

**Devotions – June 21-27, 2020**

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**Unraveled**

This summer, Messiah is using a lectionary (a set of readings) from *A Sanctified Art* and each of the readings centers on the theme of unraveled.

**Sunday, June 21, 2020**

Text: Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

**18** The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. <sup>3</sup> He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. <sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup> Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” <sup>6</sup> And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” <sup>7</sup> Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

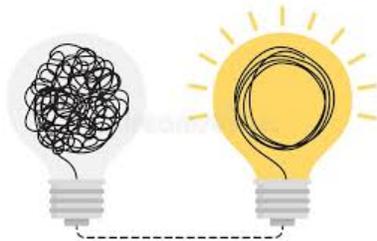
<sup>9</sup> They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” <sup>10</sup> Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. <sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. <sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” <sup>13</sup> The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ <sup>14</sup> Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” <sup>15</sup> But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”

**21** The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. <sup>2</sup> Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup> Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. <sup>4</sup> And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup> Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” <sup>7</sup> And she said, “Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

In this story, what comes unraveled is Sarah and Abraham's shame at being barren and childless as they both near 100 years of age. What also comes unraveled is Abraham's disbelief that anything could be too wonderful for God. You see, leading up to this, there are two other times that God tells Sarah and Abraham that they will have a child who will be a blessing because generations upon generations will get to be in relationship with God and to know God's love. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup>!!! time that they are hearing this good news. It is a story where what is unraveling are things that have tied them up, knotted up their hearts, and held them captive in despair. Sarah laughs in disbelief, but also in relief because all that has knotted her up is being unraveled by God.

In your own life, how is God unraveling the things that have knotted you up? Maybe it is the things that bring you shame, guilt, prejudice, disbelief, addictions, labels that you place upon yourself or others. How is God unraveling those harmful things in your life? And, when God unravels those things, do you respond with joyful laughter and with a proclamation that nothing is too wonderful for the Lord our God?

*Prayer: God of unraveling, you unravel the knots in our lives that tie us up and hold us back from joyful laughter. We give you thanks for Sarah and Abraham and for turning their hearts from disbelief to joyful laughter. May we respond with joyful laughter and proclaim that nothing is too wonderful for you when we become unraveled. Amen.*



**Monday, June 22, 2020**

Text: Luke 19:1-10

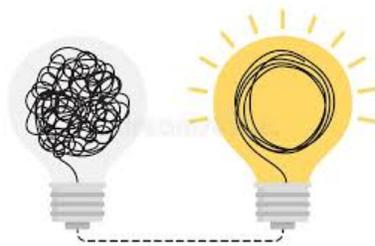
**19 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. <sup>2</sup> A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. <sup>3</sup> He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. <sup>5</sup> When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” <sup>6</sup> So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. <sup>7</sup> All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” <sup>8</sup> Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”**

Zacchaeus is one of those sinners who Jesus loves to hang out with. We know that he is a tax collector who commonly asked a little more from people and pocketed that interest. Yet, something within him urges him to climb that tree on this day. What had he heard about Jesus

that caused him to do so? Did he hear that Jesus healed people, ate with sinners and tax collectors, or that he fed 5,000 in one afternoon picnic? While we do not know exactly what it is, something motivates Zacchaeus to climb the tree to see Jesus. Jesus could have just passed him by, but he does not. Jesus sees Zacchaeus and invites himself over to eat at his house. In this moment Zacchaeus is changed and he receives a new vocation of generosity. The greed that once held Zacchaeus captive is unraveled and Zacchaeus is freed to practice radical generosity.

How does God unravel our hearts and transform us from people who think about ourselves, our own needs and livelihood, to Jesus followers who think about our neighbors first? Where was grace and forgiveness present for Zacchaeus?

Prayer: *God of unraveling, you see us and unravel our sinful selfishness by turning us towards the needs of our neighbor. We give you thanks for the ways that your loving grace transformed Zacchaeus. Transform us into people who practice radical generosity. Amen.*



**Tuesday, June 23, 2020**

Text: 2 Samuel 3:7; 21:1-14

**<sup>7</sup> Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ishbaal said to Abner, “Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?”**

**<sup>21</sup> Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. The LORD said, “There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.” <sup>2</sup> So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; although the people of Israel had sworn to spare them, Saul had tried to wipe them out in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah.) <sup>3</sup> David said to the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? How shall I make expiation, that you may bless the heritage of the LORD?” <sup>4</sup> The Gibeonites said to him, “It is not a matter of silver or gold between us and Saul or his house; neither is it for us to put anyone to death in Israel.” He said, “What do you say that I should do for you?” <sup>5</sup> They said to the king, “The man who consumed us and planned to destroy us, so that we should have no place in all the territory of Israel— <sup>6</sup> let seven of his sons be handed over to us, and we will impale them before the LORD at Gibeon on the mountain of the LORD.” The king said, “I will hand them over.”**

**<sup>7</sup> But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul’s son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan son of Saul. <sup>8</sup> The king took the two sons of Rizpah daughter of Aiah, whom she bore to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Merab daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite; <sup>9</sup> he gave them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they**

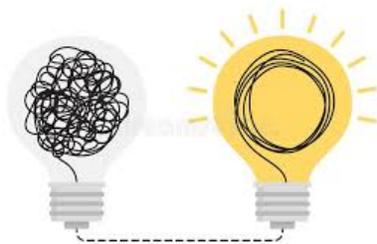
impaled them on the mountain before the LORD. The seven of them perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest, at the beginning of barley harvest.

