



THE RADIX PROJECT

small groups / deep roots

EPIPHANY/LENT 2021:
STORIES OF SALVATION



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL



Friends,

THIS fourth iteration of the Radix Project marks one year since we launched small groups at Saint Mark's. We never dreamed of the pandemic year that would follow, or how beautifully the Radix Project would lend itself to Zoom connections, prayer, study and conversation among us. We give thanks for God's gracious serendipity here, and look forward to another season of the Radix Project with you.

You may recall we chose the name "Radix" for this small group ministry because it means "root," and we are reclaiming our Christian roots by this practice. Jesus lived and taught in small groups, as did the early Church. To be "radical" doesn't mean to be rebellious—rather it describes the freedom to stretch into the borderlands precisely because one is rooted in the deep soil of a defining narrative, which, for us, is the brilliant and liberating gospel of Christ. Through this defining narrative we are known and nourished in the church community, and connected through past, present and future to all who are so rooted. Radix groups reveal this connection in tangible and life-giving ways.

For this season, we have chosen to dig deep into the stories of salvation that we hear each year during the Easter Vigil liturgy. In this way, we root ourselves in Christ, in our connections to one another, and in our spiritual ancestry to all who have told these stories to one another throughout the ages, and remembered God's saving action with hope that God's reign will be revealed more fully among us.

It is our hope that as you reflect on these stories, you might discover how God's graceful activity is revealed in your own life as well, and in those of your group members.

In Christ,

Kelly, Steve, Jennifer, Nancy

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Special thanks to Carrie Kahler for her generous assistance with the visual art interpretation, and to Lynne Cobb for reviewing the series materials.

Please feel free to contact anyone from the Planning Committee if you have any questions or concerns along the way. Thank you for your participation!

OVERVIEW FOR SMALL GROUPS

Small groups are designed to gather people of faith in settings that foster trust so that our relationships with God and one another are strengthened. When we meet each other for earnest conversation, sharing and prayer, we deepen the bonds of affection by which we learn how to love ourselves, each other and God more fully. In this way, small groups are intentional about providing space for prayerful support and accountability, guided by the One we know as Jesus the Christ.

For our purposes in the Radix Project, we have designed a process for guiding 6–10 people in their season together, designed as six 90-minute sessions, with a plenary gathering before the first session. Each small group gathering is structured to open with prayer, to have time for check-in, scripture reading and reflection, sharing of stories, and check-out with prayer.

SMALL GROUP SESSIONS

In addition to the six small group meetings (which will convene at various times), there is a plenary gathering to which all who participate in the small groups are invited. So the flow of the season looks like this:

OPENING PLENARY

What Is God Up To in All “This”?

Sunday, January 24, 2020,

7–8:30 p.m., via Zoom

The Opening Plenary will begin with a presentation by Dean Steve, giving a general introduction to the Easter Vigil liturgy and its stories. This presentation is open to anyone, whether or not they are participating in the small groups. Following this presentation, the groups will meet individually for the first time in break-out sessions.

SESSION 1: CREATION week of January 31, 2021

SESSION 2: THE FLOOD week of February 7, 2021

SESSION 3: ABRAHAM AND ISAAC week of February 14, 2021

SESSION 4: THE EXODUS week of February 21, 2021

SESSION 5: SALVATION IS FOR EVERYONE week of February 28, 2021

SESSION 6: THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES week of March 4, 2021

ESTABLISH GROUP NORMS

In order to grow in trust, it is important for groups to agree to norms for their time together and revisit them periodically as needed. It is important that everyone agree to abide by the same expectations for their time together. Here are some aspects of relational group culture that all groups will want to discuss as they begin their work.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- ◆ What is allowed to be shared outside the group?
- ◆ What may be shared on social media?

RESPECT AND MUTUALITY

- ◆ Let others finish without being interrupted.
- ◆ Resist the temptation to problem-solve.
- ◆ Mutual respect is essential.
- ◆ Give everyone a chance to speak.

LOGISTICS

- ◆ What are expectations about beginning and ending on time?
- ◆ ...about informing others of an expected absence?

ATTENDANCE

- ◆ Be punctual.
- ◆ Commit to regular attendance and participation.

PREPARATION

- ◆ What, if anything, are group members expected to do to prepare for their meetings?

COMMITMENT TO PRAYER

- ◆ What are expectations that each group member commits to pray for the others daily during this time as a small group?

ZOOM ETIQUETTE

Keep your microphone on mute when not speaking.

Take responsibility to practice using the technology ahead of the meeting, and ask for help as needed.

