

A high-speed photograph of a water splash against a sunset background. The water is captured in mid-air, creating a dynamic, crystalline shape. The background is a gradient of warm orange and yellow at the top, transitioning to a cooler blue and teal at the bottom. Numerous water droplets are suspended in the air, catching the light.

INFINTUM

BOOK 3

INFINITUM

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INTRO

THE CREATIVE WAY DOWN

WATCH INTRO VIDEO



“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied,
“tell me to come to you on the water.”
“Come,” he said.

– MATT 14:28-29

WHAT IF WE REALLY FOLLOWED JESUS?

This is a frightening idea, not least because Jesus’ own life ended with violence and apparent failure. Why would we wish to follow this example? Yet there is something about his life that continues to capture our hearts. Something integral. Something coherent. Something *good*. Something we want to join in and experience more deeply, even if it disrupts everything else in our lives.

And if we are honest, even if we have been followers of Jesus for a long time, we will likely admit that our experience of a connection to his life can feel shallow. Maybe we have tried some tools for discipleship, accountability, community and spiritual depth. There are some great tools out there, but even the best tools will not build something good if we don’t know what we are meant to be building. And if we are trying to build anything that is not from the Lord, we know it will be a waste of time.

This is precisely what is missing in most of our imaginations: a vision of what we were *created for*. A sense of what genuine spiritual depth looks like in the world. A glimpse of a life lived in union with Christ. And a trustworthy path that helps get us there.

This is part of the genius of the 12 Step program for Addictions Recovery. It begins with an honest assessment of an unmanageable life and then proceeds to offer a personal and communal journey that will, if taken seriously, help people move into freedom. Every step along the way is reinforced by the living experiences of people who have gone before. The 12 Steps are trustworthy, clear, and provide a

vision for how to live in a new way in the world. What's more, people are encouraged to carry on practicing and going through the steps multiple times, solidifying and deepening the wisdom gained each time. Recovery is understood to be a lifelong process of freedom and connection.

WHAT IF SUCH A PATH WERE AVAILABLE TO THOSE WANTING TO FOLLOW JESUS?

Jesus *has* given us a path, a way. In Matthew 5:1-12 Jesus gives a series of blessings – The Beatitudes – which describe what we were made for and offer a vision for how we can live holy, healthy, and deeply. The Beatitudes are not a program but rather an invitation to join Jesus, step by step, deeper and deeper, into his divinely human life. This is only made possible because Jesus first journeyed towards us in his incarnation, and because the Spirit is powerfully present in us every day. We walk this path with Jesus only by God's grace, power and love for us.

The *Creative Way Down*, based upon Jesus' Beatitudes, is a resource designed to help us on this path.

It is **CREATIVE** because Jesus is making us all into a new creation (**2 Cor 5:17**). This is about a new life, a whole life, a free life, not the half-lives many of us have been living. It is anything but boring.

We recognise that each person's deepening relationship with Jesus is unique, and each of our journeys may look different. Our individual journeys, however, should still be recognisable to other Jesus-followers, because we are after all travelling together with Jesus. There is a **WAY**, a discernible path that Jesus gives us to follow, together. (**Matt 16:24-26**) We don't just make things up and call it discipleship. We submit ourselves and our communities to the revealed and life-giving way of our Lord.

And this way is the way **DOWN**. It is the way of diving *downwards* with

Jesus towards surrender, generosity, and living for others. Ultimately, discipleship means participating in Jesus' self-giving, others-preferring love as we learn the depth of the Father's love for us. **(Phil 2:1-11)**

Ephesians 3:17-19 says: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." We want to know the width, length, height and depth of this love, not just in theory, but in our own personal and communal experiences. This is the *Creative Way Down*.

THE DETAILS

We imagine this twelve-week process as a deep-sea dive. The ocean is beautiful, boundless, untameable, powerful, and dangerous. It covers much of our planet and supports teeming life, yet we know so little about it. It is a mystery that draws at our imagination, representing adventure, wonder, fear, romance and newness, but we must be very careful and brave to dare its depths. It is as strange and alien an environment as we can find on earth. We can't live in it for more than minutes at a time without help. Any exploration, therefore, does not begin at the bottom of the ocean, but in the shallows.

The *Creative Way Down* likewise begins wherever we are and gradually moves towards the deeper waters, towards immersion in the mysterious, new, dangerous, wondrous and boundless life found in God.

It is divided into three progressive sections, based on the three Infinitum categories of *Surrender*, *Generosity*, and *Mission*. Under each of these headings are three weeks of material, each focusing on one of Jesus' beatitudes. Each three-week section ends with a fourth week designed for taking a deep breath and reflecting on what you have just been through, before you dive back in again. You can do all

three sections - and therefore all twelve weeks - back to back, or you can spread them out over a year or years if you like. And you can keep coming back to these sections as often as you like. We can foresee Infinitum Hubs going through this material, or at least part of it, as often as once a year.

Every week begins with an Infinitum group meeting featuring video teaching on how Jesus inhabits each Beatitude, and how he calls us to join him there. The teaching is accompanied by a half-hour podcast conversation on the teaching (which can be listened to in the group or on your own), and accountability questions, prayers, and a new spiritual practice for each week. The rest of the week includes daily teaching, suggested actions, and prayer and scripture guides for individuals. These are designed for morning, mid-day, and evening interaction every day. You can spend as long as you like in these three daily teaching and prayer times but should probably schedule no less than ten minutes for each. There are also suggested movies, books, and playlists to go alongside the weekly teaching.

At the end of each week there is a debrief in your Infinitum Hub before moving on to the next week's focus. Working through this path together is especially important. Talk to one another during the week, encourage one another, ask questions, and especially pray for each other. Why? Because the way of discipleship was never meant to be taken alone. We were created for spiritual friendship and kinship community, and this has been misplaced in much of our Church experience.

Discipleship is also not meant to be compartmentalised. It includes the whole of each person, body, soul, spirit. It includes the way we form community, the way we act politically and economically, the way we treat our neighbours, the way we love. Discipleship radically affects everything and makes it all new. The *Creative Way Down* should therefore include lots of good music, lots of eating well and eating together, lots of fun, lots of joy. It should also include care and love for your body. Sleep well. Walk. And try to get out in the water. Find a local pool, lake or ocean, and remind yourself what it feels like to be immersed in the water as you immerse yourself in discipleship and prayer.

Remember, Jesus is calling us to join him. He *wants* us to be with him where he is. It's time to enter the water.

PREPARATION

No one goes deep-sea diving without preparation. Discipleship also requires preparation. Listen to Richard Foster: "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but where, oh where, are those who think of changing themselves? People may genuinely want to be good, but seldom are they prepared to do what it takes to produce the inward life of goodness that can form the soul. Personal formation into the likeness of Christ is arduous and lifelong."

Before you begin the Creative Way Down, ensure that each member of the Infinitum Hub:

- Reads Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), ideally more than once. Familiarise yourself with this revolutionary teaching as best you can;
- Reads the Creative Way Down Introduction and watches the intro video;
- Writes an honest assessment of where their life is currently. This includes prayer, Church, work, relationship, emotional and mental well-being, physical health, happiness, etc...The more you are self-aware and honest with yourself, the more you will get out of this process;
- Compiles a list of things they know, or strongly suspect, are weighing them down: sins, distractions, bad thoughts, unhelpful worldviews, etc.;
- Begins a rhythm of praying, even if briefly, morning, noon and evening. These prayer times will be guided and progressively deepened and lengthened during the nine weeks;
- Arranges to connect regularly during the nine-week process with a spiritual director, pastor, or mature Christian friend to give feedback;

- Lets their immediate community know that they are engaging an intense season of discipleship, for the purposes of prayer and transparency;
- Commits to walking this out with their Infinitum Hub, which will mean being in regular contact beyond weekly meetings, and most especially in daily prayer for one another.

None of us will be fully discipled after twelve weeks, or after completing a course. Discipleship is a life-long process of surrendering and being drawn more deeply into the generous life and mission of Christ. At the end of the Creative Way Down we will give advice on how to carry on as individuals and as groups in the way of Jesus. But you should not rush through this guide. Go at your own pace. This is not about finishing a course but setting a course for life.

SECTION 3

MISSION

FROM DISENGAGEMENT TO ENGAGEMENT



Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

– **MATT 28:18-20**

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

– **ACTS 1:8**

WEEK 9

CONFRONTING THE CHAOS

**BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS,
FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED
CHILDREN OF GOD.**

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

MOVIE

- *Hacksaw Ridge*
- *Pay It Forward*
- *The Mission*
- *The Perfect Storm*

PLAYLIST

- *My Enemies Are Men Like Me* by Derek Webb
- *Love is the Way* by Johnny Cash
- *God of this City* by Chris Tomlin
- *One Day* by Matisyahu
- *Pie Jesu* by Future of Forestry
- *Build Your Kingdom Here* by Rend Collective
- *Where is the Love?* by The Black Eyed Peas
- *Find the Light* by David Ramirez
- *Peace on Earth* by U2
- *911 For Peace* by Anti-Flag
- *Fussin' and Fightin'* by Bob Marley and the Wailers
- *Pipes of Peace* by MUNA

BOOKS

- *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek* by Annie Dillard
- *The Peaceable Kingdom* by Stanley Hauerwas
- *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* by Nicholas Wolterstorff
- *Mighty Be Our Powers* by Leymah Gbowee
- *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James Cone

DAY 1

THE PEACEMAKERS

IN INFINITUM GROUPS

DECOMPRESSION

Share with one another how your week of rest and reflection went. What went well? What was challenging? What issues are rising to the surface for you?

Have you managed to incorporate Stillness, Lament, Awareness Examen, Almsgiving, *Lectio Divina* and *Visio Divina* into your daily routine? Remind each other how to practice those particular disciplines, checking in with the previous instructions if needed. But also remind each other that these practices, and the ones we introduce in the weeks to come, are designed to help turn our attention to the Gospel. They are not, in themselves, the Gospel. They are tools. The moment they cease directing our gaze towards Christ is the moment they become idols. They are very helpful, but we must not come to rely upon them. Our hope is in Christ alone.

CHECKLIST

Ask each other the following questions:

- What does mission mean to you? Does the word have a positive or negative connotation?
- Do you consider yourself part of the mission of God? Why or why not?
- What do you do best to bless the world around you?
- Is there anything that makes you feel inadequate in trying to bless the world?
- Does the brokenness of the world seem overwhelming to you? If yes, what do you do?
- Are you more prone to apathy or overworking?
- Do you feel you know the Gospel well enough to share it with others?
- Do you believe the Gospel can have a measurable impact in the lives of people and communities?
- Where have you seen the Gospel have an impact in people's lives?
- Where have you seen the Gospel have an impact in a community?
- How well do you handle opposition and set-backs?
- Have you ever encountered persecution for your faith? If yes, what did you do? If no, is it something you fear?

MEDIA

VIDEO

Jesus the Peacemaker

PODCAST

VISIO DIVINA: COMMUNITY EXEGESIS

Read **Romans 8:18-27**

The new practice for this week is called “Community Exegesis,” which is a deepening of our practice of *Visio Divina*.

Christian Direction in Montreal, Canada works with local communities to help discern what an effective, peacemaking, Jesus-centered mission would look like. They measure the success of the work of Churches and organisations according to twelve key indicators of a transformed city, which can be viewed here:

direction.ca/en/12-indicators-of-a-transformed-city/

The starting point of this work is “Community Exegesis”. Just like a good preacher or teacher will study the Bible in order to draw out its meaning (this is what *exegesis* means), a good Church will study their community in order to understand it and draw out its meaning. So this week we will offer suggestions on how you can contemplate your community, understand it better, and see how the Lord is at work within it.

The first step is identifying which community/neighbourhood you want to exegete this week. It could be your home neighbourhood, or the area where you work, or the community where your Church is located. Tell each other in your group the story of your neighbourhood, as far as you know it. What is its history? What is its potential? What are the threats it faces? What are the demographics? As you go through this, ask yourself: is there more that I want/need to know about my neighbourhood? Also: how can I better love and serve my neighbourhood? And finally: What does Jesus want for my neighbourhood?

Take a few minutes now to pray for your neighbourhoods, asking God for the ability to see his beauty and hope there this week. Begin with St Francis’ prayer, a prayer we will use each mid-day this week:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

(For an in-depth analysis of how to exegete your neighbourhood step by step, see the article, "Reading Your Neighbourhood: Towards an Authentic Encounter with the City" by Glenn Smith, which can be downloaded here: direction.ca/en/article-reading-your-community/)

STILLNESS

Read out **Matthew 5:1-12**

Spend sixteen minutes of silence and stillness together.
End by praying the Lord's Prayer.

DAY 2

JESUS, THE PEACEMAKER

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Romans 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21**

Ask anyone who makes a habit of snorkelling, surfing, scuba diving or sailing why they do it, and you will almost invariably get a response about beauty and peace. There is always a moment early on in a person's experience where they encountered a beauty that completely changed the way they viewed the world, a sublime peace that overcame the fear of being in the vast, deep ocean. It is the ongoing transformative power of this beauty and peace that keeps them returning to the sea.

If we want to be peacemakers in our world, we need to know the blessing of God's beauty and peace. This is what drives Paul on his missionary journeys, through all kinds of hardship, rejection and persecution. We could choose from a whole host of passages in his letters to describe the peace that he knew. The two above are hardly sufficient to sum up the Gospel, but they give a taste of the message Paul longed to share. He longed to share it because he had received it and it had changed him forever.

