

Sunday

FROM GENERATION
TO GENERATION...

We can choose a better way



INSTRUCTIONS FOR A HARD CHOICE

First, you must take a deep breath.
Let oxygen dance through your lungs.
Exhale it slowly. Allow the hurt, the shame,
the anger to rise up in you. Let your mind run wild,
like a million loose horses. Let the narratives unfold, unroll,
a river of choppy water. Ask yourself how you got here. Look
down at your feet. Roll your shoulders back. Remember who you
are. Take another deep breath. Then, walk it back to the beginning.

Instead of looking at your feet, look at hers. Imagine where she
stands. Imagine what he needs. Dry the river of false stories
in your mind. Turn rushing water into a dry creek bed,
certainly not clean enough to drink. Call the horses.
Bring them home. Watch as they shake off
the dust of the day. Name what you're feeling.
Inhale again. Now you are ready
to choose a better way.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*

We can choose a better way

READ Matthew 1:18-25

COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

This story always raises a question for me. Why did it take divine intervention for Joseph to choose the better way? It took a vision and a celestial being for Joseph not to abandon his partner. Part of me is frustrated with Joseph. It took the hand of God for him to choose a better way; however, when I reflect upon my frustration, I realize in many ways we are each Joseph. Each day we are faced with opportunities to do and be better in our relationships with one another and the world. Yet, when we are faced with opportunities to put our privilege and power at risk—to do what is right—we often decline to engage. Risk discomforts power.

Too often, I witness white folx evade doing the right thing in justice work. When the opportunity rises for white folx to do and say the right thing, which ultimately puts their relationships, jobs, or reputations at risk with other white folx, polite excuses arise—excuses that claim to “make room” for BIPOC³ voices by declining to use their own voices. Why is it that room for BIPOC is made only when it serves the interests of white folx taking the least amount of risk? How about risking solidarity with us? I sometimes wonder about and wish for divine intervention in these moments. What would happen if the divine would intervene and demand white folx take the better way? Why should doing the right thing take divine intervention?

I wonder about Mary and Joseph’s relationship in the aftermath of the dream. What was in Mary’s heart and on her tongue as Joseph told her about the dream that changed everything? What did Mary’s face look like as Joseph confessed that saving her and the baby took the work of a divine dream and command? I hope he eventually realized that doing right by her shouldn’t have necessitated divine intervention. I hope we might be people who do not need convincing that there is a better way. Let’s choose the better way and risk solidarity with one another.

³ An acronym for “Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.”



The Courageous Choice | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Silk painting with digital drawing and collage

Tuesday | FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

We can choose a better way

READ Matthew 1:18-25

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

When Joseph learns that his engagement has turned into a scandal, he decides to dismiss Mary quietly. While this choice may seem like a compassionate one, it's also a passive choice, one with little cost to Joseph but great consequences for Mary. As an unmarried mother, she and her child would be incredibly vulnerable, shunned by society, perhaps cut off from family support and resources. This choice means Joseph's reputation remains unharmed while pregnant Mary will live on with mounting shame and threats cast upon her.

While Joseph is thinking about all of this, perhaps deliberating about how he will delicately manage the social perceptions of this unexpected turn in his life, an angel comes to him in his dreams. What I find most interesting is that the angel doesn't command Joseph; instead he simply says, "Don't be afraid." He essentially says: "Don't be afraid of the social stigma. Don't be afraid to become a parent through adoption. Don't be afraid to experience a love greater than you have ever known. Don't be afraid to make the courageous choice, the one that will not only change your life, but the lives of Mary and Jesus and so many generations who will come after you."

In this image, I've captured Joseph in the liminal space where his dreams will soon shape his reality. He rests his head on a folded blanket, which represents the woven tapestry of his ancestors who also made difficult choices for good. Gold interconnecting lines, like the roots and branches of a family tree, envelop him, symbolizing the beautiful web of regeneration that will come from his courage.

As we reflect on the Christmas story through Joseph's experience, may we, too, have the courage to choose a better way.

