



INTO THE WILD

A FAMILY-FRIENDLY DEVOTIONAL
ON HENRI MATISSE AND
THE SEASON OF LENT



INTRODUCTION

The Season of Lent is a season of walking into the wild, a 40-day journey filled with wild beasts, wild love, beauties, challenges, gifts, and visions. A journey that begins with ashes, and ends with joy. A journey that follows Jesus down into the wilderness, and up into resurrection and new life.

In this Lenten devotional, we take this adventure with Henri Matisse, one of the most daring, influential, and beloved artists in modern history. From his childhood growing up in a small town in France to what he called his “masterpiece,” the Chapel of the Rosary in Vence, Matisse explored faith and wildness throughout his life.

He once said he liked to pray with a pencil: “At the moment I go every morning to say my prayers, pencil in hand; I stand in front of a pomegranate tree covered in blossom, each flower at a different stage, and I watch their transformation... filled with admiration for the work of God. Is this not a way of praying?”

So grab a pencil (or a crayon, or a paintbrush!), your favorite Bible, and a decent internet connection (all the paintings referenced here can be found online; see the companion “Link Sheet” pdf for guidance). Week by week, with the words of Scripture and the art of Henri Matisse as our guides, we’ll head into the wild – all the way to the beautiful, joyful love of Easter morning.

ASH WEDNESDAY

AN INVITATION TO ADVENTURE

READ

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. + Matthew 6:20-21

THINK

Jesus often spoke of the “Kingdom of Heaven” as something already here, close enough that we can experience it right now. And at the same time, he also spoke of it as something still to come, not yet here in all its glory, love, and justice.

And this “already/not yet” reality is true not only of the world around us, but also of each one of our hearts. *Something great has begun*: we already treasure great things, like love and kindness, fairness and joy. *And better things are on the way*: our hearts are still growing stronger as we learn to treasure what’s truly important, and to let go of what’s holding us back.



The season of Lent, the 40 days leading up to Easter, is a time to focus on this learning and growing, this strengthening and opening our hearts. It’s like exploring the wilderness: an exciting adventure, and also a challenge. Good things have already begun, but they’re not yet complete. And so we need each other’s help, and God’s help, as we go.

Think of it this way: We’ve already begun to paint the pictures of our lives – and at the same time, there’s still plenty of work to do. Our hearts and our communities are masterpieces in the making!

LOOK

While Henri Matisse was recovering at home from a serious illness at age 19, his mother gave him a set of paints, to help pass the time. It was all the invitation he needed. Henri taught himself by going to museums and copying the great artists of his time. Some of his early paintings showed promise, but he wasn't yet ready – he had to learn the basics first. His lifelong journey into the wild had begun!

For some examples of his early still life paintings, check out [*Still Life with Books and Candle* \(1890\)](#), [*Blue Pot and Lemon* \(1897\)](#), and [*Still Life with Compote, Apples and Oranges* \(1899\)](#).

PRACTICE

TRY IT

Inspired by Matisse, pick one of your favorite paintings (by any artist!) and copy it as best you can, learning from the original artist as you go. Try to match it – or give it your own wild twist!

MINI-REVOLUTION

Paint or draw an imaginative, playful portrait of your heart: What's most important to you? What do you treasure today? How do you want to grow between today and Easter (and beyond)? Now paint a similar portrait of your community: What treasures are already around you – and what treasures do you want to get to know better?

The phrase, "Kingdom of Heaven," can be translated in many ways, each one like a little painting of God's "already/not yet" world. Here are some additional options to consider as we go "into the wild" together this Lent.

The Reign of Heaven
The Realm of Heaven
The Community of Heaven
The Dream of Heaven
The Revolution of Heaven
The Celebration of Heaven
The Dance of Heaven





WEEK ONE

INTO THE WILD

READ

Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. + Matthew 4:1-2

THINK

During the 40 days of Lent, we're also invited by the Spirit into the "wilderness," a place where we can think, challenge ourselves, and decide how we want to continue to grow. But make no mistake, any wilderness journey requires some boldness, ferocity, and creativity. Just ask the animals, the "wild beasts" who call the wilderness home!

