

Holy Week – An Exploration of the Meaning of Kenosis

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Introduction

Throughout Holy Week, the *Revised Common Lectionary* readings for all three years focus on the Gospel of John, and the Servant Songs of Isaiah. The readings are carefully selected to show that Jesus is God’s Son, the Anointed One, known and ordained by God from the beginning of time to suffer and die for the sins of humanity, as foretold by the prophet Isaiah. The writer of John’s gospel intensifies his proof that Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One, the eternal *logos*, the Word of God known from the beginning of time, and the light of the world.

This Holy Week series assumes particular answers to four questions for the apocalypse, which have framed the discussion in the series, *Theology From Exile: Commentary on the Revised Common Lectionary for an Emerging Christianity*:¹

1. What is the nature of God? Violent or non-violent?
2. What is the nature of Jesus’ message? Inclusive or exclusive?
3. What is faith? Literal belief, or trust and commitment to the great work of distributive justice-compassion?
4. What is deliverance? Salvation from hell, or liberation from injustice?

“God” here is non-theistic and “kenotic.” *Kenosis* classically means “emptiness.” As a Christian term it has been defined as in Philippians 2:6-7: “. . . although [the Anointed One] was born in the image of God, [he] did not regard ‘being like God’ as something to use for his own advantage, but rid himself of such vain pretension and accepted a servant’s lot. . . . [H]e was born like all human beings. . . .”² In John Dominic Crossan’s words, a *kenotic* god is “the beating heart of the Universe, whose presence is justice and life, and whose absence is injustice and death.”³ Here, *kenosis* includes the desire of a relational spirit for an exiled people to live in justice-compassion. The *kenotic* servant listens and continues to teach reconciliation with that spirit and distributive justice among the people. In these commentaries, *kenotic* “god” becomes interchangeable with *kenotic* “servant,” as the creative force that both contains and is contained by the universe.

In answer to the four questions, the nature of that force is nonviolent; Jesus’ message is inclusive, faith is trust in an inclusive, non-violent universe, and deliverance is liberation from injustice. The context for human personal, social, and political life then becomes a covenant with justice and life, and commitment to the ongoing struggle for liberation from injustice. Civilization defines justice as retribution – payback; an eye for an eye. But the deeper meaning of justice is fair distribution. “Distributive justice” usually is narrowly defined as the fair distribution of wealth. But here the meaning is both wider and deeper, to include the fair distribution of justice. Far beyond

¹ Raven, Sea. *Theology From Exile Volume I The Year of Luke; Volume II The Year of Matthew*. <http://www.amazon.com/dp/1491077328>

² Dewey, Arthur J., et al. *The Authentic Letters of Paul* (Scholars Version) Polebridge Press (Salem, OR 2010), 186.

³ John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed. *In Search of Paul: How Jesus’s Apostle Opposed Rome’s Empire with God’s Kingdom* (Harper San Francisco, 2004), 288-291.

economics, as the rain falls on the good, the bad, and the ugly without partiality, distributive justice shows no partiality for any particular human condition. Human civilizations have not used that definition except in cases where there is clearly injustice if partiality enters the picture. The classic example in the United States is that if you are rich, white, and male your chances of serving jail time for possessing cocaine are significantly less than if you are poor, black, and female, charged with possessing marijuana. Occasionally there is a reversal of this pattern, as when an over-zealous North Carolina prosecutor trumped up a case of gang rape of a black stripper against a championship team of white LaCrosse players. In either case, distributive justice is at work – although in a negative sense.

The positive understanding of distributive justice is contained in the term distributive justice-compassion. The normal development of civilizations has historically led to systems for assuring safety and security of citizens. But as any reader of Charles Dickens must be aware, those systems often exclude the poor, the uneducated, those who are presumed to have no economic or social power (women, minorities). Members of societies who are denied access to those powers often become ensnared in activities deemed anti-social or criminal in order to survive. Distributive justice-compassion would not demand payback or retribution for such activities, but would provide solutions: reeducation, rehabilitation, redress of grievances. Distributive justice-compassion holds sway in the covenant relationship with the non-violent, inclusive, *kenotic* realm or kingdom of God. Justice as retribution/pay-back holds sway in the normal march of humanity into civilization. The short-hand term for the seemingly inevitable systems of injustice that are the result of that march is “Empire.”⁴

The context for the above four questions for the apocalypse is the postmodern era of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Generally, historians speak about time in terms of premodern, modern, and postmodern. Premodern refers to the time before the Enlightenment and Descartes. The modern era (post-Enlightenment) lasted for about three hundred fifty years. During that time, God was a separate being or entity who created the universe, and proclaimed humanity to be the fulfillment of God’s creativity. The “postmodern” era might be argued to have actually begun with Charles Darwin. But regardless of the timing, “postmodern” means the time in which humanity began and continues to deal with the nature of the universe as science has defined it. “God” as a separate being who intervenes in human life from “heaven” somewhere beyond Antares no longer makes intellectual sense.

This leads to another term that has migrated from postmodern science into postmodern spiritual and religious language. In common usage, “cosmology” means the science or theory of the universe. But the term as used by Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox in his ground-breaking theology of original blessing⁵ goes beyond the scientific. Cosmology for Fox means humanity’s intellectual understanding of the nature of the universe. “Cosmology,” as Fox (and this writer, among others) uses the term, describes the mind-set of premodern, modern, and postmodern people, as each of these evolutions of human thought has understood our place in and our relationship to the universe and

⁴ See especially the work of Jesus Seminar scholars John Dominic Crossan and Marcus J. Borg for a thorough discussion of these concepts.

⁵ See, e.g., Fox’s *Original Blessing* (Bear & Co., 1983); *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (Harper San Francisco, 1988).

to God. If, as John Shelby Spong argues, Christianity is to have any relevance at all to postmodern spirituality, changes in focus and metaphor must be made.

