

***An American Awakening
A Reflection and Study Guide
for Groups and Individuals***

by Sharon Ely Pearson

based on

AN AMERICAN AWAKENING

From Ground Zero to Katrina

The People We Are Free to Be

by Courtney Cowart

Study Guide

Introduction

Following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in the fall of 2005, the Episcopal Diocese of Louisiana has hosted approximately 7,000 volunteers. The numbers who have volunteered in Mississippi is even higher. According to the National Council of Churches, at the end of 2007, 1.1 million people had given their time and talents to the region from faith-based communities. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the St. Paul's Chapel community in lower Manhattan engaged 5,000 volunteers and 15,000 recovery workers.

In addition to the experiences and reflections shared about September 11 and the aftermath of the storm, *An American Awakening* is a call to commit to living in ways that have the power to transform our communities. Besides the actual events and the thousands of people that each continues to touch, many issues are raised that call for greater learning, exploration, reflection, and action. Courtney Cowart not only shares a narrative of her experience in New York City and New Orleans; her story is about letting go of safety in order to live into new ways of being.

It is a story of ordinary people being taught to reframe the emotional lenses through which they view death, human pain, and poverty and being liberated to live socially transformative lives as a result. The sightline of the narrative is inside Ground Zero from the moment of the attack and for the duration of the recovery, then four years later inside the Katrina recovery in New Orleans. It is meant to help us break out of the negative and distorted interpretive loops we've been fed about the meaning of these twin traumas so that we can and will risk acting on issues confronted in the wake of these events: war, violence, poverty, classism, and racism.

This book is essentially about hope for the future. It shares how overwhelming events can transform lives through the power of healing and giving over to God that which we cannot control. This study guide is offered to assist in exploring how to be personally engaged as an individual and community in God's work of

reconciliation in the world in the context of group conversation, commitment, and action.

How to Use *An American Awakening* for Study

There are a variety of avenues that can be taken to reflect upon this book in a group setting. In a faith community, it can be a focal point for an Advent or Lenten evening adult program that is bracketed by a meal and worship. It can be a study series offered during a Sunday morning education time. Or whoever is spurred to action by reading this book can gather to further explore the issues raised and develop ways to address them through local, national, or even global means.

In recent years, the number of youth and young adult mission trips sponsored by local churches has grown exponentially in the United States and abroad. The Millennial Generation (born between 1981-2000) is highly altruistic and motivated to make a difference in the world. However, many are ill-equipped for what they face when they arrive to “do mission” and lack the ability as a group to reflect upon their experience upon their return to their home communities. For their leaders, this may be a helpful tool for identifying the concerns they will be facing as well as a means to identify their own values in light of the peace and social justice issues that are raised by moving out of one’s comfort zone. A companion website, www.anamericanawakening.com, provides another means for social networking, peer-to-peer networking, and blogging that can support these new servant leaders.

The book can be discussed chapter-by-chapter or theme-by-theme. It provides rich material for conversation and a challenge for engagement. Each section of this study guide will offer prayers, scripture, reflection questions, and a variety of options for conversation. They can be used separately or together, however a group might decide and time permits.

It is hoped that groups who come together to consider this book will not experience it as a short-term study, but one that becomes a life-long normative commitment toward working for a more hopeful and just society.

Guidelines for Small Group Discussion

An American Awakening explores deep-rooted social and spiritual issues such as race, poverty, class, and violence. Creating a safe space for such conversations is essential in order for individuals to be fully engaged and participate at a level that promotes growth and action.

There are several specific models for creating an environment for open discussion. Parker Palmer’s “circles of trust” as explored in *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994) is “a space between us that honors the soul.” He shows how people in settings ranging from friendship to organizational life can support each other on the journey toward living “divided no more.”

Eric H. F. Law has a wonderful technique for active listening in his work, *The Wolf Shall Dwell With the Lamb* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993). The technique is presented as a tool for multicultural conversation and dialogue, but it seems valuable for any number of settings and circumstances. Below is an adaptation of Law's mutual invitation technique.

1. Begin by letting everyone know the amount of time provided for the group's conversation.
2. Carefully name the topic to be discussed or the information to be shared or the question(s) to be answered.
3. Read the following directions: In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way. The leader/convenor will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she invites another person to share. The person whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another person to share. If the person invited does not wish to say anything, that person simply says "pass" and proceeds to invite another to share. This process is followed until everyone has been invited to speak.
4. The process is a discipline for the group that allows everyone to share the power of selection and everyone to share the power of response. Be patient with one another. Allow time between invitations to hear what has been said. A person may wish to pass on speaking, but no one should be allowed to pass on inviting. No one should invite for another. If the person who is supposed to invite forgets to do so, remind them that they have the privilege of selection.

