

## Called to Give

November 22, 2020  
Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell  
Senior Pastor

### OPEN IN PRAYER

### OPENING QUESTION

Where have you seen or where are you seeing God at work in the world around you?

### SCRIPTURE

Together read Mark 12:41–44 and Mark 14:3–9 (NRSV)

Mark 12:41–44

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you; this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Mark 14:3–9

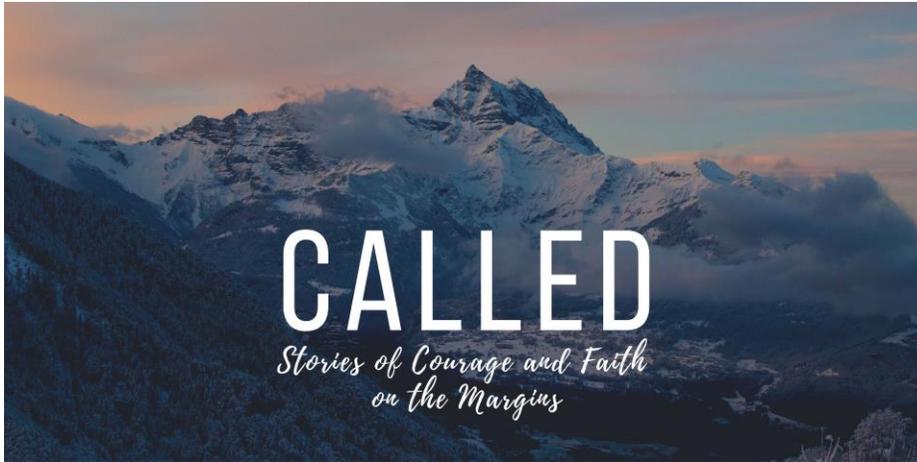
While Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body

beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In Mark 12, why do you think Jesus distinguishes giving out of abundance vs. giving out of poverty? Have you ever given out of poverty? What was that like?
2. Based on the Mark 12 passage, what do you think God is calling us to do? What can we learn from the widow?
3. What is the difference between the widow in Mark 12 and the woman with the alabaster jar in Mark 14?
4. Even in their contrast, both are held up by Jesus as exemplary. Why do you think that is the case? How are they similar in their giving?

### CLOSE WITH PRAYER



## Called to Speak Up

November 15, 2020  
Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell  
Senior Pastor

### OPEN IN PRAYER

### OPENING QUESTION

Have you ever advocated for someone or been advocated for? What was that like for you? What did you learn about yourself, the other person in the process?

### SCRIPTURE

Together read Mark 7:24–30 (NRSV)

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

“First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

“Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

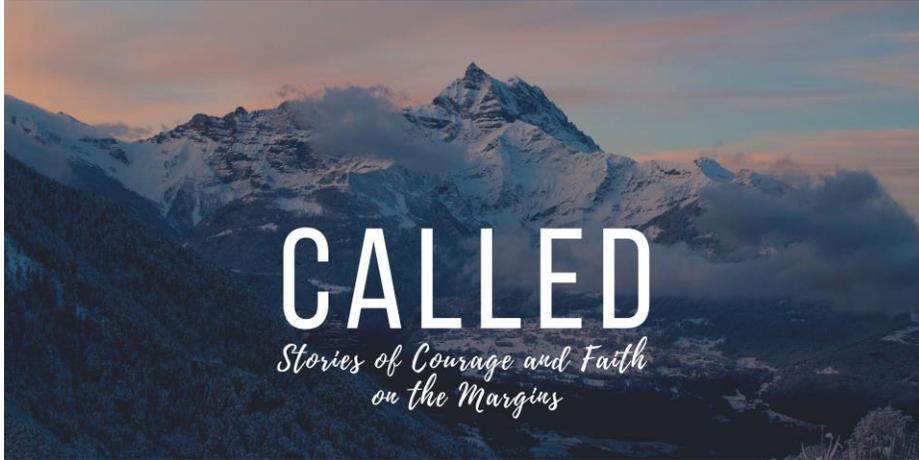
- 1) What is surprising/troubling to you about this passage?
- 2) What does this passage say to you about who Jesus was?
- 3) What does this passage say to you about who this woman was?
- 4) What can we as individuals and faith communities learn from this passage?