Paul knew Jesus as the ultimate peacemaker, the one who was able through his life and death and resurrection to call humanity back into

relationship with his Father. Humanity had wandered away, alienated and hostile in their minds towards God (**1 Corinthians 1:21**), trapped in the guilt and shame of their sin and rebellion. Paul knew this guilt, shame and alienation better than most, describing himself as the “chief of sinners” for his persecution of the early Church. Yet he also knew the forgiveness and reconciliation of God through Jesus. It is why he could say with such boldness: “if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

You wouldn’t listen to someone telling you about the benefits of scuba diving if they had never tried it. Nor can we be peacemakers if we don’t have an experience of God’s peace. The starting point in the posture of mission, then, is to receive the reconciliation of Jesus so that you can share the good news you *know* with others.

How well do you know this peace? How well do you know the peacemaker? What obstacles stand in your way towards this knowing? What would it take for you to truly say, along with Paul, “the new creation has come: The old is gone, the new is here!”

VISIO DIVINA: COMMUNITY EXEGESIS

In Glenn Smith’s seminal article, “Reading Your Community: Towards an Authentic Encounter with the City,” he talks about four essential ideas for the missional Church:

- First, we are affirming that God is missionary in His character – Being in action. Mission is first and foremost about God through Jesus is active in His creation by the work of His Spirit. Yes, God is love, God is just, God is holy... He is also missionary!
- When we use the word “missional,” we are reaffirming the Gospel – Jesus is LORD. A king has a kingdom; the Good News is about the LORDSHIP of Jesus over all His creation, in our lives, in His Church and over our cities!

- When we use the word “missional,” we are admitting that we live in a new period in our history. Some people call this “Post-Christendom” – a period where Christianity and the Church are no longer at the centre of our culture. We may grieve our loss, but we also need to think and act in fresh ways.
- When we use the word “missional”, we are affirming that the church by its very nature as a people of living the implications of the Gospel is sent into our neighbourhoods and cities.¹

Take a walk around your chosen neighbourhood today, and stop at a number of places to affirm these four truths: God is missionary; Jesus is LORD; this is no longer “Christendom”; and you have been sent by God to this place with the Gospel.

Pray these things out at a number of street corners, and ask God to show you what each of them might mean in and for your neighbourhood today.

ALMSGIVING

Christians Direction has done a lot of work helping the Church in Quebec, in Canada, and around the world understand how to “do mission” in our communities. Consider supporting their work in gratitude today: direction.ca/en/give/

PRAYER

Pray the Lord’s Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase “Your Kingdom Come, Your Will be Done.”

Pray **Psalm 62:5-8**

Pray St Francis' prayer:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Find a place to be still and silent for sixteen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you the peace and beauty God has given you.

Remember **Psalm 62:5-8** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for sixteen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the sixteen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 62:5-8** again.

LECTIO

Read **Hebrews 10:19-25**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Is there any area in your life where you are not experiencing God's peace? Where you still feel trapped by guilt and shame? Where you still believe you are God's enemy? Speak this out with honesty before the Lord, and ask for his peace, reconciliation and life to infuse these specific areas. If you need to make confession and ask forgiveness then do so, and trust that the Lord's grace and mercy is greater than humanity's brokenness and rebellion.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

SEEING WITH GOD'S EYES

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read the book of **Jonah**

Jonah is a well-known story thanks to the appearance of a great fish that swallows the prophet, always a sure-fire hit in Sunday School. As we dive deeper into the waters of faith and discipleship here, though, let's dive deeper into the purpose of this particular story.

Jonah does not try to avoid Ninevah because he was afraid of it. Rather, he fears that God is going to have compassion on these ancient enemies. He knows that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster (4:2-3). The message he was given is a call to repent, but Jonah does not want Ninevah to repent. He wants them to feel the wrath of God for the evils they have wreaked upon his people. So he resists being sent to his enemy as a peacemaker.

Going deeper into Jesus' posture of mission means becoming a peacemaker. This begins by learning to see as Jesus sees. Jesus knew there were people who rejected him, yet he looked at them with love. Jesus knew there were people who would betray him, yet he washed their feet. Jesus knew there were people who would kill him, yet he healed them and asked his Father to forgive them.

The world can seem a dark place full of enemies. There are many who, in our judgement, deserve to feel the wrath of God. Or, at the very least they do not deserve our time, energy and love. Ninevah was a clear enemy, a threatening Empire that was full of violence, injustice, idols and sin of every kind. Yet God says to Jonah, "I pity Ninevah, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 person who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle." (4:11) The first step in becoming a peacemaker is having our hearts shaped by God towards our neighbours, and especially towards our enemies. We want to learn to see them through the lens of God's compassion, grace, mercy, and steadfast love.

VISIO DIVINA: COMMUNITY EXEGESIS

Take a "Tour of Beauty" in your chosen neighbourhood today. Try to discover beauty in places and people who you have dismissed before. Talk to people as you walk and pray. Ask them what they love about their neighbourhood, and what good things they hope for the place. Ask God to show you something in the neighbourhood that you have never seen before. Ask for help to see the place and the people as He does. Begin writing down your reflections when you get home.

ALMSGIVING

Take something good with you on your "Tour of Beauty", some snacks, a book, maybe some money. Look for the opportunity to bless someone in your neighbourhood with the good thing that you have.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "On earth as it is in heaven". What might this mean in your neighbourhood?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 98**

Pray St Francis' prayer:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Find a place to be still and silent for sixteen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you how steadfast and gracious the Lord has been to you, and how He longs for the ends of the earth to see His salvation.

Remember **Psalm 98** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for sixteen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the sixteen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 98** again.

EVENING

LECTIO

Read **Luke 10:1-24**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Consider where there has been - or still is - hardness in your heart towards your neighbours and enemies. Try to name these specifically, so you can repent of this hardness and consider making amends if necessary. Ask God to soften your heart, to help you see how He has made peace with you, so that you can be a peacemaker for others.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

OBSERVING THE SPIRITUAL ATMOSPHERE

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Acts 17:16-34**

It is very easy to get overwhelmed in an unfamiliar or chaotic environment. This is one of the most dangerous things that can happen to a swimmer. Panic attacks are a real threat, particularly in open water, and can even happen to world-class athletes. The symptoms of a panic attack include: "feelings of shortness of breath, smothering, choking or hyperventilation; tightness or pain in the chest; a pounding or racing heartbeat; feelings of extreme fatigue; a dry mouth; trembling; lightheadedness, dizziness and mental confusion; a feeling of disassociation from one's body; a feeling of impending doom; and/or, a desire to flee the current situation."²

One of the ways to avoid such panic attacks is to become as familiar as possible with the surroundings. What appears chaotic might become more manageable and understandable with time and careful observation.

When Paul gets to Athens he is distressed by the number of idols all around. It seems totally chaotic to him, and he has been in a fair few chaotic scenarios during his missionary journeys. His first attempts to

preach about Jesus and the resurrection do not go very well. Athens is a place where all the philosophers just want to hear and discuss the latest ideas, and where temples and sacrifices crowd the landscape.

This is where we get to the famous story of Paul preaching on Mars Hill. He has spent some time in Athens, has observed what is going on and is able to accurately assess the spiritual atmosphere. He notes that the Athenians are very religious in every way. Mars Hill is only a stone's throw from the Acropolis, an area filled with temples dedicated to the goddess Athena and home of the famous Parthenon. It would have been impossible for Paul to have missed all this religious activity. That, plus the Athenians' reputation as philosophers, could have been very daunting. But Paul does not panic. In fact, his sermon makes use of everything he has seen: he quotes a Temple inscription to "the unknown God", a Cretan philosopher, and a Greek poet.

Paul is being a peacemaker here. He takes his surroundings seriously; looks for signposts towards truth within the culture; and uses references that his audience would understand and appreciate. Paul is unafraid to do this because he knows Jesus well and has taken time to know the people with whom he is communicating. And by his peacemaking, Paul helps some of the Athenians receive his message (even though some still sneered). He certainly doesn't soft peddle the Gospel at all. He just builds a bridge of communication based upon careful attention to the spiritual and social atmosphere. This peacemaking is a very practical application of love for God and love for others, and it is born out of Paul's sure knowledge that he is loved by God and so has nothing to fear.

The idea of mission can feel chaotic and overwhelming to many of us, and may even induce panic. But if we are grounded in God's love for us, and choose to express our love for Him and for others through careful attention, then this panic can be overcome.

ALMSGIVING

Read **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**

Paul is generous with his time and attention. He does everything he can to understand the culture and speak the language of the people he meets so as to better present the Gospel to them. What languages are spoken in your neighbourhood? Could you try to find that out today, and then try to learn to say "Hello, how are you?" in a few other languages? (Write down the words if necessary.)

VISIO DIVINA: COMMUNITY EXEGESIS

Walk around your neighbourhood again, this time noting down any evidence you see of people being "religious" or "spiritual", people longing for something more than their material lives. Try to get an accurate count of the number of centres of religious worship in your community, Christian or otherwise. If you can, talk to people of faith in your neighbourhood and ask about their hopes and fears for this place.

Also pay attention to centres of learning and of poetry, art and music. These are also places that express the hopes and fears of a community. We should become familiar with this language in order to lovingly communicate the beauty and truth of Jesus.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer?

Pray **Psalm 96**

Pray St Francis' prayer:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Find a place to be still and silent for sixteen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you a new song that God wants to put in your heart.

Remember **Psalm 96** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for sixteen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the sixteen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 96** again.

LECTIO

Read **1 John 4:18-21**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Step 10 of AA says, "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it." Is there any area of our life where we are still acting out of fear rather than love? Acknowledge the chaos that this represents and creates, and confess it to yourself, to God, and to one other person. Then ask for God's help to go forward boldly *with* love, knowing that you are loved.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

THE NEED FOR PEACEMAKING

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Acts 8:1-25**

“The Perfect Storm” is a movie about a number of forces - natural and human - that combine to create a terrifying situation at sea. The sea can be peaceful and calming. But the sea can also rage and kill.

It is vital for us to acknowledge that there are storms brewing all around us, both natural and human-made. The world is not at peace. This is clearly true in active conflict situations around the world where people are suffering unimaginable violence or displacement by the millions. But it is equally true in our own neighbourhoods, in places that appear peaceful on the surface but are filled with loneliness, quiet desperation, secret addiction, and alienation from God and from others.

Acts 8 tells the story of persecution, scattering, sorcery, wickedness and a call to repentance. The book of Acts - the whole Bible, truly - is likewise filled with stories of brokenness and the need for peace. The early Church was not naive. They knew their faith must be lived out and shared in a world of greed, hatred, and injustice. And very early on they learned that people would seek to use the power of the Spirit for their own advantage and profit.

We must not be naive. The world is in pain, our neighbourhoods are in pain. There is wickedness all around. There is a reason Jesus was a peacemaker and why he calls us - and blesses us - to be peacemakers. To be called "children of God" is to be welcomed into the Father's work and mission of peacemaking in a lost world.

Being a peacemaker means becoming aware of the lack of peace in a place, and being able to name it where it is found. It may also mean being bold enough to engage with those who are acting wickedly and to call them to repentance, particularly those who claim to be acting in the the name of God.

VISIO DIVINA: COMMUNITY EXEGESIS

Take another trip around your neighbourhood, but this time look and listen for any lack of peace. But don't just make this assessment on your own. Talk to as many people as you can. Glenn Smith says it is essential for us to know "the dreams, aspirations, hopes and expectation of specific people groups within the community..." but also to understand "the obstacles that various groups identify to attain these aspirations. In some communities, such things as personal illness, loneliness, physical hardships, insecurity in terms of housing, property rights and the threat of losing one's dwelling are very real. You are looking for indications of receptivity and 'keys' which may unlock doors to homes and hearts."

So, what do people identify as obstacles to goodness and success? What do they see as threats to their safety and livelihood, or to the good functioning of the neighbourhood? Do people have hope, or are they lost in despair?

(All of these community exegesis ideas can obviously take more than a day to complete. Take these suggestions as a starting point for missional engagement, and as ideas for further exegesis of your neighbourhood).

ALMSGIVING

(This will take a little courage, but it is worth it. And it will work best if you are not alone but in a group.) Go into a local business and ask the owner if there is one way you and your group can bless his/her business, one way you can help them achieve their goals. They may just say "buy something" and that is fine, but see if there is some way you can go further. It helps if the business owner is able to identify what her or his goals are. Make it plain that you are not looking for anything in return, you just want to bless a local business. (This is a great ongoing practice for the Church in a community.)

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread."

Pray **Psalm 14**

Pray St Francis' prayer:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Find a place to be still and silent for sixteen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you the need for peace in your life and in the community around you.

Remember **Psalm 14** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for sixteen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the sixteen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 14** again.

LECTIO

Read **Jeremiah 29:1-7**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Where do you see the need for peacemaking in your neighbourhood? Where is there such brokenness, idolatry, and sin that it feels like there is no hope? Lament and weep, but do not despair. Bring your cry for your neighbourhood before the LORD, and trust that He hears.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

THE COST OF PEACEMAKING

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Acts 16:16-40**

In 2018, 116,647 migrants (by official counts) crossed into Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. At least 2,275 are known to have died on that crossing, though there are surely many, many more whose deaths have gone unrecorded. The President of the European Council has told migrants, in no uncertain terms, that they are not welcome to make that crossing to Europe.

The situation has led to a serious dilemma for ships in the Mediterranean as they encounter unseaworthy boats filled to overflowing with migrants and in desperate need of rescue. The law of the sea is unequivocal in the duty to rescue those in danger.³ Yet captains are finding themselves in situations where the people they rescue are refused entry into European ports (the same scenario is true of Australian ports).