Chapter Reflection Questions

At the beginning of each chapter study, a series of questions is asked for reflection. These can be a starting point for personal thoughts or group discussion.

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

Thematic Study

Instead of gathering to discuss *An American Awakening* chapter by chapter, the reader or group may wish to focus on the themes that run throughout the text. Any of the questions or scripture can be used or modified to fit the themes, of which a few are listed:

- Poverty
- Racism
- War
- Education
- Darkness and light
- Justice
- Activism and organizing
- The Baptismal Covenant
- Resiliency
- Leadership

Guidelines for Bible Study (optional)

Each session of this study guide offers scripture for reflection related to the text. One method is the African Bible Study, which offers a means for personal reflection and group insights that may be helpful as the group prepares to discuss each chapter or at the conclusion of each session of study for *An American Awakening*.

1. One person reads the scripture passage slowly.
2. Each person identifies the word or phrase that catches their attention (1 minute).
3. Each shares the word or phrase around the group (3-5 minutes, no discussion).
4. Another person reads the passage slowly (from a different translation, if possible).
5. Each person identifies where this passage touches their life today (1 minute).
6. Each shares (3-5 minutes, no discussion).
7. Passage is read a third time (another reader and translation, if possible).
8. Each person names or writes, "From what I've heard and shared, what do I believe God wants me to do or be? Is God inviting me to change in any way?" (5 minutes).
9. Each person shares their answer (5-10 minutes, no discussion).
10. Each prays for the person on their right, naming what was shared in the other steps (5 minutes).
11. Close with the Lord's Prayer and silence.

Chapter Study Guide

Chapter 1: Ash Tuesday

Gathering Prayer:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters. He revives my soul and guides me along the right pathways for his Name's sake. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me; you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over. Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Amen.

Psalms 23

Scripture:

Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not." Thus says the LORD: "Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, says the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country."

Jeremiah 31:15-17

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

Sharing stories

It is difficult to read this chapter without thinking about where you were on September 11, 2001. Time may need to be spent discussing how the actual day unfolded for each person: where they were, how they learned of the event, if they knew anyone immediately affected at the World Trade Center or Pentagon, as well as those who were on the airplanes involved. Share stories of how you participated in that day's "events" – watching the news coverage, calling family and friends, gathering for prayer.

1. What was your first reaction upon hearing the news of the terrorist attacks?
2. What did you do next?
3. In what ways did you feel isolated?
4. Were there ever moments of consolation, and if so, how did they occur?
5. How did the events of the day change your view of the world?
6. How did the events of the day challenge your faith or relationship to God?

Kenosis

Dr. Cowart speaks of “a desperately urgent and insistent giving over to God, not at all passive – almost violent. My whole being in a state of utter tremulous powerlessness and fear is pleading for a swift and immediate release from beyond.” (p. 13) *Kenosis* (Greek word for emptiness) is a concept of the “self-emptying” of one’s own will and becoming totally receptive to God and God’s perfect will. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis describes *kenosis* as the idea that God is self-emptying. He gives the example of a painter who pours his ideas out in his work, and yet remains quite a distinct being from his painting.

1. At what moments in your life have you been totally powerless? What were your thoughts and feelings?
2. There is a saying, “Let go and let God.” How does this relate (or not) to Dr. Cowart’s experience? How does it relate (or not) to your own experiences?
3. Where was God on September 11?

Rachel weeping for her children

Jeremiah (31:15-17) recounts the dramatic story of Rachel weeping for her children as the Israelites are led into captivity by the Babylonians. It is again heard in Matthew 2:18 for the children massacred by Herod after Jesus’ birth. Walter Brueggemann has often stated that the weeping mother Rachel becomes a venue for violence and hope.

1. Read the passage from Jeremiah as well as Matthew.
2. How are these passages ones of violence *and* hope?
3. How does being at Ground Zero on September 11 become an experience of hope for the author as she states, “It is the moment I am set free”?

Closing Prayer:

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and giving life to those in the tomb. The Sun of Righteousness is gloriously risen, giving light to those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. The Lord will guide our feet into the way of peace, having taken away the sin of the world. Christ will open the kingdom of heaven to all who believe in his Name, saying, Come, O blessed Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you. Into paradise may the angels lead you. At your coming may the martyrs receive you, and bring you into the holy city Jerusalem. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 500

Chapter 2: The Little Chapel That Stood

Gathering Prayer:

Almighty God, by your Holy Spirit you have made us one with your saints in heaven and on earth: Grant that in our earthly pilgrimage we may always be supported by this fellowship of love and prayer, and know ourselves to be surrounded by their witnesses to your power and mercy. We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ, in whom all our intercessions are acceptable through the Spirit, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Collect 8, Book of Common Prayer, p. 395