LOOK

Henri Matisse is considered the founder of fauvism (pronounced "FO-vi-zum"; rhymes with "snow prism"). He was called a fauve (rhymes with "stove"; it's French for "wild beast") because of his use of bold, bright colors and fierce brushwork, so different from the typical style of painting at the time. For an example, check out [*Woman with a Hat* \(1905\)](#) and [*The Roofs of Collioure* \(1905\)](#).

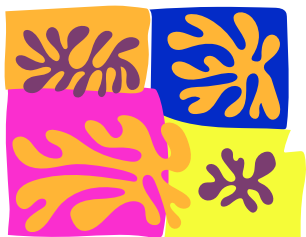
PRACTICE

EXPLORE

Spend some time in the wild this week – a nature preserve, your backyard, a city park. How do you feel here? What do you notice? What if you went at a different time of day? What if you went at night?

DISCUSS

Where are your favorite "wilderness" places? What are some of the most memorable adventures you've had there? What did it feel like? How might a journey into the wild change a person? Bonus question: If you were a "wild beast," which one would you be?



"From the moment I held the box of colors in my hands, I knew this was my life. I threw myself into it like a beast that plunges towards the thing it loves."

+ Henri Matisse

TRY IT

Color your world boldly this week! Try a painting in the fauvist style, or brighten the neighborhood with wild sidewalk chalk – see if you can make the colors really pop. Or if there's snow on the ground outside, combine a little food coloring with water in spray bottles and make a masterpiece on a canvas of snow. Go wild!

MINI-REVOLUTION

Fasting can make us feel more free. Try a "tech fast" this week: for example, commit to not using any screens from 4-8pm every night (or choose one or two nights for starters). Turn off the TV, close your laptop, silence your phone and put it away in a bowl or a drawer. Be bold enough to take in God's beauty and color all around you: read a book, make a meal together, check out the stars, play an instrument – in short, plunge toward the things you love!



READ

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. + Matthew 17:1-2

THINK

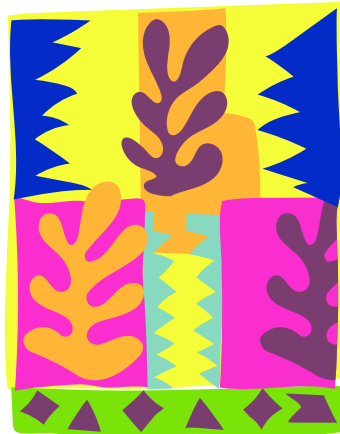
In the wilderness, colors can appear richer, light can seem brighter, and shadows can feel more velvety. We sometimes notice things we normally would miss: tiny creatures, faint sounds, even the beat of our own heart. Going “into the wild” has the power to change us, transforming how and what we see.

When Jesus invites Peter, James, and John to come with him on a hike up a high mountain, what they see up there is a dazzling mystery: Jesus shines with light as bright as the sun, and a divine voice says, “This is my child, the beloved – listen to him!” For the disciples and for us, the whole experience is like a brilliant, fauvist portrait of Jesus, a picture boiled down to the essence of who he is: God’s child, our teacher.

LOOK

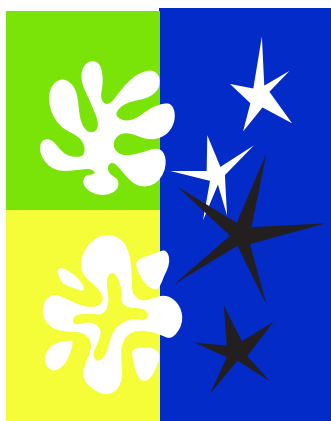
Henri Matisse was fascinated by art that boiled subjects down to an essence – not just the essence of what they look like, but also the essence of what they feel like, the emotions they create in us when we see them. He once explained that his goal wasn’t to paint a table, but rather to paint the emotions that the table made him feel.

One of the ways he tried to achieve this goal was to use colors in bold, dazzling ways, seeking to match his emotions about a particular person or object or view. And he sometimes squirted bright colors straight from the paint tubes, rather than mixing paints together into more mellow tones. Matisse’s use of color was unusual, even scandalous, at the time. He was taking the figures common in art (objects, people, and landscapes) and *transfiguring* them, infusing them with bright, brilliant emotions. For example, check out [Open Window, Collioure \(1905\)](#).