## PRAYER

As you close your time together today and throughout the week ahead, dwell with this Prayer of St. Francis. How might this prayer help shape us to be people who speak up?

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  
And where there is sadness, joy

O Divine Master, grant that I 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  
And it's in pardoning that we are pardoned  
And it's in dying that we are born to Eternal Life  
Amen



## **Called to Be Vulnerable**

November 8, 2020  
Michelle Vecchio-Lyzenga  
Minister for  
Christian Formation

### OPEN IN PRAYER

### OPENING QUESTION

Recall an experience in which you were either made vulnerable (health, finances, social location, etc.) or chose to be vulnerable (in your relationships, spirituality, etc.). What was that like for you? What did you discover—about yourself, about others?

### SCRIPTURE

Together read 1 Samuel 1:1–28 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup>There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. <sup>2</sup> He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

<sup>3</sup> Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord. <sup>4</sup> On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; <sup>5</sup> but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. <sup>6</sup> Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. <sup>7</sup> So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore, Hannah wept and would not eat. <sup>8</sup> Her husband Elkanah said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

<sup>9</sup> After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. <sup>10</sup> She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. <sup>11</sup> She made this vow: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

<sup>12</sup> As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. <sup>13</sup> Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore, Eli thought she was drunk. <sup>14</sup> So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." <sup>15</sup> But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. <sup>16</sup> Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." <sup>17</sup> Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." <sup>18</sup> And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

<sup>19</sup> They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. <sup>20</sup> In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord."

<sup>21</sup> The man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and to pay his vow. <sup>22</sup> But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, that he may appear in the presence of the Lord, and remain there forever; I will offer him as a nazirite for all time." <sup>23</sup> Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Do what seems best to you, wait until you have weaned him; only—may the Lord establish his word." So the woman remained and nursed her son, until she weaned him. <sup>24</sup> When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. <sup>25</sup> Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. <sup>26</sup> And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. <sup>27</sup> For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. <sup>28</sup> Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord."

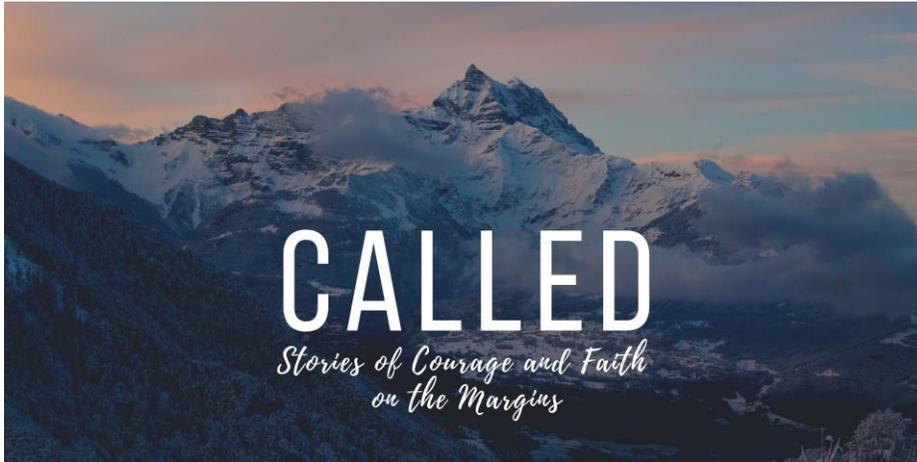
She left him there for the Lord.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Where do you see Hannah being made vulnerable in this narrative? Where do you see her choosing vulnerability?
2. How is Hannah's vulnerability received by others, namely Penninah, Elkanah, and Eli? How does each respond to her vulnerability? How might their responses reveal some of their own issues? What vulnerabilities might be lurking there?
3. We often consider vulnerability to be a sign of weakness. In reality, however, it's our most accurate measure of courage. Where in the narrative do you see Hannah courageously risking vulnerability? What is the result?
4. In your own life, what is the risk of choosing vulnerability? What is the cost of not choosing vulnerability? As you consider our nation at this particular moment in time, what is the risk of choosing vulnerability? What is the cost of not choosing vulnerability?
5. Empathy is the ability to tap into our own experiences in order to connect with and reflect back an experience someone is relating to us. A prerequisite to both giving and receiving empathy is vulnerability—the courage to open ourselves up enough to listen to another's story or share our own and connect to its pain. Such vulnerability and empathy are difficult...but can transform lives and systems. How do you see this in Hannah's story? Where have you seen this in your own story?

