

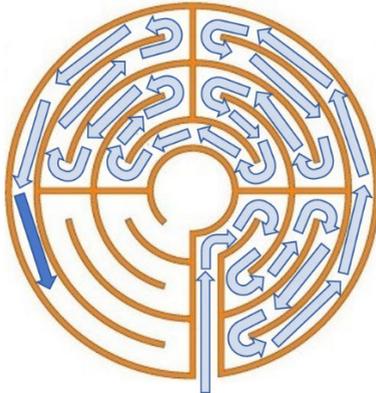
## Week 3: March 4 – 10

### Gospel Reading: John 2:13-22

#### Path of Discipleship: Through the Maze

For the third week of Lent, we will be journeying through the final quadrant of the labyrinth, contemplating how this part of the path can relate to the history of the early Christian church, and also to our own spiritual journeys.

**Day 1 (3/4):** *Your long arc around the outermost ring continues. You have travelled so far and accomplished so much, yet you've never felt further from the goal.*



Even during his time on earth, Jesus had a long relationship with the physical temple in Jerusalem. As an infant, he was taken there to be presented to the Lord and was recognized instantly by some as the Messiah. As a child, he went there regularly with his parents for religious festivals. As a 12-year-old boy, he spent several days “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.” That was also the first time he is recorded as referring to the temple as “my Father’s house” (Luke 2:22-50).

This week's Gospel reading tells of Jesus returning to the temple as an adult. When he finally arrived there, instead of pious preparation for the upcoming observance of the Passover for which he had come, "he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!'" (John 2:13-16).

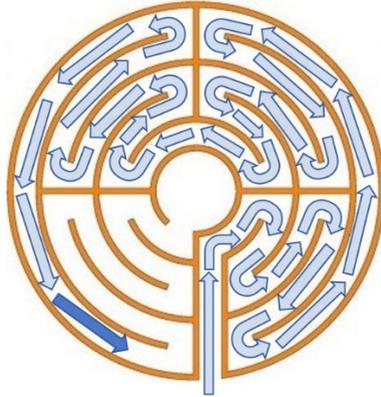
Have you ever felt that level of indignation? Of finding something so offensive, so repugnant, that you felt compelled to take action to stop it? What brought you to that point?

Have there been times when you acted out of anger when, in hindsight, it was not justified? Why do you think you acted that way?

Have there been times when you were faced with a situation in which both anger and action could have been appropriate, but you did not take any action to stop it? What kept you from acting then?

Prayer for Day 1: God of justice, we thank you for the knowledge of your divine providence and loving plan for all creation. We ask for patience and temperance in dealing with the challenges that we face and for resistance to temper, lest we take rash action to avenge ourselves, losing sight of the judgment and justice from you that no one will escape. We also ask for the strength and courage to take action when appropriate to make a stand, such as to stop intolerance or injustice to others. Please guide us in our interactions with others and help us to use our time on this earth productively and in a manner that pleases you. Amen.

**Day 2 (3/5):** *These are the darkest times, the longest stretch, yet you keep moving forward, one foot in front of the other.*



After Saul's miraculous conversion, he and the other disciples continued to spread the word throughout the region and beyond. They had many successes and saw much growth, but the road was not easy, as they also continued to experience much opposition and violent persecution.

James and Peter, two of the original apostles, were seized by Herod, the Roman-appointed king of Judea. Herod captured James first and had him put to death by the sword. Seeing that this "pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also... When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover," where he would surely meet his death (Acts 12:1-5).

It is hard to imagine as dire a situation as Peter found himself in that night as the sun set. However, Peter had a unique perspective from which to view that predicament. A few years earlier, on the night Jesus was betrayed, he told Peter and his other disciples "in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" (John 16:33).

When we receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, we each share that same promise. In communion, God's forgiveness comes to each one of us individually and tangibly. Bread is placed in our hands with the promise: Broken for you. Wine is poured with the promise: Shed for you. For you individually. For you as you are. For you with all your regrets and failures, joys and triumphs, challenges and sins. Jesus is given and shed for you. God is forgiving you. God loves you, just the way you are.

One theologian said that with Holy Communion, God provides a meal to sustain and strengthen us on our journey. How very true. In this meal, God revives our soul and nourishes our faith and gives us the assurance of salvation. With these gifts, we gain the hope and energy to continue living faithfully in this challenging world. We receive the healing presence of Christ when we deal with illness, sadness, depression, or grief.

In Holy Communion, our Lord Jesus Christ blesses us with his presence; with a steady supply of food for the soul, nourishment for the journey, week after week connecting us with God and one another, reminding us of his promise of forgiveness and salvation and life.

When taking communion, remember also Jesus' command to "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). This Lent, remember the sacrifices that Jesus made that led to the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood. But also remember the promises that he made regarding why he made those sacrifices.