“A painting in a room spreads joy around it by the colors... A painting on a wall should be like a bouquet of flowers in the room.”

+ Henri Matisse



"To look at something as though we had never seen it before requires great courage."
+ Henri Matisse

PRACTICE

EXPLORE

When you look at Matisse's painting, [*Open Window, Collioure \(1905\)*](#), what do you see? Notice all the dazzling energy, color, and light. How do you think Matisse felt about the time he spent in that small Mediterranean village?

TRY IT

Find a space with some light – a sunny window or the glow of a lamp in the evening dark. How does the light feel to you? Draw or paint what you see, including the emotions the scene makes you feel. Does the light "feel" different than it "looks"? Are the colors in the world of your picture different or the same as the colors in the world outside your picture?

Now try this: With a partner or group, draw a simple picture (anything works!), and then color it in with colors that match your emotions about what's in the picture. Now trade pictures, and try to guess the emotions the artists had in their hearts and minds.

DISCUSS

When Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James, and John, they looked at him and saw the bright colors of the sun, like a heavenly disco ball of silver, gold, and white. In your opinion, what about Jesus (or which part of Jesus' teachings) shines most brightly for you? Maybe it's something he did, or a story he told?

MINI-REVOLUTION

Step One: What key words and phrases would you use to describe the core (or the "essence") of who you are? Write them down in a short list.

Step Two: Ask two or three people (family or friends) how they'd describe the core of who you are, and write down what they say.

Step Three: Look for common ground between your list and the other lists, and boil them all down to the top two or three words or phrases.

Step Four: Draw or paint those key words/phrases with bright colors, and post them somewhere you and others will see them every day (a mirror or the fridge often works!).

Step Five: Now challenge yourself: what's a concrete step (or two!) you can take this week to embody these key words/phrases? How can you "transfigure" yourself just a bit, little by little, to let your dazzling light and colors shine through?

Step Six: Look at the other bright-colored lists in your family or friend group, and when you see their light shine, cheer them on!

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH YOUR EMOTIONS

Where do you feel your emotions?

Inside your belly? Close to your heart? Heavy on your shoulders or back?

How do your emotions look?

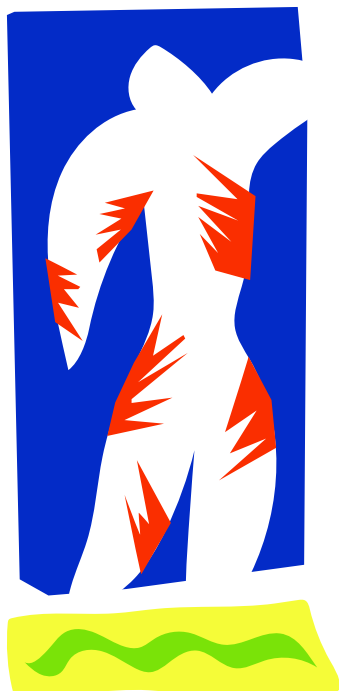
Big? Small? Shiny? Shadowy? Colorful? No color at all?

How do your emotions sound?

Are they loud or soft? Like the growl of a cougar or the whisper of the wind?

How do your emotions feel?

Heavy or light? Soft, hard, fuzzy, cold, hot, sharp, smooth, or bumpy?





WEEK THREE

BACK TO BASICS

READ

John 4:5-42

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.” + John 4:13-14

THINK

When wandering through the wilderness, we can become keenly aware of our basic needs: food, shelter, and water. But we also have other “basic needs” as we make our way through the challenges of life. Friendship and community, for example, can be just as important as bread and water as we travel on the way.

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well is all about these basic needs, as well as the “basic lines” we sometimes use to divide ourselves from one another. In Jesus’ day (not unlike our own!), men were often treated as if they were more important than women, and Jews and Samaritans often didn’t trust each other. Jesus speaking with this woman, then, drinking the water she offered him, and then offering her another kind of water (“living water” that would quench her thirst for God’s love and grace) all send a clear, basic message: Jesus values friendship over distrust, respect over unkindness, community over division – and calls on us to do the same. Let’s get back to basics!