Two choices arise from the answers to the four questions that frame this discussion. If the answers are violent, exclusive, literal belief, and salvation from hell, then the context for personal, social, and political life becomes the systems of retributive justice that define Empire. If the answers are nonviolent, inclusive, trust, and liberation, then the context for personal, social, and political life is Covenant with a *kenotic* god: a mutual participation in the ongoing work (struggle) for distributive justice-compassion. The choice for most of human history – including Christian history – has been Empire. This series of essays for Holy Week calls for a change in paradigm, and points toward a beginning.

Palm Sunday

Luke 19:28-40; Luke 22:14-23:56; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11 (Readings from Year C)

Palm Sunday is also known as “passion Sunday.” The minister has the choice of concentrating on Jesus’s triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, hailed as a conquering hero by the fickle crowds (the “Liturgy of the Palms”), or telling the entire “passion” story. The Abingdon Press edition of *The Revised Common Lectionary* of 1992 (RCL) admonishes worship planners that “whenever possible, the whole passion narrative should be read.” As a result, the liturgy on Palm Sunday can run the dizzying gamut from adulatory parade to Pilate’s death sentence in an hour.

In Year C, the RCL offers for consideration Luke’s descriptions of Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem and Pilate’s decision to grant the demand of the crowd and sentence Jesus to death, along with a portion of Paul’s letter to the Philippians. The traditional view of both the Jerusalem procession and Philippians 2:9-11 is that this is the imperial Christ triumphant. “Therefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”⁶

Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan suggest that Jesus’s “entrance into Jerusalem” on a donkey during the festival of Passover is a parody of Pilate’s procession into the city at the same time. Jesus’s “peasant procession” came from the east, down the Mount of Olives. Pilate’s “military procession” came from the west, in a show of force for law and order⁷. While they base their study on the Gospel of Mark, Luke’s gospel uses Mark, but adds details. A very telling detail – never read if the RCL is followed – is Jesus weeping over the consequences that will arise because of the inability of the people to recognize their visitation from God and the “things that make for peace” (Luke 19:41-44). The Palm Sunday parade is a political protest. If Borg and Crossan are also correct in their theory that Luke’s birth story was meant as a counter to the birth stories told about Caesar Augustus⁸ then Luke’s gospel appears to be threaded (albeit subtly) by subversive imagery.

In addition, based on Jesus Seminar scholarship, Paul’s theology is not one of domination, but of transformation; not of violence and political victory, but of nonviolent justice-compassion. Despite the use to which these verses in Philippians 2:9-11 have been put throughout Christian history, the Apostle Paul was not establishing Jesus as the new commander-in-chief of the military might of the known and unknown universe. The hymn was probably not written by Paul. Instead it is probably one of the earliest used by followers of Jesus’s Way, and quoted by Paul.

The portion of the hymn to the Christ that Paul quotes may be seen to fulfill Isaiah’s expectation of deliverance from injustice. It is an ecstatic, mystical declaration that the Emperors of Rome, living and dead, who declared themselves and their ancestors to be “god” and “son of god” and even “very god of very gods” would have to acknowledge that Jesus’s name was above even theirs. Jesus was the one chosen by God to be the one to restore God’s distributive justice-compassion, in place of the Emperor’s retributive justice. In place of law, the Christ establishes radical fairness. The servant of God gives up the power associated with the usual systems

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from scripture are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

⁷ See: *The Last Week* (Harper SanFrancisco, 2006).

⁸ See: *The First Christmas* (Harper SanFrancisco, 2007).

of imperial civilization (See Luke 4:1-13). The servant of God is not interested in pay-back or retribution, nor in reward and glorification. The servant of God works with God to establish God's distributive justice-compassion. The servant does the work for the glory of God, and is vindicated, delivered from injustice and death.

Luke's scene where Pilate condemns Jesus to torture and death, along with Philippians 2:7-8 (Jesus "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross"), has been interpreted to mean that Jesus agreed to submit to the orders of a violently vengeful god and to accept the death penalty on behalf of sinful humanity. Without that payment, humanity cannot be saved from hell. This is the "ransom theory of the atonement." It is the earliest of the atonement theories, probably beginning with the writer of Mark's gospel in the sixties to seventies, C.E. Since the twelfth century, St. Anselm's substitutionary atonement has defined the death of Jesus at the hands of the Roman Empire. Mel Gibson's 2004 film, *The Passion of the Christ*, is perhaps the penultimate illustration of that theology. God required that Jesus not only die in our place, but should suffer in order to pay for the sin humanity inherited from Adam and Eve. The greater the sin, the greater the vicarious suffering, the greater Jesus's love for us.

But the first part of the hymn to the Christ is about neither ransom nor substitution. It is about personal *kenosis* – the act of disregarding petty human desires, and defeating the temptation to revel in being the equal of God. "[A]lthough he was born in the image of God, [Jesus] did not regard 'being like God' as something to use for his own advantage, but rid himself of such vain pretension and accepted a servant's lot" (SV).⁹ Because Isaiah 50:4-9a is part of the Palm Sunday liturgy, the words of that hymn might be seen as a kind of midrash – a retelling or reframing of that portion of sacred story. As the hymn restates the nature of the ultimate servant of God, the suffering servant described by Isaiah becomes the suffering messiah, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave." The servant is obedient to God's law of justice-compassion to the point of death on a cross – the ultimate symbol of imperial law and order. "That is why God raised him higher than anyone and awarded him the title that is above all others. . . ."

Isaiah 50 is not some kind of foretelling of the fate of the future Jesus. It is a model for those who would teach the nature of God. "Morning by morning [God] wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught" sings Isaiah. When we let go of self-interest – ego survival – we "think in the same way that the Anointed, Jesus, did. . . ." We think and act *kenotically* in a constant, evolving struggle of spirit for justice-compassion against the normalcy of civilization. The "suffering servant" trusts God's vindication, that God will prove the servant to be right in the end: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word . . . God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious . . . I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. . . . Who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment."

