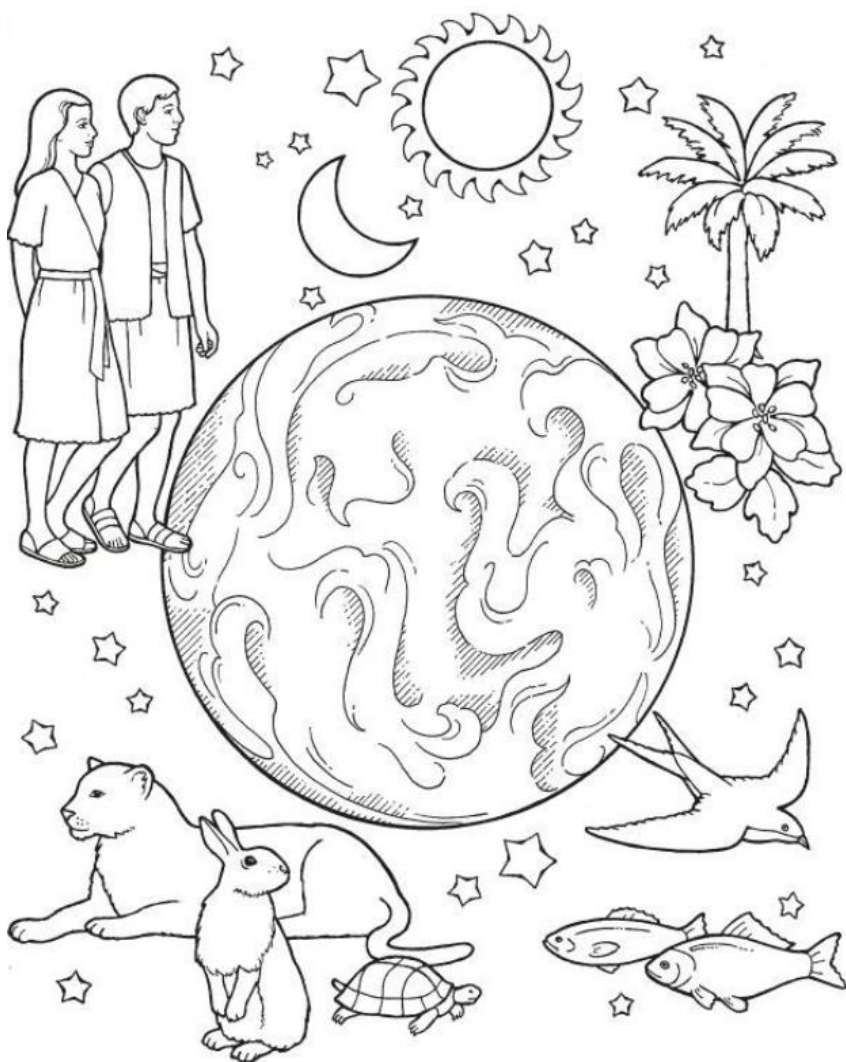




Easter Vigil:
Remembering God's Stories of Salvation

Midweek Lenten Devotions
Tri-Saints Lutheran Parish
Byron & Hardy, Nebraska



Creation: Genesis 2:4b-9

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground;⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—⁷ then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.⁸ And the Lord God

planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Prayer: Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Questions: What does it mean to you to know that you are, literally, made from dust? What difference does it make? What does it mean to you to receive the cross of ashes on your forehead? What difference does it make? Do you have any plans to keep Lent in a special way? What are they?

Prayer Experience: Dirt + Sand + Dust

This week, find a small dish and fill it with sand, dirt, or dust. When you take time to pray, feel the sand, hold the sand, or even draw pictures in it with your finger. Imagine all the ways in which you are connected to the whole universe, and all the ways that the universe is connected to you.



Promise: Genesis 9:8-13

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹²God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Prayer: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions: Why do you think God sent the Great Flood? Why do you think God decides not to repeat the experience? Why do you think God chooses the natural world as a reminder of this promise? What do rainbows remind you of? Traditionally, a dove and an olive branch are a symbol of peace. What reminds you of peace or brings peace to you?