PRAY

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Wednesday | Journal Prompt

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

We can choose a better way

*Reread the poem, “Instructions for a Hard Choice” by Rev. Sarah Speed (pg. 21). In the space below, reflect on a time when you made a difficult decision. How did you find your way to the choice you made?
How was God at work in that experience?*



Wilderness Blossom | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting

We can choose a better way

READ Isaiah 35:1-10

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Hope is difficult to come by these days; the wilderness seems to expand toward the horizon with no end in sight. “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing” (Is. 35: 1-2). How does one cling to the nonexistent, vibrant purple petals of a crocus flower as they crouch in a barren, dusty wasteland? How does one reach for the cool relief of clear springs in a parched haunt of jackals?

Have you ever looked through a kaleidoscope? A kaleidoscope doesn't expose your eye to anything that isn't there. It takes what is in view, and with light and mirrors, creates a new, dynamic, luminous image. The overlapping, novel perspectives, light, and movement transform mundane and even unappealing subjects into vibrantly dancing masterpieces. Now, how does this relate to this text? I think it's possible that when we face difficult seasons that seem unending, if we immerse ourselves in the light of the voices of prophets, move to a new vantage point, and try new perspectives, we just might be able to see the wilderness bloom.

In this image I chose a few of the many vivid visuals from the text and created a kaleidoscope of sorts. Starting in the center, crocuses bloom, weak hands are strengthened, eyes are opened, bodies leap with joy, burning sand becomes a pool, swamps are formed, and the light of gladness radiates from the entire composition.

We need prophecies like this. Please don't get me wrong; there are certainly seasons of disappointment, devastation, and grief in this life, but we need not make our homes there. We could choose to shy away from such optimism during particularly difficult times while getting endlessly lost and settled into apathy and despair. Or, we could choose a better way, and hold fast to the stories of the joy that is to come.

PRAY

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

We can choose a better way



Scan to hear the tune!

A Better Way

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Text: Anna Strickland (2022)

Music: Traditional English carol (18th cent.)



When Jo - seph learned of Ma - ry's state he
 He planned to leave her qui - et - ly and
 Said Ga - briel, "Jo - seph, do not fear to
 Like Jo - seph woke from sleep to find his



pon - dered her dis - grace He cal - cu - lat - ed
 not cre - ate a scene But Ma - ry still would
 make Ma - ry your wife She bears in - side her
 path - way had been changed Still here to - day God



all the shame the scan - dal would cre - ate But
 grow with child; what then would her fate be? When
 womb the hope of ev - er - last - ing life The
 calls us all to choose the bet - ter way Be -



not con - tent to see her stoned he of - fered her some
 Jo - seph went to sleep that night an an - gel in - ter -
 son that she will bear to you is Je - sus the Mes -
 - yond our wild - est dreams is still a call - ing that re -



grace
 - vened Oh there is a bet - ter way, God's bet - ter way Oh
 - siah"
 - mains



we can choose the bet - ter way

Saturday | *We can choose a better way*

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

SABBATH IN THE KITCHEN

As a Sabbath activity, follow this family recipe or prepare another favorite dish.

PEANUT'S PECAN PIE (ADAPTED FOR POPPA)

A family recipe shared by Lauren Wright Pittman

Peanut was my Poppa's (my maternal grandfather) little sister who was born in 1944. Peanut learned to cook early on because she wasn't able to work in the fields with the rest of her family. Her pecan pie was my Poppa's absolute favorite. Her pie was a seasonal treat because she had to wait for the pecan trees to drop the nuts, and she cracked them each by hand. It was hard work, so she tried to make it easier in some other ways. She adapted a recipe to use a whole bottle of Karo syrup so she could use up the whole bottle and have it yield two pies. Peanut knew this was also one of my mom's favorite recipes, so when my mom got married in 1984, Peanut gave her the recipe. As my Poppa grew older, he lost his teeth and wasn't able to enjoy all the foods he used to. My mom decided to start chopping up the pecans almost to dust so he could taste his favorite pie once again. I lost my Poppa this year. At his celebration of life, we shared his favorite pie and our gratitude for his life with hundreds of his family and friends. I will cherish this recipe for the rest of my life, and will certainly pass it on.

INGREDIENTS

- 6 eggs
- 2 cups of pecans
- 1 bottle dark Karo syrup
- 4 tablespoons of butter melted, or a 1/2 stick
- 1 cup of sugar
- 2 pie shells

INSTRUCTIONS

Mix the ingredients well and pour into the pie shells (*be careful not to mix hot butter with the eggs; let it cool first*). The recipe makes 2 deep dish pies or 3 regular pies. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. If using a deep dish, bake for 65 mins.