Scripture:

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:28-31

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

Symbols of Shekhinah

When Dr. Cowart returns to St. Paul's Chapel, she is struck by the images of glory within the building: a painting of the Great Seal of the United States with an eagle holding symbols associated with peace and war, and Mount Sinai rising in clouds and lightning in the altarpiece. Outside amidst the ruin there are other images: the smell of decay, pick-up sticks of cable and steel, shredded paper hanging from barren trees. *Shekhinah* is derived from the Hebrew verb, which means literally to settle, inhabit, or dwell. Used frequently in the Old Testament to explain "the presence of God," it is similar to the Greek word *Parousia*, the anticipated return of Jesus Christ from heaven to earth. At first the chapel is vacant and lifeless, but quickly becomes a center of sustenance and healing.

1. Our nation's motto is "*E Pluribus Unum*." Out of many, one. How did this come to life in the days after September 11 at St. Paul's Chapel?
2. How is St. Paul's Chapel transformed into a space of healing amidst death? Have you ever been in such a space?
3. What makes a space sacred?
4. What are symbols of hope for you? Where do you find them in your life?

Tapping into the Wells of Passion

Throughout Chapter 2 we hear stories of individuals reaching out with an enormous capacity to care, to give, and to sacrifice for others. In one incident, a firefighter points to his shield in the shape of a Maltese cross stitched on his uniform, “It means that the person who wears this is willing to lay down his life for you.”

1. When has the power to care been unleashed in you? What led up to this moment or occasion? What were your thoughts and feelings before, during and after?
2. Have you ever met the challenge to see beyond hatred, to go forward in times of trouble instead of fleeing in adversity? Share what gave you courage and what sustained you at that time.
3. What gives you the power to surrender fear?
4. In John 15:12-13, Jesus says, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” What does this mean to you? How does it relate to the post-September 11 world?
5. Archbishop Rowan Williams has said that need is the beginning of truthfulness. What does this mean for you?

The Renewal of Hope

Jerusalem with its Temple was the spiritual and intellectual home of the prophet Isaiah, even though the Temple had been in ruins for over 50 years. There is a message of comfort and reassurance for Israel and the promise that those who are scattered will be called home.

1. Read the passage from Isaiah (40:28-31).
2. How does this prophecy give power to those who are in despair?
3. How is the creation of the world and the idea of purpose and meaning in human history a sign of hope in today’s world?

Closing Prayer:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Collect for the Human Family, Book of Common Prayer, p. 815

Chapter 3: Life Together

Gathering Prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who are born into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 290

Scripture:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in our flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

Ephesians 2:13-14

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

Transformation

Fred speaks about arriving at St. Paul's Chapel (p. 42) ready to "give your all" but is concerned about his capacity to do so under the overwhelming circumstances surrounding the relief efforts. He speaks of "degrees of liberation from self-concern" and the experience of love in the environment that gave him the courage to open up – a transformative moment.

1. For what causes or occasions have you "given your all"?
2. What does Fred mean by "degrees of liberation from self-concern"?
3. What are the hurdles you need to overcome in order for transformation?
4. When have you been liberated? How did it feel? What allowed for that to happen?

Healing Wounds and Dismantling Divisions

The awareness of stereotypes and the isolation that instills becomes a theme as more people accept help and more people offer assistance at St. Paul's Chapel and the surrounding area. Dr. Cowart discovers that healing is going on in the Chapel that has nothing to do with the attack. It is about healing wounds of class, race and ethnicity through the compassionate act of helping each other.

1. Read the passage from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2:13-14).
2. Have you ever accepted help from someone you previously thought had nothing to give?
3. All it really takes to dismantle divisions, heal wounds, and establish new ways of relating is "helping each other and loving each other and that's it." (p. 55) Can we do that for one another? Are we willing to give up something for that?
4. "And when you are equal there's endless possibilities of communion and community." Where is there inequality in your community? What acts of

- compassion can create new fellowship of the future? What steps do you need to take to begin?
5. How does your church work in silos within your congregation, neighborhood, and community?
 6. How can you “open your doors” for all to enter, where everyone is an equally valued contributor?

Justice and Love

Dr. Cowart shares how all the combined influences working on her through ordinary people giving of themselves out of love, compassion, and faith has shifted her class prejudices that she did not know existed. The words of Martin Luther King, Jr. are used as an example of “justice is love working to correct all that opposes love.”

I am quite aware of the fact that there are persons who believe firmly in nonviolence who do not believe in a personal God, but I think every person who believes in nonviolent resistance believes somehow that the universe in some form is on the side of justice. That there is something unfolding in the universe whether one speaks of it as a unconscious process, or whether one speaks of it as some unmoved mover, or whether someone speaks of it as a personal God. There is something in the universe that unfolds for justice and so in Montgomery we felt somehow that as we struggled we had cosmic companionship. And this was one of the things that kept the people together, the belief that the universe is on the side of justice.