LOOK

One of Matisse’s strategies was to simplify the people and things in his paintings to their most basic shapes, using clear, strong lines. Along with his use of vivid colors, these simple lines helped him boil things down to their essence.

It's like taking a long, complex story and summarizing it into brief, simple language, such as a fable or a poem. This can help the basic ideas and feelings in the story (or the painting) shine through – and so help us focus on what's most important, most essential, most beautiful. Getting back to basics can help us to see.

For example, check out Matisse's four line-drawn [self-portraits](#), as well as his [Marguerite Reading \(c. 1906\)](#) and [Large Face \(Mask\) \(1952\)](#). In a sense, biblical stories use a similar "back to basics" strategy, painting pictures with simple, bold, graceful strokes, and not cluttering things up with too many details.

PRACTICE

EXPLORE

Keep an eye out for this "back to basics" style, and you'll see it everywhere (see how many you can find!). Here's a hint: explore logos, team mascots, animation, cartoons, tattoos, graffiti, and on and on and on...

DISCUSS

Why is it sometimes helpful to draw with bold, simple lines? How does this strategy help us to see, to feel, or to connect with each other? And

on the other hand, how do crude lines sometimes separate groups and create divisions, like those between Samaritans and Jews in Jesus' day?



"These drawings spring up in one piece... I am absolutely convinced that they represent the goal of my curiosity."

+ Henri Matisse

TRY IT

Take a photo of someone you love (a family member, friend, or someone you admire), and make a very simple drawing of their face – the simpler the better! Can you capture a glimpse of their personality with a few simple lines?

MINI-REVOLUTION

Some lines are worth crossing – so challenge yourself to cross one this week. Do you know someone (at school, at work, or in your neighborhood) who sometimes

gets left out or excluded? Reach out to them: say “Hi,” ask how they’re doing, or invite them into a group activity. Cross another dividing line by reading a book by an author of a different culture, color, race, or religion than yours. Or step into generosity by financially supporting an organization that supports a vulnerable population in your community and beyond. If you need ideas, here’s one: check out the Loveland Foundation Therapy Fund that provides financial assistance to Black women and girls seeking therapy. Get back to the basics of kindness, sharing, and connection!



READ

John 9:1-41

“While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” After saying this, Jesus spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means “Sent”). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. + John 9:6-7

THINK

Several of the stories about Jesus focus on helping people to see, and in this one, Jesus declares, “I am the light of the world.” What does he mean, exactly? Well, light isn’t only something we see; it’s also the thing that makes it possible to see everything else. Light makes the world visible, beautiful, colorful, and delightful. And so does Jesus, “the light of the world”!

In other words, Jesus is saying that by learning from him and being in relationship with him, we can see the world more clearly in all its colors, beauties, and challenges. And this also means that Jesus is everywhere, just as light is everywhere – even and especially as we journey through the wilderness. Jesus is in our hearts and in our neighborhoods, as distant as the farthest star and as near as our own breath.

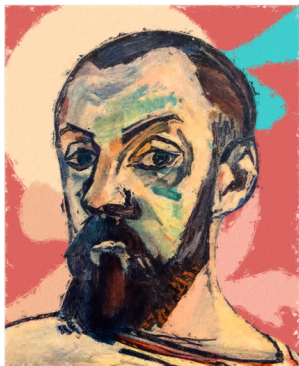
And so we don't "follow" Jesus as though he's over there, and we're over here, and we're trying to walk in his footsteps. Rather, it's more like a fish swimming in water: Jesus is all around us and within us, lighting up the world so we can see, and live, and help each other whenever we can.

LOOK

One of Matisse's central ideas was that painting should be "decorative," a word that comes from the old Latin words *decorare* ("to make beautiful") and *decor* ("beauty, grace"). Rather than create realistic pictures, like photographs, Matisse instead made paintings that are simplified, special versions of reality, like visual poems. These images are strikingly flat, with obvious brush strokes, surprising colors, and unusual arrangements – almost like pictures of dreams. For Matisse, the purpose of these paintings was to "decorate" the spaces we live in, and so to bring some beauty and grace into our lives.

