

**Faith Bible Study Guide**  
**For the Week of March 10, 2024 - 4th Week in Lent**  
**"Wandering Heart: Fixed Upon It"**

**Be still [2 Minutes]:** As you hear these Centering Words, let us greet each other, greet the Holy Spirit, and begin with 1 minute of silence, breathing in the breath of God and allow the group to open themselves to the Holy Spirit today:

**CENTERING WORDS: Open Hands**

We are born with the ability  
to wrap our fingers around another,  
to hold tight to what we know.  
Maybe that's where the instinct comes from— this clinging,  
this sinking,  
this holding on.  
Maybe that's why Peter cries, "Never!"  
when Jesus must leave.  
From the very beginning  
we've known how to hold tight.  
So I pray:  
open up my hands.  
Uncurl my fingers  
one by one.  
Loosen the grip  
that I hold unyielding.  
Remind me that birds must fly  
and children must grow  
and leaves must fall.  
And even though  
we are born with the ability  
to hold tight,  
we can learn how to love  
with open hands.

**OPENING PRAYER:**

Listening God,  
If we could attach ourselves to you, we would.  
We would scribble your scripture onto our tender hearts.  
We would weave your good news into the fiber of our being.  
We would bind ourselves to you,  
but instead,  
we wander.  
Instead of attaching ourselves to you,  
we find ourselves swept up in the business of the day.  
Like a seesaw of faithfulness, we move back and forth, up and down, constantly trying to find you in the midst of it all.



So speak clearly to us now.

Quiet the distractions long enough for us to affix ourselves to your good news. We are listening.

We are hungry.

We are hopeful.

Amen.

## **\*\*Artist Statement at end of Bible Study**

### **Be the Word: New Testament Scripture – Matthew 16:21-23**

**21** From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and legal experts, and that he had to be killed and raised on the third day. **22** Then Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him: “God forbid, Lord! This won’t happen to you.” **23** But he turned to Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan. You are a stone that could make me stumble, for you are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

**L: The Word of God for all people**

**P: Thanks be to God**

### **Be present: [Being mindful of others and sharing time]**

1. Take a deep breath. How is it with your soul?

2. *“Instead of attaching ourselves to you, we find ourselves swept up in the business of the day.”*

**What is your present Lenten journey looking like?**

- How are things REALLY going for you this year during Lent?
- Are you feeling more present with God? Farther away?
- Distracted by the ways of the world? What is your soul REALLY feeling today?

### **Be rooted: [Bible Study]**

#### **Theme Connections**

When your world unravels and your beliefs are tested, you may cling to what you know. As Jesus foretells his death and resurrection, Peter protests. Peter is fixed upon the way he thinks things should go; he resists the pain of what will come. But Jesus is fixed upon his calling and calls Peter out. For everyone, there comes a time when your faith is tested and you will have to face difficult and inconvenient truths. We may want to take the easier path, the path with less pain. We may want to cling to easy or simplistic answers.

1. Do we try to take the easier path, the path with less pain? Do we try to cling to easy or simplistic answers?
  - Instead, what does it look like to welcome complexity? Can you stay fixed upon your convictions while also expanding your perspective?

Commentary on Matthew 16:21-23 & Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 by Dr. Terence Lester

It was one of the toughest nights in my life. I had just received the “Humanitarian of the Year” award from the National Urban League of Greater Atlanta for the work we do with *Love Beyond Walls*. The evening had ended around 11 p.m. after a celebration with friends. As we left, I casually said, “I’ll talk to you later. Be safe!” Little did I know how

ironic those words would soon become. My wife Cecilia drove, and I went to sleep. Ten minutes later, I was jolted upright by Cecilia's screams. We had narrowly escaped a car accident.

The car in front of us had come to an abrupt stop. The driver had become distracted by a child vomiting in the back seat and hit the brakes. Airbags deployed, and then I was on the ground. The impact of the airbag had driven me back into my seat and broken it. Moments later, the EMTs arrived and rushed me to hospital. The pain was indescribable. I discovered that my right hip and pelvis were fractured, and I suffered nerve damage. Emergency surgery followed to place a ten-pound rod in my leg to prevent it from crushing a vital artery.

It was a whirlwind of events. I had gone to receive an award and I ended up in the hospital. Previously, I had found worth in my work and believed that God was with me. That belief came crashing down in a single, devastating moment that left me grappling with my faith. Have you ever experienced something like this, where life shatters and makes you question everything? We, too, can encounter upheaval and crisis, and our hearts may wander as we seek answers and meaning.