God grant that as men and women all over the world struggle against evil systems they will struggle with love in their hearts, with understanding good will. *Agape* says you must go on with wise restraint and calm reasonableness but you must keep moving. We have a great opportunity in America to build here a great nation, a nation where all men live together as brothers and respect the dignity and worth of all human personality. We must keep moving toward that goal.

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam” – June 4, 1957

1. Why are the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. recollected in this chapter? What thoughts and feelings do his words evoke for you?
2. Volunteer Ulla Suokko states, “When we say things out loud our words and visions and wishes have so much more power.” How is this true for her? How is this true for Martin Luther King, Jr.? How is this true for you?
3. Where have you seen justice at work in your faith community? In the community in which you live?
4. Where have you seen injustice in your community?
5. What institutional structures in your daily life could use an active agent on the move, stirring hearts to move? How could you be part of such a movement?
6. Name leaders you know who serve ordinary people through service, sacrifice, or empathy. What qualities do they share? Do you share any of these qualities?
7. How can service to others be an instrument of justice?

Closing Prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for Proper 29, Book of Common Prayer, p. 236

Chapter 4: The Torch

Gathering Prayer:

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect for the First Sunday of Advent, Book of Common Prayer, p. 211

Scripture:

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on – since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

Genesis 18:1-8

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

Light in the Darkness – Resting in God

Again, Dr. Cowart reminds us of the altarpiece of the *Shekhinah* at St. Paul’s Chapel. It is hope out of devastation, light out of darkness, exemplified by the work that is transforming despair for all who enter the doors. The Chapel has become a resting place. Explore and reflect upon one or more of the writings from our Christian tradition that follow while asking:

1. When has your heart felt restless?
2. How can we be a community where all are welcome to rest in God?
3. How can we draw close to suffering in order to restore a meaningful balance to our lives?
4. Who in your church, neighborhood, or community is in need of hope and rest in God? How can you be that place of rest, a light in the darkness? Where can small seeds of hope be planted?

- *Julian of Norwich* (1342-c.1416) from *Revelations of Divine Love*, Chapter V: It needeth us to have knowing of the littleness of creatures and to hold as nought all-thing that is made, for to love and have God that is unmade. For this is the cause why we be not all in ease of heart and soul: that we seek here rest in those things that are so little, wherein is no rest, and know not our God that is All-mighty, All-wise, All-good. For He is the Very Rest. God willeth to be known, and it pleaseth Him that we rest in Him; for all that is beneath Him sufficeth not us. And this is the cause why that no soul is rested till it is made nought as to all things that are made. When it is willingly made nought, for love, to have Him that is all, then is it able to receive spiritual rest.
- *Ezekiel 36:26* – A new heart I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
- *Psalms 51:10* – Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
- *Hebrews 4:9-10* – So then, a Sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labors as God did from his.
- *Mark 4:30-32* – He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

A Thin Space

The phrase “thin space” comes from the Celtic spiritual tradition. It refers to a place, or state, in which there is only the thinnest of veils between oneself and God. It is a place of presence, of wholeness, and connectedness. For many, St. Paul’s Chapel became such a place. Pilgrimages have become popular today for youth, young adults, and other seekers of the holy. They are meant to take the pilgrim into unfamiliar territory where challenges are often faced, helping build a new understanding of one’s relationship to God, self, and others. Even to this day, many people make a “pilgrimage” to Ground Zero and St. Paul’s Chapel, to offer prayers and connect with an event that changed the lives of Americans.

1. Where have you experienced “thin spaces?” What was the occasion? What led you there?
2. Were you a pilgrim or volunteer in the weeks, months, or even years following September 11, 2001? If not, do you know someone who was? How did it impact your (or their) life?
3. Have you ever been on a pilgrimage? If so, what difference did it make in your life?
4. Where could God be calling you to go now?
5. How can your faith community create a place of wholeness and connectedness for all people who come to you?

Passing the Torch

In the story from Genesis, Abraham provides hospitality to strangers, thus ministering to angels. It is the beginning of a new life for him, for soon after, his barren wife Sarah gives birth to a son. With that son comes the possibility of future generations – the people of God. By a simple act of kindness, his life is forever

changed. Dr. Cowart concludes her story about the ministry of St. Paul's Chapel with comments from Ulla Suokko, one of the volunteer workers (p. 73).

1. Read Genesis 18:1-8.
2. What gives Abraham the courage to offer hospitality to strangers?
3. How did St. Paul's Chapel have the courage to offer hospitality to strangers?
4. What is the "torch" that has been given to the people who have experienced and given the hospitality at St. Paul's? Where does it need to go?
5. What "torch" have you been given as a member of the Christian community of faith?