FLOW OF THE SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

A key to the flourishing of small groups is some consistency week to week so folks will know what to expect. A group facilitator will encourage the group to stay on track, but everyone has a part in making that happen. Here is the suggested format for all Radix Project groups which are designed to meet for 90 minutes each week:

GATHERING.	5 minutes
OPEN IN PRAYER	5 minutes
CHECK-IN QUESTION.	10 minutes
SCRIPTURE REFLECTION	20 minutes
GROUP DISCUSSION	30 minutes
CHECK-OUT INCLUDING PRAYER REQUESTS.	10 minutes
CLOSING PRAYER/WORSHIP	10 minutes

IDEAS FOR CHECK-IN QUESTIONS

Pick one for each week.

- ◆ Share a memory about your first visit to Saint Mark's Cathedral.
- ◆ What is your favorite water sport or hobby (swimming, boating, showering, etc.)?
- ◆ Let's say you decided to give up something that you love to indulge in for Lent. What would it be?
- ◆ What is the most adventurous trip you've ever taken?
- ◆ What are you most looking forward to when the pandemic ends?
- ◆ What is one important thing you've learned about yourself in the past year?

OPENING AND CLOSING PRAYERS/CHECK-OUT

Leading one another in prayer is a responsibility that is meant to be shared among the group. At the close of each week, invite a group member to find and share a brief opening prayer, and another to bring a closing for the following week. These may be extemporaneous, or sourced from the rich variety of resources, some of which are listed below:

- ◆ Daily Devotions, BCP, p. 137–140
- ◆ Compline, BCP, p. 127
- ◆ A brief hymn, chant, or Taizé prayer
- ◆ Lectionary-based Prayers from Vanderbilt Divinity School
<https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/prayers.php?id=154>
- ◆ The Book of Common Prayer Online
<https://www.bcponline.org/>
- ◆ The New Zealand Prayer Book Online
<https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/>
Here are three that might work well:
<https://anglicanprayerbook.nz/138.html>
- ◆ The Work of the People
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/visual-liturgy>
<https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/be-still>
(Some resources on this site will require a password, available from Kelly kmoody@saintmarks.org or Greg, gbloch@saintmarks.org.)

Closing prayer is an opportunity for each member of the group to reflect on the time together, articulating what they learned, and to ask the group to hold them in prayer with special intention. That intention may have arisen in the

context of the meeting, or it could be that you are asking for prayers for some prevailing part of your life (e.g., my child has surgery next week, or I am retiring from work, etc.). The important thing is that the prayers of the group gather all those intentions up as the meeting comes to an end, AND that each person commits to holding those prayers through the week, until you meet again.

In addition to including a prayer from one of the above resources, consider the following:

- ◆ The group may choose to go around and allow each person to pray for the person sitting to their right, with the facilitator opening and closing.
- ◆ Alternatively, after the intentions are named, sit in silent prayer, centered on God's mercy and presence.

SCRIPTURE STUDY GUIDES



WEEK 1: THE STORY OF CREATION

SCRIPTURE *Genesis 1:1–2:4*

IN THE beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule

the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the

face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What word or phrase stands out to you?
2. What jars you, or what phrases do you have questions about?
3. Did you notice that nowhere in this story of creation is Adam, Eve, the garden or snake? That is a second creation story that follows this one. Why do you think there are two different creation stories? Do you see them as conflicting?

GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Describe a time in your life when you have experienced the “goodness” of creation, including yourself?
2. Why do you think God chose to create the world?
3. What does the notion of “resting on the seventh day” mean and what are we to do with it?
4. Why do you think this scripture is included in the Easter Vigil’s telling of “God’s Salvation History?”



The Hand of God

Auguste Rodin (1840–1917)

Marble, 1907

in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

This sculpture, typical of Rodin's style, is one in a series of delicately sculpted hands. The series focuses attention on the relationship between space and matter, fingers and movement, creator and creation. This particular study pulls back the veil in the midst of creation, revealing a partially formed figure in the hands of a gentle and discerning creative force.

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WEEK 2: THE FLOOD

SCRIPTURE *Genesis 6:13–22; 9:8–13*

AND God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.” Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him. [...]

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and 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. I 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.” God 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: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. God tells Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them.” What do you imagine Noah was thinking and feeling? How does it make you feel?
2. Noah acted in faith to do as God instructed. Do you see a connection between faith and obedience? How is faith expressed?
3. God saves Noah and his family and establishes a new covenant with Noah and the earth. What do you imagine as your side of the covenant?

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Building the ark would have been a tremendous undertaking that probably looked crazy to people around Noah. Can you think of a time when you were called to trust in God when others could not understand?
2. This section of Noah’s story that we read at the Easter Vigil contains the words: “[Noah] did all that God commanded him.” In many interpretations, Noah’s is a story of trust in God’s saving power. What does trust in God’s saving power look like for you, in our world today?
3. How do the themes of judgment/salvation resonate for you in reading this Bible story today? How do they reflect or jibe with your relationship with God?