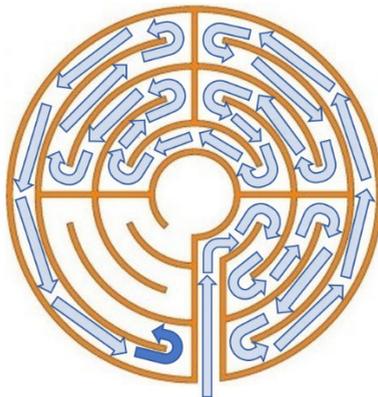
Take a few minutes to read the following verses and reflect on what these words and promises mean to you personally:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty... Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away (John 6:35-37).

I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved... I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:9-10).

Prayer for Day 2: Lord of comfort and endurance, we thank you so much for all that you do to strengthen us on our journeys, and for the regular opportunity to physically share in your promise, love, and salvation through the blessed sacrament of Holy Communion. We praise you for your strength and mercy and ask that you help us to always remember that we are not alone on this path and can always take courage in you. Amen

**Day 3 (3/6):** *A turn inward! The first one in a long, long time!*



With Peter imprisoned, “the church prayed fervently to God for him.” This was definitely a time for prayer! Peter, “bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison,” waiting to be executed before an angry mob. But, suddenly, an angel of the Lord appears and saves him! This occurred so unexpectedly that, even after being freed from his chains, getting dressed, and walking out of the prison accompanied by the angel, Peter himself “did not realize that what was happening with the angel’s help

was real; he thought he was seeing a vision” until the prison was well behind him (Acts 12:6-9).

It was actually not until Peter and the angel together had left the gates of the city “and they went outside and walked along a lane when the angel suddenly left him. Then Peter came to himself,” and realized that it was not a vision and that, in fact, an angel of the Lord had delivered him from prison and certain death (Acts 12:10-11).

The poem “Footprints in the Sand” is reminiscent of this incident:

As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.  
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.  
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,  
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,  
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,  
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,  
there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.

"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,  
You'd walk with me all the way.

But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of  
my life,  
there was only one set of footprints.

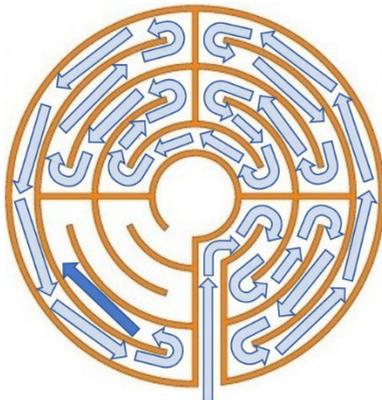
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would  
leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you  
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.  
When you saw only one set of footprints,  
It was then that I carried you."

It is so easy to lose perspective of the all-present, all-powerful, and all-knowing nature of God, especially when we are faced with hard and stressful times. When were some periods in your life that you felt like the person in the poem, not able to see the presence of God in your life and possibly even questioning his existence? How has your perception of those times changed in hindsight? Why?

Prayer for Day 3: God of love and compassion, we are weak and easily lose faith and perspective. Thank you for always being with us, even during the times when we don't realize or appreciate it. Please help us to always remember that your ever-present love is there for us and help us to turn first and always to you for comfort and support in times of need and also in times of joy. Amen.

**Day 4 (3/7):** *No additional turn inward immediately after the last. It becomes clear that, even though you have again started moving slowly inward, there will still be plenty of twists, turns, and sideways travels as you continue forward.*



After Peter's delivery from prison, Saul (now also known as Paul) continued travelling and spreading the word of God along with Barnabus, a leader from the church in Antioch of Syria. In several

cities, including Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia, they spread the word, performed miracles, and exposed false prophets, only to be run out of town, sometimes under threat of stoning.

In Lystra, after healing a man who had been crippled from birth, things got even worse. Things first started to go downhill when the crowds there were so impressed and enthralled with them that they called them gods and wanted to make sacrifices to them (much to the chagrin of Paul and Barnabus... talk about missing the point of their message!). While that must have been mortifying for them, as they were there to spread the word and glory of the one true God, things would only get worse.

The enemies that they had made in previous cities followed them there and turned the crowds against them. The same crowds that “they scarcely restrained... from offering sacrifice to them” soon “stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead” (Acts 14:18-19)

How can this mentality be related to us today? What are some contemporary examples (while usually not as violent as this instance) where a segment of our society first rushes and clings to someone or something as a savior of sorts, only to be disappointed and turn against them or it just as quickly?

Can you think of examples in your life when you have prematurely rushed to judgement (either for or against) a person, thing, or concept only to find that those feelings were not properly founded?

Are there ideas or notions that you now hold (and may have been holding for a long time) that you should reevaluate? In its Draft Social Statement on Women and Justice, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in which Calvary is a congregation, states that “we believe that God the Holy Spirit is always at work, transforming and inspiring new ways of living in this world towards God’s promised, beloved, eternal community.”

