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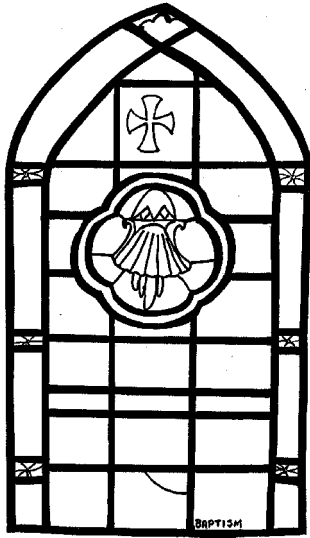
ETERNAL LIFE



Stories in Stained Glass

This Lent, we're walking through the stories of Jesus as laid out in the stained glass windows of our church. This devotion allows you to read and reflect on each of these stories, accompanied by recreations of the stained glass windows hand-drawn years ago as part of a child's coloring book. We hope these images, readings, and reflections help you connect with God as we journey together to Easter.

Trigger warning: As we look at the story of Jesus' journey to the cross, we reflect on the violence and hatred Jesus experienced. This pushes us to reflect on the ways we've been hurt by religious people. If you have experienced religious trauma, please proceed with caution and skip the parts that might not be helpful for you given your experiences and season of life.

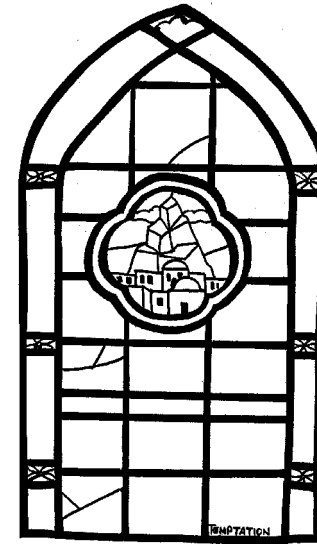


Baptism

Read Matthew 3:13-16

Baptism is a chance for us to be reminded that we are children of God, loved by God, and included in God's family. It was important, before Jesus began his ministry, to remember he was a child of God, loved by God. Knowing this would sustain him through difficult times. The same is true for us.

How might you remind yourself and those around you that we are beloved children of God?

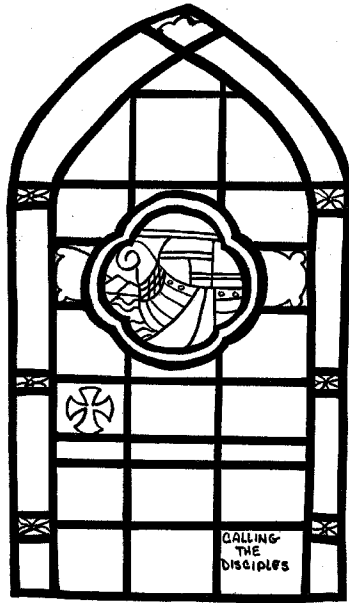


Temptation

Read Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus engages in scriptural debate with Satan. This story, amongst other things, makes it clear that just because someone can quote scripture doesn't mean they are using it correctly.

When scripture is mis-used, it can result in the creation and perpetuation of false kingdoms that bring harm to communities. In this backwards sort of way, scripture can be used to promote things that are not the way of Jesus. Scripture can be used to support the values of this world; things like greed, selfishness, power—which is evident in this temptation narrative—but also other things like hate, fear of outsiders and other toxic religious mindsets. Have you seen this happen? How have you learned to tell the difference between the “kingdoms of this world” and the “kingdom of God”?



Calling the Disciples

Read Matthew 4:18-22

This story, as simple as it is, is the basis for what it means to be a Christian. Christians are people who respond to Jesus' invitation to follow him. As a follower of Jesus, we learn to love more like Jesus.

What do you think it means to be a follower of Jesus?

How has your life changed since choosing to follow Jesus?

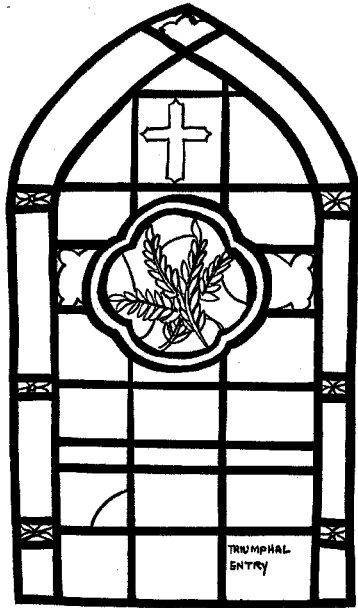


Sermon on The Mount

Read Matthew 5-7 to read the sermon in its entirety, or select a part of the sermon to read and meditate on. You might also consider reading it in different translations.