Italian lawmakers are even imposing fines of up to one million Euros on vessels or organisations that carry out search and rescue operations for migrants along the coast. This at a time when many European countries have suspended their own official search and rescue operations. The UN is extremely concerned that this will deter most sea rescue efforts and lead to even further drowning deaths in the Mediterranean.⁴ (In the United

States a similar effort has been made to prevent people leaving stores of food and water in the desert near the Arizona-Mexico border.)⁵

There is a cost to peacemaking, and there always has been. Peacemaking threatens powers that profit from inequality, greed and sin. When Paul and Silas cast a demon out of the slave girl in Philippi, her owners did not rejoice at her liberation. Instead, realising that their prophesying meal-ticket was now gone, they brought the two missionaries before the authorities to be beaten and jailed.

We will be looking at the strange blessing of persecution next week, but for now it is important for us to acknowledge that peacemaking is not simple, not idealistic, and not without cost. There are powerful people and systems that are invested in the lack of peace. It therefore requires great faith, courage and wisdom to be a peacemaker in the footsteps of Jesus. Have you considered the cost of being a peacemaker? Is it worth it?

ALMSGIVING

Consider making a donation to the International Association for Refugees, a Christian group that works to help people survive and recover from forced displacement, particularly through mobilising the Church to make connections and offer hospitality to migrants and refugees around the world. iafr.ca/donate

VISIO DIVINA: COMMUNITY EXEGESIS

Look through the list of Indicators of a Transformed City again, found here: direction.ca/en/12-indicators-of-a-transformed-city/

As you journey around your neighbourhood again today, ask yourself the questions:

What would peacemaking really require in this neighbourhood? What would it cost? How could the Lost – spiritually, emotionally, financially, socially – truly be reached? And, importantly, who might it upset? What are the centres of power here that would not like to see reconciliation, evangelism and service, justice and forgiveness, or the stewardship of creation happen? If you aren't sure, again ask people in the neighbourhood what they think.

Bring your thoughts back to your Infinitum group and to your Church for prayer, discernment, and action.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Deliver us from evil."

Pray **Psalm 116**

Pray St Francis' prayer:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Find a place to be still and silent for sixteen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you the cost of peacemaking in your neighbourhood.

Remember **Psalm 116** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for sixteen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the sixteen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 116** again.

LECTIO

Read **Romans 12:1-2**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Bring your fears, uncertainty, and even anger at the world's injustice before the Lord in lament tonight. Talk to Him in prayer about the unfairness of migrants drowning at sea, or of people living on the streets, or of women who were abused and children who were abandoned.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

THE GOAL OF PEACEMAKING

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Isaiah 35; Matthew 11:1-6**

Hopefully we have all experienced some moments in our lives where everything felt right and good. Surfers call it being in “The Zone”. You can watch a short movie trailer about The Zone here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHz0vTFKAQo&feature=emb_logo

These moments may not last long, and they may be surrounded by chaos on both sides, but they give us a glimpse into the possibility of peace and the goal of peacemaking. Remember, in spite of the reality of brokenness and the cost of peacemaking, Jesus still calls peacemakers blessed.

C.S. Lewis described this as *Joy*, which he defined as “an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again.”⁶ His understanding of this moment of peace was anticipatory, but also real in the present. It was something we could experience here and now, but which pointed towards something even more real and satisfying to come later.

Isaiah 35 is all about anticipation. The people of Israel are in exile, but they are offered the promise of a return to their land, a return to safety, blessing, prosperity, health, holiness and wholeness. This was the goal of peacemaking for them, and they didn't yet have it in their hands. Yet they could imagine it. When John the Baptist sent his followers to question Jesus, he wanted to know if this promise of peace was finally coming true. Jesus responded by pointing to the signs of healing and wholeness all around him. Yes, the promise is coming true, the Messiah is here. But there is still anticipation. There is still more to come. The kingdom is here, but its fullness is still on the horizon.

As we work for peace, pray for the lost, seek justice, and preach the good news of the Gospel, we have to hold the full promise of Joy in our hearts and minds. We have to remember the goal of peacemaking. And we can reasonably expect to catch glimpses of the kingdom here and now, real transformation in our communities, real healing of the sick, real hope for those in despair, real salvation. But we also know that every good thing we see here and now is an anticipation of the fullness of the kingdom that is to come.

So we continue to work and pray for peace and to preach the Gospel, rejoicing in the moments of Joy we see in this world and hoping for the fullness of Joy when the kingdom comes in all its glory.

VISIO DIVINA: COMMUNITY EXEGESIS

Read one more time through the Indicators of a Transformed City, found here: direction.ca/en/12-indicators-of-a-transformed-city/

Think of your community. What would each of these indicators look like where you live and/or work? What would be the signs that real transformation is actually happening? What can you imagine for your neighbourhood?

If you can, take yet another trip around your neighbourhood and ask that question to people you meet. Write down their answers and your answers. And begin to pray with hope for the divine transformation and Joy.

ALMSGIVING

Write up your reflections of all the community exegiting you have done this week, make some copies, and hand them out to anyone you have spoken with in your neighbourhood. Ask them to consider creating their own reflection so you can compare notes. The goal is to foster hope and imagination for your community and to develop relationships with people of peace.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever, amen."

Pray **Psalm 24**

Pray St Francis' prayer:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Find a place to be still and silent for sixteen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you some hope for your life and your community.

Remember **Psalm 24** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for sixteen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the sixteen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 24** again.

LECTIO

Read **Revelation 22**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Think of the difference between the current state of the world and the Scriptural promise of redemption. Lament how far apart these realities are, yet pray with hope that God will bring about his kingdom as he promises.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

WEEK TEN

FEELING THE PRESSURE

**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR
RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM
OF HEAVEN. BLESSED ARE YOU WHEN OTHERS REVILE
YOU AND PERSECUTE YOU AND UTTER ALL KINDS
OF EVIL AGAINST YOU FALSELY ON MY ACCOUNT.
REJOICE AND BE GLAD, FOR YOUR REWARD IS
GREAT IN HEAVEN, FOR SO THEY PERSECUTED
THE PROPHETS WHO WERE BEFORE YOU.**

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

MOVIES

- *Silence*
- *Quo Vadis*
- *Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace*
- *The End of the Spear*
- *Romero*
- *Crimson Tide*
- *The Abyss*
- *The Shape of Water* (warning: very graphic)

PLAYLIST

- *I Shall Not Be Moved* by Mississippi John Hurt
- *A Mighty Fortress* by The Singing Company
- *How Long* by Stuart Townend
- *Even Unto Death* by Audrey Assad
- *Pledge My Head to Heaven for the Gospel* by Keith Green
- *Picture of Jesus* by Ben Harper and Ladysmith Black Mambazo
- *Death in the Grave* by John Mark McMillan
- *Christ Has No Body Now But Yours* by Josh Garrels and The Porter's Gate Project
- *Come On* by Brooke Poindexter

BOOKS

- *Pursuing God's Will Together* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *A New Christian Manifesto and The Beautiful Gate* by Bob Ekblad
- *Subversive Jesus* by Craig Greenfield
- *Seeking Allah Finding Jesus* by Nabeel Qureshi
- *A War of Loves* by David Bennett
- *The Violence of Love* by Oscar Romero

DAY 1

THE PERSECUTED

IN INFINITUM GROUPS

DECOMPRESSION

Share with one another how your week went. What questions, actions, or topics were challenging? Did you encounter anything new about yourself? Did you encounter God in any new or unexpected ways? Share some of your answers to the questions from the week and pray for one another. Walk through your practices of Almsgiving, *Lectio Divina*, Awareness Examen, Community Exegesis, Stillness and Lament again, talking about how these are affecting you.

MEDIA

VIDEO

Jesus the Persecuted

PODCAST

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Read **Romans 12:1-3**

And read out Step 11 of AA and NA: "Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out."

How can we know God's will? We can study the Scriptures diligently and have the community of Christians to help guide our way.

There are also questions we can ask that help us discern the work and will of the Spirit *within us*. This week we introduce the practice of Consolation and Desolation. The practice of paying close attention to consolation and desolation is a major aspect of spiritual discernment and a tool for persevering through difficulties and persecution.

This is the major question we can learn to ask: Are we walking towards God, or away from God? One way leads to consolation. The other, to desolation. Checking whether we are experiencing consolation or desolation can help us determine if we are on the right road. This practice is about paying careful, prayerful attention to how God is speaking to our souls and to how we are responding to Him.

Margaret Silf, in her book *The Inner Compass*, identifies some key markers of desolation and consolation:

DESOLATION

- turns us in on ourselves
- drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings
- cuts us off from community
- makes us want to give up on things that used to be important to us
- takes over our whole consciousness and crowds out our distant vision

- covers up all our landmarks
- drains us of energy

CONSOLATION

- directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves
- lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people
- bonds us more closely to our human community
- generates new inspiration and ideas
- restores balance and refreshes our inner vision
- shows us where God is active in our lives and where he is leading us
- releases new energy in us⁷

Understanding consolation and desolation is vital for the posture of mission, and especially for enduring persecution. It places spiritual discernment at the centre of our decisions, as opposed to emotions, strategies, or conventions. These things are not bad, but they all must be subject to Jesus' Lordship. Facing opposition and undergoing suffering for the sake of righteousness does not feel good, does not appear to be good strategy, and is definitely unconventional. But that does not mean we are walking in the wrong direction. We will know the blessing of persecution for righteousness' sake when we know that we are joining the life and mission of Jesus.

Persecution for its own sake is not a good thing, and just because we experience opposition does not in itself mean we are drawing closer to Jesus. This is why it is so important to learn to hear from the Lord and to draw closer to him in every decision. Discerning our consolations and desolations is one of many tools the Lord has given us to help direct our path. We will walk through some practical steps towards spiritual discernment this week.

Ask each other: how have you made big decisions in your life? How you have sought to hear from God? How have you known that God was

speaking? Have you ever experienced major opposition or persecution that made you question whether or not you were going in the right direction? What did you do? Did it prevent you from going ahead? Do you ever feel paralysed by uncertainty, or the fear of hardship or opposition?

This week, as you explore persecution, don't be surprised if you encounter some. Pray for protection therefore for one another, and commit to supporting one another through any difficulties.

Pray this prayer together, from Release International, which we will use each day this week:

*Sovereign God,
we worship You
and we acknowledge that You know all of those
who suffer in Your name.*

*We remember those who are imprisoned for their faith
and ask that they would join with the Apostle Paul
to see that even though they remain captive,
their chains have furthered the gospel,
not frustrated it.*

*May they inspire and embolden their fellow believers
to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

*God of all comfort,
for those who are tortured both in body and mind,
give them the grace to endure
and to see their suffering as part of following in Christ's footsteps.*

*Merciful God,
for those asked to pay the ultimate price;
who are martyred because of their love for You,
may they truly know Christ
and the power of His resurrection
and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings,
becoming like Him in His death.*

*Father God,
for those who are widowed and orphaned
may they know the comfort that comes from Your promised presence
even when they walk through the valley.*

*May they be strengthened by Your Spirit,
enabling them to rejoice with the psalmist
as they proclaim that the Lord will not abandon them in death.*

*Heavenly Father,
we ask that You would make us ever mindful of our brothers and
sisters around the world
who need us to stand with them
as they suffer in Your name.*

*Teach us what it means
to overcome by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of our testimony;
we pray that we would not love our lives so much as to shrink from
death.*

O Lord, hear our prayer.⁸

STILLNESS

Read out **Matthew 5:1-12**

Spend seventeen minutes of silence and stillness together. End by praying the Lord's Prayer.

MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING?

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Hebrews 2:10-18**

Everyone knows that enough pressure over time turns coal into diamonds. Everyone knows that irritating sand causes oysters to form into pearls. When we use those examples we have the beauty of the diamond and the pearl in mind, so it is easy to downplay the pain of the pressure, the frustration of the sand. But the pressures and frustrations are real.

The deeper you go into the ocean the greater the pressure. At sea-level every inch of our skin is subject to 14.6 pounds of pressure. Another 14.6 pounds per square in of pressure is added every 10 meters you go down. If you were to dive down 1000 meters you would experience 100 times the amount of pressure at sea-level. Most divers won't go deeper than about 40 meters in scuba gear. The world record for deepest human dive is 305 meters. We just can't survive the deeper pressures without help.⁹

The deeper we go into Jesus, the more extreme the pressures and frustrations become. This becomes frighteningly clear as we progress through the beatitudes. We begin with poverty of spirit, mourning and meekness, which are difficult enough. But now, at the end, Jesus

announces his blessing over those who suffer persecution for his sake and for the sake of righteousness. As we join Jesus in his life and mission we will also be blessed - yes, blessed - to join him in his suffering.

Yet we have to acknowledge that we could never get there on our own. The pressure is too great. Jesus accomplished something on our behalf that we could never have hoped to accomplish.

The passage from Hebrews talks about the "pioneer of salvation" - Jesus - being made perfect through suffering. That is a weird thought. How can Jesus be perfected? Perfection here does not mean *moral* perfection, but perfection or completion of purpose. Jesus suffered in the pursuit and completion of his mission. He suffered by being made human in every way, a perfect incarnation, subject to all the tests and temptations of humanity, so that he could make a full atonement for his people. Jesus knew suffering so that he could help those who were suffering. The result of Jesus' suffering is that we are declared his brothers and sisters; the deathly power of the devil is broken; and we are freed from the fearful slavery that held us captive.

Hallelujah!

As we go deeper and deeper into the pressure and frustration of persecution, we are not diving alone. Jesus surrounds us; he is the shield about us; he is the breath in our lungs. This doesn't mean we won't face incredible hardship and pressure. It is promised that we will. But it does mean that the pressure isn't purposeless, and that death and the devil will not win. Jesus has gone through the suffering first, and perfectly, so that we can join him in his righteous mission.

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

There are some norms that can help guide our discernment and decision-making. One of them is this: Does the decision/action lead to the greater glory of God, even if it leads us to the Cross?