Matisse and other modern artists didn't invent these ideas; they were inspired by paintings from other cultures and time periods. Think of

Byzantine art, or Eastern Orthodox iconography, or Islamic geometric designs, or Moroccan textiles, or Persian rugs (check out some of these online!).



"What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity... a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue."

+ Henri Matisse

Here are three Matisse masterpieces along these lines. First, [*The Red Studio \(1911\)*](#), which includes many of Matisse's paintings, sculptures, and ceramics. Notice how the red color helps create a flat, dreamlike, poetic sense of space. Second, [*Red Room \(Harmony in Red\) \(1908\)*](#), in which a wall and a table seem to blend into each other. And third, [*Woman in a Purple Coat \(1937\)*](#), featuring a woman immersed in decorative patterns. All three of these paintings portray the world as drenched in beauty – suggesting that we are surrounded by art, the light of the world, if we have eyes to see!

PRACTICE

EXPLORE

Brainstorm a list of as many sources of light as you can think of, and then pop by your local library and check out “The Very Lonely Firefly” by Eric Carle. Follow the firefly’s journey as it finds different sources of light while looking for friends.

Here’s another bright idea: One night this week, get out some flashlights and make some shadow puppets on a blank wall. And add a little magic to your house by decorating it with fairy lights for the week.

DISCUSS

What’s something about Jesus, or about one of his teachings, that helps us to see or notice something we might otherwise overlook? Jesus says both “I am the light of the world” (John 9:6) and “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). How do you connect or fit those two ideas together?

TRY IT

If there’s mud outside, go and play in it, remembering the story of Jesus restoring sight with water and mud. And if you’re in the mood, find a long stick and draw or sketch an image into the muddy ground for someone else to find. Or stay indoors and draw or paint a picture of a room in your home, emphasizing all the decorative patterns. Are some of those patterns from other parts of the world?

MINI-REVOLUTION

Jesus is the light of the world, and he also calls us to shine. As a family, choose a neighbor, a nearby family, or an organization you’d like to help on their journey through the wilderness. Come up with a plan: What’s the best way to be helpful? Baking them something yummy? Shoveling snow or doing some yard work? Publicly highlighting an organization’s good work in a conversation or on social media? Giving some money? Signing up to volunteer? All (or many) of the above?





WEEK FIVE

DEEPLY MOVED

READ

John 11:1-45

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. + John 11:32-33

THINK

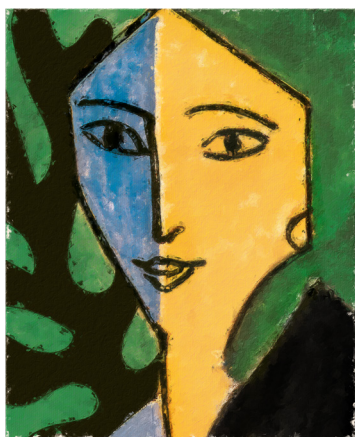
In this story, Mary and Martha are deep in the wilderness of sadness and grief. Just the other day their brother, Lazarus, was right there with them, alive and well – and now he's died. They're heartbroken and lonely, and when Jesus finally arrives, Mary confronts him with a version of an ancient question: *Where is God in times of suffering and death?* "Lord," she says, "if you had been here..."

It's good that Mary's question comes just before Holy Week, since Jesus' amazing answer can sink down into our bones before Good Friday. Lazarus, Jesus says, will rise again, for Jesus himself is "the resurrection and the life." And this mysterious good news for Mary is also good news for all of us: when we suffer, when we feel overwhelmed with grief, and even when we die, God is there with us, both "deeply moved" and calling us back to life.

LOOK

Henri Matisse did not create art in easy times. He lived through two world wars. He was displaced from his home by the threat of bombs falling out of the sky. And his beloved daughter was tortured and taken by the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police (thankfully, she escaped when the train stalled on the way to a German prison camp). Matisse also struggled with poor health, especially later in life. How does someone create so much beauty in the midst of so much pain?