What part of this sermon stood out to you?

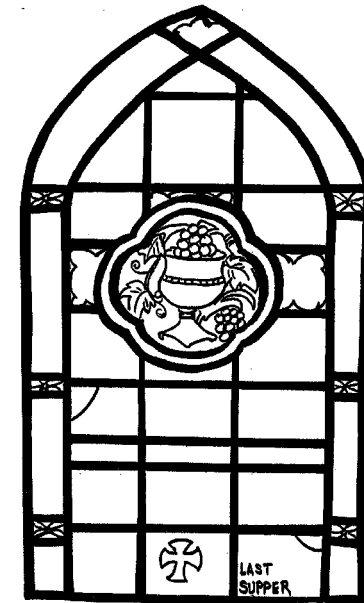
What part encourages you? And what part challenges you?



Triumphal Entry

Read Matthew 21:1-11

The people longed for a king to overthrow the Romans, someone like their ancestor David. Jesus is proclaimed the “son of David” as if he might be that great ruler. Yet, Jesus’ kingdom wasn’t going to be like the kingdom of David at all. It would be a kingdom of love, peace, kindness, and justice. The people got caught up in the moment, excited to welcome a “king” that they would later crucify. Think back in your faith, were you ever excited about something that you later regretted? Have you ever cheered something on, in the name of Jesus, only later to realize that’s not what Jesus is about?

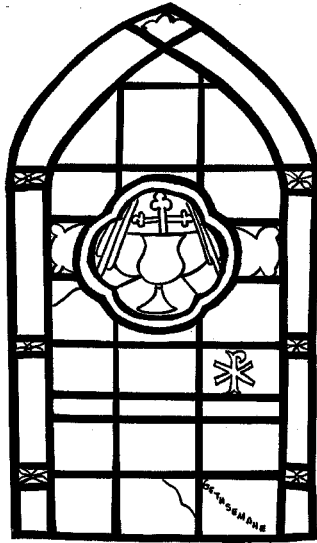


Last Supper

Read Mathew 26:17-30

In order to make bread and wine, basic elements like wheat and grapes have to be crushed and pulverized, one turned into flour and the other juice—and only then, can they become bread and wine. This mimics Jesus’ story perfectly: his body would be beaten and crushed, his story discredited, his life put on trial, and only after his brutal death, would he usher in something new.

Consider your life - have you ever had to experience something painful in order to experience something new? What was that like? What helped sustain you during the difficult times?

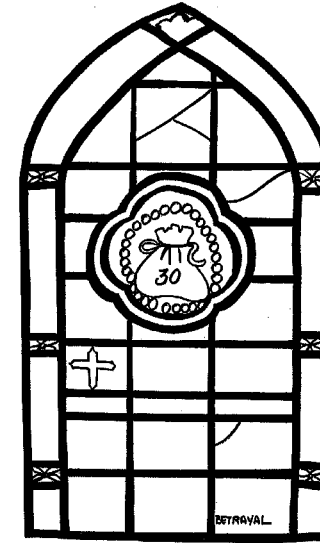


Gethsemane

Read Matthew 26:36-46

Jesus knew his future would include pain and suffering, and in a moment of complete anxiety, he found himself struggling to feel supported by those closest to him. Have you ever struggled in a way that left you feeling alone or unsupported?

In what ways have you tried to support others when they are facing difficult situations?



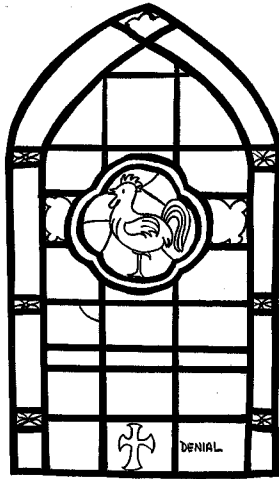
Betrayal

Read Matthew 26:47-56

Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies, but as we can see in this story, learning this and practicing it are very different things. Loving our enemies isn't as easy as it sounds, and when we're faced with real struggle, and real loss, it can feel impossible. Our default is to want to act out, get revenge, or seek retribution. Yet, Jesus believes so profoundly in this lesson, that he chooses to heal the person Peter meant to harm.