Read **John 12:20-33**

The glory of God is the driving motivation of Jesus' life. It would be good to explore your own life and ministry - ideally with the others in your Infinitum group - to determine if this is your driving motivation. Why do you do what you do? Is God's glory the purpose of your work? (Your work does **not** need to be "Church-work" for this to be the case!) Your home life? Your relationships? Your hobbies?

Ask the Lord to show you your motivations. Do you find consolation or desolation in this revelation?

One particular temptation is to be *nice*, but in so doing to be less-than-transparent about your faith in Jesus. So, be up front today with someone about Jesus. You don't have to be obnoxious or aggressive; just choose to be honest about who Jesus is to you. Pray about how and where you should do this, and wait for the inner prompting in your spirit. Pray that God would be glorified as you speak his name.

ALMSGIVING

Bring some change or snacks to give away today. As you give it to someone let them know that you see them and that they matter, and that God sees them and they matter to Him as well.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Lead us not into temptation."

Pray **Psalm 69:1-15**

Pray out this prayer for the persecuted Church:

*Sovereign God,
we worship You
and we acknowledge that You know all of those
who suffer in Your name.*

*We remember those who are imprisoned for their faith
and ask that they would join with the Apostle Paul
to see that even though they remain captive,
their chains have furthered the gospel,
not frustrated it.*

*May they inspire and embolden their fellow believers
to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

*God of all comfort,
for those who are tortured both in body and mind,
give them the grace to endure
and to see their suffering as part of following in Christ's footsteps.*

*Merciful God,
for those asked to pay the ultimate price;
who are martyred because of their love for You,
may they truly know Christ
and the power of His resurrection
and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings,
becoming like Him in His death.*

*Father God,
for those who are widowed and orphaned
may they know the comfort that comes from Your promised presence
even when they walk through the valley.*

*May they be strengthened by Your Spirit,
enabling them to rejoice with the psalmist
as they proclaim that the Lord will not abandon them in death.*

*Heavenly Father,
we ask that You would make us ever mindful of our brothers and
sisters around the world
who need us to stand with them
as they suffer in Your name.*

*Teach us what it means
to overcome by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of our testimony;
we pray that we would not love our lives so much as to shrink from
death.
O Lord, hear our prayer*

Find a place to be still and silent for seventeen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you His face.

Remember **Psalm 69** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for seventeen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the seventeen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 69:1-2**.

LECTIO

Read **Matthew 26:36-46**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Meditate on the cross tonight. The cross, that great victory of Jesus, is also a lamentable, terrible thing. It is the worst human response to beauty and truth. It is ugly, vicious, and violent, a symbol for all the brutalizing humans have done and continue to do to one another in the name of power. It is a picture of humanity's attempt to de-humanize the other. And Jesus suffers there for us. Consider the love and the courage of Jesus as he willingly endures the cross.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Hebrews 12:1-13**

"I was the last of my immediate family to become a certified SCUBA diver and I have no one but myself to blame for that. I was terrified, knowing that making a mistake while diving could have grave consequences, and I didn't trust myself. I firmly believed that if something happened on a dive that caused me to panic, I would shoot to the surface and my lungs would explode."¹⁰

This quote is taken from an article entitled "The Joy of Diving". It is hardly a ringing endorsement for the uninitiated. The article goes on to say that the author's understanding of the danger involved was "simplistic", but it does not say that these fears were entirely unfounded. There is, for instance, something called "High-Pressure Nervous Syndrome" that can affect divers who descend below 150 meters, and can lead to tremors, visual disturbance, EEG changes, nausea, and more.¹¹ Descending into the pressures of the deep is, in truth, a dangerous activity. But it is also a joyful one. And the joys to be had are considered good enough to risk the pressure and the danger.

It is hard to see where the joy exists for someone undergoing crucifixion. Yet the author of Hebrews asks us to look closely at Jesus,

to “fix our eyes” on him, to consider him carefully, and to witness his joyful endurance of the pain and shame of the cross.

This must be related to Jesus’ announcement of blessing over those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. It isn’t the joy of crucifixion or persecution itself that Jesus experiences. Persecution and suffering are not good or beautiful in and of themselves. Let us be clear on this point. Persecution is not something for us to pursue for its own sake. That kind of thinking can lead us to self-centred dreams of heroic martyrdom, or visions of self-hatred and self-destruction.

Persecution is only a blessed thing when it is experienced for righteousness’ sake. Jesus doesn’t love the cross for the sake of the cross. He doesn’t agree with the Romans or the religious leaders that he deserves to be destroyed. It is the *purpose* for which he suffers that gives Jesus joy. It is giving glory to his Father and bringing freedom to his beloved people that causes Jesus to scorn shame and willingly endure the agony of the cross. The pressure, pain and fear are all real, but the joy is greater. We are not *worthy* of this sacrifice - how could we be? - and yet Jesus considered us *worth* it. Our salvation is his joy.

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

What is the joy that is set before you? What do you consider to be worth the pressure, the struggle, even the pain of opposition and persecution? When you contemplate this question, what leads your soul to consolation, and what leads it to desolation? What part of God’s mission in the world gives your soul such joy that you would be willing to persevere through suffering for it?

Ask your infinitum partners this question today as well. What is the joy set before them, the joy that is sufficient for them to endure suffering? How do they see God drawing them towards this joy, even if they must pass through persecution to get there? Try to be as specific as you can.

ALMSGIVING

Have a look at the Voice of the Martyrs website, and see if there is any project or person that you are moved to support in some way.

www.vomcanada.com/

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Hallowed be Your name." It was for the glory of his Father's name that Jesus endured the cross. What does it mean for God's name to be hallowed, to be glorified, in your life today?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 141**

Pray out this prayer for the persecuted Church:

*Sovereign God,
we worship You
and we acknowledge that You know all of those
who suffer in Your name.*

*We remember those who are imprisoned for their faith
and ask that they would join with the Apostle Paul
to see that even though they remain captive,
their chains have furthered the gospel,
not frustrated it.*

*May they inspire and embolden their fellow believers
to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

*God of all comfort,
for those who are tortured both in body and mind,
give them the grace to endure
and to see their suffering as part of following in Christ's footsteps.*

*Merciful God,
for those asked to pay the ultimate price;
who are martyred because of their love for You,
may they truly know Christ
and the power of His resurrection
and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings,
becoming like Him in His death.*

*Father God,
for those who are widowed and orphaned
may they know the comfort that comes from Your promised presence
even when they walk through the valley.*

*May they be strengthened by Your Spirit,
enabling them to rejoice with the psalmist
as they proclaim that the Lord will not abandon them in death.*

*Heavenly Father,
we ask that You would make us ever mindful of our brothers and
sisters around the world
who need us to stand with them
as they suffer in Your name.*

*Teach us what it means
to overcome by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of our testimony;
we pray that we would not love our lives so much as to shrink from
death.*

O Lord, hear our prayer

Find a place to be still and silent for seventeen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you how to fix your eyes upon Jesus.

Remember **Psalm 141** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for seventeen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the seventeen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 141** again.

End by reading out Bud Osborne's poem, *See My Face*

*I walk to a 24-hour corner store
east hastings and gore
12:30 in the morning
the air is raw
a hooker inside the place says
"can you buy me a cigarette?"*

*I do
and she tries to give me some change
I say "you asked me to buy it for you
it's yours"*

*"thanks" she says and adds
"I got attacked tonight
see my face"*

*she pushes back long brown hair strands of hair
"two women jumped me"*

*I look at
the wounds
the blood
across her cheek and nose and ear and neck*

*"my old man was there" she says
"and ran off and left me
he ran off with my rent money
now I'm homeless*

thanks for the cigarette”

and she walks away

*the hebrews said you could not look
on the face of god
and live*

*but if you could
I think god's face
would look a lot
like hers¹²*

LECTIO

Read **Matthew 16:24-26**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Do you think of the command to deny yourself and pick up your cross as a duty? As a burden? Or as a joy? Be honest with yourself and with God, confessing and lamenting if need be. Then read **Matthew 11:25-30**. In the midst of opposition, Jesus stops to thank his Father and to tell his followers that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. This is because the yoke Jesus is talking about is the shared life with his Father. This is the joy that makes all the pressure, all the suffering, worthwhile.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

SHARING JESUS' SUFFERING

MORNING

REFLECTION

Listen to the song "Come On" by Brooke Poindexter:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9OgsdQvA_8

Read **1 Peter 4:12-19**

One of the first stories we looked at in The Creative Way Down was Jesus inviting Peter to get out of the boat and join him on the water. Peter tried. Didn't go so well after the first few steps. Then Jesus rescued him.

Jesus continues to invite his followers to join him in the deep waters. Maybe Peter was thinking about his water-walking when he wrote the letter above, urging his fellow-believers to walk through the trials of life with perseverance and faith.

The revolutionary idea that Peter puts out here, and which Paul writes about in his letters as well, is the notion that we can share or participate in the sufferings of Jesus. Peter experienced this directly in his encounters with the Sanhedrin (told especially in **Acts 4-5**).

Acts 5:40-41 says, "They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because

they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

That is an incredible reaction to being tortured. The apostles must have genuinely believed - and felt - that it was blessed to be persecuted for the sake of Jesus. They didn't go out looking for persecution, but nor did they try to save themselves from it by agreeing to be quiet about Jesus. They told the truth, refused to compromise with power, were jailed and beaten for it, and went home rejoicing because they had shared in Christ's suffering.

They weren't just persecuted for "doing good". Peter brings up the fact that they are in jail for being kind to a lame man who can now walk (**Acts 4:9**), but the miracle isn't really the issue at stake. It is Peter and John's insistence that this miracle happened through the power of Jesus of Nazareth who had been killed but was raised to life and who is the only source of miraculous healing and salvation.

The Sanhedrin did not like that.

The powers of our world still do not like that.

The "powers of our world" include governments, but are not restricted to the political realm. Powers can also be cultural, economic, media, technical, social, religious. There is a new advertisement in London, England that says "Technology Will Save Us." No, it won't. No human system or worldly power will. But questioning these powers and refusing to believe their grandiose claims will often result in a backlash.

There are lots of reasons people are persecuted in this world, and they are all unjust and wrong. And there are many good things that we can and should be doing in the world, many of which will cause opposition and persecution. But Peter had in mind more than just "doing good" here. The insistence on the Name of Jesus was a defiance of power. It was the defiance of human power and systems that claimed to be the ultimate power and authority. It was also a defiance of the power of death as the final reality. Peter and John make the claim that Jesus is the only righteous authority, the right ruler over all earthly power and even over death itself. And they demonstrate that they would gladly spend their lives in allegiance to the Name of Jesus.

The blessing that Jesus calls us into is to join him in his life and work, to live for his Name. This means joining Jesus in his defiance of the “powers and principalities” of this world, which also means joining him in his persecution and his death. It is aligning ourselves entirely with his purposes and enduring the same opposition that he endured. This is what it means to be called children of God. Come on!

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Read **1 Peter 3:13-18**.

There are many powers out there which want to claim your allegiance. Can you name some of them? (Think about everything from nations, to political parties and systems, to brand names, to sports teams...) Why do they want your allegiance? How do they try to gain your allegiance?

When you think of where your allegiances lie, which lead you to hope and freedom? Which lead you to fear and enslavement?

Why does this matter for the posture of mission? How could the wrong allegiances disrupt your engagement in the mission of God?

ALMSGIVING

Peter and John famously had no silver or gold to give to the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. So they gave him what they had, which was the power of the Holy Spirit within them and the miracle of healing and new life.

What is it that you really have to give someone today? You may have silver or gold (or paper cash) to give away, and that can be good. But is God calling you to give out of a deeper place today? What could you really give to someone in desperate need of healing and wholeness?

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 82**

Pray out this prayer for the persecuted Church:

*Sovereign God,
we worship You
and we acknowledge that You know all of those
who suffer in Your name.*

*We remember those who are imprisoned for their faith
and ask that they would join with the Apostle Paul
to see that even though they remain captive,
their chains have furthered the gospel,
not frustrated it.*

*May they inspire and embolden their fellow believers
to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

*God of all comfort,
for those who are tortured both in body and mind,
give them the grace to endure
and to see their suffering as part of following in Christ's footsteps.*

*Merciful God,
for those asked to pay the ultimate price;
who are martyred because of their love for You,*

*may they truly know Christ
and the power of His resurrection
and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings,
becoming like Him in His death.*

*Father God,
for those who are widowed and orphaned
may they know the comfort that comes from Your promised presence
even when they walk through the valley.*

*May they be strengthened by Your Spirit,
enabling them to rejoice with the psalmist
as they proclaim that the Lord will not abandon them in death.*

*Heavenly Father,
we ask that You would make us ever mindful of our brothers and
sisters around the world
who need us to stand with them
as they suffer in Your name.*

*Teach us what it means
to overcome by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of our testimony;
we pray that we would not love our lives so much as to shrink from
death.*

O Lord, hear our prayer

Find a place to be still and silent for seventeen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you what it looks like to reject worldly power and align yourself with the name of Jesus.

Remember **Psalm 82** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for seventeen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the seventeen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 82** again.

LECTIO

Read **John 15:18-25**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Lament the hatred that is in the world. Lament the hatred that you have experienced, the hatred that the Church experiences, the hatred that the poor experience, and the hatred that Jesus experienced and still experiences. We were not created to hate. Lament that so many people are caught up in this deep brokenness and sin.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

SHARING IN EACH OTHERS' SUFFERING

MORNING

REFLECTION

Listen to "Christ Has No Body Now But Yours," featuring Josh Garrels:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7ymxW3rndk

Read **1 Cor 12:12-27**

There is an emergency practice scuba divers can learn called "Sharing Air". If one person is dangerously low on oxygen their partner will share their breathing apparatus - either their primary oxygen or their emergency back up - and alternate breathing until both can get to the surface safely. It is not a situation that is meant to happen very often, but when it does this "buddy-breathing" technique is a life-saver.¹³

We were not meant to descend into the pressures of persecution for righteousness' sake all alone. It is, in fact, dangerous to do so. It is why Peter advises the Church to "be sober-minded and alert. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in your faith and in the knowledge that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering." (**1 Peter 5:8**) We suffer together, and must watch out for one another and encourage each other. It is why James gives the Church communal instructions on how to help each other when there is trouble, sickness and sin. (**James 5:13-20**)

This idea of sharing each others' lives, sharing each others' suffering, even sharing each others' air used to be symbolised in the central Christian ritual. (Apologies, but this next bit is going to sound very weird to modern, western people!)