The cherry-picking of Paul's writings, which are scattered throughout all three years of the RCL, means that the Palm Sunday verses from Philippians are separated from the context in which Paul wrote them. When that happens, Christians can easily ignore or dismiss the action that is called for in 2:1-5, just before the hymn to the Christ. Paul urges the community in Philippi to have this same *kenotic* mind that Jesus had: "regard others as better than yourselves . . . look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others." With those words, Paul invites the first century Philippians

⁹ Dewey, et al., 186.

(and anyone in the twenty-first century) to a radical abandonment of self-interest. Paul is talking about creating the realm of God on earth. In such a realm, greed has no place, and debt has no power. Creating such a realm requires the kind of obedience that comes from total commitment to distributive justice-compassion, which can (and often does) lead to death at the hands of imperial systems.

Later in the letter (3:8-9) Paul writes “Indeed, I now regard everything as worthless in light of the incomparable value of realizing that the Anointed, Jesus, is my lord. Because of him I wrote off all of those assets and now regard them as worth no more than rubbish so that I can gain the incomparable asset of the Anointed and be found in solidarity with him, no longer having an integrity of my own making based on performing the requirements of religious law, but now having the integrity endorsed by God, the integrity of an absolute confidence in and reliance upon God like that of the Anointed, Jesus. This integrity is endorsed by God and is based on such unconditional trust in God” (SV). Here is the meaning of *kenosis* at all levels:

- a *kenotic* foreign policy – in which crushing debt carried by nations such as Haiti is summarily dismissed;
- *kenotic* business practice – in which profits are secondary to safety, reliability, and sustainability; where debt is not leveraged in order to amass fortunes that seduce others into debt they cannot afford;
- *kenotic* management – in which suggestions for improvement, or whistle-blowing corruption are valued;
- *kenotic* relationships – in which the well-being of the other is foremost.

In the twenty-first century C.E., some are calling for punishment of the speculators and managers who seem to be responsible for the global financial melt-down of 2008-10. Others are holding individual people responsible for making poor choices, or for not having the good sense to avoid the deal that seemed too good to be true. But this is pious revenge. If justice is distributive, there is no need for punishment beyond the consequences already befalling all of us who are caught in the system. Luke’s Jesus weeps over the inability of the people to recognize the coming of the kingdom, and the consequences that will result from that inability. Christians today are too busy getting ready for the Easter Bunny. We don’t want to hear how our failure to keep the promises we made during Lent to give up chocolate or stop smoking somehow make us personally responsible for the death of the Son of God two thousand years ago. Somewhere deep in our post-modern brains we know that just isn’t true. But what is true is that as soon as we abandon justice-compassion, or ignore the consequences of our actions that lead to unjust systems, we are caught in the powerful currents that propel civilizations into empires.

This is not an indictment of human nature. Empire can happen when people begin to organize themselves into societies, but the good news is that Empire is not necessarily inevitable. If we truly turn from our destructive, unjust habits, the old patterns will not be repeated. Sign onto the Covenant. Pick up your Blackberry and start making sustainable deals that ensure that no part of the interdependent web of life on this planet is compromised. That is the promise and the hope of Palm Sunday. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Monday

John 12:1-11; Isaiah 42:1-9; Hebrews 9:11-15

The reading from John's gospel for Monday of Holy Week revisits the story of the woman with the alabaster jar. The story is so powerful that it appears in all the gospels, and is considered twice by the lectionary readings in Year C. For that reason, some form of this incident may very well have actually happened. The question is when, and under what circumstances. She must have been an important member – even a leader – in Jesus's entourage, even though she is unnamed in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Mark, Matthew, and John place the story in Jesus's last days as he journeys toward Jerusalem, death, and resurrection. In Luke's version this demonstration was not associated with Jesus's last days. It was an intrusion on a symposium, or banquet, for men only. The woman was a penitent prostitute (by legend, Mary Magdalene), and the story is treated as a scandal. John assumes she was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, close friends of Jesus. In John's version of the story, "six days before the Passover," there is a dinner for Jesus at the home of Lazarus, whom Jesus has raised from the dead. At this dinner, Lazarus is one of those at table with him, and Martha serves. Mary takes a pound of expensive perfume and anoints Jesus's feet with it, then wipes his feet with her hair.

The RCL includes Hebrews 9:11-15 with the readings for Monday of Holy Week. The writer of Hebrews argues that the Christ came as a high priest from the mysterious order of Melchizedek. This high priest overthrew the old ways of purification through animal sacrifice. "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!" The writer is talking about purity and redemption (buy-back) for transgressions committed under Moses' old covenant. It is because of Jesus's pure blood sacrifice that "those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance." These passages – lifted from the context of the full argument – place antisemitism like a faint watermark in the background.

But from Israel's ancient past, Isaiah's "suffering servant" models a different kind of power that brings God's justice-compassion. Whether the servant is a person – perhaps a future king – or represents the collective people of ancient Israel, power is redefined as *kenotic* power. That is, power that is self-denying, not self-aggrandizing. In the first of these "servant songs," the prophet says that the former ways of doing business are well established, but new ways are coming.

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

The mandate is unmistakable: the servant is a partner with God in establishing God's justice, and "the coastlands" – the earth within its coastal boundaries – actively wait (anticipate – look forward to hearing) whatever the servant has to say. Suddenly there is no threat of retributive mayhem or

payback, and the universe – perhaps weary of the constant bombardment of human unwillingness to live in trust and wholeness – is waiting for that teaching.