## PRAYER

As you close, spend time vulnerably sharing prayer requests and praises, offering these to one another and God through prayer. Additionally, pray for those most vulnerable in our global, national, and local communities right now. As you pray for them, empathically imagine and connect with their stories, bringing them before God.



## **Called to Talk to Strangers**

**November 1, 2020**  
Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell  
Senior Pastor

### OPEN IN PRAYER

### OPENING QUESTION

Share about an experience in which you engaged in conversation with a stranger. What was it like for you? How were your initial assumptions about that person confirmed or challenged over the course of your interaction? What was a take-away from that experience?

### SCRIPTURE

Together read John 4 (NRSV)

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, ‘Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John’ — although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized — he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So, he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?’ (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink”, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?’ Jesus said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty

again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

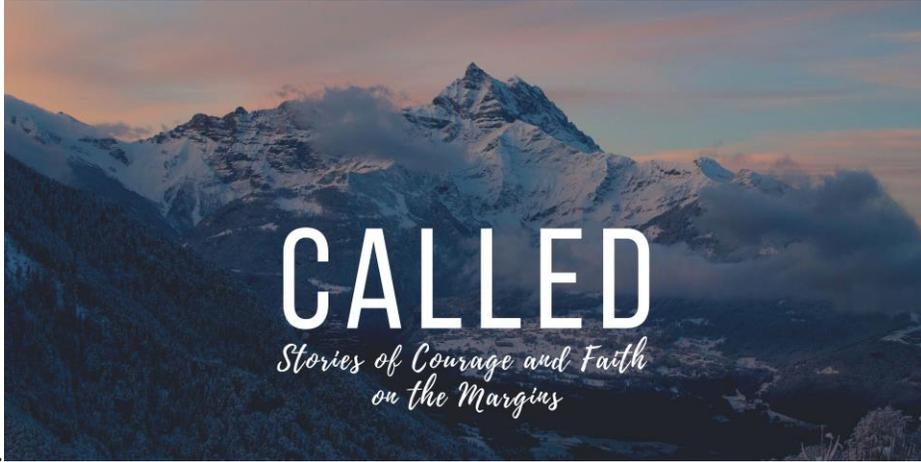
### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is surprising/troubling to you about this passage?
2. What do you expect strangers assume about you? What are some assumptions you have made about a stranger?
3. What can we as individuals and faith communities learn from this passage?

### PRAYER

As you close your time together and as you pray throughout the week, dwell with this prayer from Henri Nouwen's book, *With Open Hands*:

"In another's eyes I see my plea for forgiveness, and in a hardened frown I see my refusal. When someone murders, I know that I too could have done that, and when someone gives birth, I know that I am capable of that as well. In the depths of my being, I meet my fellow humans with whom I share love and have life and death."



## Called to Compassion

October 25, 2020  
Rev. Dr. Charlene Han  
Powell  
Senior Pastor

### OPEN IN PRAYER

### OPENING QUESTION

Share about a time you were the recipient of meaningful compassion. What was that like for you? How did it impact you?

