

March 10, 2019 Lent 1

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Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Romans 10:8b-13

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16, Luke 4:1-13

Drawing on ideas and language from Debie Thomas' post, 3-3-19 Human and Hungry from Journey with Jesus.

Information about Praying Mother from the artist statement for the piece, and the Weisman website.

Grace and peace to you, God's beloved, Christ's beloved, on this holy ground. Amen.

Our theme for this Lenten season here at University Lutheran Church of Hope, is this: a plea, really,
Make us bold to pray.

Through this season, we're getting bold and we're digging into the Lord's pray,
line by line, section by section, focusing each week on an element.

This week it's that very first line, where, in this congregation we usually begin:

"Our Creator, our Mother, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

Holy, sacred, be your name, O God, you, of many names.

As we gathered to plan for this Lenten season and read together the scripture for these Sundays,
we were reminded that in uttering God's holy name,
in praying as Jesus taught us to pray, in making this plea,
we are on holy ground.

Years ago, a seminary student I worked with named Katie Emery stood up to preach one Sunday.

She began by taking off her shoes, really kicking them off.

I remember being surprised, and then I was moved, deeply moved.

Katie explained that in sharing a sermon, in coming to worship, in being together with God's people,
she wanted to take off her shoes to remind herself that she is on holy ground.

Katie is in good company.

Moses had a similar response back in Exodus, when the bush was burning and God was calling, "Take off
your shoes, Moses, for you are on holy ground," sacred ground, vulnerable, life changing ground.

Some of you do this already and every once in a while I see folks padding up to Holy Communion in
stocking feet, feeling the cool tiles, intentionally mindful of this holy ground.

Today, if you haven't already, I invite you to take off your shoes.

Plant your feet, feel the ground beneath you, the depth of our roots, our ancestors in the faith, our family
through the generations.

Feel this holy ground, God's presence when we call out, hands open in need:

Our Creator, our Mother, our Father in heaven, hallowed, holy, mysterious, be your name.

On Ash Wednesday, just a few days ago, we began our Lenten journey.

We smudged an ashy cross on one another's forehead with the words,

"Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return."

There's an important tension held in those words, in that action:

we are beloved of God, held in God's deep and abiding love, AND,

at once, we remember that we are dust, that we will die, that we are fragile creatures.

We are BOTH, one does not prevent the other, one does not negate the other.

Jesus holds this same tension as he enters the wilderness in our gospel reading this morning:

He's arisen from the baptismal waters, heard the promise: you are my child, my beloved.

He's been to the mountain top, spoken with the elders, same words: this is my child, my beloved.

Today, with those promises ringing in his ears, etched on our foreheads, he is led by the Spirit into

the 40-day-wilderness of temptation—his frailty, his humanity more bare, more vulnerable than ever.

Jesus doesn't get a choice about going to the wilderness, but the truth is, he chooses to stay.

Three times Jesus could side step, avoid, the temptations—for each time the devil is quick to give him an exit ramp.

But the devil's way runs counter to that deep Lenten tension: we are beloved AND we are mortal.

When the devil tempts Jesus with bread, in his hunger, in his desire to be satisfied, he could bypass his yearning.

Instead Jesus faces it, feeling the hunger in his stomach, and also our hunger.

Oh, I know that temptation to fill my hunger, it's real, quick, fill it with something, lest I must face it.

Debie Thomas writes, "To sit patiently with desire — to become its student — and *still* embrace my identity as God's beloved, is hard."

When the devil tempts Jesus with power, with ego, with, really, the kingdom, Jesus could cry "Uncle".

But instead he leans in, let's humility be his power, let's love measure his success.

Finally, the devil tempts Jesus with protection, with a bubble of safety as he teeters on the pinnacle.

Wouldn't that be a comfort with all the dangers, all the fear and uncertainty that swirls around us?

But Jesus knows, and we are trying to embody, that this way of the cross, this life, still holds pain, still carries grief, it's built on uncertainty, on not knowing, and yet being held tenderly in grace.

Debie Thomas writes, “[Jesus] has to trust that he can be beloved *and* famished,
precious *and* ‘insignificant,’
valued *and* vulnerable at the same time.

He has to learn that God's care resides *within* his flesh-and-blood humanity.”

Dear ones in Christ, on this holy ground, in these temptations, that is our learning, too:
we are beloved AND we are dust.

Vulnerable and bare when we're honest, and that's good news.

We meet our God again on holy ground.

Where do you experience holy ground? Turn to a neighbor, just for a moment. _____

This season we've moved into our worship space this powerful sculpture.

It's called Praying Mother.

It was created by in 1942, in the midst of World War II, by John Rood, who later became an art professor at
the U.

His work is at the Weisman and around the city.

Usually this Praying Mother rests in the corner of the lounge.

She's been with us here at Hope for many, many years.

In writing about this piece, a high point of his work, John Rood commented that his father died when he was
five, and left his mother with four small children.

His mother was on his mind as he sculpted this piece, and he later wrote of her:

“She was an intensely religious woman and one of my earliest memories is hearing and seeing her pray.
At such times there was a look of peacefulness on her face and at the same time an exaltation as if she
were speaking directly to her God.”

On this holy ground, O God, make us bold to pray.

In her times of temptation, in her wilderness, this Praying Mother, like Jesus, draws on the faith that she
carries with her.

We had been looking forward to a baptism this morning for Harper Jo Eberle, Ryan and Amanda's child.
With family coming from North Dakota, that didn't work out as planned!
We've postponed Harper's baptism until Easter Vigil.

This morning though, we still pray at the baptismal font.

Today we're remembering long-time Hope member Jean Brovold.

Jean died around the holidays at the age of 96.

She'll be buried this spring in Baudette with her husband.

He died years ago, when they were both still very young.

Jean raised their 3 kids and worked at Honeywell, and later at the U of M library.

Into her 90s, Jean was part of a team (along with Marian Jacobs) that collated the Sunday bulletins.

On a day like this, you'll appreciate that she was so dedicated to getting the bulletins complete that after a big snow, even when her apartment building lot hadn't yet been plowed, she would still make it over to church.

It seems to me that Jean knew well that she is beloved, and also that life is fragile and fleeting.

When members of this congregation die,

we remember how the waters that first washed over them in baptism, hold them now in death.

We pray at the baptismal font, on holy ground, linking ourselves to God's powerful waters of promise.

Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our sister Jean Brovold. We thank you for giving her to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. At these waters of baptism, you welcomed her into your love. At these waters, you comforted her in times of trouble and encouraged her in delight. At these waters, you now enfold her into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with all the saints of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.