Three times God says that his servant will bring justice, and while it will come with nonviolence, and without fanfare, it will come nevertheless with power. How is justice brought forth with power and without violence? Here is where postmodern Christian exiles must part company with the Christian orthodoxy represented by the writer of Hebrews. Jesus' death was not a blood sacrifice required to “purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God.” Mary's action at Lazarus's dinner party claims unequivocally that the first part of the prophecy in Isaiah 42 has been fulfilled in Jesus. The meaning of this story is far removed from what is presented in Hebrews. Jesus's death was in the service of God's distributive justice-compassion.

That death – although violent – did not happen in order to bring about God's distributive justice-compassion. That violent death was a result of subverting the old ways of doing business – retributive justice, payback, the usual power structures. Isaiah says that the servant “will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice . . . a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.” The poor and those denied access to the usual social and political powers afforded to citizens of civilized societies (the disenfranchised) demand justice because they live with injustice daily. But any human being is susceptible to the corruption of political, social, economic, and personal power systems that lead seemingly inevitably to what John Dominic Crossan calls “the normalcy of civilization.” Justice under this “normal” condition is retributive. Power over others and getting even define the only power that seems to make a difference. The rich – the privileged – who control access to the usual expressions of political or social power are the ones most easily corrupted by the power they hold.

This may be the trap Judas found himself in. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus may have been among the rich patrons who supported Jesus. Lazarus sponsored a dinner party for Jesus. Mary may have bought the perfume herself. So what is Judas complaining about? In John's story, Judas is outraged by Mary's extravagant waste of a commodity that could have been sold and the money given to the poor. But it is a false piety. “He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief,” says John. “He kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.” The writer was probably setting up Judas for the betrayal to come. The writers of both Luke and John say that the reason Judas betrayed Jesus was that he was possessed by Satan. Without working through the metaphor suggested by this characterization (“the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” 1 Timothy 6:10), it is possible that after Mary's extravagant misuse of the company funds, the only way Judas could see to ensure his own economic survival was to turn Jesus in to the collaborators with Roman authority.

But money is not what brings God's distributive justice. What brings God's distributive justice is “my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.” Mary uses the money to buy a pound of pure nard, and instead of keeping it “for the day of my burial,” as Jesus suggests, she anoints Jesus's feet with it. Jesus says, “You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” Money designated by the rich for the poor merely continues to buy into the normal systems that keep injustice and violence in place. Instead of making the expected donation, Mary has acknowledged Jesus as the servant of God, and has anticipated his death.

Tuesday

John 12:20-36; Is. 49:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Light versus darkness, revelation versus secrecy, wisdom versus foolishness are the motifs that are interwoven in the readings for this day. Christian tradition has so intertwined and literalized these metaphors that it is nearly impossible for postmodern exiles to glean any other meaning than what has come to be “orthodox” (correct) belief. The RCL does not follow the sequence of John’s narrative. Knowing that John’s gospel was written seventy to ninety years after the death of Jesus, and thirty to fifty years after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple hardly helps. As presented by the RCL, John’s gospel bears little if any connection to participation in God’s justice-compassion on earth, here and now. Instead, it dazzles and distracts us with promises of becoming “children of light” if we will only believe. The story is not important; conveying the theology and proving the supremacy of Christianity is what matters.

The “servant’s songs” in Isaiah are attributed to an unknown prophet who lived in Babylon during the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people in the sixth century, B.C.E. The servant is often interpreted to be the nation of Israel, not an individual, and in this second song (Is. 49:1-7) God declares to the entire earth (bounded by the “coastlands”) that the nation of Israel has been called to serve God’s justice-compassion. The servant Israel has been hidden away, and even though it looks as though that great work of justice-compassion has gone unnoticed, it has not. God will restore the servant people to power and kings and emperors will stand up and take notice. God says, “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” “Salvation” in this context does not mean “going to heaven at death.” “Salvation” in terms of the Isaiah of the Babylonian exile means liberation from enemies. In the wider sense of Isaiah 55, it means living in God’s kingdom of distributive justice and peace for all of the days allotted to life, whether of the community, or the individual members. The Jesus of the synoptic gospels may have pointed to these prophecies as encouragement to his followers, struggling to love justice and live in non-violent resistance to Rome. He is highly unlikely to have claimed that he himself was the fore-ordained embodiment of Isaiah 49, which Christian tradition continues to do.

The readings for holy week from John’s gospel do follow their own logic. On Monday, Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, anoints Jesus’s body in advance for burial. On Tuesday, John’s Jesus delivers his last public dialogue, in which he claims the metaphor of seed and grain, life and light, and God Himself speaks from heaven in response to Jesus’s pious invocation: “Father, glorify your name.” God thunders that “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” And we understand that to mean the glorification of the once and future Christ Jesus. Jesus proclaims that the ruler of this world (Satan) will be driven out, and that Jesus the Christ will be lifted up and “will draw all people to myself. . . . While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

After this, Jesus (the servant) goes into hiding. This is not the first time in John that Jesus has disappeared for some period of time (see 7:1,10; 8:59). Most recently (12:36) after the raising of Lazarus, Caiaphas, the high priest, declares “. . . it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” From that time on, John says, “they planned to put

Jesus to death.” So Jesus “no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.”

Jesus does a lot of hiding out in John, and swears everyone to secrecy in Mark. But that is no reason to think that when the prophet says in Isaiah 49:2b “in the shadow of his hand he hid me,” the prophet is talking about Jesus. When the prophet says “I will give you as a light to the nations,” he is not talking about John’s Jesus, who says, when the people ask him who is the Son of Man who will be lifted up, “The light is with you for a little longer. . . . While you have the light believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” That is John’s insightful metaphor, which may be said to claim that Jesus is the fulfillment of the servant song. But in order to fulfill that prophecy, the servant must suffer the consequences of countering the political powers that be.