### SCRIPTURE READING

Together Read 2 Kings 5:1–19 (NRSV)

**5** Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. **2** Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. **3** She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." **4** So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. **5** And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. **6** He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." **7** When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

**8** But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." **9** So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. **10** Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." **11** But Naaman

became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! <sup>12</sup> Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. <sup>13</sup> But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" <sup>14</sup> So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

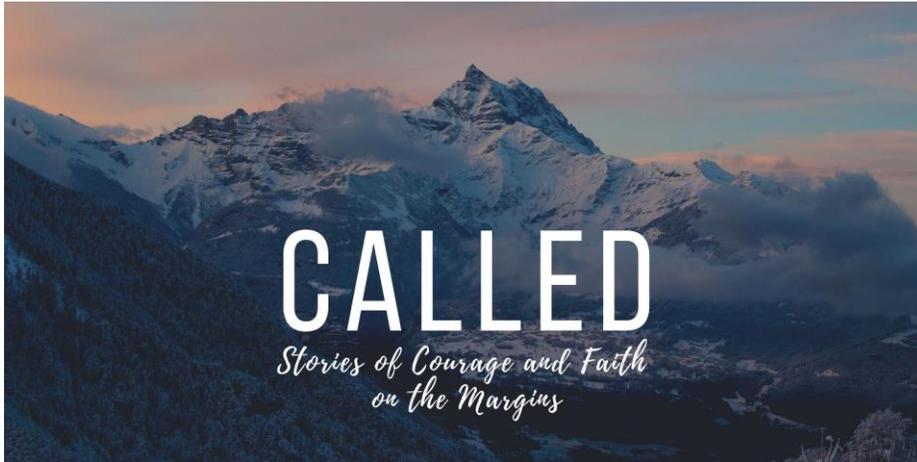
<sup>15</sup> Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant." <sup>16</sup> But he said, "As the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!" He urged him to accept, but he refused. <sup>17</sup> Then Naaman said, "If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the LORD. <sup>18</sup> But may the LORD pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant on this one count." <sup>19</sup> He said to him, "Go in peace."

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is surprising/troubling to you about this passage?
2. What is compassion? How does one cultivate compassion?
3. Who modeled compassion in this passage? How so?
4. What can we as individuals and faith communities learn from this passage?

### PRAYER

As you close, spend time sharing praises and prayer requests, compassionately offering these to the God whose mercies never come to an end. In addition to offering prayer for those people and causes familiar to you, quietly ask the Spirit to reveal to you those "others" for whom you might not instinctually consider. Invite the Spirit to guide your compassionate prayer and care for them this week.



## Called to Worship

October 18, 2020

Rev. Dr. Charlene Han Powell  
Senior Pastor

### OPEN IN PRAYER

Lord God, be your Spirit, teach us to obey your voice and keep your covenant so that we may be a priestly kingdom, your holy people; in Jesus's name. Amen.

### OPENING QUESTION

What does it mean to you to belong to God?

### SCRIPTURE READING

Together Read Exodus 19:1–9a, 20:1–3 (NRSV)

**19** On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. **2** They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. **3** Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: **4** You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. **5** Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, **6** but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

**7** So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. **8** The people all answered as one: "Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do." Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD. **9** Then the LORD said

to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.”

**20** Then God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup>I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup>you shall have no other gods before me.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What was the unique call of the congregation of Israel? What do you think is the unique call of First Pres?
2. For the Israelites, what responsibilities came with their chosenness? What are the responsibilities or commitments that come with being a child of God today?
3. What does it mean to worship God?
4. In Exodus 19:4, God recalls bearing the Israelites on “eagles’ wings” to bring them to God, but maybe God’s wings take us to places unknown. What ways does God draw you towards the divine? Where might be God calling you/First Pres/the church to go?

### PRAYER