As I reflect on my journey, I'm reminded of a pivotal moment for Peter. Peter has just declared that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God—a mountaintop experience of unwavering faith. Yet, he immediately faces a reality that challenges his understanding of Jesus and faith itself. Jesus reveals the difficult path ahead—suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection. It seems incongruent with Peter's vision of a triumphant Messiah who would establish an earthly kingdom. Peter instinctively seeks to avoid the hardship, grief, and struggle. This leads to a rebuke from Jesus: "Get behind me, Satan!" It's a sharp reminder that sometimes our well-intentioned desires to protect and preserve can become stumbling blocks to fulfilling our calling.

Peter's faith journey, like my own, reminds us that faith doesn't always shield us from hardship. As we reflect on Peter's journey and the challenges of our own faith, let us remember that unraveling can lead to profound growth. Like Peter, we may have to face inconvenient truths and drop our preconceived notions. Jesus' response to Peter reminds us of the importance of our commitment to God's mission, even when it's difficult. May we learn from Peter and embrace the transformative power of faith.

Sometimes, it is by leaning into grief that we begin the journey of healing in our own lives and in our relationship with God. This is because grief isn't about fixing what has happened as much as it is about learning new ways to navigate the realities that cause us to feel disoriented. Let us set our hearts and minds upon God's grace, trusting that we are always guided by the unwavering love of our Creator, even in the midst of grief and unexpected suffering.

2. In *The Life and Witness of Peter*, Larry R. Helyer argues that Peter's profession of Jesus as the Messiah indicates that he misunderstands Jesus' purpose. He writes, "Peter almost certainly harbors nationalistic hopes for the Jesus movement." In his commentary on Mark, James R. Edwards agrees: "Peter has supplied the proper title, but he has the wrong understanding . . . Jesus will don the servant's trowel rather than the warrior's sword."
  - What do you think Peter expected and hoped for?
  - What do you think were his perceptions of who Jesus would be and how Jesus would behave?
3. Reflecting on Matthew 16:21-23, Larry R. Helyer asserts: "Christians in the United States of America can sympathize with Peter; sometimes, we too fall prey to equating nationalism and political preferences with Jesus' kingdom."
  - When have you fallen prey to this instinct?
  - In what ways are you guilty of "setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Matthew 16:23)?
4. At what moments in your life have you cried out like Peter, "God, forbid it!" (Matthew 16:22)?
  - When have you faced inconvenient and difficult truths that challenged your faith or the way you see the world? What did you cling to during those times?

5. Brian McLaren uses the image of tree rings to describe stages of faith, with the innermost ring representing Stage One and the outward growth representing subsequent stages. Each new stage builds upon the previous ones, which means that even if it feels like you are losing your faith, you still hold onto the gifts you gained from each stage. Like a tree, the dark ring lines represent dormant seasons (fall and winter), and the wider areas in between represent growth seasons (spring and summer).
  - Does this visual provide you hope for the moments when your world unravels and you feel lost in your faith?

### **Be transformed: [Call to action]**

#### *Considerations for this Week*

*There are a few texts many preachers dread, and this might be one of them. To go from Jesus praising Peter as the rock of the church to declaring, "Get behind me, Satan!" certainly feels like whiplash. One idea that surfaced is how this interaction between Jesus and Peter shows us the intimacy and trust that they shared. Jesus rebukes Peter because he loves him deeply, and because he has high expectations for him as the "rock" of the church. Perhaps we are even witnessing Jesus' grief as he declares, "Get behind me." Many of us empathize greatly with Peter. Who doesn't want to avoid pain and suffering? Ultimately, this week's text shows us that growing in our faith inherently comes with challenges and complexity.*

1. *In the midst of grief and hardship, can we stay rooted in our convictions while also loosening our grip on control?*
  - *If we are in a stage of deconstructing our faith, can we move through that season with an open heart and open hands?*
2. Go back to our "Centering Words"/Poem on the first page, "Open Hands" by Rev. Sarah Speed. The final lines of the poem conclude: *"And even though / we are born with the ability / to hold tight, / we can learn how to love / with open hands."*
  - When do you feel the instinct to hold tightly to what you know? What does it look like for you to "love with open hands"?

### **Prayers & Concerns**

#### **Celebrations...**

Rev. Eric Iki, passed his Ordination interviews to be Ordained at AC in June!

Sally & Ken's 54th Anniversary (1/31/24)

Kainoa Kent Barajas born to Lauren & Carlos (2/4/24) - (Great-grandma is Jane Kiyohara!)