The portion from 1 Corinthians is apparently pivotal to Christian orthodoxy because it is required reading in all three lectionary years: twice in years B and C and three times in year A: Holy Cross (all three years; September 14); Lent 3 (year B); Tuesday of Holy Week (all three years); and 4 Epiphany (year A). But First Corinthians 18 cannot be taken at face value: “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Taken out of its context, and put together with the other readings understood in the traditional way, this verse is arrogant, exclusive, and – given its association with verse 23b – antisemitic. Paul’s opening salvo needs to be studied in its whole context from 1:10 through 2:17. Two points made by Crossan and Reed in *In Search of Paul* need to be kept in mind. First, Paul’s theology sets the realm/kingdom of God in opposition to the empire of Rome. Second, Paul’s theology contrasts the self-serving normalcy of civilized life with the radical denial of self-interest (*kenosis*) of those who are committed to the great work of restoring God’s distributive justice-compassion. When these two points are understood, antisemitism disappears, along with Christian spiritual exclusivity and Christian political hegemony.

So Paul is blasting his friends in Corinth for fighting about which baptism carries the most weight. Paul says he wishes he hadn’t baptized anyone, because Christ did not send him to baptize people but to proclaim the power of the cross of Christ. That power, says Paul, makes no sense to those who are “perishing” by living according to the unjust systems of Roman imperial society. But those who get the point of the crucifixion of Jesus are liberated from injustice, and empowered to join and continue the work. Paul calls for the Corinthians to consider who they were when they joined the group. “Not many of you” were powerful or of noble birth – which implies that some indeed were. But those who were of high rank or social status don’t get to brag about that, and claim power over others in the community. “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord,” Paul says.

Twenty-first century Christian leaders must repudiate the emphasis on Paul’s phrase, “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” Clearly, this phrase has been used in the service of antisemitism from the beginning of the organized Christian Church. Further, “Gentiles” has often meant non-Christians other than Jews who do not believe the Christian myth. Both interpretations have been and continue to be anachronisms because the phrase has been lifted out of its context. Paul goes on to say that “to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God.” In other words, to those who agree to participate in the restoration of God’s realm of distributive justice-compassion, regardless of who they may be, the crucified Christ symbolizes the power and the wisdom of God’s *kenotic* action in the world.

Because Paul was a devout Jew, and a Pharisee, he uses Jewish theology to powerful effect. One aspect of Jewish theological tradition is the concept of the Wisdom of God. Wisdom is personified as the feminine spirit who was with God from the beginning, who pitched her tents among the people, who calls from the heights beside the way. When Paul says that “Christ [is] the power and the wisdom of God,” he is drawing on ancient and revered Jewish tradition. In 1 Corinthians 2:8, he says “Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom. . . . But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.” “Lay aside immaturity,” Wisdom says, “and live and walk in the way of insight” (Proverbs 9:6; *see*, especially, Proverbs 8).

God’s wisdom is revealed through God’s *kenotic*, radically self-denying spirit, which was embodied in Jesus. When Jesus died, that same spirit was then extended to those who can accept it. This is craziness to people caught up in the normalcy of social hierarchy and control. It is liberation to those who are able to discern that it is spiritual truth. They (we) “have the mind of Christ” – as we were inspired to do by the readings for Palm Sunday. What is revolutionary in these readings is not the magic of believing a story about Jesus. What is revolutionary is that the very nature of power as humanity generally understands it is reversed. The servant is the cornerstone. Relinquishing one’s very well-being to the point of death carries more power than any earthly ruler who relies on retributive systems to maintain his or her position. Faith is knowing the truth of that assertion regardless of all evidence to the contrary.

Wednesday

John 13:21-32; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Hebrews 12:1-3; Psalm 70

For those who chose not to do the Passion readings on Palm Sunday, Isaiah 50:4-9a is revisited now, but not in the context of Paul's letter to the Philippians ("at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"). Now the emphasis is on the willingness of the servant to submit to the will of God: "I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward . . . I did not hide my face from insult and spitting." John's Jesus knows who will betray him, and clearly indicates who it is by handing Judas the bread after it has been dipped in the bowl – yet the disciples fail to realize what is right in front of their faces: The hour for Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension has arrived.

If the readings suggested by the RCL are simply read in the context of traditional Christian belief, the story of the servant depicted in Isaiah easily becomes a prequel to the suffering and death of Jesus, the Messiah. The Psalm then is a plea on the part of listeners to be saved from such a death: "Be pleased, O God, to deliver me . . . Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek my life. . . ." The verses cherry-picked from the pastoral letter called "Hebrews" reassure that "since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses . . ." we can indeed "run with perseverance the race that is set before us. . . ." That portion of the sermon by the writer of Hebrews has been used by would-be preachers and genuine prophets of Christianity for nearly two millennia. In his last speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. made reference to those who did not receive what was promised in their lifetimes, but who, like Moses and King himself, had been to the mountain top and had been privileged to see the promised land. The "cloud of witnesses" refers to a litany of the Judeo-Christian journey (Heb 11:29-40), and the promise of the power of the Christ coming again. But if read beyond the portion selected by the RCL, the metaphor soon breaks down into a thinly-veiled antisemitism along with the usual threats of hell-fire and damnation: ". . . for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! . . . for indeed our God is a consuming fire" (12:25-29).

Because we already know the story from Mark, Matthew, and Luke, we assume that John's Judas has already conspired with the high priest Caiaphas to hand Jesus over to the religious authorities for thirty pieces of silver. We assume that the reason the "chief priests and the Pharisees" in John's story wanted to kill Jesus was because of Jesus's demonstration against the money-changers in the Temple. We never read John 11:45-57, in which the religious authorities plot to kill Jesus. We never learn that Jesus's raising of his friend Lazarus from the dead was the last straw for the high priest Caiaphas. "This man is performing many signs," Caiaphas tells the meeting of the council. "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." (The Romans did indeed destroy Jerusalem, well before John wrote his gospel, but not because Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, or performed any other "signs.") John then says, "Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples" until the time came for him to return to Jerusalem for the final Passover. "Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him." The stage is set for Judas leading both Roman

soldiers and Temple police to arrest Jesus in the garden, not for the exchange of silver or Judas's eventual remorseful suicide.

