost hope,  
who swear the glass is still half-full.  
Blessed are you who plant trees  
and sing the harmony,  
who tell the children how this world can be magic.  
Blessed are you who  
walk and seek  
and turn over every stone,  
pointing out all the corners and colors  
that God lives in.  
Blessed are you.  
Amen.

Poem by  
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed



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This Lenten season, we will read many stories of Jesus encountering people who are seeking: a new beginning, a different life, a deeper faith. In these interactions, an unveiling often occurs—assumptions are disrupted, a new perspective is revealed, mystery grows.

And so, we've crafted a Lenten series founded on questions. Many of our weekly questions feel restorative ("Can these bones live?"). Some feel like a charge or challenge ("Who will you listen to?"). Some questions are hopeful and curious ("How do we begin again?"). Our questions won't necessarily lead to answers, but they can help us find clarity and a new perspective. Ultimately, we pray they lead to a new beginning, a restoration, a wider grace.

Like the characters in our Lenten scriptures, we are also seeking many things: clarity, connection, wonder, justice, balance. We are seeking our calling, the sacred, and how to live as a disciple. We hope this devotional will help you unpack some of your big questions in ways that are honest and faithful. We encourage you to journey through these weekly readings and reflections at your own pace, asking yourself often: what am I seeking? What is God seeking?

This Lent, may you engage in the spiritual practice of seeking—by asking questions, and by staying curious, open, and nimble. We hope you will soften your assumptions and expand your perspectives. We pray that these questions will create a safe space to explore—to be drawn more deeply into the fullness of life, into the heart of God.

Artfully yours,

### The Sanctified Art Creative Team

Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity  
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed  
Hannah Garrity  
Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman  
Rev. Anna Strickland

# a lenten quest for a love that makes us whole

REFLECTION PROMPTS FOR THE LENTEN JOURNEY  
BY REV. DANIELLE SHROYER

This Lent we are seeking: seeking clarity, seeking wisdom, seeking a love that makes us whole. Christians have a long tradition of embarking on a spiritual quest, which invites us to look with fresh eyes at our life and the world, and listen for the longing in our souls. All you need to begin is a willing heart. May you journey with bravery and discover how trust meets you along the way. And may these questions guide you closer to the heart of God and the sanctuary of your soul.

**We encourage you to start your Lenten journey here and return to these pages frequently throughout the season to reflect on these questions.**

## PACK YOUR BAGS

As the season of Lent begins, journal, pray, or meditate on these questions:

- **What do you need for your journey?**
- **What needs to be left behind?**

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**QUESTION MAP** Throughout the Lenten season, we invite you to return to these questions often. Unpack them in conversations, include them in your prayers, and write about them in your journal.

**What is your soul yearning for?**

**What is holding you back from soulful, wholehearted exploration?**

**What do you need to know about God to trust God more fully?**

**Is there another question your soul needs to ask during this Lenten quest?**

## DAILY BREAD

Choose one spiritual practice to accompany you on this journey. Choose something simple, like a daily gratitude practice, five minutes of centering prayer, or leaving burdens to God as you go to bed.

**What spiritual practice will you commit to?**

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## RETURNING HOME

On Easter Sunday, reflect on your Lenten journey as a whole (flip to the last page of this devotional to journal in response to these questions):

- **What do you see in God more clearly after this journey?**
- **Where do your explorations need to continue?**
- **What would it look like to follow God wholeheartedly in the season of Eastertide?**

**A PRAYER FOR THE JOURNEY** God of the Way, give us willing hearts for the Lenten quest that lies ahead. Remind us that you honor our questions and can be trusted with our longings. Help us remember that you are seeking us, and we can rest in being found, even as we venture into the unknown. Guide our steps and bring clarity and love more fully into our hearts. May our way be the Jesus way, whatever steps we take. Amen.

# ABOUT THE SA CREATIVE TEAM

## REV. LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

Founder | Creative Director of SA

Lisle Gwynn Garrity (*she/her*) is a Pastorist (pastor + artist), retreat leader, and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. She founded A Sanctified Art with the conviction that, in order to thrive, the church needs more creative expression and art-filled freedom.

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Anna Strickland (*she/her*) looks for the Divine in the everyday like treasure in clay jars, and first encountered God in the integration of her spiritual self and artistic self. She is a native Austinite and graduated from the University of Texas where she now works as a college minister, especially serving LGBTQ students.

# about our guest contributors

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# who will you listen to?

Twitter or the BBC / the ads on late-night television / the wind as she blows / the echo of children playing / the quiet of snow / the ice bucket challenge / the phone when it rings / your pastor / your mother / your doctor / your gut / the tension in your shoulders / the restaurant singing happy birthday / audio books / TED talks / the rhythm of the music / the coffee drip in the morning / your therapist / the wisdom of the enneagram / the way your heart comes alive when you're being creative / the man on the corner asking for change / the kid on the subway selling chocolate / the labels on the makeup bottle that promise timeless beauty / the magazines that tell you you need timeless beauty / astrology / the Dow Jones / the hiss of the radiator / the pitter patter of little feet / financial advisors / the top 40 pop / the top 40 country / the *New York Times* / the rumor mill / the Book of Psalms / your sense of self / Jesus, when he says, "I am with you, always."

