

Stations of the Cross: The Co-Suffering God
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Intro *(Adapted from Erickson):*

The Stations of the Cross began as a practice of pilgrims going to Jerusalem who would retrace the final journey of Jesus to the hill where he was crucified.

This journey to the cross is not only a meditation of Jesus accomplishing what he came to do - the redemption of humanity through his own willful sacrifice - but its also a contemplation of Jesus silently participating in some of the worst aspects of being human. Being tempted. Being betrayed by a friend. Being convicted in an unjust system. Physical pain. Mockery. Broken family relationships. Public humiliation. And a lot of our greatest fears... having to die. These are all aspects of human life that he was not insulated from. In fact on the cross he quotes King David saying "My God My God, Why have you forsaken me?"... as if to say "Why is it like this?" He was one who was not separate from our own pain.

I don't think our deepest question is "Is there a God?"

I think our deepest question is "Is there a God that's with us in all this?"

How to use this Resource:

These stations are a cross-section of elements, ideas, and objects from Jesus' journey of being with us. As we reflect on the God who knows suffering, we hold space for the many people groups that Jesus associates with in his suffering. Jesus' own story of oppression, betrayal, suffering, pain, and death reflects many peoples human experiences. As such, this resource also provides a journey of the cross focused on disabled people, LGBTQ+ people, and the journey of immigrants and refugees. Jesus, as the co-suffering God invites us all, regardless of our oppression into a story of redemption even in the midst of system oppression and pain. May we enter into the solidarity of Jesus, pray for our siblings who suffer, and draw near to Christ on his journey to the cross.

I



JESUS IS TEMPTED

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Matthew 26:38

Scripture Reading:

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me." He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will." When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." **Matthew 25:36-41**

Think of Jesus' complete honesty in prayer. What pushes you toward or prevents you from doing the same?

LGBTQ+:

Societal norms tempt LGBTQ+ people to suppress who they are. They are pushed to conform to heteronormative and gender essentialist standards for their own physical and social survival. A lack of affirming spaces both in and out of the church maintain this culture.

Disability:

People with and without disabilities are tempted by ableism and the notion that people without disabilities are better or more valuable than disabled people. Rather than allowing our bodies to tell us what we need, we often try to conform our bodies and capacity to what we are told that they "should" be.

Immigrants and Refugees:

War, political instability, and lack of opportunity tempts and pushes people to imagine life outside of their homes, families, and places of origin. Increasingly desperate situations create scenarios of risk with no guarantee of a better life.

II



JESUS IS BETRAYED

"Friend, do what you came here to do." Matthew 26:50.

Scripture Reading:

Then, while [Jesus] was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, “the man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely.” He came and immediately went over to him and said, “Rabbi.” And he kissed him. At this they laid hands on him and arrested him. **Mark 14: 43-46**

In what ways are you potentially tempted to backstab, betray, or shortchange people for your own good (reputation, employment, finances etc.)?

LGBTQ+:

50% of LGBTQ+ youth experience negative reactions when coming out to their parents and 68% have experienced some form of family rejection. Churches and Christians that have preached Christ's unconditional love, make who and how people love the condition for rejection (and attribute that rejection to God). .

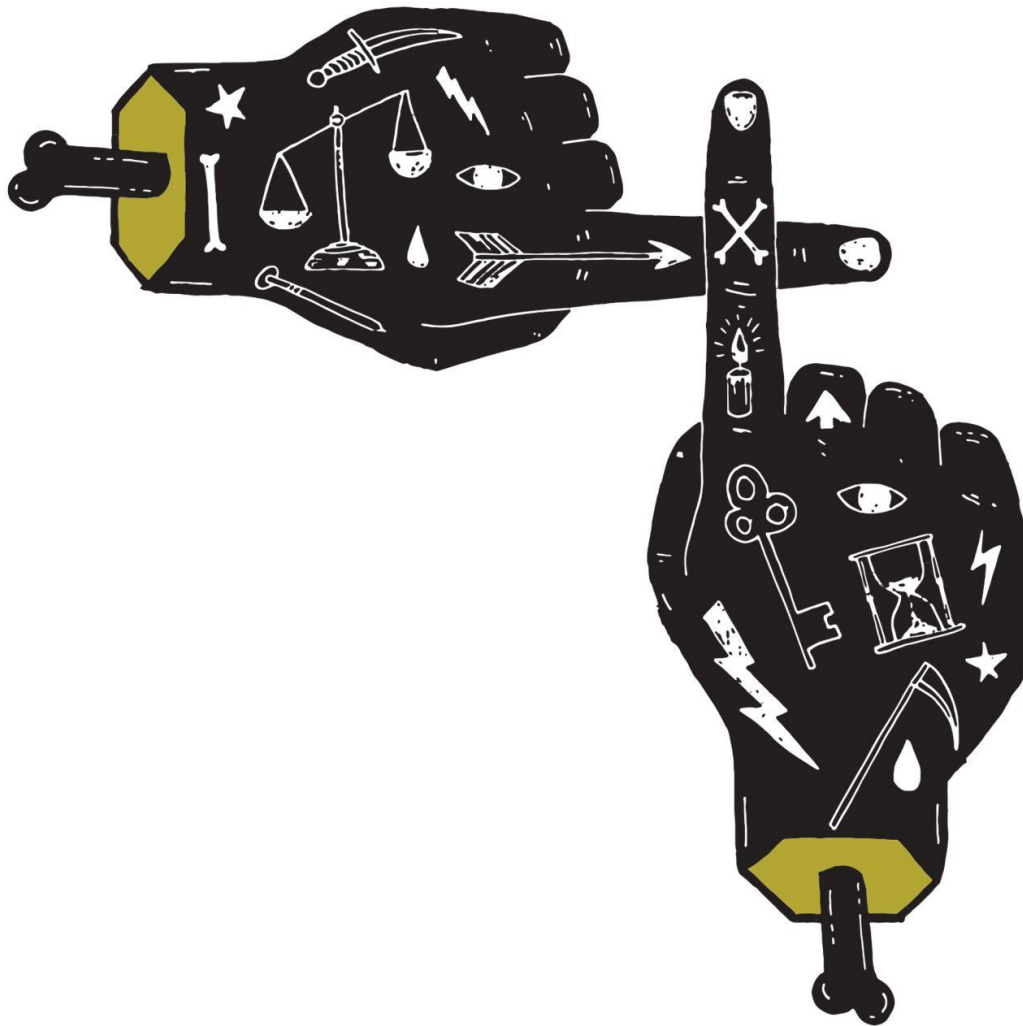
Disability:

