

This week I shared with the morning Bible Study group an email I received that morning. It's a regular post from an Episcopal priest and Thursday's reflection was called "Experience Lent." She's a published author and is in the midst of writing a book and shares about the challenges of that discipline. She writes, "Imagine intense therapy sessions every day...with the end being everyone gets to read what you're writing." In this reflection of last Thursday, she then goes on to talk about the importance of Lenten disciplines—how they allow us to go deeper into ourselves and find a renewed relationship with God. Lent a space and time for possible transformation and important to choose one or two disciplines that might stretch the soul.

She then goes on to list seven practical ways that one might take on a new discipline. They are more about taking on a practice than giving up something for Lent. The very first one she suggests is this: "**Experience voices unlike yours.** Too often, we are part of the choir to which people with whom we agree are preaching. What might happen to our interior assumptions and expectations if we listened to voices NOT like ours? If we're white, spend the Lenten season reading books by people of color or watching movies that focus on their experience. I commend *Thirteenth* and *I Am Not Your Negro* for starters. If you're straight, read and watch art and narratives by LGBTQ people. If you're male, read works by

women and listen to their experiences. Allow yourself to be bothered, to be challenged. Explore your own prejudices. What assumptions did you have before you listened, and how have they changed?”

The other suggestions were equally good and all involved action—
“*experience* the reality of those who live in poverty... *experience* silence... *experience* generosity,”¹ etc. I put a few copies of the post on the Lenten Resource table. Sometimes the word *discipline* has a negative ring to it, especially if we think of something we’ve done wrong. The root for the word *discipline* is *disciple*.

The first discipline offered in this post particularly struck me: experience voices unlike yours. We are indeed doing that in our Lenten Book study this year with Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*. I have found additional copies and now have three more to be claimed, so join us if you can. The book is a new way of looking at mass incarceration as being the new Jim Crow in our time. Racism has not been neatly packed away and put to bed. Reading and listening to this young black woman’s voice may just lead us to shedding some assumptions.

Yesterday I attended the Companions in Mission Conference, which had a focus on refugee ministry—long ago planned with that focus and very fitting for the times in which we live. Allison Duvall, Manager of Church Relations and Engagement, Episcopal Migration Ministries, was the keynote speaker. She began her talk sharing about the little island of Lampedusa, Italy. It’s a place where

¹ *Dirty Sexy Ministry* post, March 1, 2017, 12:48 p.m.

refugees from Africa risk their lives in tenuous boats to cross mighty waters to safety. On October 11, 2013, there was a boat with 466 Eritean and Somali refugees aboard set out from Libya to Europe, and the boat sank. The people of Lampedusa helped to save the lives of 155 people and the other 311 died.

Francesco Tuccio is a carpenter on this little island and he was moved by the plight of these refugees and realized the only thing he could do was to offer his carpentry skills. He walked the beach and picked up the scraps of wood from the boat wreckage and made little crosses for each of the survivors as a reflection on their salvation from the sea and hope for the future. A similar cross was made for Pope Francis who carried it at a memorial service for those who perished. The primates of the Anglican Communion were also gifted with a Lampedusean Cross, and we saw on Saturday the one presented to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. The people of this little island do what they can for refugees and migrants that arrive on their shore.

At the conference I had the opportunity to hear the voices of Syrian refugees who are resettling in Wilton and in West Hartford. St. John's, West Hartford, and St. James's, West Hartford, are together sponsoring a refugee family. A member of St. John's, who works with refugees throughout the Hartford area, speaks Arabic and helps in translation and with many other basic needs. She helps these refugees have a voice that can be heard and reminded us that they all have a story just like

you and me. Listen to their voices when you have a chance to hear them or to read about them.

Just after his baptism “Jesus was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights...” (Matt 4:1-2). Jesus was tempted by bread to fill his hunger. He was tempted to save himself from danger, and he was tempted to have all the world’s power and wealth. He refused each of the three temptations and chose God, even knowing the journey ahead that he was to embark. It’s hard to imagine temptations of this magnitude and yet temptations are before us on a daily basis.

We set out on this Lenten journey of ours paying more attention to the temptations we encounter. Temptations get the better of us when we get caught up in the busyness of life such that relationships are on the back burner or we get caught up in our blindness to human need or in our not making time for soul work. We have 40 days and 40 nights to pay attention, to take on something new, to experience the voices of those different from ours, to listen for God in the midst of them. Lent is an invitation for each of us to go deeper into ourselves and to do something with what we find. It’s our chance to prepare for the new life that awaits us. Find what works for you, knowing that Jesus walks every step along the way.

Let us pray with words from the Iona Worship Book.

“Because the world is beautiful,

and beauty is a tender thing,
and we are stewards of creation,
we need you, God.

Because human knowledge seems endless,
and we do not know what we do not know,
we need you, God.

Because we cannot live without you
and are free to go against you,
and could worship our wisdom alone,
we need you, God.

Because you came among us,
and sat beside us,
and healed our pain and let us wound you,
and loved us to the end,
and triumphed over all hatred,
we need you, God.”² Amen.

² “Because the World is a Beautiful Think” (excerpt), in *The Iona Community Worship Book* (Glasgow, Scotland: Iona Community/Wild Goose Worship Group, 1988), 47.