<sup>10</sup> Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it on a rock for herself, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens; she did not allow the birds of the air to come on the bodies by day, or the wild animals by night. <sup>11</sup> When David was told what Rizpah daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done, <sup>12</sup> David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the people of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hung them up, on the day the Philistines killed Saul on Gilboa. <sup>13</sup> He brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan; and they gathered the bones of those who had been impaled. <sup>14</sup> They buried the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of his father Kish; they did all that the king commanded. After that, God heeded supplications for the land.

This is a story that you may have never heard and, it may be a story that you struggle to hear. It is the story of Rizpah. Rizpah is a concubine of Saul: essentially, she is a sexual slave and she has no say or consent in what happens to her body. The story begins with the sin of Saul, persecuting the Gibeonites by genocide. Rizpah's two sons are sentenced to death at the hands of the Gibeonites to pay for the sin of Saul and to end the famine in the land. Rizpah climbs the mountain of God to publicly grieve, to protest what has been done to her and her children, and to defend the bodies of her children from wild animals. David sees her public protest and his heart is changed, the bodies of her sons and the other five are properly buried. The famine is ended when David gives delayed justice to Rizpah by burying her sons. God never required the lives of the sons, but God did require David to see the truth of what is just and right. Injustice comes unraveled in this story because David listens to the suffering and grief of Rizpah.

Where are people in our country, in your community, and in your day to day life crying out for justice? What does the word justice mean to you, what does the word justice mean to God? Is God capable of unraveling injustice?

Prayer: *God of unraveling, when humans commit sins, you are always looking to bring about justice. We give you thanks for Rizpah and for her public protest and grief. Help us to see where you are calling us to respond to the cries of justice in our own lives. Unravel the sin deep within us and bring us into newness of life. Amen.*



**Wednesday, June 24, 2020**

Text: Acts 9:1-20

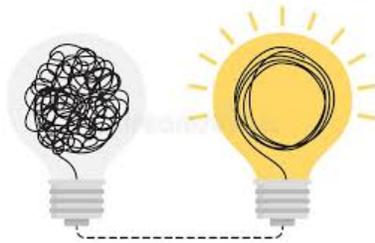
**9** Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup> He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” <sup>5</sup> He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The reply came, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” <sup>7</sup> The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. <sup>8</sup> Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” <sup>11</sup> The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; <sup>14</sup> and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; <sup>16</sup> I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” <sup>17</sup> So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, <sup>19</sup> and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, <sup>20</sup> and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”

Paul’s old life comes unraveled. Whether this is a call story or a conversion, Saul is changed into Paul. Before Saul witnesses Jesus, he hates the people who follow Jesus, they threaten his traditions and his exclusive power as a Pharisee and as a chosen person of Israel. Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus-followers are not born into their tradition and they do not exclude anyone: Jew, Gentile, man or woman, all can become followers of Jesus. As a Pharisee, sharing the exclusive relationship that the Israelites had with God made them feel as though their special relationship with God was less special. And so, the Jesus-followers threaten Saul’s very way of life. It therefore must be quite a shock to him when he is blinded by a light on the roadside and none other than Jesus himself speaks to Saul telling him that he must do the exact opposite of what he has been doing: he must go and share the good news of Jesus with those Gentiles. The Holy Spirit fills Paul and he gets a new story and a new calling.

Have you ever considered Saul being changed into Paul, the Jesus-hater being turned into a Jesus-follower as an act of radical healing? Where does Jesus appear to us with a radical call to be different? Does that call feel like healing to you?

*Prayer: God of unraveling, you call us from our daily lives to follow you by sharing the good news with the world. When we are going down the path of sin and hate, you appear to us and offer us a different way to be. We give you thanks for changing the story of Saul into Paul and for his work in bringing the good news of Jesus to so many communities. May your love of every created being and of our neighbors be our guiding path. Amen.*



**Thursday, June 25, 2020**

Text: John 4:1-29

**4** Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, “Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John”<sup>2</sup>—although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized—<sup>3</sup> he left Judea and started back to Galilee. <sup>4</sup> But he had to go through Samaria. <sup>5</sup> So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. <sup>6</sup> Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

<sup>7</sup> A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”<sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)<sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”<sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”<sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”<sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,<sup>14</sup> but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”<sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

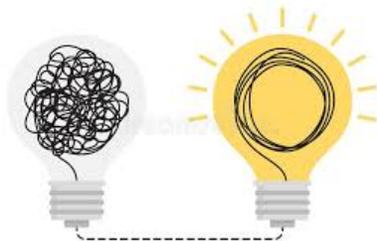
<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.”<sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’;<sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!”<sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.”<sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.<sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.<sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.<sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”<sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”<sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

**27 Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”**

The separate-ness and other-ness of the Samaritan woman is unraveled when Jesus says that simple command to her, “Give me a drink.” Do you think she was shocked to hear this man talking to her? This man who was not of the same gender, race, or cultural background. Men and women were not allowed to speak to each other. Samaritans were not just different people than the Israelites, they were lesser, they were *those* people, they were separate and not equal, they were different and deficient. Jesus breaks down the boundaries by speaking to this woman but also by offering her the living water. He offers her a chance to follow him and makes a statement about who is worthy to be a Jesus-follower.