Closing Prayer:

Gracious God, our endings are our beginnings. You call us out into the world, each to where we belong, bringing our torches of healing, compassion and reconciliation with us. Give us the courage to move forward and move on and somehow allow the transformation to happen and translate all this into our lives in whatever form it needs to take. Help us to be open to the change to take place in the way it needs to take place. Let us not go back to where we were. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who is our companion on the way. Amen.

adapted from Ulla Suokko, p. 73

Chapter 5: The Deluge

Gathering Prayer:

God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient Church's story;
bring her bud to glorious flower.

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour.

Hymn 594 (first verse) The Hymnal 1982

Scripture:

This is what he showed me: the LORD was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the LORD said, "See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by; the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

Amos 7:7-9

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
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Set your Plumb Line

With the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, families lost more than their homes. They lost their orientation and way of life. It has been compared to Hiroshima and Nagasaki – everything obliterated.

1. Read the passage from Amos (7:7-9).
2. What is a plumb line, literally? What is your plumb line, figuratively?
3. What are the linkages that make you who you are?
4. Sing (or listen to) the Negro Spiritual, "Steal Away," #103 in *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*.
5. What must it be like to lose your connectivity, your familialness, all that you once had?
6. How can there be healing following decimation?
7. How can one "go home" when "home" no longer exists?

The Onionskin

Just as at Ground Zero, those caught in the devastation of Hurricane Katrina had their lives turned upside down. Those who had come to help at St. Paul's Chapel were now in need of help. But this time the people of New Orleans had to fight for assistance. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina opened the eyes of America to the economic disparity and prejudice in our country. Violence instead of compassion gets the media's attention. "The air is full of fear, and the greatest fear is there is no law." Cries for justice in our land and around the world inevitably confront us

with the sin of racism. Those cries have not gone away – not from the far corners of the world, not from the communities in which we live, nor from our beloved church itself.

1. Amos 5:23-24 (*Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*) is the theological principle behind the Episcopal Church’s anti-racism policies and training. What does justice mean to you?
2. Research your diocesan policy on anti-racism training. Have members of your church participated? If not, why? If so, what difference did it make, if any?
3. Discuss “The Sin of Racism: A Pastoral Letter from The House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church,” which was issued on October 1, 2002. http://www.episcopalchurch.org/social-justice_7388_ENG_HTML.htm
4. Discuss Bishop Charles Jenkins’ “Dark Night of the Soul.” Have you ever had such an awakening?
5. “Courage is fear having said its prayers.” What does this mean to you?
6. Nell shares her story of being called to seek reconciliation; seeking social healing in New Orleans. Where is God calling you?

Closing Prayer:

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among nations, to the glory of your holy Name: through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Collect 21: For Social Justice, Book of Common Prayer, p. 260

Chapter 6: Moviemaking in Red Stick

Gathering Prayer/Hymn:

Just a Closer Walk with Thee

Just a closer walk with thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

I am weak and thou art strong;
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to thee.

Just a closer walk with thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

#72 *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* (American Folk Song)

Through this world of toil and snares,
If I falter, Lord, who cares?
Who with me my burdens shares?
None but thee, dear Lord, none but
thee.

Just a closer walk with thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be;
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Scripture:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' *Matthew 25:34-40*

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

All that Jazz

Dr. Cowart discovers that jazz is about the human spirit's power and possibility, the sound of the brave, devoted, and noble spirit against all odds that we were made for one another. She is reminded of the "torch" from St. Paul's Chapel. Discuss the role of music, jazz especially, in communicating the hope and dreams of the people of God. Listen to some of the songs mentioned in this chapter, followed by a discussion using the open-ended questions Dr. Cowart poses:

1. What is the core belief of America?
2. What is the message of our African American spirituals?
3. What is the message of the music of New Orleans?
4. How can intense suffering yield transcendence and saving grace?
5. What if the church claimed this vision, to forge this kind of mutual availability across the races as our goal in the recovery of Katrina?

Who is My Neighbor?

Throughout *An American Awakening*, we are reminded of the passage from Matthew 25 in which we see Christ in all who we encounter.

1. Read Matthew 25:34-40.
2. Who are the least? Where are they in your community?
3. How is God calling you to live a fuller, more compassionate life?
4. How is your congregation engaged in service, outreach, and mission? What is the difference between each of these?
5. How has another person ministered to you?