Ivan Illich describes it this way: "The high point of Christian ritual and ceremony still consists in a communal meal of bread and wine...but in the first centuries of Christianity there was also *conspiratio*, that is a breathing into each others' mouths. That's what Christians did. They came together to eat and kiss, to kiss on the mouth. In this way they shared the Holy Spirit and became members of a community in flesh, blood, and spirit."¹⁴

This was replaced by what is called the *conjuratio*, where the bonds of fellowship were secured not by direct engagement with the Holy Spirit, not through Christians "sharing air", but through oaths and legal contracts which were guaranteed by the Church and then the legal system.

You may be thinking, "Well, I'm pretty glad of that change. I don't want to kiss a bunch of people on the mouth. The greeting time on Sunday mornings is already hard enough."

Fair enough. But the change marked a huge shift in the way Christians saw one another. If our love and care for each other is based upon a contract rather than a shared indwelling of the Holy Spirit, then we are less likely to truly share in one another's sufferings. It will be harder for us to genuinely experience the suffering of one another as our own. It is harder for us to say, "We share flesh, blood and spirit, and what is done to you is done to me."

If this all seems a bit much, remember that one of Paul's primary ways of describing the Church is the Body of Christ. He makes it sound less like a metaphor, more like a spiritual reality. When Jesus stops Saul on the road to Damascus he asks him, "Why are you persecuting me?" Not, "Why are you persecuting the Church?" (**Acts 9:4-5**) We are the Body of Christ, on Christ's mission in the world, joined together by His Spirit, rejoicing and mourning with one another. The posture of mission is therefore not a solitary posture. The blessing of persecution for righteousness' sake is not a solitary blessing.

We are not likely going back to open-mouthed kissing during communion.

But we really must get back to an understanding that we are one flesh, one blood, one spirit together, joined by the sacrifice of Jesus and the Holy Spirit's breath in our lungs.

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Read **1 Corinthians 12:7-11**

One of the greatest dangers to good discernment is the modern, western emphasis on individualism. Personality systems and spiritual gifts questionnaires have us answer questions about ourselves so we can determine who we really are. But maybe this isn't the best way to know ourselves?

Self-awareness is a very good thing, but we were not meant to live out our faith on our own. We were given to one another as a gift, to help each other endure suffering and also to be consoled together.

So contact your Infitum group today and pray for each other. Tell one other the gifts that you see God bringing into the world through each other. Don't try to figure out your own gifts or personality make-up, let your Infitum partners help you discern that. And see if what you say about each other leads to consolation, the inner sense of truth, goodness and leading towards Jesus. (This exercise obviously may take much longer than one day to complete, but be persistent in it. We will follow up with this tomorrow as well).

ALMSGIVING

Pray together some more with your Infitum partners and seek consolation around where to direct some financial blessing this week. Where is the Lord leading you to give? How do you make that decision together? What gives you peace as a group in this decision? How does your giving give glory to God and help His mission on earth?

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 74**

Pray out this prayer for the persecuted Church:

*Sovereign God,
we worship You
and we acknowledge that You know all of those
who suffer in Your name.*

*We remember those who are imprisoned for their faith
and ask that they would join with the Apostle Paul
to see that even though they remain captive,
their chains have furthered the gospel,
not frustrated it.*

*May they inspire and embolden their fellow believers
to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

*God of all comfort,
for those who are tortured both in body and mind,
give them the grace to endure
and to see their suffering as part of following in Christ's footsteps.*

*Merciful God,
for those asked to pay the ultimate price;
who are martyred because of their love for You,*

*may they truly know Christ
and the power of His resurrection
and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings,
becoming like Him in His death.*

*Father God,
for those who are widowed and orphaned
may they know the comfort that comes from Your promised presence
even when they walk through the valley.*

*May they be strengthened by Your Spirit,
enabling them to rejoice with the psalmist
as they proclaim that the Lord will not abandon them in death.*

*Heavenly Father,
we ask that You would make us ever mindful of our brothers and
sisters around the world
who need us to stand with them
as they suffer in Your name.*

*Teach us what it means
to overcome by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of our testimony;
we pray that we would not love our lives so much as to shrink from
death.*

O Lord, hear our prayer

Find a place to be still and silent for seventeen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you the people you whose suffering you have been blessed to share.

Remember **Psalm 74** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for seventeen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the seventeen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 74:12-17** again.

LECTIO

Read **Revelation 6:9-11**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

Read out Bud Osborn's poem, *The Truth of Community*

*all day long
 the horrible august sun
 set them on fire
 and maching guns
 and attack dogs
 and barbed-wire fences wired with elecricity
 where teenaged boys threw themselves
 to escape
 from auschwitz*

*a prisoner fled the camp
 or so the nazis said
 and lined 600 men of barrack 14 into rows*

*the men were forbidden to speak
 sit down
 or take one step out of line
 under penalty of immediate execution*

all day long

*until camp commandant fritsch arrived
 and announced that since*

*the escaped prisoner had not been found
10 of the men standing there would die*

*and fritsch began to walk the rows
examining the prisoners
selecting which of them would be
stripped naked
locked in a cellar half-buried in the earth
and kept there
until they starved to death*

*one of the condemned men
a young polish soldier
francis gajownicek
fell to his knees and cried out
that he had a wife
and small children
and wanted to live*

fritsch ordered the man to the starvation cell

*but then
something extraordinary occurred
something unheard of in auschwitz*

*a man stepped forward out of the rows
and began to speak*

*fritsch commanded the man to get back into line
"have you gone mad?" fritsch shouted at him*

*but the prisoner calmly replied
that he wished to take
francis gajownicek's place*

*the man explained that since he himself
was old and ill
the nazis could get more work
from a younger man*

*and assistant camp commandant fritsch
according to witnesses
fell silent
and appeared stunned*

*the august sun burned the air
and auschwitz fell silent*

*fritsch pondered
then
astonishingly
rescinded his own order
and granted the prisoner's request*

*and so maximillian kolbe joined the other 9 men
stripped of their clothes
and interred in their tomb*

*kolbe's own hard-won community of franciscans
who has housed refugees
fed the poor
repaired the machinery of peasant farmers
and dispensed medicine to any who were in need
had been destroyed
his brothers murdered or sent to exile
and kolbe incarcerated in auschwitz*

*first the brain dehydrates
and hallucinates
but kolbe remained lucid
and comforted the others
they sang canticles of love
in a death cell
in auschwitz*

*and on the 14th day
when nazis entered the cell
to remove the bodies
maximillian kolbe*

still alive

*had to be killed
with an injection of phenic acid*

*kolbe
who lived community while naked and starving to death*

*kolbe
who sang community into a situation without hope*

*kolbe
who demonstrated that community cannot be destroyed
though buildings are demolished
though people are scattered and lives shattered*

*kolbe
who taught that community cannot be extinguished
as long as a single human being
steps forward
out of line
and speaks out
for the sake of another's life*

kolbe¹⁵

LAMENT

Lament tonight on behalf of others. Consider the sufferings of those who are close to you in heart and bring them before the Lord as if they were your own. Pray and weep for them, and commit yourself in prayer to walking alongside them in their distress.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

SHARING THE SUFFERING OF CREATION

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Romans 8:14-30**

The idea of Creation “suffering” is one that has gained some currency in our time. Often it is used to spur people to care about the damage humans are doing to the world. And the fact is, human carelessness and greed are causing damage. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is the largest human-made “structure” in the world, currently twice the size of Texas. You can see pictures here: georgerothert.com/the-great-pacific-garbage-patch/

Yet many Christians balk at the anthropomorphizing of the suffering of “Mother Earth”. The earth, it is argued, has no feelings, does not care, and isn’t really threatened by us. Furthermore, the earth is ours to do with as we please. Right? Weren’t we given the keys and told to run the place?

Well, Paul seems to think that Creation matters, that it suffers, and that we are intimately connected with its destiny. He is not talking about garbage in the oceans, of course. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch was probably not foremost on his mind. But he is talking about the “bondage to decay” that all of Creation is suffering under. It seems that the glory which will

be revealed in us, as children of God, is something that all of Creation is waiting for - groaning for, as in labour pains! And we groan alongside it, as we also experience suffering and frustration while we wait for adoption, redemption, liberation.

We are part of Creation. A unique part, yes, but still part of the whole. The rebellion of humanity has had a terrible effect on everything, and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch is just one small (but growing) part of that. But our redemption and revelation as children of God will bring about liberation for us and also for the rest of Creation. It will be a glory that outshines all the present suffering we and the rest of Creation experience.

This is a huge part of our posture of mission. We acknowledge that the suffering of the world, the suffering of others, and the suffering of the poor and vulnerable are part of our suffering. We share it. Even the Spirit of God groans with us in intercession, translating our wordless cries before the throne of heaven.

But though we feel this suffering fully, we are not overcome by it. We are destined to be conformed into the image of Jesus, which includes the cross but also the resurrection. This means we can confidently testify about the coming glory, but we can also begin to live out that redemption here and now as part of the first-fruits of the kingdom. The glory *will* be revealed. Creation *will* be liberated. Our bodies *will* be redeemed. For now we wait and work patiently, believing that God is working all things to the good for those who love him and who have been called towards his great purpose for all of Creation.

ALMSGIVING

Here is a game you can play that outlines some of the ways we are damaging our oceans, and offers ways to help clean up the mess we are making. It's called Dumb Ways to Kill Oceans: gamingfortheoceans.org/

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Read **Acts 13:1-3**

The story of Paul and Barnabas being sent out from Antioch is one of the most fascinating examples of group discernment in Scripture. The Holy Spirit did not speak to Paul or Barnabas individually. Neither of them went to the Church leadership to inform them of their decision to leave for missions work. The Holy Spirit spoke to the Church as they worshipped and fasted, asking them to set the two missionaries aside. There were prophets and teachers there who could discern, weigh and approve the word. They reached consolation together through prayer and fasting, and were thus able to lay hands on Paul and Barnabas and send them off with joy and peace. The mission of God is bigger than an individual, bigger even than the Church.

Arrange a time of worship and, if you can, fasting together with your Infinitum partners. Ask others to be praying and fasting for you as well. Ask the Lord together what a posture of mission will mean for each of you. Weigh up what you hear together, and ask other trusted believers in your Church to weigh it as well. Seek a common consolation on God's missional calling for you.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "On earth as it is in heaven."

Pray **Psalm 8**

Pray out this prayer for the persecuted Church:

*Sovereign God,
we worship You
and we acknowledge that You know all of those
who suffer in Your name.*

*We remember those who are imprisoned for their faith
and ask that they would join with the Apostle Paul
to see that even though they remain captive,
their chains have furthered the gospel,
not frustrated it.*

*May they inspire and embolden their fellow believers
to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

*God of all comfort,
for those who are tortured both in body and mind,
give them the grace to endure
and to see their suffering as part of following in Christ's footsteps.*

*Merciful God,
for those asked to pay the ultimate price;
who are martyred because of their love for You,
may they truly know Christ
and the power of His resurrection
and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings,
becoming like Him in His death.*

*Father God,
for those who are widowed and orphaned
may they know the comfort that comes from Your promised presence
even when they walk through the valley.*

*May they be strengthened by Your Spirit,
enabling them to rejoice with the psalmist
as they proclaim that the Lord will not abandon them in death.*

*Heavenly Father,
we ask that You would make us ever mindful of our brothers and
sisters around the world
who need us to stand with them
as they suffer in Your name.*

*Teach us what it means
to overcome by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of our testimony;
we pray that we would not love our lives so much as to shrink from
death.
O Lord, hear our prayer*

Find a place to be still and silent for seventeen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you how the Lord has been mindful of you, even in the midst of the whole of Creation. What is His plan for you? What is His plan for Creation?

Remember **Psalm 8** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for seventeen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the seventeen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 8** again.

LECTIO

Read **Ephesians 1:3-10**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Read **Revelation 5:1-4**. How do you see all of creation groaning and weeping? Where is there a longing for the kingdom of God to be shown? For history to make sense? For the tears and the sorrow and the sin to end? Can you join in? Can you add your voice to the cry? Once you have lamented, read the rest of **Revelation 5**, and go forth with hope and good news.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

GAZING INTO HEAVEN

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Acts 6:8-7:60** (if you are pressed for time, focus on **7:54-60**, the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr of the Church).

The Abyss is a fascinating film that is set within the crushing pressures of the ocean depths. A team of scientists attempting to recover a lost submarine and its nuclear payload encounter a beautiful, non-terrestrial life-form deep under the sea. Some of the team seek to destroy these aliens, while others take great risks to draw closer to them while fulfilling their mission. One of the characters has to essentially “drown” in order to survive. It is a story of the power of transcendent love and beauty, and the willingness of humans to pursue it at all costs. *The Shape of Water* is another film about truth, love, beauty and sacrifice. A mute woman discovers something/someone beautiful and joyfully risks her life for its/his sake. (Seen in a certain way this film is a fantastical re-telling of the story of Jesus and his Church. Just be warned that it is very, very graphic.)