People with disabilities are betrayed by the healthcare system that is intended to provide care that often impoverishes, mistreats, and disbelieves people with disabilities. The system often cares more about profits than people, even when providers themselves are well intended.

Immigrants and Refugees:

Those seeking asylum and citizenship are betrayed by promises of a fair and just U.S. legal system. Many are left to the discretion and violence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) both at the border and in their local communities.

III



JESUS IS CONDEMNED

"But this is your hour - when darkness reigns." Luke 22:53

Scripture Reading:

When day came the council of elders of the people met, both chief priests and scribes, and they brought him before their Sanhedrin. They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us," but he replied to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I question, you will not respond. But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?" He replied to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further need do we have for testimony? We have heard it from his own mouth." **Luke 22: 66-71**

Prayer: Lord, grant us your sense of righteousness that we may never cease to work to bring about the justice of the kingdom that you promised.

LGBTQ+:

In 2022 alone over 250 anti- LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced (some passed) across the United States. These seek to limit schools' abilities to talk about the existence of LGBTQ+ people, to inhibit gender affirming healthcare, to frame parents who affirm their children as abusers, and more. These laws both criminalize queerness and compassionate care for LGBTQ+ people leaving many at the whim of systems and structures that seek to harm or invisibilize them.

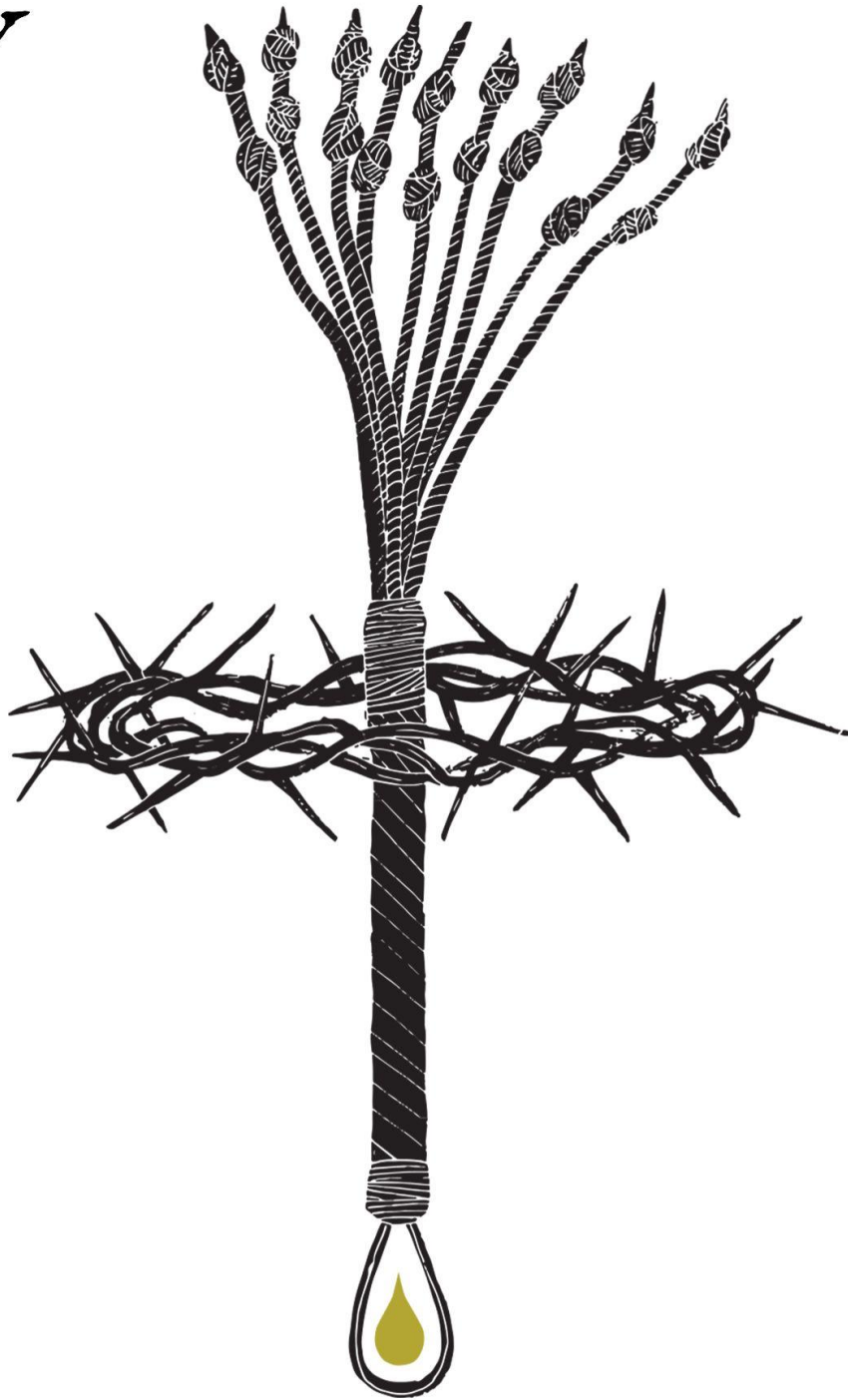
Disability:

People with disabilities (seen and unseen) are often condemned to an invisible life. A lack of accessible buildings, programs, and spaces prevent disabled people from participating fully, leading many non-disabled people to invisibilize or forget them. Communities inability or unwillingness to provide accommodations (whether ramps, tools for sensory over stimulation, ASL or brail, refusing to wear face masks) perpetuate the erasure of disabled people.

Immigrants and Refugees:

Poverty, politics, and violence condemn people to migration with no guarantee of safety. This decision to migrate comes with social, political, and economic discrimination especially in cultures like the U.S. that demonize migrants without understanding the conditions of their life and oppression.

IV



JESUS IS MOCKED

"But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" John 18:23

Scripture Reading:

Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; 64 they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, "Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?" 65 They kept heaping many other insults on him. **Luke 22:63-64**

In what ways are we tempted to mock those who we disagree with? How might the posture of Jesus invite us away from dehumanization?

LGBTQ+:

Our culture at large uses queerness as a metaphor for evil or inferiority. Words like "gay" and "queer" have been given negative social connotations, and queerness is often used in media to delineate evil. Media companies like Disney "queer code" evil characters like as Jafar and Ursula, thus perpetuating a negative social connection with queerness.

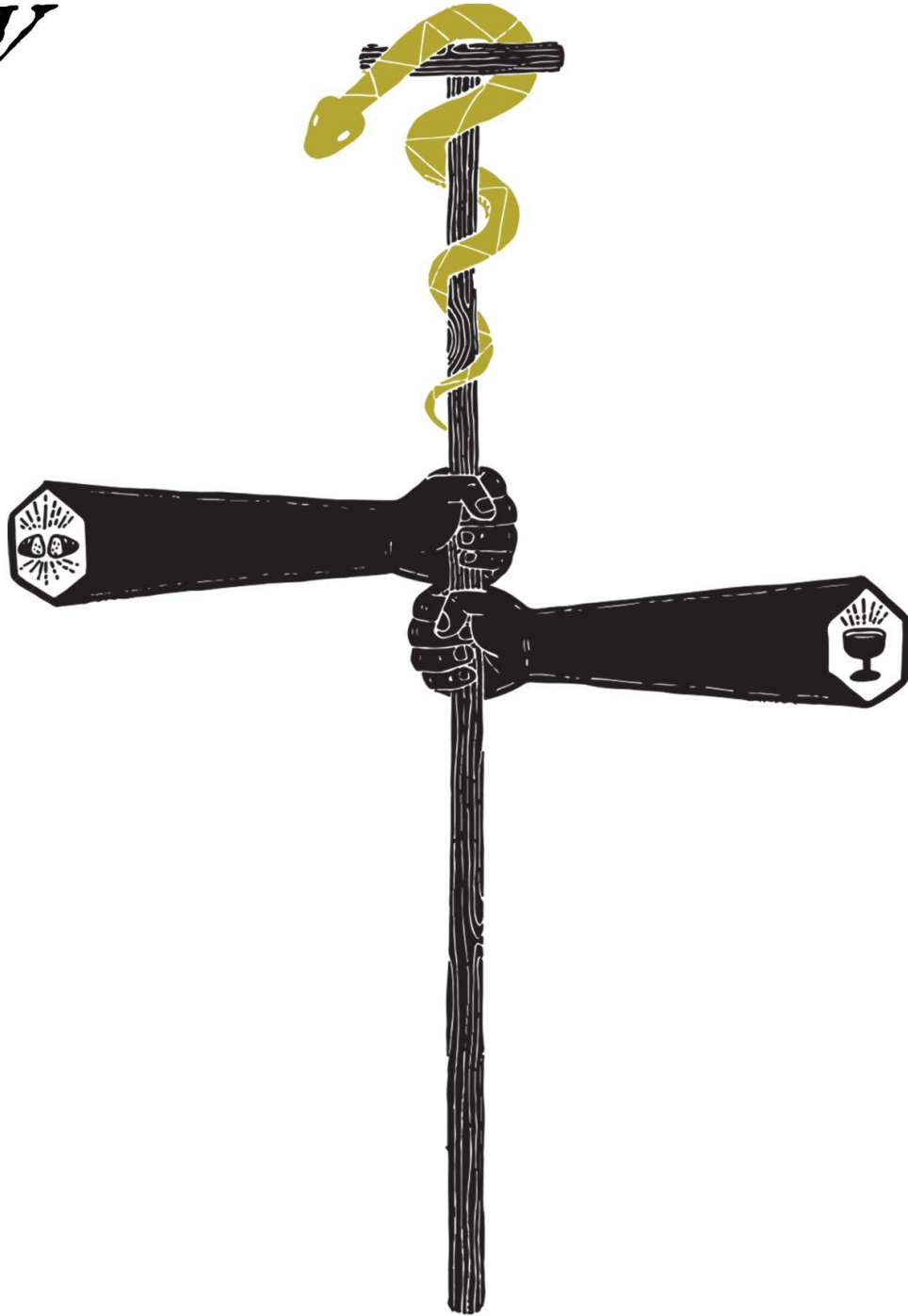
Disability:

Most people will have a disability at some point in their life, yet our culture often views being disabled as "a-fate-worse-than-death." It frames disabled people as a burden to others and an embarrassment and failure to oneself. There is little space to own that we all have human bodies that experience pain, limitation, and aging. Instead, we belittle, disregard, name call, or gaslight people with disabilities.