Closing Prayer:

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

from The Great Vigil of Easter, Book of Common Prayer, p. 291

Chapter 7: The Jericho Road

Gathering Prayer:

Heavenly Father, in your Word you have given us a vision of that holy City to which the nations of the world bring their glory: Behold and visit, we pray, the cities of the earth. Renew the times of mutual regard which form our civic life. Send us honest and able leaders. Enable us to eliminate poverty, prejudice, and oppression, that peace may prevail with righteousness, and justice with order, and that men and women from different cultures and with differing talents may find with one another the fulfillment of their humanity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer 33: For Cities, Book of Common Prayer, p. 825

Scripture:

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Luke 10:25-37

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

Giving Voice to the Voiceless

The mission of the Office of Disaster Response in Louisiana is to bring people home with dignity and help build a stronger future by creating opportunities for youth. What the nation saw in New Orleans lifted the veil on poverty in America and dramatized the heartbreaking disparity that still exists.

1. Re-read Carolyn Lukensmeyer’s challenge to America on p. 104-105.
2. What is American morality?

3. What is our moral responsibility as an American citizen?
4. What would a new America look like to you?
5. How can your church, or you as an individual, be engaged in creating a new America – a New Jerusalem?

Today's Jericho Road

The commemoration of the birth of Martin Luther King, Jr. coincides with a diocesan staff meeting led by Bishop Jenkins. He reads the Parable of the Good Samaritan followed by portions of Dr. King's speech "Beyond Vietnam," which talks about the spiritual health of America in a time of war. Many Americans are living in exile: physically, spiritually, and emotionally. He calls for a long-term response – a transformation of our society.

1. Read Luke 10:25-37, followed by "Beyond Vietnam."
www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/Beyond_Vietnam.pdf
2. How does each of these speak to civil rights and the eradication of poverty today?
3. What does "Diaspora" mean in today's world? In America?
4. Where is the Jericho Road in your neighborhood or community?
5. Many statistics, initiatives, and programs are shared in this chapter as individuals respond to the suffering in New Orleans. What are the statistics of poverty in your community? Are there organizations you can partner with to help make a difference? If not, how can you plant a new vision?
6. Mother Teresa said, "We are not called to be successful. We are called to be faithful." Where is God calling you?

Concluding Prayer:

Praying the Baptismal Covenant

Do you believe in God the Father, in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and in God the Holy Spirit?

Our God,

It's one thing to say the creed but another to put my trust in you.

Help me to live with the assurance that you are my Father and that nothing can separate me from your love, trusting in your forgiveness expressed in Jesus and looking to your spirit to make me your person.

Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the Prayers?

Our God,

I know I was not meant to go it alone because you created the church to be supportive family for your children.

And I know the church is made up of people like me — so it isn't perfect!

Help me to play my part in the church, so I can learn from the teaching, be encouraged by the fellowship, be renewed in the Eucharist, and find strength for living each day through prayer.

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Our God,
you understand that sometimes I do things I never intended to do.
My sorrow doesn't put it all right.
Neither can I use my weakness as an excuse.
Help me to begin anew, to experience your forgiveness and to walk again in Jesus' way.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Our God,
help me to live the way Jesus called me to live.
May my actions speak louder than my words of your love and of new life in Jesus.
At the same time, help me rise above my own stumbling speech and give the words to express what I believe.
Let me be a witness to the Truth.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Our God,
all too often I have looked at people in a very superficial way.
Help me begin to see them with your eyes, knowing that every person is created in your image, as your child.
If Jesus died for that person, how can I despise him?
Give me a new love that reaches out to everyone because Jesus died for all.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

Our God,
I don't want my attitudes to be shaped by the injustices that mar society, by the discrimination, greed and lust that spoil relationships.
In Jesus, color does not count, wealth carries no weight, and gender is not important.
Help me to live in Jesus, to see people through his eyes, and work for the harmony that reflects your kingdom. Amen.

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Chapter 8: Whose Hood is the Hardest?

Opening Prayer:

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer 47: For Young Persons, Book of Common Prayer, p. 829

Scripture:

Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us; look, and see our disgrace! Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to aliens. We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows. We must pay for the water we drink; the wood we get must be bought. With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven; we are weary, we are given no rest. But you, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations. Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days? Restore us to yourself, O LORD, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old – unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure.

Lamentations 5:1-5, 19-22

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

Are You Fyre?

Violence has become a way of life for many of our youth today. Those from New Orleans had “an awakening” when they were evacuated and got to see what other cities’ education systems look like. Despite the adversity the youth of the city of New Orleans have faced, they remain resilient. It is about survival. It is about tapping into their passion for the good of the community.

1. How does the passage from Lamentations speak to you about the young people in Chapter 8? In your community?
2. As Tupac states, “Kids are only a product of something.” What is the “something” in your community that will form and nurture the kids?
3. What are ways a faith community can break the cycle of “multi-generational transmission of trauma” that so many of our youth have been raised with?
4. “Fyre” means to be hot, unstoppable in your passion and determination. In this chapter, this energy is channeled into positive expressions and advocacy. Where have you seen passion in the youth of your community? How have you supported it?