Judas's motives have been the subject of speculation since the story was first told. Jesus hands the bread to Judas and tells him to "Do quickly what you are going to do," and Judas goes out into the night. John's version of the story says that "Some thought that because Judas had the common purse," Jesus was telling him to buy supplies for their Passover festivities, or make a donation to the poor – acts of easy piety. The writer of John's gospel concludes that Judas was taken over by Satan. In *The Last Week*, Borg and Crossan write that ". . . it is possible to gain control of the earth by demonic collaboration. It is possible to fall prey to the ancient (and modern) delusion of religious power backed by imperial violence"(p. 206). Quite probably, Judas did what he thought was right. He abandoned what had to look like a lost cause in occupied Jerusalem in order to save himself from the consequences of being associated with a man the authorities wanted to arrest. Caiphas did what he thought he needed to do in order to survive and preserve what he perceived to be the Jewish way of life. Indeed, John has him say that "it is better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50). Ultimately, Pontius Pilate was absolutely correct in sentencing Jesus to death for the sake of preserving law and order and his own position as the Roman ruler of Palestine.

There is nothing supernatural about Jesus's conviction that he would be turned over to the religious authorities, and likely ultimately executed by the Roman occupiers. Jesus maintains his integrity in the service of justice-compassion, against the normalcy of civilization, relying upon the same kind of faith as Isaiah's servant. But the *kenosis* illustrated by the third servant song of Isaiah is not submission to the will of an interventionist God who wants a sacrifice in payment for sin, or who "disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts" (Heb. 12:5-6 *ref* Proverbs 3:11-12). Instead this *kenosis* means actively listening to the desire of a relational spirit for an exiled people to live in justice-compassion. The servant says, "Morning by morning he wakens my ear to listen as those [do] who are taught." The servant listens and continues to teach reconciliation with that spirit and distributive justice among the people. The servant does this despite persecution, torture, failure, and insult. He empowers the people to maintain their covenant with God against the demonic forces that impel the people to collaborate with the empire that has carried them off into exile.

The disciples could not hear what John's Jesus was trying to tell them. The others around the table that night apparently had no clue as to the danger that he (and they) were in because of the threat that he (and they) presented to law and order under Roman occupation. Judas was not the only follower of Jesus to be caught up in the mind-set that reduces teachings of nonviolent justice-compassion to empty piety. To live and practice nonviolent justice-compassion is to actively counter the imperial forces that seduce us into going shopping, hiring illegal aliens as slave labor, and joining the military because we have been convinced that it is the only way to obtain peace and security and "be all we can be."

The creators of the RCL leave out verses 10 and 11 of Isaiah 50, and they should not because the servant addresses those very conditions that produce empty piety instead of an active counter to imperial retributive systems. The servant wonders "who [among you] walks in darkness and has no light, yet trusts in the name of the Lord and relies upon his God?" The conclusion is, few if any. But in a postmodern world, where for many the interventionist god died long ago, the servant's challenge

to faith has meaning only if we accept the invitation to participate in the ongoing great work of justice-compassion. Then we become partners with the *kenotic* servant God in restoring God's justice-compassion to the world – which belongs to that *kenotic* servant God. And the life and death of the servant-teacher Jesus is the model.

Thursday

Exodus 12:1-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-10; John 13:1-17; 31b-35; 1st Cor. 11:23-26

Holy Week began with Jesus's demonstration countering the pomp and circumstance of imperial force; Monday was a foreshadowing of the consequences of taking such a stance against the powers and principalities of normal human systems, as Mary anoints Jesus, preparing his body in advance for death. Tuesday provided the theological context. God's wisdom raises the slave above all others who would pretend to be the rulers of the universe. Wednesday suggested Jesus as the model of that *kenotic* servant. This is not a power-over others, but a power-with the seamless matrix of Being in the Universe. On Thursday those who would follow that model receive the mandate. When the Church conflates John's pre-Passover footwashing with the imagery of the Paschal Lamb and the stories of the "last supper" in the synoptic gospels, the result is a mixed metaphor: Forgiveness of "sin" is confused with deliverance from injustice, and the radically inclusive equality of the kingdom of God is lost.

In John's version of Jesus's story, Jesus "loved his own, who were in the world, [and] he loved them to the end." As a demonstration of that self-less love, Jesus takes off his outer robe, wraps a towel around himself, and proceeds to wash his disciples' feet and dry them with the towel. In the normal course, as the master teacher, Jesus would be justified in expecting that his disciples wash his feet. But Jesus never does what would be expected in the normal course. His *kenotic* action is a demonstration of how his followers are to treat one another. After he has washed their feet he says, "I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you. . . . I tell you, servants are not greater than their masters, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." In other words, John's Jesus says, if you understand the conventional social arrangement (servants are not greater than their masters), congratulations. But look at what I have just done. The master has become the servant; the order of normal human interaction is reversed. When Peter objects, Jesus says, "Unless I wash you, you have no share [i.e., nothing in common] with me." Taken at face value, these words seem contradictory or exclusionary; instead, they illustrate the profound equality of power in the Kingdom of God.