Poem by  
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

# who will you listen to?

LEONI ("The God of Abraham Praise")



Scan to hear the tune!

Text: Anna Strickland (2022)

Music: Meyer Lyon (1770)

The voices from the past That  
So - ci - e - ty de - mands We  
A rush - ing flood of hate In  
ech - o through our minds Like  
al - ways strive for more Ac -  
news we of - ten see Con -  
noi - sy ghosts haunt and har - ass With  
- cum - u - lat - ing wealth and land And  
- ceals God's king - dom in a great Ca -  
words un - kind Who will we lis - ten to? Lies  
leave the poor Who will we lis - ten to? The  
- co - pho - ny Who will we lis - ten to? The  
that bind and a - base? Or God who coun - ters  
temp ter's jea - lou - sy? Or God's pro - vis - ion  
cha - os all a - round? Or God's dream of a  
words un - true With words of grace?  
and pur - suit Of e - qui - ty?  
world made new Where love a - bounds?

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT **seeking:** *Who will you listen to?*

**read** Matthew 4:1-11 | Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7  
**commentary** | Rev. Danielle Shroyer

In the ancient world, snakes were a symbol of transformation. Their venom held the possibility of both poison and medicine. Our human story begins in the crux of this same paradox of possibility, as the first humans embark into the fertile field God had prepared for them.

"God knows that when you eat it, your eyes will be opened," the serpent says. And while the serpent didn't lie—indeed, their eyes did open—as it often goes with crafty tricksters, that isn't the whole story. Because while the humans wouldn't physically die as they imagined, God also told the truth. A death would happen.

It was the death of their innocence.

Before we can embark on a life of wisdom—one that requires us to choose, over and over again, between using our words and actions as poison or medicine—we must allow our naive innocence to die. This call to grow up and leave our Divine Parent's house comes for all of us. It is painful, and yet it is necessary.

Many years later, this same choice comes to Jesus as he wanders the wilderness. Will he use his gifts as a parlor trick or a sacred balm? Will he use his glory for fame or for peace? Will he use his power for domination or for justice? Jesus shows us the way by choosing medicine, every time.

And as he does so, he teaches us what we all need to know as we fumble toward wisdom east of Eden. When he refuses to turn bread into stone, it's because he knows his gifts and abilities are in service to something far greater than hunger. When he refuses to test God, it's because he already trusts God. And when he refuses the kind of loyalty that leads to worldly authority, it's because he knows power is meant for connection and not domination.

Jesus knows all of this because he has been listening. Day after day, he dwells with his Divine Parent. He embodies the teachings he has received in the Temple, on his mother's lap, in his father's shop. Jesus shows us what it looks like to walk in wisdom, to become adept at parsing out the many voices that call for our allegiance.

If we are to be like Jesus, we also must begin by first listening to the voice of God at our center. This voice tells us, above all and after it all, we are God's Beloved. When we know this, we filter out so much of the silt and grit that traps us. We release ourselves into the arms of love. We make space for the work of transformation to be born in us.

As you begin this Lenten journey, consider what voices might be pulling you toward more poison than medicine. Carve out time for silence, that the still, small voice of God may come into fuller focus. Listen for God, who is always there, right at the center of your heart, inviting you into a life of belovedness, even as you travel east of Eden.



## reflect

**What voices are pulling you toward poison, and what voices are pulling you toward medicine? As you listen for God's still, small voice, what will enable you to hear?**

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT **seeking:** Who will you listen to?