Immigrants and Refugees:

National and local media frame migrants as drains on society, criminal by nature, self-segregating, and accuses them of damaging social cohesion. Migrants are made into weapons in culture wars that use fear of the other (xenophobia) to build political power at the expense of vulnerable people.

V



JESUS IS GIVEN HIS CROSS

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." John 3:14-15

Scripture Reading:

And carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." **John 19: 17-19**

In what ways do you currently feel unfairly burdened or afflicted? What does the Jesus story speak to you in the midst of it all?

LGBTQ+:

LGBTQ+ people are given the heavy burden of questioning, discovering, and becoming their true selves while facing the reality that it could lead to harm, discrimination, violence, and/or death.

Disability:

Inaccessibility creates disabling realities for people. People's disabilities are framed as a burden when in reality, our world simply is unwilling to accommodate the great diversity of what it means to be human. Our world is designed for non-disabled people and in turn creates challenges for all body/minds with disabilities. .

Immigrants and Refugees:

As migrants flee both within their countries of origin and internationally, they carry the burden of systems that often lack compassion and functional structures all while carrying the reality of grief, loss, loneliness, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, exploitation, and restrictive migration policies.

VI



JESUS FALLS

"Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." John 12:24

Prayer:

Lord, you understand the weight of pain, injustice, and violence- you suffer alongside us in our own troubles.

LGBTQ+:

LGBTQ+ people in the church are given tools to “manage” their queerness. Notions like “love the sinner hate the sin” create painful spaces of disassociation and pain. Practices like conversion therapy are imposed on LGBTQ+ people in order to change them rather than creating spaces of belovedness and acceptance.

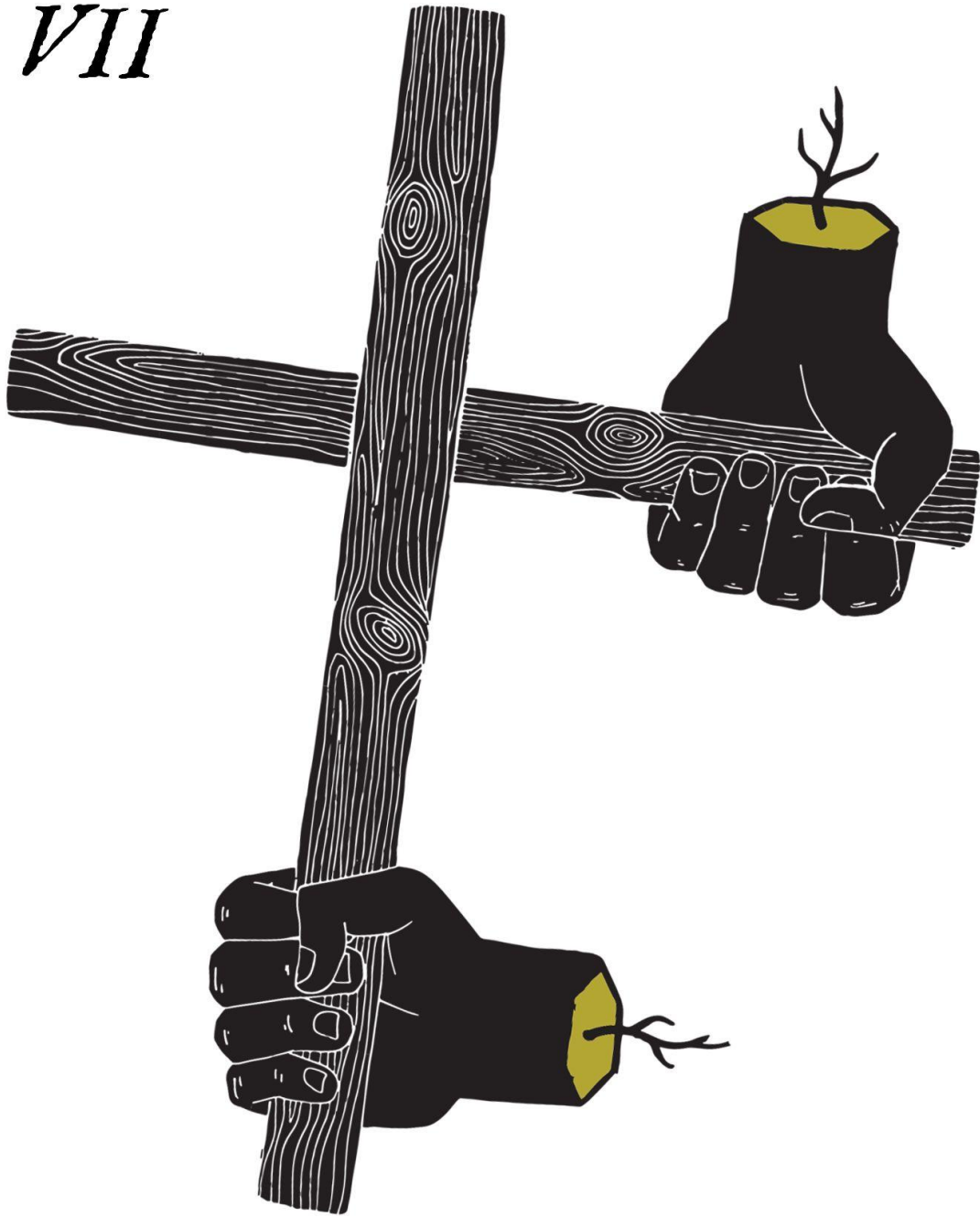
Disability:

Being disabled is considered a pitiable reality by society and people. When families/parents give birth to kids with disabilities the church often moves to pray for God to “perfect” or “heal” people who already bear the image of God. Parents will use phrases like “I don’t care about the gender/appearance/etc, I just want a healthy baby.” This practice takes away dignity, voice, and inherent value from disabled people as it frames having an able body/mind as inherently superior to being disabled. We hold complexity in this reality and have compassion for parents who grieve the hardship that their kids with disabilities will face in our ableist world.

Immigrants and Refugees:

The journey of people migrating is full of painful obstacles- both physical and emotional. Many suffer violations to their human rights regardless of how and where they migrate from. They are politicized, treated cruelly, arbitrarily detained, questioned, and jailed. Their right to move freely and choose where to live is disrespected or scorned and many are robbed of an opportunity for a fair wage because of their immigration/refugee status. This, in addition to the erecting of border walls and increased security, add further danger to people’s journeys.

VII



SIMON CARRIES JESUS' CROSS

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Matthew 16:24

They pressed into service a passer-by, Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. **Mark 15: 21**

How might you come alongside those who are carrying heavy burdens? How have others done that for you in this season?

LGBTQ+:

LGBTQ+ people create spaces of chosen family, belonging and acceptance to carry the grief and pain of rejection and isolation that they have experienced because of their gender, sexuality, and attraction.

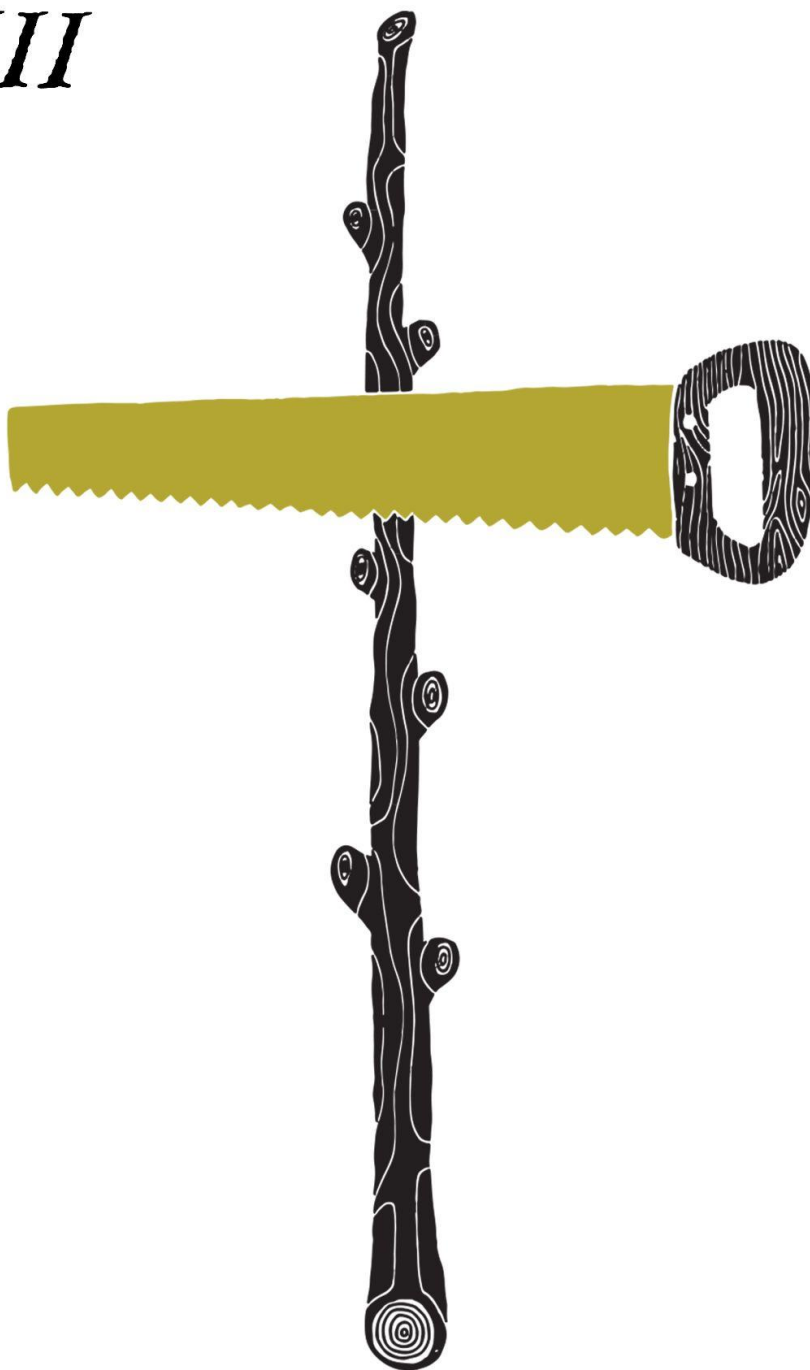
Disability:

Caregivers and assistants make efforts to learn, accommodate and provide care for people with disabilities. They help people get around in a world not made for disabled body/minds.