Have you ever been hurt or harmed by someone close to Jesus? Has a disciple of Jesus ever caused you harm?

Have you ever experienced healing from these experiences? How does this story of Jesus healing this soldier resonate or connect with you, given your own experiences?



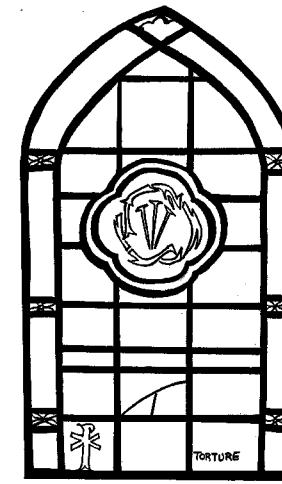
Denial

Read Matthew 26:57-75

The beauty of this passage isn't that Peter denies Jesus, but that Jesus knew he was going to, and in the end, Jesus still made him the leader of the early church.

Have you ever rejected your faith, rejected Jesus, or some part of the faith? Have you ever done something that made you feel you were disqualified from serving Jesus or the church?

How does this story of Peter open your eyes to God's unrelenting grace?



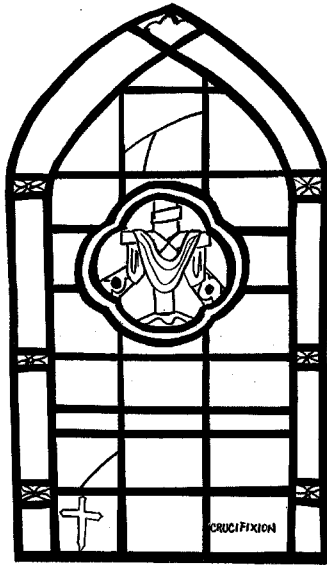
Crown of Thorns

Read Matthew 27:27-31

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he was treated like a king. Now, on the day of his crucifixion, they mock him. The world is often confused by power. They see power in one way, but God sees it in another. Here, Jesus would take all the violence and hatred the world had to offer, and in the end, by choosing to love and forgive, he would show us another way. This is true power, the kind of power that changes the world for the better. This power is far better than if Jesus had actually been an earthly king.

Do you sometimes wish Jesus did more in the world? Are you sometimes dissatisfied with how God works in your life? Do you at times want God to do more?

Have you ever given Jesus' method of suffering and love a chance? In what ways have you seen this posture bring about lasting change in your life and others?



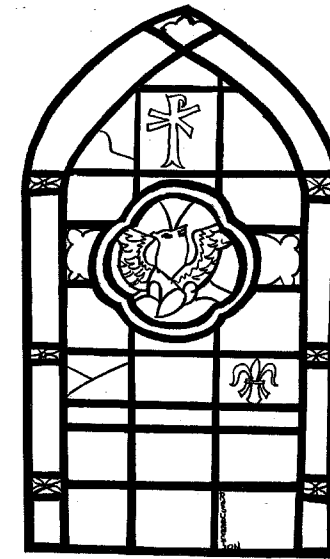
Crucifixion

Read Matthew 27:32-56

While on the cross, Jesus feels abandoned by God. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This doesn’t mean he was. This prayer is a quote from a Psalm. Included in that Psalm is the line: “For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.”

It might feel like God has abandoned us, but in reality, God has not.

Have you ever felt abandoned by God? During that time, was there anything to remind you that God was there?



Resurrection

Read Matthew 28:1-10

The women were “afraid yet filled with joy”—a great description of the events they had just witnessed. Have you ever experienced something so good, but so new, and so shocking it left you feeling this deep sense of awe? I like to think of “awe” as equal parts joy and fear.

Often our faith is sustained by significant events that leave us in “awe”. When was the last time you experienced something in your faith that left you in awe?

Often, we can’t experience “awe” if we are cynical, detached, or without hope, for in those times we will reason it away or miss it entirely. We have to be open and looking for God’s resurrection in our lives. What does it look like for you to be open to God doing something amazing in your life?