The inclusion of Exodus 12:1-14 in the list of readings for Maundy Thursday seems to confirm John's theology that Jesus is the new Paschal Lamb. Twice John refers to the day and time of Jesus's death being the "day of preparation" for the Passover, when the Passover lambs were ritually slaughtered in the Temple (see John 19:14; 19:31). But the synoptic tradition does not make that connection. The blood of the Paschal Lamb was smeared above the doors of the ancient Hebrews enslaved in Egypt so that God's angel of death would pass over them. The Paschal Lamb is a symbol of deliverance, both from God's judgment for injustice, and from the people's enemies. It is not a symbol of forgiveness of sin. As John's high priest Caiphas says (albeit without a clue what he was saying at the time), ". . . it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:50-52). Jesus is the willing sacrifice – the one who willingly chooses to give up his life in the process of restoring God's justice-compassion to God's world. Borg and Crossan say it best:

Recall, however, the challenge of Jesus in [Mark] 8:34-35: ". . . those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life

for my sake . . . will save it.” Recall also [that] . . . Peter wanted no part of that fate, the Twelve debated their relative worth, and James and John wanted first seats afterward. But Jesus had explained to them quite clearly that his and their life was a flat contradiction to the normalcy of civilization’s domination systems. In other words it was by participation with Jesus and, even more, in Jesus that his followers were to pass through death to resurrection, from the domination life of human normalcy to the servant life of human transcendence.¹⁰

There is no “institution of the Lord’s Supper” in John, and so the RCL offers what is thought to be the original from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Paul’s Jesus declares, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Paul explains, “for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” But these words have become identified with substitutionary atonement and apocalyptic second-coming imagery. The Eucharist has become the commemoration of Jesus’s betrayal and death, and the confession of sin as complicity on the part of his followers (then and now) in that action. The celebrant proclaims “The blood of the new covenant poured out . . . for the forgiveness of sins.” But that is not what Paul intended.

The purpose of the shared meal that became the defining ritual of early Christianity was to renew the covenant with God for radical, distributive justice, and to pledge to keep the covenant until the Christ would come again. Like the foot-washing ritual in John’s story, the usual social order was reversed. Instead of a public sacrifice and banquet intended to maintain the proper relationships between the social elements of clients and patrons, extending to the emperor and ultimately to the gods (and to the god Caesar), the bread and cup were a symbol of the absence of hierarchy among the members of the communities founded by Paul (the body of Christ). In the Corinthians passage, which is of course lifted out of context, Paul explains that if the ritual meal maintains the usual social hierarchy, then it is not “the Lord’s supper” (1 Cor. 11:17-22).

The Maundy Thursday Tenebrae ritual, whether it includes footwashing, or simply the re-enactment of Jesus’s last supper, sends us out of the church in silence and darkness to contemplate our complicity in Judas’s betrayal. The betrayal is understood to be the sin that Jesus forgives. But traditional commemorations of the last night Jesus spent with his disciples risk empty if not dangerous piety. Piety is empty when it relies on the certainty of forgiveness without accountability and unaccompanied by transformation; piety is dangerous when it is aligned with imperial injustice. Followers of Jesus’s Way are complicit with Judas, not because of personal wrongdoing, or some kind of “original sin” dating back to Adam and Eve, and certainly not because of vicarious responsibility for Jesus’s death. Followers of Jesus’s Way are complicit with Judas because it is so much easier to settle for survival. If we try to organize a union where we work in our local grocery store chain, we will be fired. If we preach a twenty-first century faith based on scholarship and the realities of twenty-first century life, we will be ignored at best or fired and defrocked. If we defend terrorists, our homes may be fire-bombed. If we come out as gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered humans, we will be drummed out of the military. If we provide legal abortions to poor women, we risk being murdered.

¹⁰ Ibid, 119-120.

It gets worse. Whether we claim to be followers of Jesus's Way or not, if we invest our money in the companies that give us the best return, we could be supporting companies that exploit workers, intimidate whistle-blowers, and disrupt the balance of the Earth's eco-systems. If we move to the country to escape the stress of the city, we could end up with a much less sustainable life-style, unless we grow our own food. The "interdependent web of which we are a part," celebrated by Unitarian Universalists, is nearly totally compromised by the normalcy of human social systems.

Holy Week, beginning with Palm Sunday, may be a time of profound ritual of remembrance but what is more important is that it is a time for recommitment to the great work of distributive justice-compassion, in the face of the overwhelming strength of conventional, normal, social and political systems. Maundy Thursday, when the mandate to love one another as Jesus loved his disciples is powerfully demonstrated by Jesus, is actually the heart of Holy Week. The execution of Jesus at the hands of Rome is not the point. The belief in the resurrection of Jesus as a verifiable fact is also not the point, no matter how many reinterpretations of the metaphor of the empty tomb. The point is *kenosis*: the radical abandonment of self-interest in the service of distributive justice-compassion, with the expectation that living such a life leads to death on a cross, and the willingness to take that risk.

Tenebrae Eucharist

One: On the last night with his disciples, as they lounged at their dinner, Jesus decided to try one last time to make them really understand what he was doing, and what it really meant to follow him.

Another: He picked up a loaf of bread, and spoke into the hubbub of their conversation: Listen! – he said – This bread is like God's justice in this world. Then he tore the loaf into two pieces. This is God's justice in the hands of the Romans and the Temple authorities who collaborate with them. Believe me, one of you is going to turn me in to them soon. If not tonight, then as soon as the Passover is finished. Whenever you eat together after this night, remember that, and remember me.

One: Then Jesus picked up the jug of wine.

Another: This wine is also like the Kingdom of God – it is the blood of the Paschal Lamb, painted on the lintels and doorposts of our people as a sign that they belong to God and not to Pharaoh's Empire. But now the collaborators have made this wine into a corruption – a libation poured out in honor of the Empire of Rome. – a repudiation of God's protection and deliverance.

One: And he poured the wine into a cup and held it up to them.

Another: He said, "Let the one who has chosen this cup take his possessions and do what he must." And he dumped the contents into a bowl for disposal.

One: Several of the company began to leave quietly, and he let them go. Then he poured a second cup of wine and said, "But this cup that I drink is a new cup. It is a libation of my blood poured out for justice for all those who choose to share it. Drink it. All of you who are willing to commit to establish God's justice-compassion, and remember.