Prayer Experience: Two by Two Prayers

When God saved the world from the flood, God saved them two by two. Chose a particular person to pray for over the course of the rest of the season of Lent. If you are feeling brave, ask them what you can pray for, and even ask them to pray for you! If you are a prayer partner in secret, keep a record of what you are praying for. If you are a mutual prayer partner, check in with one another, perhaps weekly, to see how your prayers might need to shift and change, and to let the other person know that you are keeping your commitment.



A Future: Genesis 15:1-6

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” ² But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” ⁴ But the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” ⁵ He brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your

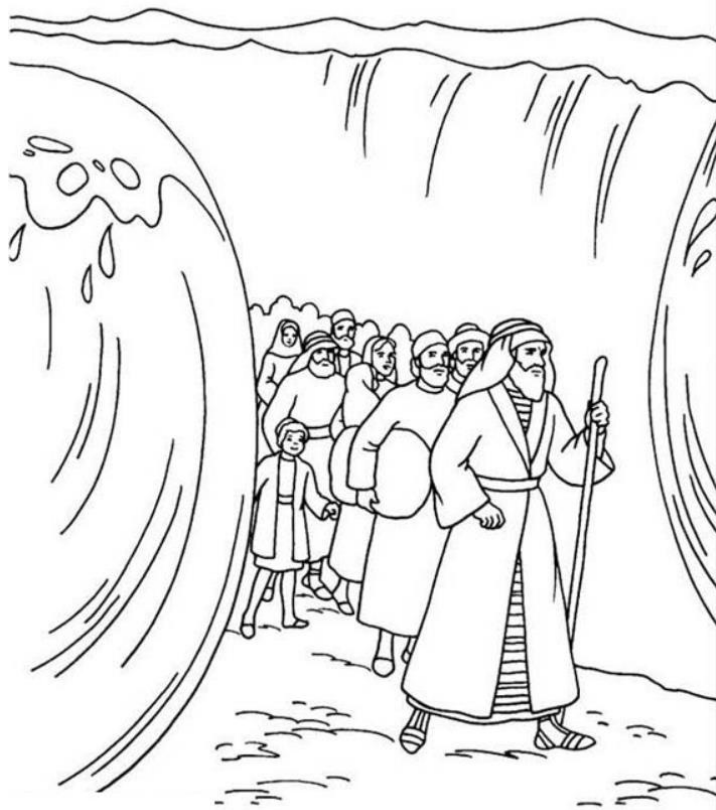
descendants be.”⁶ And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Prayer: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions: What is it like to know that you are the fulfillment of one of God’s promises? What is it like to know that you are related, through God, to everyone who is related to Abraham? Have you ever experienced a time when you felt let down? What was that like? How about a time when a long-awaited promise finally came true? What was that like?

Prayer Experience: Web of Relations Prayer

In this prayer practice, we remember in prayer everyone to whom we are related. It could be by blood, by marriage, by choice, or by baptism. Start with a blank sheet of paper with your name in the middle of a circle in the center of the page. Pray through those who are related to you, adding lines of relationship, and circles with names. Don’t worry about doing it in the correct order; it is a web, not a tree. When you have prayed through everyone you can think of, as an “Amen” to your page. Revisit this page over the course of the week, adding names as you wish.



Escape: Exodus 14:19-25, 29

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. ²⁰ It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night. ²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea.