5. Who are the Big Mamas in your life? In your congregation? What qualities do they have that you can build upon to strengthen your ministry with young people?
6. Resilience is the positive capacity of people to cope with stress and catastrophe. It involves “protective factors” as opposed to “risk factors.” *The Search Institute* has developed 40 Developmental Assets® that are common sense, positive experiences and qualities that help influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible adults. Participating in a faith community is one of the top assets. Go to www.search-institute.org and download materials to determine how you or your church can support children and young people in the neighborhoods and community in which you live.
7. How involved are you in your local education system? What are the issues faced by teachers and students in the schools? How can your voice be heard for those who have no voice?

Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a traditional South African concept regarding people’s allegiances and relations to one another and became a worldwide concept through the work of Nelson Mandela. According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu (*No Future Without Forgiveness*, Doubleday, 2000), “A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.”

1. How can a faith community practice Ubuntu?
2. Shakoor Aljuwani shares a variety of stories of his heritage. How are they similar to yours? How are they different?
3. What was a formative event in your life that changed you?
4. What do you need to “give up” in order to be reconciled and part of a whole community?
5. How could Ubuntu change you? How could Ubuntu change the world?

Be an Organizer

1. If you had all the resources you needed, what would your wish list be for all the children in your community? What would be essential? What would be your “second tier?”
2. Research ways your church community can be active in supporting young people in your town or city (or beyond). Where are resources lacking, both human and financial? Is there a vision that you can build upon? What relationships need to be fostered for action to begin?

Closing Prayer:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy; Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

Prayer 62: A Prayer attributed to St. Francis, Book of Common Prayer, p. 833

Chapter 9: Silence is Violence

Gathering Prayer:

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land; though Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer 36: For the Oppressed, Book of Common Prayer, p. 826

Scripture:

“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:6-8

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

Being a Prophet

Following the march from Central City, Bishop Jenkins reflects, “We didn’t need to be a leader that day but to begin to stand publicly for the rights and dignity and the safety of all.” Fr. Bill Terry of St. Anna’s quotes Fr. Daniel Barrett, “The charism of social justice has more to do with the act than with the outcome. There are things we can do, and to do something is so much better than to do nothing.”

1. Share a story when you stood up for something that you believed in. What were the circumstances? What were your thoughts and feelings before, during, and after the incident?
2. Share a story of when you did not stand up for something. What were the circumstances? What were your thoughts and feelings before, during, and after the incident?
3. How can your church community stand up to the violence in your neighborhoods, even where you might not live?
4. How is the church called to be prophetic today?
5. What are the risks involved and what is at stake?
6. What are the multiple fronts you can be marching on?

Our Baptismal Covenant

A portion of the Baptismal Covenant calls us to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.” The people’s response is, “I will, with God’s help.” Fr. Terry says, “What we preach is what we do, and now they are excited about being part of a spiritual enterprise – worship coupled with praxis.”

1. Read the passage from Micah and the Baptismal Covenant on p. 304-305 in the *Book of Common Prayer*.
2. How do you live out these promises individually and as a faith community?
3. How does your congregation lift up the needs of others as well as peace and justice issues in the context of worship?
4. How can you be more purposeful in coupling your worship with action in your community?

Closing Prayer:

Dearest Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight, and not to heed the wounds; to labor, and not to seek to rest; to give of myself and not to ask for reward, except the reward of knowing that I am doing your will.

Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Chapter 10: The New Jerusalem

Gathering Prayer/Hymn:

In Christ there is no East or West

#529 *The Hymnal 1982* (John Oxenham)

In Christ there is no East or West,
in him no South or North,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

Join hands, disciples of the faith,
whate'er your race may be!
Who serves my Father as his child
is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both East and West,
in him meet South and North,
all Christly souls are one in him,
throughout the whole wide earth.

Scripture:

Thus says the LORD: I will return to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts shall be called the holy mountain. Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with a staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. Thus says the LORD of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the LORD of hosts? Thus says the LORD of hosts: I will save my people from the east country and from the west country; and I will bring them to live in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness. Thus says the LORD of hosts: Let your hands be strong.

Zechariah 8:3-9a

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

The Issues that Remain

Bishop Jenkins states, "As Christians, we do not see humans as a means to an end, especially if the end is profit. This is particularly offensive when we see the poor or the traumatized as a means to an end. As Christians, we see humans as an end in ourselves. As John Henry Newman wrote, and I must paraphrase, it is the cross that places due value upon everything. The cross of Jesus Christ, the hope of Christ crucified and resurrected, gives value to all."