Many of Matisse's paintings are full of vivid color, beauty, and joy. But he was also "deeply moved" by other emotions in his work. For example, check out [French Window at Collioure \(1914\)](#) and [View of Notre Dame \(1914\)](#), both painted during the year the so-called "Great War" began (later known as World War I). Even as the shadows of violence closed in around him, he continued to create art that pictured the world through the emotions that deeply moved him.



PRACTICE

EXPLORE

Compare Matisse's [French Window at Collioure \(1914\)](#) his earlier [Open Window, Collioure \(1905\)](#). And then compare [View of Notre Dame \(1914\)](#) with [A Glimpse of Notre Dame in the Late Afternoon \(1902\)](#), painted from the same spot (his studio on the fifth floor of a house). What differences and similarities do you notice? What emotions do you think Matisse was feeling in each case?

DISCUSS

When in your life have you felt the most sadness? Have you ever felt loss or grief? What did it feel like? What helped you feel better – and what didn't help? What are some of the best things we can do for someone who's feeling sad?

TRY IT

Sometimes, when we're sad or grieving, we put on a kind of "mask" for the outside world that hides what's going on inside. Drawing a "Dual Self Portrait" can help bring these two worlds together, so we can embrace the whole of who we are. Draw a face that represents yourself, and then divide the face in half (one half will represent your inner self while the other half will represent your outer self). Using colors, patterns, and symbols (really anything works!), decorate the outer self to show how you think others see you, and decorate the inner self to show how you feel inside. How different is your inner self from your outer self?

MINI-REVOLUTION

When you feel a difficult emotion this week, like sadness or discouragement or hurt, try taking the time to welcome it as a friend,

rather than rushing through it or trying to “fix it” right away. Everyone feels these hard emotions sometimes. When they come, try focusing on taking care of yourself (eat good food, get plenty of sleep, do some exercise, talk with a good friend). And as you journey through the wilderness, express yourself – through spoken words, through written words, or through paint!



PALM SUNDAY

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



READ

Matthew 21:1-11

A very large crowd spread their coats on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” + Matthew 21:8-9

THINK

Why did the crowds lay down coats and branches in front of Jesus? Laying down coats for someone to walk on is a very old way of welcoming royalty, and the branches are an echo of the ancient Israelites’ journey out of Egyptian enslavement and into the wilderness, where they built simple shelters out of branches as they traveled. These coats and branches are the crowd’s way of saying: *Just as in the days of old, when God led us out bondage and into freedom, so today, God is leading us to freedom again!*

This seems like a joyful celebration – and it is! But it’s also taking place in a time of wilderness, difficulty, and intense hope for a better life. In those days, Jerusalem was under military occupation by the Roman Empire, and so the freedom many people were dreaming of was a freedom from Roman rule, and from the hard life of being treated unfairly by the empire. Palm Sunday’s “Hosanna!” is a shout of joy in the midst of pain and struggle, a refusal to give up hope for the future.



LOOK

Toward the end of his life, Matisse's health didn't allow him to paint as he had before. He was forced to spend most of his time in a wheelchair or in bed. But Matisse refused to stop making art. Instead, he began "painting with scissors," as he put it, cutting paper into fantastic, beautiful shapes. The same bright colors and joyful style – now on an even bigger scale, sometimes covering an entire wall!

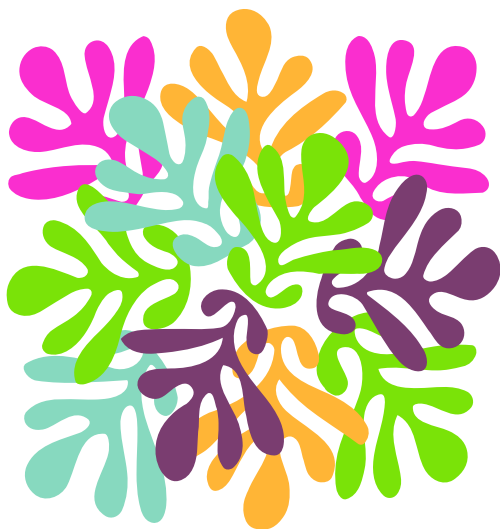
These cut-outs turned out to be the last major chapter of Matisse's career as an artist – and it was also one of the most creative and productive chapters of them all. He even called this period his "second life." In the midst of a wilderness of illness, pain, and confinement, Matisse found a new way to experience freedom, refusing to give up hope for the future.