Hollywood likes to tell the story of people willingly enduring persecution for the sake of truth, beauty and love. And well they should. There is something hidden deep within humanity that tells us that these things are worth the sacrifice.

Jesus tells the stories of a labourer who sells everything he has to gain a

field with buried treasure, and of a merchant who sells everything to get a pearl of great price. He himself lives this out, willingly sacrificing himself for the glory of his Father and the beauty of his children's salvation.

Jesus' followers seem to have grasped this as well. We have already looked at how Peter and John rejoiced at being found worthy to be beaten for the sake of Jesus' Name. Now we see Stephen laying down his life in the same cause. He has time for a lengthy exposition of Scripture before he is killed, but this is the moment that concerns us today: "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'"

Stephen saw beauty, truth and love, and it was enough. It was worth dying for. Stephen could see a reality that was greater than the deception of the world, greater than the fear of persecution and death. And he couldn't help himself; he had to tell the world about the beauty he had seen, even though it killed him. He was like Jeremiah, who said,

*"If I say, I will not mention Him,
Or speak any more in His name,
There is in my heart as it were a burning fire
Shut up in my bones,
And I am weary of holding it in,
And I cannot."*

– JEREMIAH 20:9

Or like Paul:

"Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

– 1 CORINTHIANS 9:16B

We are called likewise to live in the light of that glory, in the promise of the kingdom of heaven to come, in a place where it becomes unthinkable not to share the goodness we have seen. It is only this - not our willpower, not our organisation, not our personalities - that will

sustain us in the pressures we will face.

Truth, beauty and love, manifested in the presence of Jesus, is enough. It does not mean we won't endure pressure; it does not mean we won't be hurt or even killed; but it does mean that there will be blessing in being persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for the sake of Jesus. The blessing is the kingdom of heaven.

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Read **Philippians 3:7-14**

In this passage we have a clear example of Paul finding desolation in the treasures of the earth, and consolation in the promises of the kingdom of heaven. He has seen real beauty, and everything else pales in comparison. This is not just about stuff: it is about all Paul's learning, all his wisdom, all his accomplishments, all his worldviews, even his religious tradition. All was "garbage" compared to Christ, so much so that Paul longed to participate in Jesus' sufferings and death which he saw as greater than everything he possessed before.

Thomas Aquinas, one of the most brilliant theologians of all time, came to a similar realisation late in his life. He wrote vast texts of theology, and yet said: "All that I have written seems like straw compared to what has now been revealed to me."

Is there anything you are holding onto that is a distraction? Is anything weighing you down as you journey towards the prize for which God has called you heavenwards in Jesus Christ? It may be a material thing, or a worldview, a habit, or something else - anything you feel it is impossible to release.

Ask the Lord if there is anything like that. Does it give you life? Joy? Consolation? Or does it cause desolation? Ask Him to show you how much greater the kingdom of heaven is than the thing you are holding onto. Ask Him for help in letting it go, today.

Read out Bud Osborne's poem, *A Binner is a True Spiritual Guide* ("binner" is slang for someone who goes through trash bins looking for things to use or sell).

*A binner approaching a bin
Anticipates
Something valuable
Will be found
Among the discarded
Rejected
Trash and useless
Objects
Of our society
A binner is not afraid
To be seen
In deep
And intimate relationships
With what others
Avoid
Like the plague
A binner sees possibility
Where others
See the need
For a clean-up campaign
A binner
Is a true spiritual guide
So let their example
Impel
The rest of us
To go
And do likewise¹⁶*

ALMSGIVING

Give someone beauty today. Tell them about the beauty, love and truth you have seen in Jesus. Write a poem, paint a picture, or compose a song if you can. Try as best you can today to let someone in on the beauty you have seen.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever, amen."

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 124** and listen to the song Mighty Fortress by The Singing Company: www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9Ty71SMT8A

Pray out this prayer for the persecuted Church:

*Sovereign God,
we worship You
and we acknowledge that You know all of those
who suffer in Your name.*

*We remember those who are imprisoned for their faith
and ask that they would join with the Apostle Paul
to see that even though they remain captive,
their chains have furthered the gospel,
not frustrated it.*

*May they inspire and embolden their fellow believers
to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

*God of all comfort,
for those who are tortured both in body and mind,
give them the grace to endure
and to see their suffering as part of following in Christ's footsteps.*

*Merciful God,
for those asked to pay the ultimate price;
who are martyred because of their love for You,
may they truly know Christ
and the power of His resurrection
and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings,
becoming like Him in His death.*

*Father God,
for those who are widowed and orphaned
may they know the comfort that comes from Your promised presence
even when they walk through the valley.*

*May they be strengthened by Your Spirit,
enabling them to rejoice with the psalmist
as they proclaim that the Lord will not abandon them in death.*

*Heavenly Father,
we ask that You would make us ever mindful of our brothers and sisters
around the world
who need us to stand with them
as they suffer in Your name.*

*Teach us what it means
to overcome by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of our testimony;
we pray that we would not love our lives so much as to shrink from death.*

O Lord, hear our prayer

Find a place to be still and silent for seventeen minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you how He has been on your side.

Remember **Psalm 124** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for seventeen minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the seventeen minutes are up, pray **Psalm 124** again.

EVENING

LECTIO

Read **2 Corinthians 12:9b-10**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

I have a friend who for many years lamented that he could not “hear the music that other people hear as they worship.” His physical hearing was just fine; he just could not experience the same joy and freedom he saw in others as they worshipped with abandon.

If you have a hard time seeing or hearing the Lord’s beauty, then lament this, and ask God for help to know his glory. Or if you know others who simply cannot experience it, lament and pray for them, and ask God that their eyes, ears and hearts would be opened to beauty, truth and love.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

WEEK ELEVEN

FINDING SUNKEN TREASURE

**BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEY
SHALL RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.**

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

MOVIES

- *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* (seriously, do a movie marathon of this trilogy and watch for all the ways humility, service and mission are in the forefront. Especially in the character of Samwise Gamgee.)
- *Babette's Feast*
- *Forrest Gump*
- *Dunkirk*
- *Goonies*

PLAYLIST

- *I'm Blinded by Your Grace* by Stormzy
- *Wild Love* by Ellie King
- *Help* by The Beatles
- *Jesus is Yours* by Ordinary Time
- *Love Alone is Worth the Fight* by Switchfoot
- *Like Oil* by We Will Worship

BOOKS

- *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* by Henri Nouwen
- *Hundred Block Rock* by Bud Osborn
- *The Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning
- "Waters to Swim In", sermon by Charles Haddon Spurgeon

DAY 1

THE UNEXPECTED MISSION OF GOD

IN INFINITUM HUBS

DECOMPRESSION

Share with one another how your week went. What questions, actions, or topics were challenging? Did you encounter anything new about yourself? Did you encounter God in any new or unexpected ways? How have your practices of almsgiving, lectio divina, consolation and desolation, lament, stillness, and awareness examen gone? Share some of your answers to the questions from the week and pray for one another.

MEDIA

VIDEO

Jesus the Poor in Spirit

PODCAST

MISSIO DEI - FOOT WASHING

Read **John 13:1-17**

“Now that you have seen these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

The *Missio Dei* is the Mission of God. This is the plan God being worked out in the world, and incredibly we are invited to participate. But we do not set the agenda. We only join in with what Jesus is already doing, following his example and his commands.

Jesus' primary command is for us to love one another as he has loved us. He shows us how to do this on the cross, of course. But he also shows us how to love one another at the Last Supper.

When Jesus removes his outer garment, takes on the clothing of a servant, and washes his disciples' feet (including his betrayer's feet), he is demonstrating for us how the posture of mission and the blessing of the poor in spirit go together.

This week we will practice this posture of loving service and humility. We begin by receiving Jesus' love so we can be joined with him. Receiving can be very difficult. But once we have received Jesus' love we can then *become* the love of Jesus in the world.

This practice is deeply connected to the 12th and final step of AA and NA: “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.” This step is about ongoing humility and diligent practice, but also about carrying the message - adopting the posture of mission - to others who are suffering and in bondage to their addiction. When you find something good, something beautiful, sometime true, you want to share it. But you don't just share the message, you share your renewed life with others.

Begin now by washing each others' feet. Do you find it more difficult to receive this act of love, or to give it?

PRAYER

We will be using Aidan of Lindisfarne's tidal prayer each day this week. Lindisfarne, known as Holy Island, is only accessible at certain times of the day because of the ocean's tide coming in and out. This is like the rhythm of our lives, where we have times alone with God to receive his loving presence, and times when God calls us out in the world to carry his loving presence.

PRAYER OF ST. AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE

*Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
Make me an island, set apart,
Alone with you, God, holy to you.
Then with the turning of the tide
Prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,
The world that rushes in on me,
Till the waters come again and fold me back to you.
Stillness*

Read out **Matthew 5:1-12**

Spend twenty minutes of silence and stillness together. End by praying the Lord's Prayer.

DAY 2

HIDDEN TREASURE, OLD AND NEW

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Matthew 13:44-46, 51-52** (or read all of **Matthew 13** if you have time).

We return once more to the blessing of the poor in spirit. Why are we looking at this again? Why go back to the beginning? Well, the first time you dive deep into the ocean is a different experience than the 80th time. You have learned things, your body has adapted, your lungs, your mind, your eyes are more accustomed to the pressures and more perceptive to the hidden beauties of the deep. You don't send a rookie diver down into great depths to discover new forms of life or to uncover hidden treasures. You send someone with experience.

But it is still important to remember the first truths we learned, the most basic lessons about entering the waters. Karl Barth, the prodigious 20th century theologian, was asked near the end of his life to summarize the essence of his vast and voluminous writings. He answered, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Barth had spent a lifetime delving deeply into each of those words: Who is Jesus? Who am I? What does it mean that Jesus loves me? How do I know this? What does the Bible really say about it, and how can I trust that? At the end of it all he returned to the simple truth that Jesus

loves him. He knew this as a child. He knew it in a different way as an adult. Jesus' love had not changed. But maybe Barth had.

Perhaps we have been changed throughout this journey of the Creative Way Down. One hopes that as we have delved deeper into Jesus and his blessings we will have been become more and more like him. And this should lead us into a deeper understanding of the blessing of poverty of spirit. The further we are drawn into the life of Jesus, the more we "adapt" to him, the more of his poverty and of his beauty we will know.

Matthew 13 contains a number of Jesus' parables. When he tells them to the crowd and to his disciples nobody really understands them at first. The disciples, who have been hanging out with Jesus for awhile and are more accustomed to him, still need to pull Jesus aside and ask for an interpretation. Why is he talking about sowers and seed, about women and bread, about mustard plants? How are these things like the kingdom of heaven?

So Jesus explains the parables, using himself as the interpretive key. If you are close to him you are close to the kingdom, and it is coming in a way that you do not expect. His second to last set of parables concerns the uncovering of great and unexpected treasures and how the wise treasure-hunter will sell all they have for a chance to get them. The kingdom treasure is worth absolutely everything, and requires us to impoverish ourselves of everything we are trying to hold onto if we want to possess it.

At the end of his stories and explanations, Jesus asks the disciples if they have understood all these things. They say yes, but one wonders how *confidently* they said it. Their subsequent behaviour certainly does not suggest that they had taken the full message of Jesus on board, at least not until after the resurrection and the filling of the Spirit at Pentecost. They don't appear to be wise house owners who are digging old and new treasures out of their storehouses. They have not yet fully grasped how to understand the Scriptures in the light of Jesus' teaching and life. They still hold onto their old ways of thinking, their desire for glory and position, their agendas for Jesus. They are still learning, still struggling, still messing up, still weak of faith.

But maybe they are a little closer than they were before. And yes, it will take an absolute crisis for them to get there, just as it does for us. They don't "learn their way" to the kingdom; only the intervention of the cross can do that. But when the crisis of the cross and the resurrection happens, and they encounter Jesus on the other side of it, his presence and his teaching have prepared them to receive the treasure they are offered. And once they have received this kingdom treasure for themselves they start bringing it out of their storehouses to share with the world. Poverty of spirit leads to abundance in the kingdom of heaven, and this is an abundance we get to share.

There is more for us to learn, always. There is more for us to let go of, always. There is deeper humility, deeper poverty of spirit that we need to grasp, always. There is more and more and more of Jesus for us to dive into, always. Let us therefore dive deeper into Jesus and his poverty of spirit, anticipating the blessing of the kingdom of heaven as we do so.

ALMSGIVING

Do you have an old treasure - something tucked away that you haven't thought of for some time - that you could give away today? You don't have to, it's completely voluntary, and it should be a joy rather than a burden to do so. But is anything jumping to your mind that you can give away, and maybe the name of a person to whom you can give it? Consider this in prayer.

MISSIO DEI - FOOT WASHING

A lot of mission activity unfortunately takes the posture of power. Even in neighbourhoods or countries not our own we like to retain our sense of control and position. What would it look like to switch this up? What is one way, today, that you can take a lower position, a vulnerable place, the posture of a servant? This is not about pretending, not about acting a

part, this is about genuinely laying down power, privilege and position for the sake of serving someone else. Think about the places where you have power and control, and what it might mean to let that go for someone's sake. Look for an opportunity to do this today, and check with your Infinitum partners to see if they have any ideas on how you could best do this in your context.

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Pray this prayer of relinquishment from Richard Foster each day this week. Use it as a help towards greater exploration of consolation and desolation:

*Today, O Lord, I yield myself to You.
May Your will be my delight today.
May You have perfect sway in me.
May your love be the pattern of my living.
I surrender to You my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions.
Do with them what You will, when You will, as You will.
I place into Your loving care my family, my friends, my future.
Care for them with a care that I can never give.
I release into Your hands my need to control, my craving for status, my fear of obscurity.
Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and establish Your Kingdom on earth.
For Jesus' sake, Amen.*

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Yours is the kingdom."