How does Jesus unravel our understanding of who is separate from us? Where in your life do you exclude people who you have thought of as too different from you? How has God brought you together with someone who you might have seen as other?

*Prayer: God of unraveling, you call us to see our neighbors although they may look, speak, or act different than us. You call us to see them as part of your beloved world. We give you thanks for the Samaritan woman at the well whom you saw as a beloved child. May we overcome barriers of separation so that we too can receive your life-giving water. Amen.*



**Friday, June 26, 2020**

Text: Job 28:12-28

- 12“But where shall wisdom be found?  
And where is the place of understanding?**
- 13 Mortals do not know the way to it,  
and it is not found in the land of the living.**
- 14 The deep says, ‘It is not in me,’  
and the sea says, ‘It is not with me.’**
- 15 It cannot be gotten for gold,  
and silver cannot be weighed out as its price.**
- 16 It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,  
in precious onyx or sapphire.**
- 17 Gold and glass cannot equal it,  
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.**
- 18 No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;**

**the price of wisdom is above pearls.**

**<sup>19</sup> The chrysolite of Ethiopia cannot compare with it,  
nor can it be valued in pure gold.**

**<sup>20</sup> “Where then does wisdom come from?  
And where is the place of understanding?”**

**<sup>21</sup> It is hidden from the eyes of all living,  
and concealed from the birds of the air.**

**<sup>22</sup> Abaddon and Death say,  
‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’**

**<sup>23</sup> “God understands the way to it,  
and he knows its place.**

**<sup>24</sup> For he looks to the ends of the earth,  
and sees everything under the heavens.**

**<sup>25</sup> When he gave to the wind its weight,  
and apportioned out the waters by measure;**

**<sup>26</sup> when he made a decree for the rain,  
and a way for the thunderbolt;**

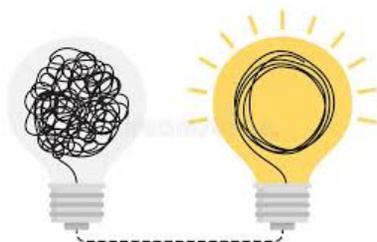
**<sup>27</sup> then he saw it and declared it;  
he established it, and searched it out.**

**<sup>28</sup> And he said to humankind,  
‘Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;  
and to depart from evil is understanding.’”**

Job comes unraveled when everything he holds near to him is lost. We hear that he is a righteous man. Often when we hear that something bad has happened to someone, our gut reaction is to ask, what did they do to deserve that? In the story of Job, our desire to justify punishment is challenged: Job does not deserve the bad things that happen to him. Job (and also us) has to unravel theology that tells us God rewards good actions with good things and bad actions with bad things. In this chapter of Job, he marvels at the wonder of God’s work within the world and proclaims that only wisdom can be found within God.

Job’s understanding of how God works is unraveled. What things have been taught to you throughout your life that you have had to unlearn? How has God shown you grace instead of punitive punishment?

Prayer: *God of unraveling, you call us to live into difficult questions of how you are at work in the world. We give you thanks for Job and the chance to wrestle with difficult questions of justice and fairness. We ask that you unravel our need for answers and guide us into awe at the wonder of your expansive mystery. Amen.*



Saturday, June 27, 2020

Text: John 20:19-29

**<sup>19</sup> When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>20</sup> After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” <sup>22</sup> When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”**

**<sup>24</sup> But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”**

**<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”**

Thomas loved Jesus, just as the other disciples did and Jesus' death unraveled them. Time and time again we hear stories about the disciples' disbelief that Jesus would die and their cries of 'No, we will not betray you!' And yet it comes to pass. We therefore should not be surprised to find that Jesus' resurrection was hard for the disciples to wrap their heads around. Would you not have felt shocked to hear that someone who you loved, who was nailed to a cross, that you saw executed by the government, dying on that cross until he could not breathe, and then stabbed in the side, was alive and walking among you? Doubting Thomas gets a bad nickname that makes us immediately think of lack of faith, but in his moment of unraveling, he sees Jesus, and proclaims, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus lovingly invites Thomas to touch his wounds and see for himself. Thomas does see; he sees Jesus' true identity. It is then that we, who cannot see Jesus as the first disciples did, are invited to believe.

When has doubt invited you into deeper faith? Has God ever unraveled something in your own life and in its place something hopeful bloomed? How is God inviting you into peace on this day?

Prayer: *God of unraveling, when we are reeling in grief and loss you appear to us and invite us into your loving care. We give you thanks for Thomas who, because of his doubt, got to bear witness to you. We pray that our doubt will always turn into deeper faith. Amen.*