Through this belief, the ELCA challenges us to challenge ourselves and our old ways of thinking to ensure that they are “grounded in the faithful message of God’s graciousness and God’s call for justice that seeks to enable all people.”

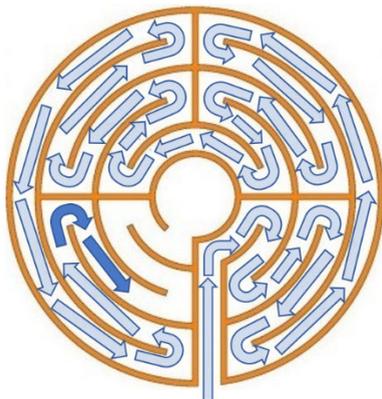
Use this season of Lent to challenge yourself in this manner. Are there parts of you that still need to be reformed to make a priority of Jesus’ commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39)?

aWareness Wednesday: People from different cultures manifest signs of mental health issues differently. These differences can include and stem from perceptions, stigmas, and beliefs that people from cultures different from theirs would often not even think of, much less fully understand. This makes interpersonal support structures even more important. Mental health issues affect people from all backgrounds and walks of life. If you suspect that someone may be struggling in any manner – mentally, emotionally, or spiritually – *never* hesitate to ask if they are in need of help. If you think that they may be considering suicide, ask that directly, as it demonstrates that you are open to talking about that subject. Regardless of the issues that they are dealing with at the time, it is important to not only open the dialogue with them, but also to help them connect with appropriate professional support and to stay in touch with them. Follow up to see how they are doing to show that you support and care about them. Find more information and suggestions at <http://www.bethe1to.com/bethe1to-steps-evidence/>

Prayer for Day 4: Father of all life, we praise and thank you for the wonderful and diverse world in which we live. Please help us to have the courage to explore the diversity to which we are exposed and the wisdom and patience to not rush to judgement when exposed to people or things that are new or different from

us and what we are used to. Help us to enter each new situation with the mindset of looking for how we can use it as an opportunity to please and serve you. Amen.

**Day 5 (3/8):** *Yes! More progress towards the center, and the lateral journeys again seem to be getting shorter in between turns inward.*



With Paul stoned and his limp body dragged through the streets and thrown out of the city to rot with the garbage, the disciples went to his body, presumably with the intention of giving him a proper burial. In a turn of events that must have come as an astonishing surprise, “when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city” (Acts 14:20). He was not only alive, but able to continue travelling and proclaiming the good news with them!

The day after the stoning, Paul and Barnabas travelled to Derbe, which was in the Roman province of Galatia. That was a very productive trip, where “they had proclaimed the good news to that city and had made many disciples” (Acts 14:21).

Consider the options that the group had when deciding where to go next. Behind them was a rough road. They had spread the

word to many people in many cities, but they had also faced much resistance when starting churches in those cities, often barely escaping with their lives. Ahead of them were countless destinations to which they had not gone yet and populations who had not chased them away and tried to kill them.

Where would you be tempted to go? The past places where you would face certain prosecution or the new places where you could start fresh?

The disciples knew that they would face persecution by returning to some of their past destinations, but they also knew that there were people in those cities that had heard and received the word of God. Those new disciples had stayed in their cities to conduct the work of starting and growing new churches there, and they did so also in the face of possible and sometimes certain persecution.

Knowing this, the disciples left Derbe and “returned to Lystra, then on to Iconium and Antioch. There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue the faith, saying, ‘It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.’ And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe” (Acts 14:21-23).

One way to look at that decision to go back instead of moving forward is that they chose to prioritize the health of existing churches over starting new ones. What lessons from that mindset could be applied to your life? Are there ways in which you keep looking forward, possibly wanting more than you have now, when you should be looking at the present? Are there aspects of your life today (relationships with other people, self-health, your relationship with God, etc.) that you are not paying as much attention to as maybe you should?

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his listeners, “do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today” (Matthew 6:34). What does that verse mean to you? How does it relate to your present-day attitudes, priorities and concerns?

Before delivering the above admonishment, Jesus provided the following instruction:

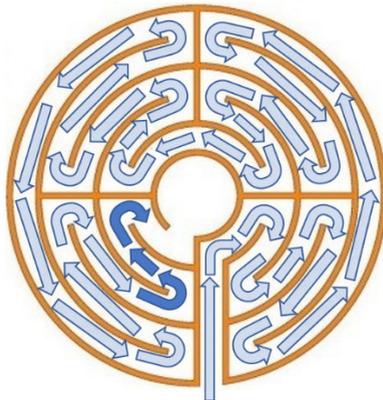
“do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ ...indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:25-33).

Consider the previous questions (regarding Matthew 6:34) again in the context of the passage you just read.

