

Dawn | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace over watercolor

WEEK OF ASH WEDNESDAY: Again & Again, We're Invited In

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Day 1 – Wednesday, February 17 – Ash Wednesday

Word/Phrase: When you Pray

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-21

Reflection Prompts: What are your spiritual practices? What spiritual practices need new life?

Prayer: Teaching God, you remind us to avoid going through the motions on autopilot so that we can engage our faith with our whole hearts. You're worth our whole hearts. So today, I pray: Be there in my fasting. Be there in my praying. Be there in my waking and walking. Make this journey real. Make it rich. Make it yours. Amen.

Day 2 – Thursday, February 18

Word/Phrase: Those Who Dream

Scripture: Psalm 126

Reflection Prompts: What dreams do you have for this world? For Yourself? For your community?

Prayer: God of tomorrow, brokenness weighs on us. No one is left untouched. And so we lift our eyes to you, dreaming of the day when love is all we carry. Give us the strength to be those who dream – today and tomorrow. Amen.

Day 3 – Friday, February 19

Word/Phrase: Come and See

Scripture: John 1:35-42

Reflection Prompts: In a world that loves certainty, where could you practice curiosity? How might curiosity be a spiritual tool?

Prayer: Inviting God, you are a God who is up to something good, always thinking ahead, always inviting us to join. So spark curiosity in me today so that I might ask, "Where are you going? I want to tag along." Amen.

Day 4 – Saturday, February 20

Word/Phrase: Gentle

Scripture: Titus 3:1-15

Reflection Prompts: Can you think of a person in your life who is gentle yet strong? How are they impactful? How might you adopt that character?

Prayer: Gracious God, being people of faith has never been easy. From the very beginning we have needed reminders – to be gentle, to show courtesy, to devote ourselves to good works. In a world of division, help me to be gentle. May that gentleness be a power for good. Amen.

Commentary for the Week: (Matthew 6:1-21)

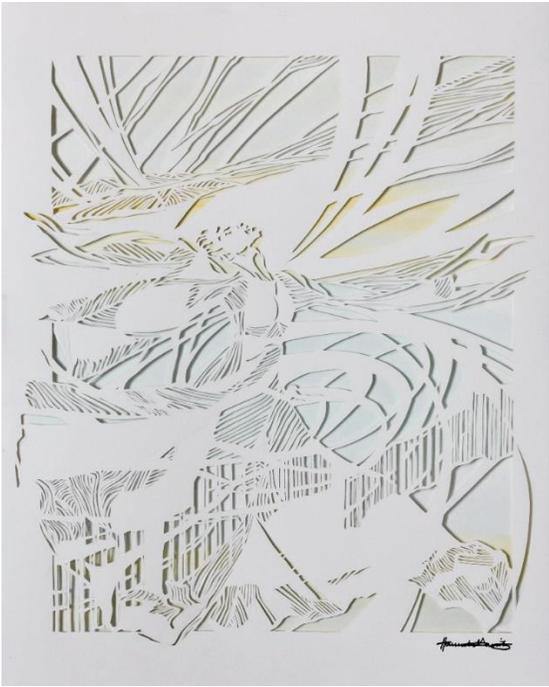
By Rev. T. Denise Anderson

Sanctified Art, Again and Again Devotional | Again and Again We're Invited In

As I write this, millions have been affected by a disease that was unknown to humans just a year ago. It has stolen loved ones and changed us in ways we are still discovering. On Ash Wednesday 2020, it hadn't yet had the global impact it eventually achieved. You probably marked the occasion by having ashes imposed on your forehead as a sign of lament and repentance, showing you intend to turn things around in your living.

That was when we could touch, hug or just be with each other without face masks and an imaginary tape measure.

I'm sure lament is easy to find today. There is also much we still need to turn around.



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Collectively known as the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's anthology of Jesus' teachings begins with the Beatitudes, a litany pronouncing blessings upon the unsung folks. The poor in spirit, the meek, the mourners, the peacemakers – these are called "blessed." Jesus shows himself here to be countercultural. The kind of religion he promoted wasn't performative, as so much of religious life can be. We give because it is necessary. Prayer prioritizes God's will, not our words. Fasting produces spiritual, not physical evidence. What we value is different.

There's something poignant about this in a time when we cannot rely on most of the social norms we've used our whole lives. Even facial cues fail us because of the masks we must wear! Performative interactions with God and others will similarly fail us in these times. They simply are not enough. We must go deeper.

Again and again, God invites us into fuller ways of being. There is no better time to accept that invitation than now, when so much is different. Maybe ashes aren't imposed in the sanctuary today. Maybe no ashes even mark our foreheads today. But they can still mark our hearts.

Poem for the Week: Invited In

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I like to imagine that each year,
God invites me to a party.
God drops me a note that says,
"No gifts, casual dress. Come just as you are."

I like to imagine that I am brave enough to go.
I like to imagine that I decide that I am worth it.
This was no pity invite,
There is no obligatory postage.
God wants me there.

So I get myself together,
Smudged glasses, sensitive ego, wrinkled shirt, and all.
I ring the doorbell a few minutes late
on account of the fact that
I lost my keys twice trying to get out the door,
And I almost turn back to hide in my car,
Afraid that I might embarrass myself over appetizers or
small talk.
But then God answers the door,
And God says, "You're here!"
And I smile, because I am.

And with every step past that threshold,
I know that God is cheering me on.
It's the pride of a parent watching their child take their
first step.
If I freeze, God is not disappointed.
If I fall, God is not mad.
But if I trust the invitation,
If I move closer, I know, God celebrates.

Friends, you've got mail.
It's an invitation to dust off your shoes,
To go deeper,
To trust that you're worth it,
To lose your keys and your faith,
And then to find them both, along with your worth.
You are invited.
We are invited.
Again and again and again.
This invitation is for you.