The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²² The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³ The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴ At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the

Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵ He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.”²⁹ But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

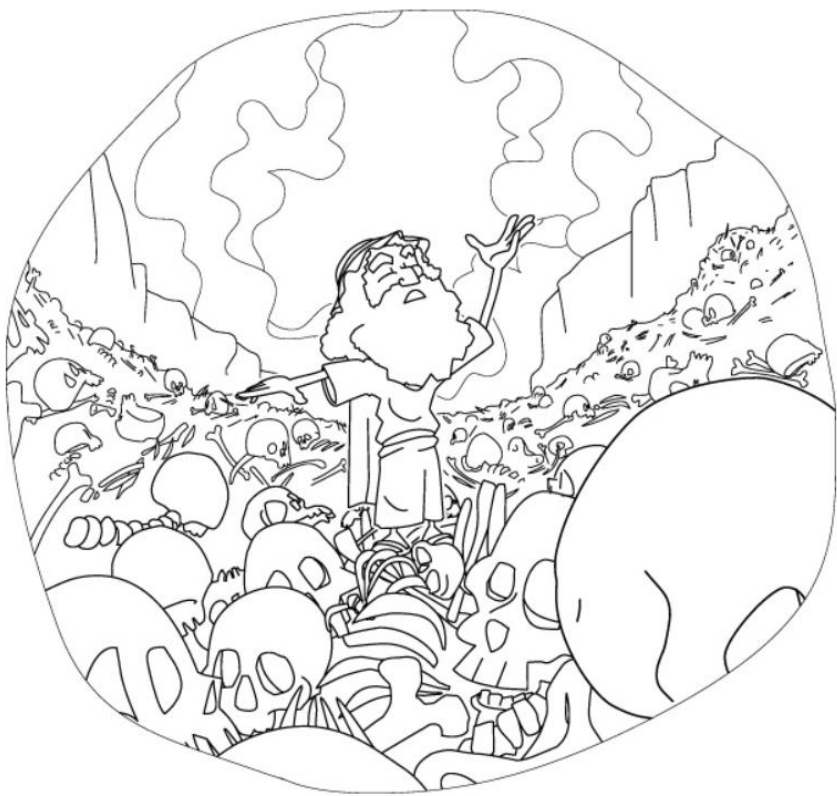
Prayer: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions: What do you think it would have been like to be an Israelite in this story? What would scare or challenge you? What part would be your favorite?

How does this story connect to the story of your life? Was there a time when you traveled on an unexpectedly easy path, or that you witnessed a natural miracle? What was that experience like? Why do you think that God chose to lead the people through the Red Sea, instead of around?

Prayer Experience: Labyrinths

In this story, God made a way when there seemed to be no way. This can also be your experience in a labyrinth, it seems like a maze with twists, turns, and dead ends, when it is really an intricate path that faithfully brings you from beginning to end. Trace the labyrinth, trying to concentrate on only where you are, and not behind or up ahead. What is it like to trust God that you will make it to the middle? When you arrive in the middle, take a few moments there to rest in God, and then travel back out on the now-familiar road, refreshed for the journey ahead.



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Life in Breath: Ezekiel 37:1-6, 12-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.” ¹²Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I

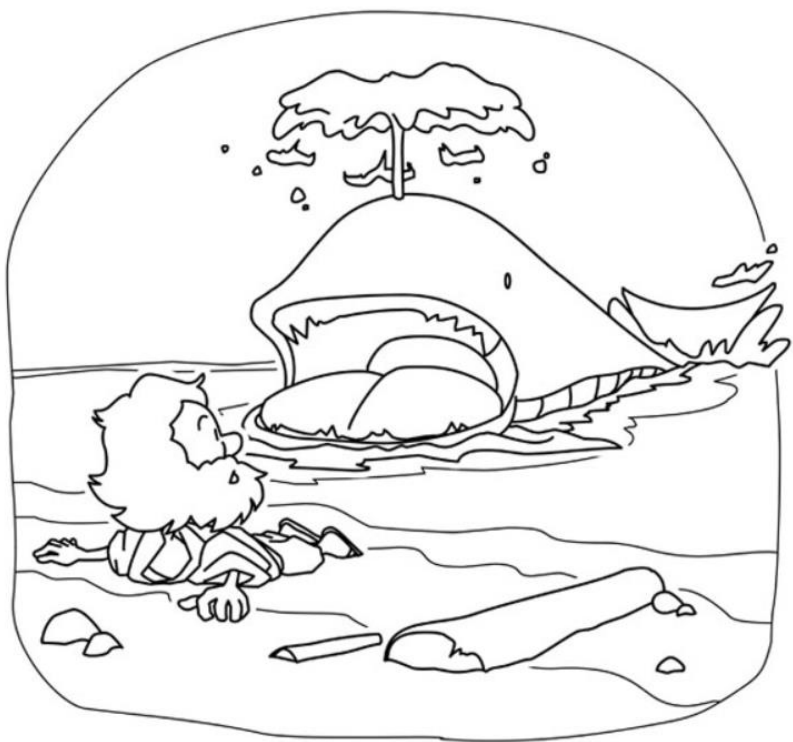
open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.”