1. On his visit to New Orleans, Rowan Williams observes, “People do these things out of fear, and if we want to stop these terrible racial acts we must find a way for people to begin to feel safe with one another.” How do we make people feel safe with one another?
2. Revisit the House of Bishops statement on “The Sin of Racism” from March 21, 2006, at www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_73047_ENG_HTML.htm, which includes a call on the United States’ elected leaders to broaden the “historic national outpouring of voluntarism” experienced along the Gulf Coast into “a movement that would make history.” How can you engage your elected officials in justice and advocacy issues? What can your faith community do to promote anti-racism training?
3. How can our values and beliefs be reflected in our public policy? Learn more through the Episcopal Public Policy Network www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn.htm
4. Homelessness in New Orleans has increased 400 percent and is now six times the national average. What is the homelessness rate / population in your town or city? What actions can your faith community employ to assist the homeless? How can you give fish to the hungry and teach the hungry to fish?

Koinonia

The passage from Zechariah 8:3-9a gives an example of what a new earth, a New Jerusalem will look like. *Koinonia*, a term from the Early Church, is the ideal state of fellowship and community that God intends for us. Gus Newport wants to see us organize behind an inspiring vision, with the solid underpinning of a compelling, common philosophy that frames what this work is about. He ends by calling every bishop, every volunteer, every donor, every caring citizen to create a movement that will undertake this generational work.

1. What does *koinonia* mean to you? How do you live this out as a Christian?
2. What is it that millions of Americans are saying when they come to gut and rebuild this city block by block with their own bare hands?
3. What do we owe one another?
4. Desmond Tutu speaks of the power of working in community, as opposed to working in isolation, “like a glowing coal that loses heat . . .” (p. 169-70). How can this movement of generosity continue in your community? In our nation? In the world?
5. Together, how can we make Zechariah’s vision a reality?

Closing Prayer:

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Collect for Proper 9, Book of Common Prayer, p. 230

Chapter 11: Live Like You Were Dying

Gathering Prayer:

Almighty God, whose will it is to be glorified in your saints, and who raises up your servants to be a light in the world: Shine, we pray, in our hearts, that we also in our generation may show forth your praise, who called us out of darkness into your marvelous light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Collect: Of a Missionary, Book of Common Prayer, p. 248

Scripture:

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:1-11

Chapter Reflection Questions:

1. Where is your story in this story?
2. Where do you see God?
3. What causes you to pause and rethink your previous assumptions?
4. What cries out to you?
5. What calls to you?

Unmistakable Good

Dr. Cowart makes an observation that “out of the tragedy of 9/11 and the devastation of hurricanes has come an unmistakable good.” Those children who responded with drawings, prayers, and letters following September 11 are of the same generation of youth who are now coming to the Gulf Coast on mission trips. As Mr. Rogers suggested to parents to “tell them to keep their eyes on the helpers” following the tragedy of September 11, these children have taken up the role of the firefighters, police, and rescue workers...the relentless love exhibited by the heroes of September 11 has come alive for them.

1. Do you believe good can come out of evil?
2. If so, where have you experienced this in your life?
3. Katie Mears states, “To give up on anybody is not an option.” Where have you given up? Where has your community given up? What will give you energy to be light in the darkness again?
4. How can you lift up and support leaders for the future in today’s children and youth?

Live Like You Were Dying

“Live Like You Were Dying” was the #1 country music song of 2004. Recorded by Tim McGraw (Curb Record Label), it is the story of a man with a deadly disease who finds he has little time to live. The lyrics and refrain includes:

... I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying and he said someday I hope you get the chance to live like you were dying... Like tomorrow was a gift and you got eternity to think about what'd you do with it – what did you do with it – what did I do with it – what would I do with it?

Ask yourself:

- What would it look like to live like I was dying?
- How well and truly did I live my life?
- How do I want to feel in that moment, when my life will be gathered back into the arms of a loving Creator?
- Is there anything I would want to be forgiven for? Could I forgive myself?
- Will I have spent my life on what really mattered most as best I could discern it?
- What are those things that matter most to me?

As a community:

- What are the things that matter the most to our community?
- How willing are we to let go of safety because we value something else much more?
- Where have we seen in others the growing presence of an incredible light?

What next?

Rowan Williams, “The life of faith is about being broken open so that life may happen, relating to Jesus . . . as someone whose light and fire is kindled in us . . .”

How is God entering our lives and waking us up to his compassion?

How will you be part of the next chapters of this story?

Closing Prayer:

O Lord, you have taught us that without love whatever we do is worth nothing: Send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts your greatest gift, which is love, the true bond of peace and of all virtue, without which whoever lives is accounted dead before you. Grant this for the sake of your only Son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Preface for the Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany,
Book of Common Prayer, p. 216*

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