Immigrants and Refugees:

In the midst of instability and suffering, people choose to tie their lives, well-being, and finances to people who are migrating. Empathy, generosity, and through acts of compassion aid migrants and alleviate some degree of suffering. Some provide aid by leaving food and water and border crossings, more by giving their money to aid organizations, and yet others through lobbying and structural social action.

VIII



JESUS IS STRIPPED

"For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Luke 23:31

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.” **Matthew 27: 27-31**

LGBTQ+:

Non-affirming Christian theology uses the Bible and Christian cultural ideas to strip LGBTQ+ people of their self worth, autonomy to self-define, and space to be fully themselves. Selective interpretations of the bible and binary ideas of men/women, straight/gay, moral/immoral limit how LGBTQ+ fit into God’s story.

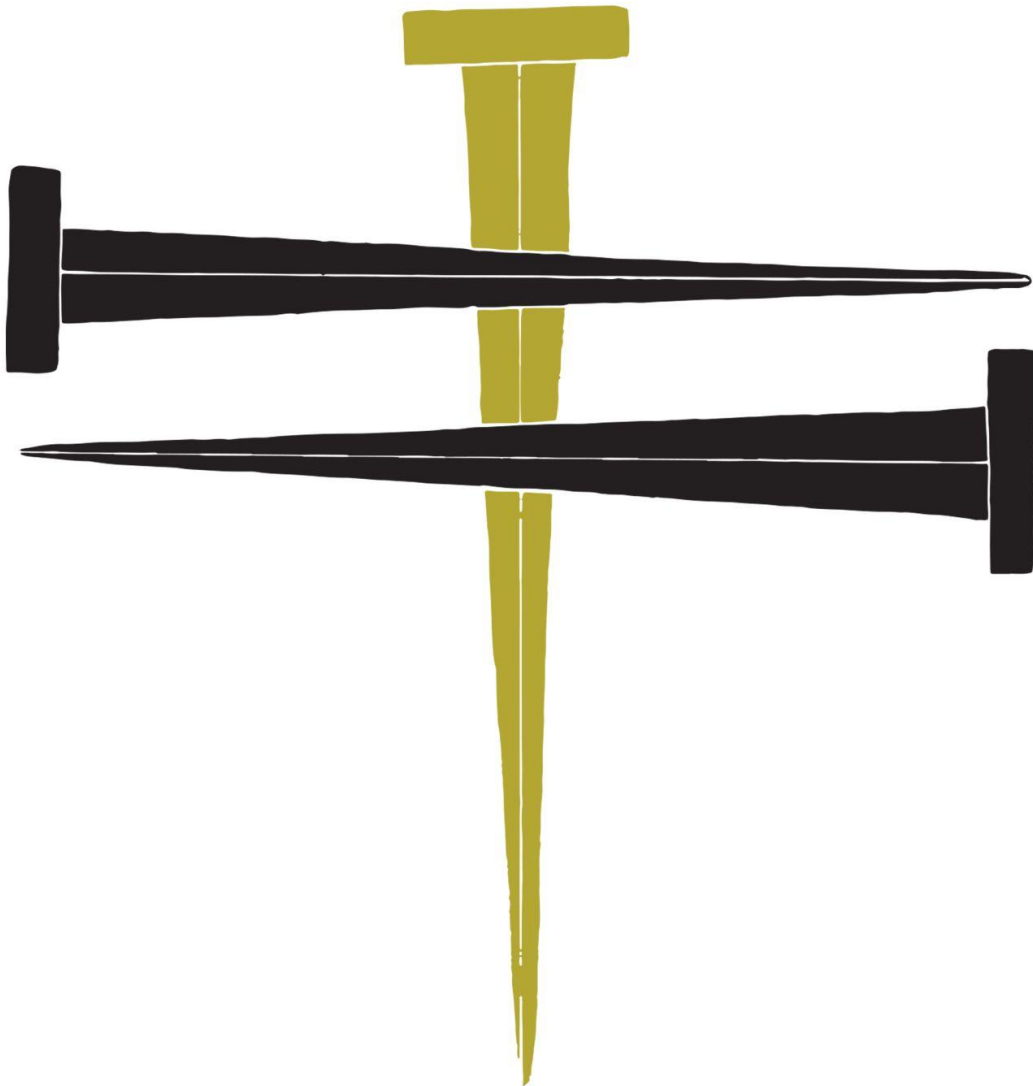
Disability:

Disabled people often have their consent violated as people impose prayer, dogma, or home “remedies” to try and heal/cure people with disabilities. People are subject to the violence of being prayed for when they don’t see or experience anything wrong with themselves. Prayer is used as a tool to increase or practice the faith of non-disabled people while communicating to disabled people that they aren’t good enough.

Immigrants and Refugees:

Migrant’s bodies are exploited and treated as commodities. Some are sold and smuggled by gangs or other actors, some are forced into manual or sexual labor and others are victims of physical abuse. Their rights and dignity are often stripped in the process of migration.