Prayer: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions: What do you think it would have been like to see the dry bones returned to life? How do you think that remembering this miracle would have helped Jesus’ disciples in the waiting time between Good Friday and Easter? Have you ever felt dry and lifeless? What was it like? How did you come back to life? Have you ever had a time when it was hard to breathe? What was that experience like? What is it like when you can breathe freely?

Prayer Experience: Breath Prayers

In this section of Ezekiel, dry bones come back to life through the power of breath. One way to pray is to focus on just a few words in conjunction with your breath. Sit in a comfortable position with both feet on the floor and your spine straight. Take in a slow deep breath, pause, and release it slowly. Do this for a few cycles, until you feel you have a rhythm. Then, add words, such as (inhale) Come to me, (exhale) Holy Spirit, or (inhale) Fill me up, (exhale) Light of Christ, or (inhale) Lord, (exhale) have mercy. Stick with one prayer for the week, or experiment with a new prayer each time you pray, until one feels like it belongs to you.



Deliverance: Jonah 1:1-4, 10-12, 15, 17-2:1

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, ²“Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.” ³But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

⁴But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. ¹⁰Then the men were even more afraid, and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them so.

¹¹Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. ¹²He said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of

me that this great storm has come upon you.” ¹⁵ So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁷ But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. ^{2:1} Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish

Prayer: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions: Have you ever refused to do something that you know that you should? Or turned away from doing something that someone else asked you to do?

Have you ever been out in a storm? What was that experience like? Have you ever prayed to God in a time of distress? What was that experience like?

Prayer Experience: Prayers in the Dark

Jonah only prayed to God after all hope was lost, and he was alone, in the dark, in the belly of a fish. This week, you are invited to pray with your eyes closed, or in a dark room. You may choose to write or draw your prayers to keep your mind focused (don't worry if you can't read them in the end), or pray in the quiet of your mind. If you write your prayers, you will be invited to shut them into a box at the end of worship. Even though they are in dark, know that God will hear and respond to your prayers, as God responded to Jonah.



Fiery Furnace: Daniel 3:14-19, 23, 26

Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?”

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. ¹⁷ If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve

your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.”¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary.²³ But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire. ²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.

Prayer: Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions: What do you think it would have been like to see these men thrown into the furnace? Come out unharmed? Who would you be in this story?

This story is one of great faith. How does your faith make you brave? What do you need the courage to do, here and now? How can you ask God for what you need?

Prayer Experience: Tealight Prayers of Courage

For the season of Lent, we have been praying for “good courage.” Tonight, you will be invited to light a tealight representing the Light of Christ as you pray for this courage, for yourself or for someone you know who needs the gift of courage. During your prayers this week, feel free to light a candle to remind you of this prayer experience, and to help you make it to the light of Easter!

Easter Vigil: Lenten Midweek Devotions 2020

Easter Vigil is an ancient festival celebrated at sundown on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. During Easter Vigil, the faithful remember all of the stories from the Old Testament when God made an impossible thing possible. They did this to strengthen one another in their faith in the time between the bad news of Jesus Death and the good news of Jesus' rising from the dead. Because our Confirmation students are studying the Old Testament, this year, we thought it would be a good time to recall these stories during Lenten Midweek services. Use these devotions in worship and at home as a way to take the story with you throughout the week. God bless your Lenten journey! In Christ, Pastor Breen

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