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 149:1-5**

PRAYER OF ST. AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE

*Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
Make me an island, set apart,
Alone with you, God, holy to you.
Then with the turning of the tide
Prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,
The world that rushes in on me,
Till the waters come again and fold me back to you.*

Find a place to be still and silent for twenty minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you the blessing of being alone with God, holy to God.

Remember **Psalm 149:1-5** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for twenty minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twenty minutes are up, pray **Psalm 149:1-5** again.

LECTIO

Read **Matthew 6:19-21**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Is there any power, comfort, privilege or control that you are frightened to release? What are the things you still hold tightly in your heart which prevent you from diving deeper into Jesus' kingdom treasure? Lament them, and ask God to help you find freedom.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

THE HIDDEN TREASURE

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Colossians 2:1-15**

The Japanese practice of *ama*, free-diving for pearls, seafood and other treasures in the cold waters off the coast of Japan, goes back 2000 years. *Ama* divers are mostly female and traditionally only wear loin cloths and head scarves to protect themselves. (Now modest white body suits are worn, but still no oxygen tanks or scuba gear). Girls as young as 12 begin training for this life, and some continue diving until their 70's. They learn to hold their breath for incredible periods of time. They are quite literally hidden in the waters, seeking treasures, until they resurface with a long whistle of air. The whistle indicates that the *ama* diver has survived another trip, that there is still breath in her lungs.¹⁷

Paul describes Christ as "the mystery of God", the one in whom are "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." He is therefore both the treasure and the ocean in which the treasure is found. The Colossian church, however, were being tempted with other secret knowledge, other mysteries, arguments that sounded fine but were not based upon the reality of Jesus. Paul describes these ways as "hollow" and "deceptive". It is always tempting for us to pursue new and exotic

ways to truth. It is flattering to be initiated into secrets, to be found worthy of worldly wisdom, to know more than those around us.

The secret of Christ, on the other hand, is not accessible by a person's wisdom or worthiness. It is a mystery that is open to all because it does not depend on a special talent. Yet it is a mystery that costs everything. This treasure requires a realisation that we are dead in our sins and a willingness to be buried with Christ in his baptism.

Now we are really entering deep waters. As we dive into Jesus, the treasure we find and bring back for others is death to ourselves and renewed, forgiven, abundant life. We can only truly access this treasure when we accept that all other would-be treasures are hollow, deceptive distractions. *Ama* divers risk death every time they plunge beneath the surface looking for pearls. But we are *guaranteed* death when we plunge beneath the waters of baptism with Jesus. It is the only sure way to life. Are we ready for this poverty of spirit?

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Pray Richard Foster's prayer of relinquishment:

Today, O Lord, I yield myself to You.

May Your will be my delight today.

May You have perfect sway in me.

May your love be the pattern of my living.

I surrender to You my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions.

Do with them what You will, when You will, as You will.

I place into Your loving care my family, my friends, my future.

Care for them with a care that I can never give.

I release into Your hands my need to control, my craving for status, my fear of obscurity.

Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and establish Your Kingdom on earth.

For Jesus' sake, Amen.

MISSIO DEI - WASHING THE FEET OF OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Read **John 15:9-17**

Jesus laid down his life for us. We lay down our lives as we join him in his baptism. Then we are commanded to love one another as Jesus has loved us. What could this mean but laying down of our lives for each other? This is what “remaining in Jesus’ love” looks like. This is what the posture of mission looks like.

But perhaps we aren’t called upon to literally die for one another all that often. In the mean time we are called to serve one another with sacrificial love.

James says, “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?” (**James 2:15-16**) John says something similar: “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (**1 John 3:16-17**)

The kind of faith that calls someone brother or sister but is not committed to them as a brother or sister is dead, useless, false.

Are there brothers or sisters you know of right now who need more than your thoughts and prayers? Who need more than words and general *friendliness*? It can be frightening to contemplate loving people in the way Jesus commands – the cost is very high. But this what love *is*. And this is how we have been loved by Jesus.

ALMSGIVING

Meet some material need of a brother or sister in the Lord, today. Try to do so in such a way that they feel like family, and not like a person receiving charity.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer?

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 77:11-20**

PRAYER OF ST. AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE

*Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
Make me an island, set apart,
Alone with you, God, holy to you.
Then with the turning of the tide
Prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,
The world that rushes in on me,
Till the waters come again and fold me back to you.*

Find a place to be still and silent for twenty minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you the blessing of carrying his presence into the busy world.

Remember **Psalm 77** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for twenty minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twenty minutes are up, pray **Psalm 77:11-20** again.

EVENING

LECTIO

Read **Proverbs 2:1-8**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Do you see hollow, deceptive things and philosophies in the culture around you? Have you or others been attracted to them and distracted by them? Name these attachments now, and lament the hold they have had on you and on others. Ask God to show you the true treasure of His presence in a way that makes these other things fade away.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

TRUSTWORTHY VESSELS

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **2 Corinthians 4:1-12**

Chris Nolan's World War Two movie, *Dunkirk*, is all about a victorious retreat. The remnants of the British army in France gather on the beach awaiting either destruction from enemy forces or an improbable rescue from the sea. The movie depicts a beautiful sense of duty and sacrifice as boats of all kinds head across the British Channel to save the soldiers. Most of these vessels are seaworthy, but other ships slowly fill with water and prompt yet another crisis for those on board. The boats may look good on the surface, and they may be clung to for momentary salvation, but if they are not sound within then they will not ultimately lead to life.

Remember again the final step of AA: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs." Most recovering alcoholics quite happily acknowledge that they are not the most trustworthy of vessels. Prone to failure, in need of help, still working the steps and aware that the world is full of temptation. They point to their lives as evidence that sobriety is possible, but they do not ask people to put their full faith in them. They are there to help, but mainly to point others to the process of recovery that has worked for so many people.

Paul says that we hold a treasure within us, but we have to be honest about ourselves. We are jars of clay, subject to pressing, perplexity, persecution and being pushed around. The treasure we carry in our bodies is the death and resurrected life of Jesus. This light shines out of our hearts, even out of our darkness, and God's power is demonstrated in the midst of our frailty. On the surface we may not appear to be the most seaworthy of vessels. But if people can see the treasure that we hold within they will see the glory of Christ, who is the very image of God.

It is really important that we get this. Our life and witness matters, but we do not preach *our* success, *our* accomplishment. No matter how great our churches, our programs, our missions, our charity, if we take the focus off of Jesus then we are offering people false hope; untrustworthy vessels; jars of clay. We must recognise our own poverty, our own vulnerability - even rejoice in it - so that the spotlight can shine on the face of Christ.

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Pray Richard Foster's prayer of relinquishment:

Today, O Lord, I yield myself to You.

May Your will be my delight today.

May You have perfect sway in me.

May your love be the pattern of my living.

I surrender to You hopes, my dreams, my ambitions.

Do with them what You will, when You will, as You will.

I place into Your loving care my family, my friends, my future.

Care for them with a care that I can never give.

I release into Your hands my need to control, my craving for status, my fear of obscurity.

Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and establish Your Kingdom on earth.

For Jesus' sake, Amen.

MISSIO DEI AND ALMSGIVING - WASHING THE FEET OF THE POOR

Read **Galatians 2:10**

During the persecutions against the Church in the 3rd century, an order was given by Emperor Valerian that all bishops, priests and deacons should be killed, and that the treasury of the Church should be handed over to the Empire.

A man named Lawrence was at this time the archdeacon of Rome. The Emperor intended to have him killed, but first demanded that he surrender the treasures of the Church. This was Lawrence's response:

"Lawrence worked swiftly. He sold the Church's vessels and gave the money to widows and the sick. He distributed all the Church's property to the poor. On the third day, the Emperor summoned Lawrence to his palace and asked for the treasure. With great aplomb, Lawrence entered the palace, stopped, and then gestured back to the door where, streaming in behind him, poured crowds of poor, crippled, blind, and suffering people. 'These are the true treasures of the Church,' he boldly proclaimed. One early account even has him adding, 'The Church is truly rich, far richer than the Emperor.'"¹⁸

So, Lawrence was killed.

But, Lawrence left a legacy about the hidden treasure of the Church. We are not commanded to care for the poor just out of pity or duty. We are instead to find God-given beauty and dignity within each person, especially within the bodies and lives of those the world disdains and disregards. *Christ* is our treasure, and Christ is found especially in the places of deep suffering.

So, do a treasure hunt today. Look for Jesus. See if there is someone you can visit who is sick at home or in hospital, understanding that you are in a very real sense visiting Jesus; someone you can take for lunch,

understanding that you are in a very real sense taking Jesus to lunch; a refugee family that you can welcome and support, understanding that you are in a very real sense welcoming and supporting Jesus.

Have a look at this project, called "Open Homes", which understands that it is hosting Jesus as it hosts newcomers to Canada:

iafr.ca/about-us/15-our-projects/58-shelter-for-refugee-claimants

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread."

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 113**

PRAYER OF ST. AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE

*Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
Make me an island, set apart,
Alone with you, God, holy to you.
Then with the turning of the tide
Prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,
The world that rushes in on me,
Till the waters come again and fold me back to you.*

Find a place to be still and silent for twenty minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you the presence of the Lord in the bodies of the poor.

Remember **Psalm 113** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for twenty minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twenty minutes are up, pray **Psalm 113** again.

EVENING

LECTIO

Read **Proverbs 3:13-15**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Look honestly at your frailty, your weaknesses, how vulnerable you are to frustrations, setbacks, persecution, sickness, limitation. Acknowledge these things as the reality of your particular clay jar. And then thank God for them. Thank God that he has put his treasure inside this fragile vessel, subject to every danger in this world, even to death. Thank him that his salvation and mission has not relied upon your strength and wisdom. And ask that you would learn to be content in this earthly poverty, knowing that you are wealthy beyond imagining in the kingdom of heaven.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

HIDDEN IN CHRIST

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Colossians 3:1-17**

In 2018 a new hotel opened in the Maldives, called "The Muraka". The thing that sets this hotel apart is that it is located 16 feet below sea level. It features a private bar, a butler's quarters, a gym, a pool (!), the world's only submerged five star restaurant, and panoramic ocean views from all rooms and bathrooms. And it only costs \$50,000 a night to stay there. For info, pictures and booking options (hah!) see here:

archpaper.com/2018/11/maldives-underwater-hotel-conrad-maldives-rangali-island-muraka/#gallery-0-slide-0

The whole venture is, of course, an unbelievable extravagance accessible only to the world's super-wealthy. It is a luxury, not a necessity. But it opens up some interesting questions: what if we could be at home in the ocean depths? What if we could thrive in a place where previously there was no possibility of survival? What if we could actually live like this?

Colossians 3:1-17 asks the same question, but in a far more important way: What if we could actually live like this? When we think of the life of Christian faith and mission, especially in the light of the pressures and persecutions we looked at last week, it may appear idealistic at best, naive and dangerous at worst. But Paul urges believers to live as if they have been raised from the dead with Christ. This means leaving our worldly nature in the grave - all the rage, immorality, greed, lying, and so forth.

Instead we are to wear the new clothes of the resurrection and live in the new nature of holiness, with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love. What was previously unimaginable now becomes not only possible, but expected.

Not everyone agrees with this. In fact, talk like this will elicit howls of protest in some places.

But Paul seems to believe that the new life of faith will be extraordinarily different from the old life, and not just after we die. He paints a picture of a communal Christian life that is far more radically transformed and beautiful - and accessible - than any underwater hotel, no matter how great the views.

We are meant to be a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven on earth, a poor-in-spirit community that has genuinely died to selfishness. We are to live in the way of Jesus, joined together by the Spirit and hidden with Christ inside the very life of God. We have been talking this week all about hidden treasure. What if Christ's hidden treasure is the Church, utterly renewed and participating in his kingdom life on earth?

The posture of mission is not just about heroic individuals go-go-going into the world. It is about the beautiful Christ-life that we demonstrate together to a sinful and hurting world.

Read **Colossians 3:15-17** again, and imagine what that kind of life would be like in the world, how *attractive* and *powerful* that kind of community would appear. What if we could live like that?

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Today, O Lord, I yield myself to You.

May Your will be my delight today.

May You have perfect sway in me.

May your love be the pattern of my living.

I surrender to You my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions.

Do with them what You will, when You will, as You will.

I place into Your loving care my family, my friends, my future.

Care for them with a care that I can never give.

I release into Your hands my need to control, my craving for status, my fear of obscurity.

Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and establish Your Kingdom on earth.

For Jesus' sake, Amen.

MISSIO DEI: WASHING YOUR ENEMY'S FEET

Read **Luke 6:27-28; Romans 12:14; 1 Peter 3:9**

Oh, the waters are deep.

Jesus washed Judas' feet right before Judas was to betray him. Can he really be asking us to wash our enemy's feet? Yes, he can. We are to bless, love and pray for those who persecute us. We are not to curse them. This is what it looks like to be hidden in Christ, to join Jesus in his posture of mission, to know the blessing of the poor in spirit.

Begin by acknowledging your enemies before the Lord. It may be an individual; it may be a number of people; it may be someone from your past who you still hold resentments towards; it may be a group of people who you have been conditioned to fear or hate. Be honest, and confess any enmity that exists in your heart.

And then ask God to bless them. You will find it very difficult, maybe even impossible, to continue hating someone if you continually lift them up before the Lord in prayer. Our hearts are changed through this prayerful action.

ALMSGIVING

As you feel your heart begin to change and soften, see if there is some way that you can materially bless or serve someone who has been your enemy. Do it anonymously if you need to, but personally if you can. This may not lead to reconciliation - do not necessarily expect that - but it will continue to help soften your heart.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

MID-DAY

Pray **Psalm 15**

PRAYER OF ST. AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE

*Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
Make me an island, set apart,
Alone with you, God, holy to you.
Then with the turning of the tide
Prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,
The world that rushes in on me,
Till the waters come again and fold me back to you.*

Find a place to be still and silent for twenty minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you what it means to live on God's holy mountain.