IX



JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

"My God My God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46

When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left. [Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."] **Luke 23: 33-34**

Consider who in your life you need to forgive or need forgiveness from, take that situation to Jesus in prayer.

LGBTQ+:

Over 15% of all documented hate crimes in the U.S. are committed against LGBTQ+ people. This represents only a fraction of the violence done to LGBTQ+ people as fear of retaliation, harassment, and discrimination prevent people from reporting.

On a national scale, we have become desensitized or disregarded mass violence events like the Pulse Nightclub shooting in which a lone gunman killed 49 people and injured 53 more in Orlando, Florida. The victims of the shooting were primarily LGBTQ+ and Latinx, highlighting the compounding oppressions that queer people of color face.

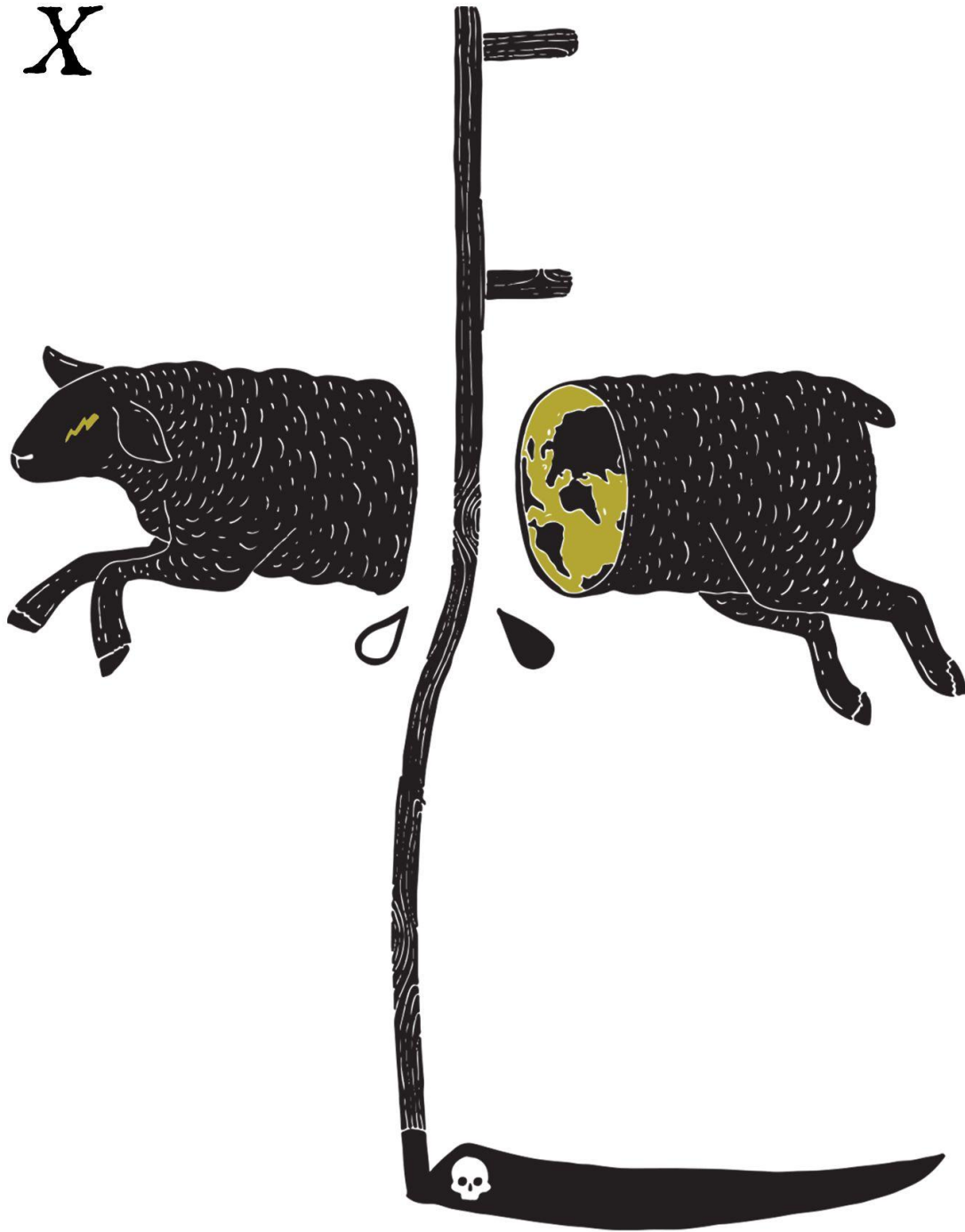
Disability:

Disabled people are disproportionately the targets of violent crime. 26% of all violent crime occurs against people with disabilities and occurs at 4x the rate of non-disabled people. The effects of this violence is heavily weighted against disabled women and people of color. The legal system, which often frames disabled people as non-autonomous people, does not offer fair and due process to disabled victims of violence.

Immigrants and Refugees:

Fear of migrants and refugees results in a culture of assault on all people of color. The recent rise in anti-asian hate stems from a political reality that sees people as threats rather than fellow humans. This fear when turned to violence has deadly implications that communicate to other people of color that their bodies are not necessarily safe anywhere.

X



JESUS DIES

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." John 15:13

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon because of an eclipse of the sun. Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle. Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"; and when he had said this he breathed his last. **Luke 23: 44-46**

Lord, grant us trust in you that you hold the past, present and future, seeking redemption through your death on the cross.