Prayer for Day 5: Generous and loving Father, you indeed provide us with all that we need in this life. We confess weakness and sin when we covet what others have and are not content with what you have provided us. Please forgive us for these shortcomings and help us to always maintain a mindset of gratitude to you for

the bountiful gifts and blessing that you have showered upon us.  
Amen.

**Day 6 (3/9):** *More twists and turns, but the path is getting brighter. The journey is still hard, but you can sense the closeness of the center. Your fatigue from the journey is outmatched by the anticipation of the fruition of your efforts.*



Yesterday we looked at some of Paul's journeys through South Galatia, including the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. We also saw the dedication that he demonstrated for making sure that the disciples that he left in those cities were taken care of as best he could. This included assisting the church leaders and providing emotional support to help them through trying times.

In addition to visiting churches such as these in person when he could, Paul also wrote them letters of instruction and encouragement. In one of those letters, he wrote to the churches in Galatia: "let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all" (Galatians 6:9-10a).

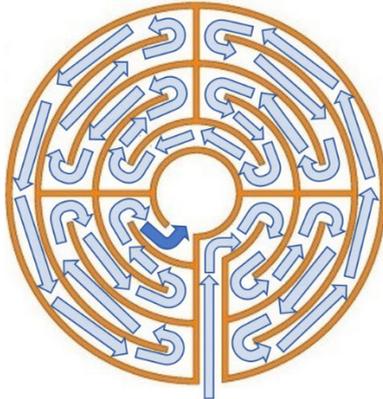
A striking aspect of that short passage is the large number of plural personal pronouns – us, we, we, we, us – leading to the final goal of “the good of all.” This highlights the importance of community and teamwork in the spread and successes of the early church. A different letter to members of an early church directs them to “consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another” (Hebrews 10:23-25a).

During Lent, it is sometimes easy to get caught up in ourselves – what we are fasting from, what we need to improve about ourselves. While this type of introspection is healthy and can help us grow in our spiritual lives, it is important also to remember the importance of the communion that we share with other Christians.

What can you do this Lenten season to not only meet with other members of the faith, but to help them to grow spiritually? To encourage them and provoke them to love and good deeds?

Prayer for Day 6: God of compassion, we thank you for the healthy fellowship that we can find in our congregational community. Help us to remember that we can also find it anywhere two or three are gathered in your name. During this dark and sometimes lonely time of year, please help us to seek out new opportunities to meet with others in your name and to strengthen each other in fellowship. Amen.

**Day 7 (3/10):** *One more turn... one that started like all the others, but turns into something else. One that leads to the next phase of the journey...*



The Path of Discipleship for this week is “Through the Maze.” Unlike a labyrinth, a maze has many possible paths, with only one path leading you to the goal, while the others detract from the goal and inhibit your ability to reach it. As much as a labyrinth can be used as a metaphor for our lives, so can a maze. The key to that analogy, though, is knowing that there *is* one path that leads through the confusions and dangers and delivers the traveler to the desired end, regardless of how many other possible paths there are.

On the night that he shared his Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus was trying to prepare them for the upcoming times when they would be without his physical presence on earth. Jesus told them “do not let your hearts be troubled... you know the way to the place where I am going.’ [Then] Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him’” (John 14:1-7).

In those words, Jesus brought to us a glorious fruition of the ancient promise of God to his creation. In the Old Testament, God reassured the prophet Isaiah with the words: “Do not fear, for I

have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God... your Savior" (Isaiah 43:1-3a).

Today's metaphorical *last turn* inward – the one that completes the circuitous journey that has been leading towards the center – is a deliberate turn. In the path of the labyrinth journey so far, it is unique; it is the first truly 90-degree turn, and the one that takes you finally into the center. The metaphorical equivalent in your life is the culmination of your spiritual journey to eternal salvation through the mercy and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

When was that turn for you? Was it during your confirmation? When dealing with a tragedy? When you were born again through the glorious intervention of God in your life?

In the Gospel reading from this week, while Jesus is clearing the temple courts, John notes that "his disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me'" (John 2:17). When thinking of that final turn of faith that you took, of your faith story as a whole, would "zeal" be a word that comes to mind? Are you zealous in your faith? Are you *consumed by zeal* in your relationship with the Lord? Has that zeal waned since you first made that metaphorical last turn inward to faith in Christ and, if so, what can you do during this Lenten season to reignite (or possibly ignite for the first time) the feeling of being *consumed by zeal* regarding your relationship with God?

Prayer for Day 7: Merciful Father, we thank you for calling us to an eternal life in your loving presence. The full scope of that gift is not fathomable to us in this lifetime, so please help us to always remain passionate in our love, appreciation, and dedication to you. Help us to always be conscious of opportunities to share the

good news of that gift to others so that they too might answer  
your call. Amen.