Remember **Psalm 15** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for twenty minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twenty minutes are up, pray **Psalm 15** again.

EVENING

LECTIO

Read **Acts 2:42-47**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Have you given up on the hope of holiness? Have you accepted compromise with the anger, greed, lust and violence of the world as inevitable? Lament. Confess. Ask God for the hope to believe a new way of living faithfully is possible. Receive this as hope and blessing, not as condemnation.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

REVEALING THE TREASURE

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **John 17**

The wreck of a Spanish Galleon, the *San Jose*, lies 2000 feet under the sea off the coast of Cartagena, Colombia. The merchant ship was sunk in June of 1708 by British naval ships. The remains of the vessel are of tremendous historical value, of course, but there is another factor at play: the *San Jose* was carrying 17-20 billion US dollars (in today's estimation) worth of gold, silver and emeralds at the time of its sinking.

So, people are interested.

An American company first found the remains in 1981, so it is claiming the right to the treasure. The Colombian government also "found" the ship in 2015 (they are keeping the underwater coordinates hidden) and claim that the ship and all its contents belong rightfully to them. Spain claims that since they originally designed, built and funded the *San Jose*, whatever is brought to the surface should be theirs.

There is a huge legal battle over it, and no one seems particularly inclined to compromise or share. As of now the ship's remains, and the great treasure, lie hidden at the bottom of the sea.¹⁹

Jesus speaks about the revelation of unimaginable treasure in **John 17**. He wants to be "glorified" (which in this context, means "crucified") so that he can bring glory to the name of his Father. He wants the true treasure of his Father to be known. **Hebrews 1:3** says that "the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, upholding all things by His powerful word." Jesus therefore prays that he might demonstrate to the world *exactly* what the Father is like, that he is a God who lays down his own life for his beloved children. He is the perfectly poor in spirit, his very poverty revealing the inexhaustible riches of God's glory.

Jesus knew this treasure would be crushed on the cross and buried in the tomb, sunk deeper than any Spanish ship or gold. The treasure would be brought back to the surface through his resurrection, but still not everyone would be able to see it. Many eyes are blinded by hate, by greed, by distraction, by power, by hurt, by unbelief. This is why Jesus reveals his treasure to his disciples. Jesus gives his glory to his disciples and sends them into the world - just as the father sent Jesus into the world - to further reveal this glory. This is the great mission of the Church.

But there is a way that Jesus wants to reveal this hidden treasure and glory to the world through his disciples, and through the people who will believe in him through the disciples: he wants them to be *One*, "perfectly united", just as the Father and Son are united. This *way* of revelation is essential to the message. How does it make sense for the Body of Christ to be divided? If the Father is in Jesus, and Jesus is in his followers, and they are in him, how can they be fighting with one another? Even hating one another?

Yet it happens. We all know it happens. And because it has never stopped happening there is treasure and glory that remains buried, inaccessible, the subject of bitterness and war and lawsuits and church splits between believers. The world will continue to "not know" the glory of God so long as the children of God refuse to share the treasure.

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

*Today, O Lord, I yield myself to You.
May Your will be my delight today.
May You have perfect sway in me.
May your love be the pattern of my living.
I surrender to You my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions.
Do with them what You will, when You will, as You will.
I place into Your loving care my family, my friends, my future.
Care for them with a care that I can never give.
I release into Your hands my need to control, my craving for status, my
fear of obscurity.
Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and establish Your Kingdom on
earth.
For Jesus' sake, Amen.*

MISSIO DEI: WASHING THE FEET OF JESUS

Listen to Like Oil by We Will Worship:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWrUjhMsUb8

Read **Luke 7:36-50** and **John 12:1-8**

Two stories of two women who anoint Jesus, in both cases to the consternation of some of the men around them. Yet Jesus praises their actions, the love they show him, the deep humility that marks them. What they do is scandalous, awkward, not "right" or "appropriate". It is terribly risky and courageous as well.

The posture of these women is the posture of mission. The posture of the poor in spirit.

The very heart of mission is loving Jesus. Often we imagine mission as if we had little portions of Jesus (kind of like sandwiches) that we

distribute to people who have none. But this feeds into an unhelpful power dynamic, and a belief that God has not already been working in the lives of people and communities before we ever got there.

So today, look for Jesus. Look for him in unexpected places. Look for evidence of Jesus at work in your business, in the community around you, in your neighbours. And when you find Jesus, love him extravagantly. Point out his beauty to those around you. Thank him. Praise him.

ALMSGIVING

Is there any conflict you know of between Churches in your area? Is there some kind of rivalry between your Church and others? If there is, give a gift this week to the other Church. Bless them, pray over them, ask for God's very best for them.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord's Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name."

Pray **Psalm 85**

PRAYER OF ST. AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE

*Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
Make me an island, set apart,
Alone with you, God, holy to you.
Then with the turning of the tide
Prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,
The world that rushes in on me,
Till the waters come again and fold me back to you.*

Find a place to be still and silent for twenty minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you what it means for "righteousness and peace" to "kiss each other."

Remember **Psalm 85** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for twenty minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twenty minutes are up, pray **Psalm 85** again.

LECTIO

Read **John 14:15-27**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

"The greatest single cause of atheism in the world today is Christians: who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, walk out the door, and deny Him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable."

– BRENNAN MANNING

Weep over the divisions in the Body of Christ, divisions which obscure the glory of God to an unbelieving world.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

MORNING

REFLECTION

Read **Ezekiel 47:1-12**

It is very difficult to walk out into deep water. You have to deal with sharp rocks, tides, crashing waves or river currents. And at a certain point the water gets too deep and your body becomes too buoyant to keep walking. You have to choose to stop, float, sink, or swim. Sometimes we simply cannot get there on foot.

In **Ezekiel 47** we see a fascinating progression. The prophet is shown water flowing outwards from under the (renewed) Temple. At first Ezekiel is lead through about 1500 feet (or 457 metres) of ankle-deep water, which is soggy but manageable. Another 1500 feet is navigated through knee-deep water, which is more difficult but still possible. Then another 1500 feet through waist-deep water, which is a serious strain. A final 1500 feet takes them to a place where the river is too deep and the prophet cannot cross it on foot. He would have to swim. So he is lead back to safety of the river bank. From that place he can see the incredible effects of this cleansing river flooding out of the Temple. It makes the salt waters of the ocean fresh and drinkable. It creates a thriving ecosystem of animals and fish, and a flourishing economy for fishermen. And it helps fruit trees grow in abundance, whose fruit is used for food and whose leaves are used for healing.

This is a picture of renewed creation, of righteousness, justice, rest, peace. It is God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

It is interesting that the progression from ankle-deep waters to over-the-head river is even mentioned. Why not just show Ezekiel the final product? Why go through the journey? The prophet takes the same kind of journey that we do through the waters of faith. We have to walk, and it is hard work. We strive and strain with all of our energy, giving everything we have to God, and experiencing more and more of the river of God as we do so. At the end of it all we get to waters so deep that all our efforts will simply not suffice. We can no longer walk across. We have to yield to God's depths, to his mystery, grace and abundant love, all of which is simply over our head. But we may still swim! Swimming isn't just floating, it is still an active participation in the kingdom of heaven. But neither is swimming walking. It is not trusting in your own strengths. It is being immersed in the beauty and work of God, "for in him we live and move and have our being." (**Acts 17:28**)

We do our best, walking and struggling through the waters. But ultimately the posture of mission is to be over our heads in the river of God.

The image of the cleansing river flowing out of the Temple in Ezekiel is revisited a few times in the New Testament. The most obvious example is the end-times vision in **Revelation 22:1-5**, which we will use for our final Lectio Divina tonight.

A more subtle moment is in **John 19:34** when "one of the soldiers pierced His (Jesus') side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out." Some Christian traditions hold this as the birth of the Church, the moment when a "river" of Jesus' cleansing blood and water hit the dirt of the earth.

Another tradition holds that the Church was born when Mary said "Let it be unto me as you have said" to the angel announcing her miraculous pregnancy (**Luke 1:38**). Blood and water pour out at the moment of Jesus' birth, as heaven's cleansing river (Jesus) gushes out of a temple (Mary's body).

The moment of the Spirit's falling at Pentecost is held by another tradition

to be the Church's birthplace (**Acts 2:1-3**). A people cleansed by Jesus and filled with the Holy Spirit pour out of an upper room into the streets below, bringing with them the Gospel in the languages of the gathered people. This is the fulfilment of Jesus' promise in **John 7:37-38**: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

In all of these cases God brings the cleansing and the blessing. But we are still called to the cross, to the pregnancy and labour, to the upper room and to the streets below. God makes it all happen, but we are still required to give our all, to show up, to wait, to pray, to travail, to be immersed in him as we swim in the kingdom waters. But it is only

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,

When our strength has failed ere the day is half-done,

When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,

Our Father's full giving is only begun.

(Annie Johnson Flint, *He Giveth More Grace*)

CONSOLATION AND DESOLATION

Today, O Lord, I yield myself to You.

May Your will be my delight today.

May You have perfect sway in me.

May your love be the pattern of my living.

I surrender to You my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions.

Do with them what You will, when You will, as You will.

I place into Your loving care my family, my friends, my future.

Care for them with a care that I can never give.

I release into Your hands my need to control, my craving for status, my fear of obscurity.

Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and establish Your Kingdom on earth.

For Jesus' sake, Amen.

MISSIO DEI: WASHING THE FEET OF THE “NEIGHBOUR”

Read **Luke 10:25-37**, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

This is normally employed as a story to convince us to help people who are unfortunate. That is obviously a good thing to do. But the story is far more revolutionary than that. The expert in the law who questions Jesus clearly understood that the beaten and robbed man should be helped. What he has a hard time accepting is that the helper in the story is a despised Samaritan. The real challenge here is not just that we should help others, but that we should be able to identify the “despised” as the true neighbour.

Who are the “despised” in your world? Think deeply on this, and pray about it as well. Ask this question: Who would it ruin your reputation to love? And: Who do you really not *want* to love?

ALMSGIVING

If you discern an answer to these questions above, seek one way today to take just one step towards washing their feet, towards serving them with humility and love.

PRAYER

Pray the Lord’s Prayer, considering each phrase as you pray it. Does anything jump out to you today from the prayer? Think especially of the phrase “Yours is the kingdom the power and the glory for ever.”

Pray **Psalm 93**

PRAYER OF ST. AIDAN OF LINDISFARNE

*Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
Make me an island, set apart,
Alone with you, God, holy to you.
Then with the turning of the tide
Prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond,
The world that rushes in on me,
Till the waters come again and fold me back to you.*

Find a place to be still and silent for twenty minutes. Ask the Spirit to meet you in your stillness and to show you the holiness of the Lord flowing through your life, your community, and the world.

Remember **Psalm 93** as a help to recall your mind if it starts to wander.

Set a timer for twenty minutes, breathe deeply, and begin.

When the twenty minutes are up, pray **Psalm 93** again.

LECTIO

Read **Revelation 22:1-5**

- **Relish**
- **Re-read**
- **Respond**
- **Rest**
- **Resolve**

LAMENT

Are there any ways that you have tried to keep yourself safe, away from the waters that are over your head? Have you tried to rely on your own wisdom, strength, talent and work? Ask the Lord to show you, confess and lament, and pray that you would be able to swim in the deep waters of his blessing.

AWARENESS EXAMEN

Step 1: Become aware of God's presence

Step 2: Review the day with gratitude

Step 3: Pay attention to your emotions

Step 4: Choose one thing to pray for

Step 5: Look to tomorrow

WEEK TWELVE

COMING UP FOR AIR

(REFLECTING ON MISSION)

INFINITUM GROUP MEETING

Have a meal together and talk through the past week, the past month, and the entire journey through the Creative Way Down.

ASK EACH OTHER SOME OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- How have you been changed as a result of this journey together?
- What questions and challenges have been raised?
- What did you find most difficult?
- What did you find most life-giving?
- And most importantly, perhaps, what happens now?

It is worth spending time this week working out a "Rule of Life", both personally and with your Infinitum Hub. Carrying on with the daily Infinitum postures is an excellent start. Then there are practices you learned together throughout the Creative Way Down that you may wish to continue as a daily rule for life.

Here are two resources to help you think about what goes into a Rule of Life:

infinitumlife.com/downloads/tools/Creating_rules_of_life.pdf

Sacred Rhythms by Ruth Haley Barton

An important aspect of any rule of life is accountability. This means to one another, but it also means as a Hub to a larger body that can help give direction, feedback, caution, encouragement and connection to the wider body of Christ.

If you choose to work on a rule of life together, you will definitely want to let your local Church body know, for prayer and support.

The Order of the Mustard Seed is a recognised religious order hosted by 24-7 Prayer. The OMS helps individuals and groups around the

world with their commitments to a simple rule of life. You can see what they do and contact them here: orderofthemustardseed.com/en/home/

If you wish to go further into the study of the Scriptures for personal and missional application, we recommend The People's Seminary, and the Guerilla Bible Studies series by Bob Ekblad:

www.peoplesseminary.org/

Finally, please do connect with Infinitum and let us know how The Creative Way Down worked for you, and how you are planning to carry on as an Infinitum Hub now that you have gone through it. We would love to hear your wisdom, and to offer suggestions and prayer as you continue your journey down into Jesus and his blessings.

FOOTNOTES

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13. <https://dtmag.com/thelibrary/air-options-playing-safe-practicing-air-sharing-skills/>
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17. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ama_\(diving\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ama_(diving))
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