**read** Matthew 4:1-11

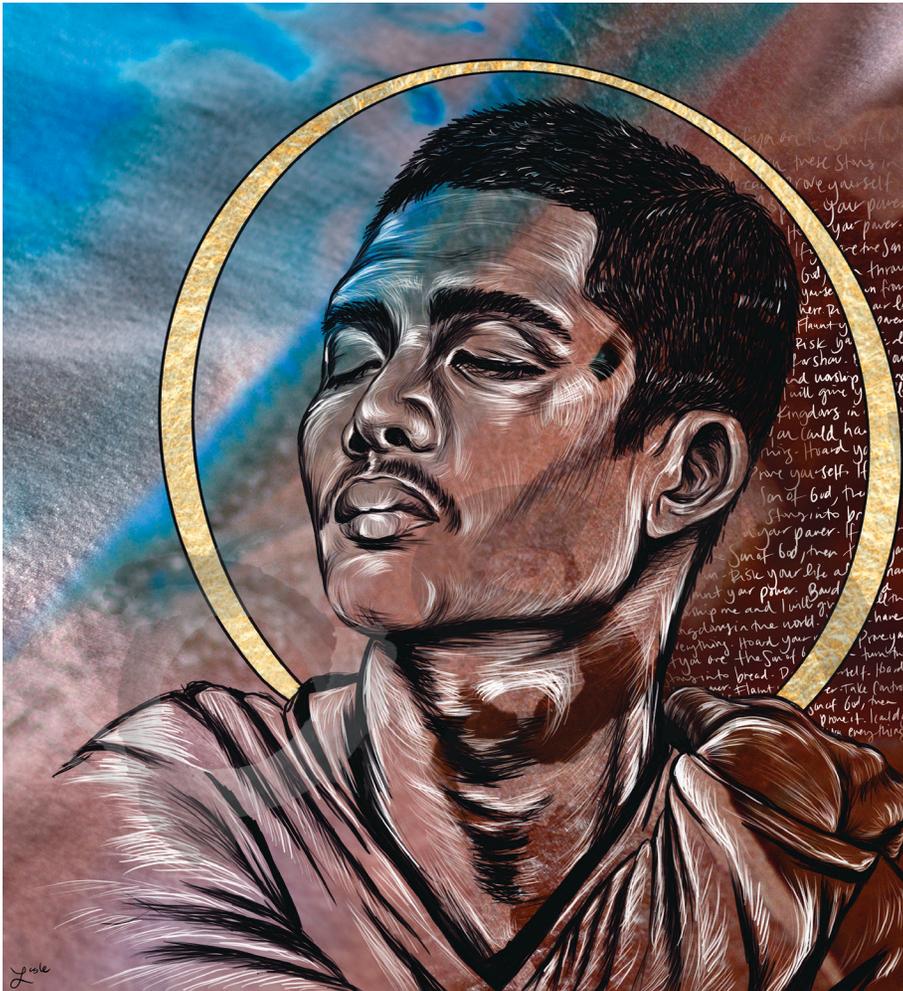
**from the artist** | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

In this image, the words of the Tempter hover in the background. The Tempter's voice lingers like a ringing in Jesus' ears, saying: "Take charge. Hoard your power. Dominate. Control."

Somehow, Jesus has deciphered that these words are simply background noise. He closes his eyes and goes inward, wrapping himself in a posture of self-embrace. From this introspective perspective, Jesus essentially says, "Get behind me, Satan."

The backdrop of this piece resembles the dust of the desert. Like sand washing along a beach, the sediment shifts into water in the top left, hinting at what bolsters Jesus in his ministry: his belonging to God. His belovedness washes over him, giving him the courage to defy the deception of the Tempter and tune into his inner wisdom. In this way, he is given a new song to carry with him, a lullaby from God that goes, "You, my child, in you, I am well-pleased." This is a melody for singing, a song for dancing.

What are the voices that linger with you like a ringing in your ears? What are the messages that try to deceive or devour you? Let those voices buzz and fade into the background. Close your eyes, tune in, and embrace yourself. From your belovedness, what song will you sing?



Tune In | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity  
Silk painting with digital drawing and collage

THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT **seeking:** *Who will you listen to?*

**read** Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

**from the artist** | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

As I was creating this piece, I was recovering from an unexpected postpartum surgery. I read the text, and then weeks of internal wrestling ensued. I felt angry, defiant, and it was all personal. Like a rebellious teenager, I poked holes in the text with hopes it would crumble; but why?

Reading Danielle Shroyer's book, *Original Blessing*,<sup>2</sup> truly helped me see why this text felt so burdensome, and I'm incredibly grateful for her work. She reminded me that this text has been forced to do things it was not written to do, and to say things it does not actually say.

In my youth, this narrative was taught as the origin story explaining human nature, sin, suffering, and death. It was the text I thought of when I had menstrual cramps. I would mutter, "Thanks, Eve," under my breath, blaming her, but I realize I was also blaming myself for my own pain. It was the text that justified distrust in myself. While engaging with this text, the pain I was feeling in my body from childbirth complications felt like punishment. I raged against this text because I felt it raging against me.

Beware of the ways harmful theology bubbles up in your life. Ask yourself, "Who will I listen to?" In this case, I was giving power to a hermeneutic that isn't in line with who God has revealed God's self to be, or with the image of God in me.

In this piece, the cool tones represent the heaviness and confusion I felt with this familiar story, and the high contrast mimics the way this text has made me feel separated and isolated from God. The woman's expression holds the weight and the pain caused by the ways this text has been used to subjugate women and to prop up destructive doctrines and a distorted gospel. In hindsight, I realize I was visualizing my emotional journey with the text.

<sup>2</sup> Shroyer, Danielle. *Original Blessing: Putting Sin in Its Rightful Place*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).



Who Will You Listen To? | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman  
Digital painting