They did not always leave because they were promised work in the North. Many of them left because of Southern conditions, one of them being great floods that ruined the crops, and therefore they were unable to make a living where they were.

Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000)

Tempera on board, 1940/41
in the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Shown here is one of sixty of the panels in the *Migration Series*, which center the exodus of African Americans from the rural South to Northern cities during and after World War I. This one depicts a flood that decimated crops in the South, forcing sharecroppers to make an uncertain journey to the North. Lawrence's art serves multiple purposes, reflecting on his own experience as the son of migrant workers, educating the public about this moment in the history of Black Americans, and taking seriously the subject of black life as artistic inspiration. Lawrence lived in Harlem, and was influenced by his life and connections in that thriving community.

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WEEK 3: ABRAHAM'S SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

SCRIPTURE *Genesis 22: 1–18*

AFTER these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.” So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.” Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” And

Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.” ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What phrase or image in this story stands out to you?
2. The story says that God tested Abraham. What is the test? Does Abraham know it is a test? Three times, Abraham says, “Here I am.” Are they all the same? What do you make of this repetition?
3. If you put yourself in Isaac’s place, what questions do you have for Abraham? For God?

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Have you ever felt tested by God? What was it like?
2. This is a difficult, troubling story. What does it say about God to you?
3. What spiritual message do you find in this story? Can you find a word of hope in it?



Le sacrifice d'Isaac
Marc Chagall (1887–1985)
Oil on Canvas, 1966
in the Musée Marc Chagall, Nice, France

Chagall was born in Belarus, and his Hasidic Jewish ancestry contributed to his handling of religious imagery in his many modern works that span the artistic landscape from stained glass to ceramics, stage sets to book illustrations, and more. He was well-regarded for his use of color in painting among fellow artists Pablo Picasso and Matisse. Pay attention to the size of the figures in this painting, in the color and the movement of the gaze. Consider the facial expressions, and the symbolism in the corners. How does Chagall's vision help you enter in to this story?

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WEEK 4:

ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE AT THE RED SEA

SCRIPTURE *Exodus 14:10–31; 15:20–21*

AS PHARAOH drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” But Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.”

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. 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.

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. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. 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. 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."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea." ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. This scripture is like an action movie unfolding verse by verse. Where in the story is the climax? The resolution?
2. How might you describe the water as a character or literary agent in this story?
3. What is significant about how the people respond after the saving event in the Red Sea? What do you make of Miriam's action in this story?

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. If you were telling this story orally to a group, what details would you be sure to include? What might you leave out?
2. The Exodus story is a seminal story for the Hebrew people's understanding of their own identity, and of their relationship with God. It is also a seminal story for us as Christians. Why do you think that is?
3. Where do you place yourself in this narrative of salvation? Are you an observer or a participant?



The Crossing of the Red Sea

Hilda Katz (1909–1997)

Linocut print, 1978

in the Smithsonian American Art Museum, used by permission

Hilda Katz was a Jewish printmaker, painter and poet who grew up in New York City. She depicted several other scriptural scenes in her linocuts including: *Jonah and the Whale*, *The Creation* and *The Flood*. Given the severe persecution of the Jewish people over the course of the 1930s–1940s, it is no wonder that the waves of the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army look to overwhelm the crossing Israelites. What shapes do you see depicted in the artwork? What is the Israelites' relationship to the waves, to the dry ground and to each other?

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WEEK 5: SALVATION OFFERED FREELY TO ALL

SCRIPTURE: *Isaiah 55:1–11*

HO, EVERYONE who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.
Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Read the words of Isaiah out loud to yourself. It is an emotional passage. What feelings come up in you as you read these words? Which phrase is most interesting to you, and why?
2. What comes to mind with the question: “Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” In your own life? In our society?
3. Isaiah says, “Ho, everyone who thirsts come to the waters.” What does this passage say to you about God? What does it mean in these divisive times?

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. Isaiah preaches an abundance of whatever we need for everyone, for both physical and spiritual hunger and thirst. How is this description of salvation the same or different from other Bible stories of salvation? What do you hunger and thirst for?
2. The prophet Isaiah says our God “will abundantly pardon.” How is that different from how we blame/forgive in our culture, how we assign worthiness?
3. “Seek the Lord while he may be found” has an urgency to it, a call for a response. What does “seeking the Lord” look like for you? Have there been times in your life when you have felt more (or less?) seeking of relationship with God?



detail from *Frieze of the Prophets* (Jonah, Isaiah, Habbakuk)
 John Singer Sargent (1852–1925)
 Oil on Canvas, 1895
 from a mural in the Boston Public Library

John Singer Sargent, one of the greatest portrait painters of all time, was born in Europe to an American family. His monumnetal cycle of murals for the Boston Public Library, titled *The Triumph of Religion*, were the subject of controversy from the moment they were made public, but his depictions of the Hebrew prophets on the north wall are among the most sensitive and intriguing elements of the work. The prophet Isaiah is depicted in a blue-black robe, raising his hands. What was Sargent trying to convey with Isaiah's pose, costume, gesture, and expression?