#### **Prayers for healing and wholeness...**

\*Claretta Foster

Jack Hamada

The Sasaki Family; Jordan Sasaki, Sally, Ken, & Jason

Jerry Osaka

\*Victoria Dela Torre

\*Diane & Destiny Ueda-Banda

Audrey Goto

Tak and Irene Ryono

\*Ralph Ichikawa's brother, Jim (Tio)

Kurt Kuniyoshi (stage 4 colon cancer)

\*Alice Kajiya

\*Faye Toma

\*Virginia Flood

Jason's friend, Kaitlyn Sabedra

Scarlett Bone

Glenn & Millie Shimizu

Faith Tanaka

\*Sam Kobayashi

\*Nancy Matsushima

Dan Yamashita  
\*Sumi Maruya  
\*Chic Miyake  
\*Winnie Osaki  
\*Postal Worker, Dexter  
\*Alveena Fukuhara  
\* Harry Lum  
\* Kyle Ichikawa (Ralph's son)

### **Prayers for Grieving Families...**

\*Nelson Mark (husband of Alice, father of Darrell, passed on 3/10/24)  
\*Takako Takao (mother of Jerry, passed 2/x/24)  
\*Charles Kvitky (husband of Lily; passed week of 2/11/24)  
Greg Kubo (passed away on 2/3/24)  
Henry Uepi Isama'u (passed on 1/24/24)  
Kenneth Kanja (passed on 1/25/24)  
\*Kent Kiyomura (Karen Muraoka, Joyce Matsubara, Tam Kobayashi and family; passed on 2/9/24)  
Dave Cook (passed; service 2/3/24; burial 2/4/24)  
Kirk Sinn passed on 12/4/23  
Rev. Kim Scott (brother passed)  
Akiko Kashiwagi (passed 1/7/24; service 3/23/24)  
Tom Tokishi (service on 1/20/24)

Helen Hayakawa passed, 11/27/23 (service 2/23/24)  
Kim's niece of a friend, Asha (passed)  
\* Elaine Suzuki (Ralph's sister)  
\*Viliami Fifita (20yo family friend of Rev. Allison)  
\*John Schwiebert (Andy's Uncle; 2/24)  
Rev. Allison's godfather's family in the passing of Uncle Vincent "Buffalo" Randall and her godmother's brother, Uncle Jack Brown.  
Paul In (passed 1/3/24; Harry Lum's in-law)  
Orion (Susan's niece), her father Bernard passed away  
Minister Ainise's cousin, James Jethro passed away  
Rose Honda (West LA)

### **For our hurting world...**

Japan Earthquake / Volcanic Eruption in Sakurajima (near Kagoshima)  
People of the Holy Land  
Families rebuilding after natural disasters  
Election year  
Covid (and for those who are sick, ailing, in need of God's love and healing)  
The United Methodist Church

### **And Know that He is God: Commission & Benediction**

#### **Affirmation of Faith**

I believe in a God of second chances,  
**a God who sees through my stubbornness and holds my fear with tenderness.**  
I believe that this God of second chances  
uses ordinary people like Peter to do good in the world.  
**Therefore, I believe and hope that God can use me too.**  
I believe that from time to time, God invites us to imagine the impossible.  
I believe that from time to time, God invites us to change our minds.  
**This change is holy and important work, although challenging.**  
**When fear and scarcity plague me, or when the impossible feels out of reach,**  
**I believe that God meets me with grace and invites me to follow.**  
Thanks be to God for a love like that.  
**Amen.**

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*\*Wandering Heart Devotionals Available*

## **\*\*Beseeching** by Hannah Garrity Inspired by Matthew 16:21-23

*Ink on paper*

“God forbid it!” says Peter to Jesus (Matthew 16:22). In this image, Peter beseeches Jesus to avoid the cross, to not let the prophecies become reality.

After ten years in ministry, I work in a church for the first time. In this text, I feel Jesus speaking directly to me: “You are a hindrance to me, for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (Matthew 16:23). This is exactly where frustration surfaces for me in my amazing church job. It is when I have set my eye on human things. I worry about the budget. I worry about the email. I worry about the building. So why am I so focused on human things? And the negative ones, at that?

Because I’m human. Because these things matter. But not if I miss the grandeur of this incredible organization sharing the expansive love of God!

With every brush stroke in this ink painting, the humanity of Peter’s face deepens, his expression clarifies. He cannot let his beloved friend be murdered. He worries about human

things. How weighty and legitimate those things feel. Jesus seems free of those human worries. He focuses with confidence on the path ahead, though Peter’s concern causes him to falter.

Perhaps we can each be free of human concerns as well... However, that feels like a pipe dream, and Jesus knows it: “Get behind me, Satan” (Matthew 16:23). He does not blame Peter. Instead, he calls out Satan from within his friend. In doing so, he offers us a much needed reminder to refocus. Thanks be to God.

—Hannah Garrity