LGBTQ+:

The Trevor Project estimates that more than 1.8 million LGBTQ youth (13-24) seriously consider suicide each year in the U.S. — and at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds.

42% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth.

LGBTQ+ youth are not inherently predisposed to suicidality because of their gender or sexual orientation, but by the stigmatizing and violent social structures that prevent safety, belonging, inclusion, justice, and flourishing.

Disability:

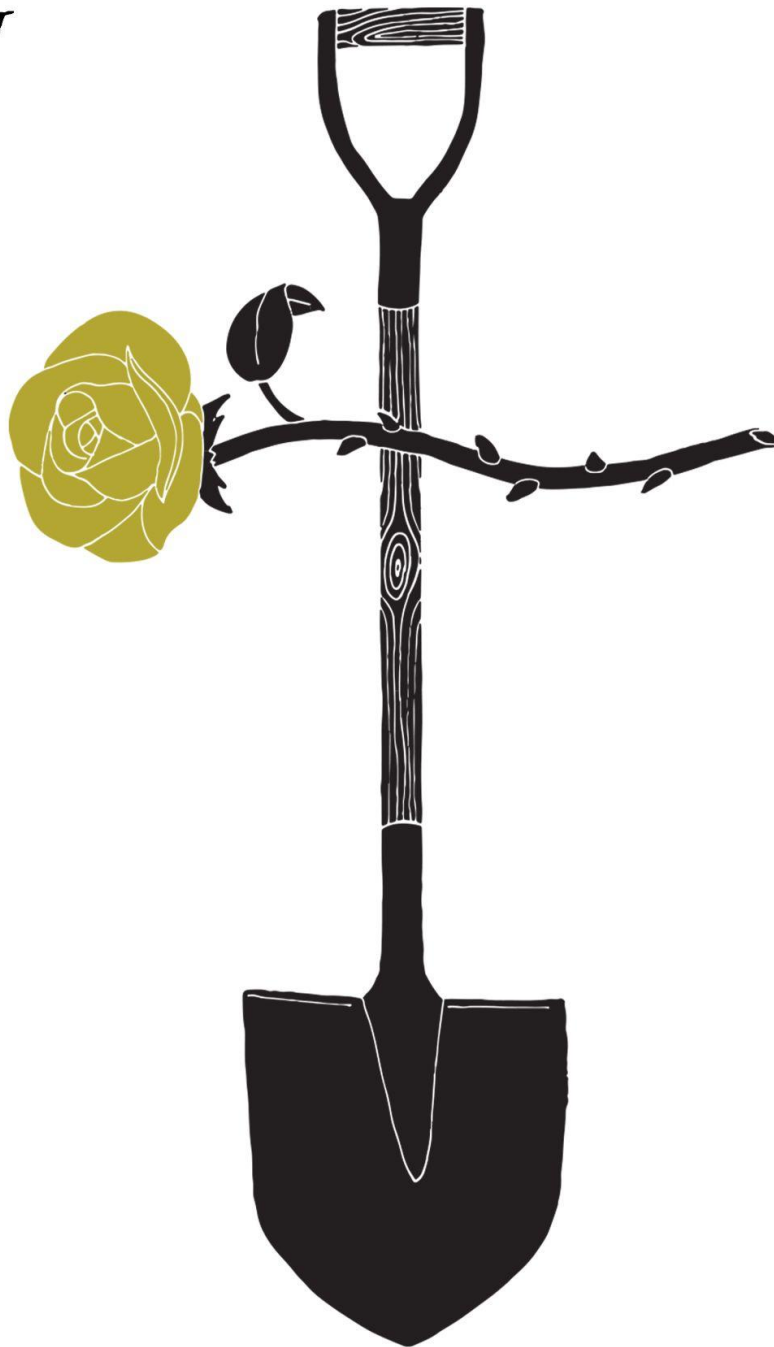
We all will die. And if we live long enough we will all likely be disabled.

Will we accept our bodies as we age and die or will we contort ourselves and buy all the latest things to keep us young and fit? Will we learn to love the human condition or continue to hide away people who are different, aging, or suffering?

Immigrants and Refugees:

At our borders and in long legal waits for access to the United States, many lose their lives. We remember the many people who die daily at our borders. We mourn migrants who die in prisons and detention centers, those who die without anyone around them knowing their name, those who die because of a lack of healthcare. Our system abuses and crushes people, extinguishing the very image of God.

XI



JESUS IS BURIED

"When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial." Matthew 26:12.

Scripture Reading:

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who was himself a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be handed over. Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it [in] clean linen and laid it in his new tomb that he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. **Matthew 27: 57-60**

LGBTQ+:

The church buries the reality of LGBTQ+ pain, suffering, and death under non-affirming theologies, Christianized political ideologies, and church tradition. Christian institutions have little to no accountability for the fruit of these ideologies and theologies. Instead we reinforce them with doctrinal statements and standards in order to create compliance.

Disability:

The very systems that we have to care for people with disabilities create corruption that both harms disabled people and buries their circumstances. Our government predisposes disabled people to poverty with such stipulations as not being able to have more than \$2000 in the bank in order to receive social security benefits. With no way to both save money and receive vital services, many disabled people are buried in expenses for basic vital needs.

Immigrants and Refugees:

Many migrants leave their homes and have limited or no access to their families or relationships that they left behind. As family members die or have crises, the rigid separation that our immigration process ensures causes many to die alone and isolated, buried far from their places and families of origin.

Spend some moments reflecting on what this journey has brought up for you and pray as you are led, able, or needing.