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WEEK 6:

EZEKIEL IN THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

SCRIPTURE *Ezekiel 37:1–14*

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. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I 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.”

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, 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. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I 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.” ♦

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

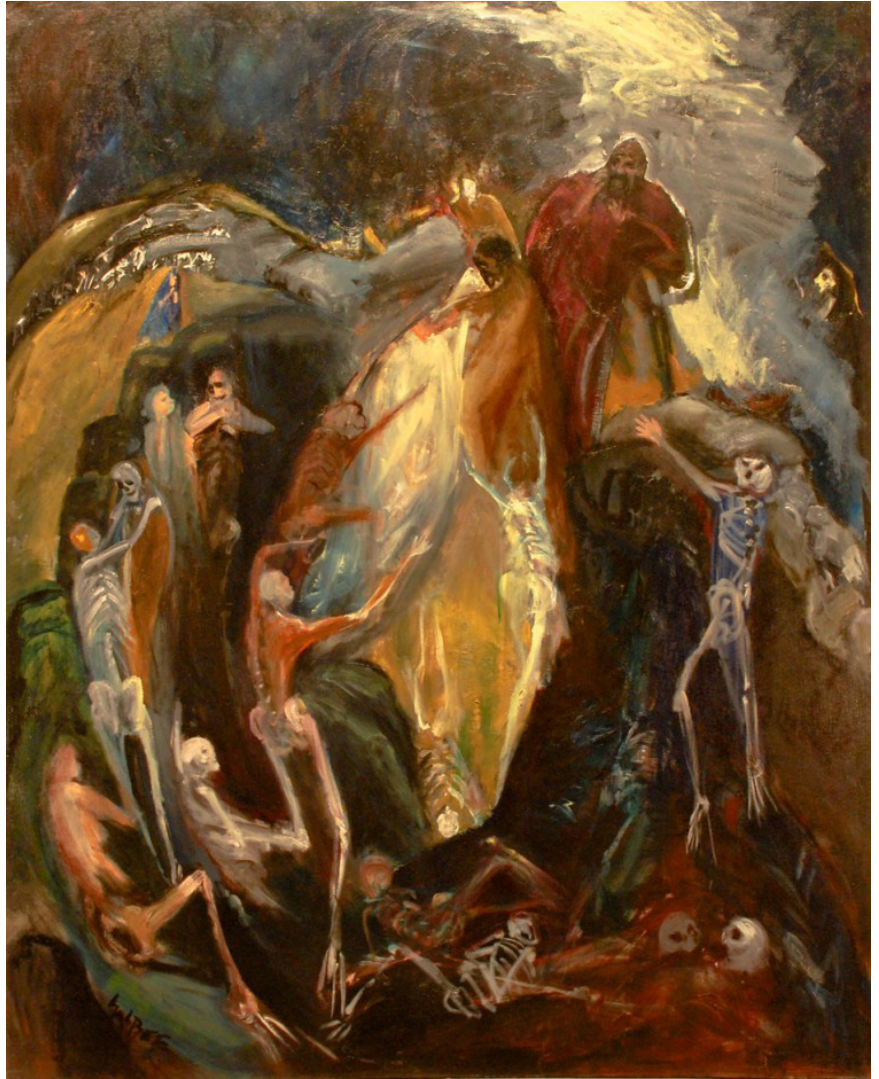
1. How do you imagine this scene? What colors, sounds, smells are there?
2. How do you think Ezekiel felt to be set down in the valley filled with dry bones? Do you think he knew how to “prophecy to the bones” before God gave him the words?
3. Why are the prophecies to the bones and the breath separate? Why is the breath set apart?

GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. What image or phrase in this story is about you?
 2. Have you ever experienced a valley filled with dry bones? What prophecy did you need to hear?
 3. What does this story say about God? Have you experienced this God in your own life?
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CLOSING DISCUSSION

This is the end of six weeks of study and reflection together. Take time to pray together about next steps, both as individuals and as a group.



Ezekiel
Richard McBee
(b. 1947)
Painting, 1979

Richard McBee is a Jewish painter and author, and has devoted himself to subjects from the Torah and Jewish history for over forty years. This is one of eight different treatments McBee made of Ezekiel. What is McBee depicting in this painting? How do the colors affect your perception of those events? What emotions do you see on the faces of the figures? Some Jewish scholars use this passage in Ezekiel to argue for Resurrection, others that God was giving an exiled people hope of a return home.

NOTES



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