Another: He passed the cup to them, and they passed it among themselves as a pledge. And while they were doing this, one of the women – perhaps it was Mary of Magdala – the one who Jesus loved – left the room and returned with a tiny jar of essential oil of lavender. And she came up to Jesus’s couch and said, “You will die for what you have done this week – perhaps tonight – and I know I will never have the chance to prepare your body for burial. If they take you, there will be nothing left.”

One: Then she broke open the vial and anointed his face and hands. And he took it from her and went to the one next to him and said, “She has done what she could. She has prepared my body for death. Do the same for one another in remembrance of her.” And he anointed that one, and that one went to the next until all in the company had been so ordained.

Friday

John 18:1-19:37; Isaiah 52:13-53:12

John's detailed story of the arrest, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus is intricately interwoven with the third Song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. John is especially interested in showing that Jesus died in fulfillment of scripture. Two millennia of tradition, visual art, musical art, and film confirm the basic belief of all Christianity: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . he was wounded for our transgressions . . . and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." There isn't a choir member on the Planet who has not sung these choruses from Handel's Messiah.

As should be evident from this past week of commentary, this Christology cannot be reclaimed; it must be replaced. Neither guilt nor self-loathing are emotions that empower people to love others, or spur people to take action with justice as radical fairness, or to give up systems that demand retribution and payback. Jesus was not executed by the representatives of the Roman Empire because God needed a scapegoat to carry away the sins of the world. Jesus was executed because the way of life that he taught challenged and contradicted the conventional order. Jesus's Way overturns the normal systems of piety, war, and victory, and restores God's Covenant: nonviolence, distributive justice, and true peace.

Kenosis, in this series of essays, means the radical abandonment of self-interest in the service of distributive justice-compassion. It is the *kenotic* servant, who actively listens to the desire of a relational spirit for reconciliation with that spirit and distributive justice among the people. The servant empowers the people to maintain their covenant with God despite persecution, torture, failure, and insult from the demonic forces of conventional social systems that insist upon collaboration. When we make that choice, as John's Jesus showed and taught us, we suffer because that choice can mean going against family, friends, church, and society into a kind of exile. Worst of all, seldom do we see any confirmation that our choice has made any difference. The descriptions of Jesus's death in Mark and Matthew are brilliant in their empathic identification with the most profound despair that anyone can experience: abandonment by God. Injustice and death at the hands of unjust systems indicate the absence of the *kenotic* god and the invalidation of Covenant. Jesus was not only betrayed and abandoned by his friends; in his experience he was in fact abandoned even by his God.

The question for twenty-first century Christians is not whether you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but whether your Jesus – your Christ – your Lord – your God – is violent, demanding retributive justice, or nonviolent, expecting and desiring distributive justice-compassion. The choice we make regarding the nature of our God determines the quality of life for all sentient beings on the Planet. The nonviolent, non-interventionist, *kenotic* God, without ego, without being, is the context within which and from which the Earth and all its creatures realize wholeness. That is the nature of the Covenant.

The violent death of anyone, whether working for the cause of justice-compassion or not, signals the refusal of the ruling authorities to be open to the spirit of that *kenotic* god, whose presence is justice and life. Such a death – like the crucifixion and death of Jesus – establishes the violation of Covenant, and the absence of God.

Saturday

John 19:38-42; Job 14:1-14

“As waters fail from a lake, and a river wastes away and dries up, so mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep. . . . If mortals die, will they live again? All the days of my service I would wait until my release should come.” So the writer of Job – taken out of the context the writer intended – plunges us into the stark reality of the death of the servant, who dies in the service of God’s justice, and waits for God’s vindication. Holy Saturday is the *via negativa*: the journey into darkness, despair, hopelessness, death.¹¹

The developers of the RCL, of course, have cherry-picked the passages from Job, ending with the servant’s anticipated release. But if the entire chapter is read, the mourning for loss is profound: If my release should come, the servant Job says, “[God] would call, and I would answer; [God] would long for the work of [God’s] hands . . . [God] would not keep watch over my sin. . . . But the mountain falls and crumbles away, and the rock is removed from its place . . . so you [God] destroy the hope of mortals . . . their children come to honor and they do not know it; they are brought low, and it goes unnoticed. . . .” By stopping with verse 14, the possibility is left open for the theological argument about how Jesus descended into hell to release the souls of the martyrs. But as far as Jesus’s community of followers was concerned, as of the Sabbath, the powers and principalities had won. It is important to realize how possible such an outcome is in the twenty-first century.

The powers and principalities, the normalcy of civilization, the seemingly inevitable domination of Empire and systems of retribution have brought us to the brink of human if not planetary extinction. To quote Borg and Crossan yet again, “. . . we can do it already in about five different ways – atomically, biologically, chemically, demographically, ecologically – and we are only up to e.”¹² Politically, the United States is the first among equals of violent empire, following the drumbeat of military and economic power in pursuit of world domination.¹³ Much of U.S. foreign, domestic, and economic policy is grounded in violent ideology that is deaf to reality, even provable, measurable, physical realities such as global warming, mortal poverty, and ignorance. We should sit in dust and ashes for a moment, and not skip blithely into Easter’s happy ending. Without experiencing *via negativa*, without traveling to the middle of the labyrinth, past the demons, we can never arrive at the fire at the center where the creative response is generated, and the key to the way out into transformation is found.

Without death, there is no life. This is the law of the universe.

¹¹ See Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Bear & Co., Santa Fe, 1983).

¹² *The Last Week*. p. 171.

¹³ Whether or not the deliberate intent of U.S. policies, foreign and domestic, is world domination, the result of U.S. hegemony is its identification as the only “super power.” While a discussion of this point is beyond the scope of this paper, a colleague has pointed out that “what the United States seems to be obsessed with is not ‘world domination,’ but the futile search for absolute economic and political security. We need to open ourselves to the transformative understanding that in this complex, interdependent, world, peace and prosperity can only be achieved through the creation of justice, not by force.” In other words, what is needed is the restoration of Covenant.