For example, check out [*Icarus* \(1947\)](#), [*Snow Flowers* \(1951\)](#), [*Christmas Eve* \(1952\)](#), and (with Palm Sunday's "donkey" and "colt" in mind) [*The Horse, the Rider and the Clown* \(1947\)](#).

PRACTICE

EXPLORE

Go outside into the wilderness (a nature preserve, your backyard, or even your wild city center) and look for colorful signs of spring – green leaves, purple crocuses, yellow daffodils – creation's "second life" that comes around each year. What color is the easiest to find? The hardest to find? Challenge yourself: Can you find all the colors in the rainbow?



TRY IT

Cut some palm fronds out of bright colored paper. Don't draw it first, just see what your scissors and hands create. (If you want to take it further, you can paint the paper with vivid colors first, like Matisse and his assistants did!)

DISCUSS

Sometimes it's hard to talk about how we feel. Try some of these sentence starters (on the next page) to get the conversation rolling this week:

I feel worried when...

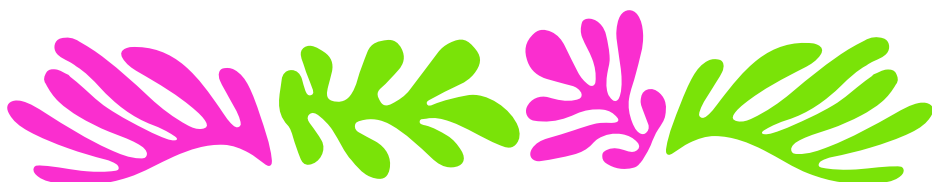
I feel loved when...

I feel hopeful when...

If I could change one thing about the world, it would be...

MINI-REVOLUTION

At its heart, Palm Sunday is a parade – so let's have a parade! Around your living room or around your block, take some branches (real ones or paper cut-outs) and wave them in the air, sing a song or two, and declare your hope for the future. You can even make some signs (decorated with cut-out shapes, of course) that express what you care about most: "Climate Action Now!" or "Peace on Earth!" or "Food for the Hungry!" or "Save the Animals!" or "Kindness Matters!" And after the parade, write a letter to an elected official to let them know how you feel.



MAUNDY THURSDAY

WILD LOVE

READ

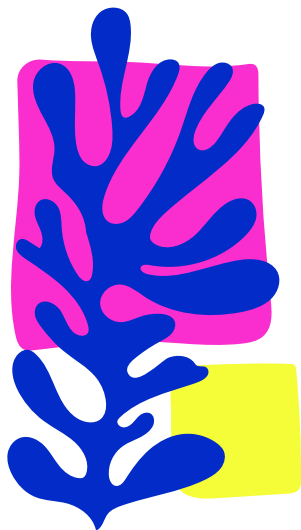
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Then Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. + John 13:5

THINK

In Jesus' time and place, most people wore sandals, and so their feet would get dusty and dirty as they walked around outside. Washing another person's feet was a helpful act of service. In the disciples' minds, the proper order of things was that they would wash Jesus' feet, since he was their teacher.

But surprisingly, Jesus did the opposite: he insisted on washing their feet instead. It was as if he was saying to them, "If you want to follow me, do what I do. Don't look to be served; rather, look to serve anyone and



everyone, no matter how ‘important’ or ‘unimportant’ they may seem.” This is what Jesus meant when he then said: “Love one another as I have loved you.” His surprising “foot-washing, serving instead of demanding service, made his message of wild love even more memorable and inspiring.

LOOK

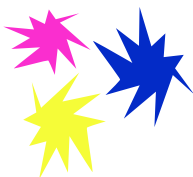
As Henri Matisse got older and more limited in his mobility, many might have expected him to produce less art, or smaller works of art, or perhaps even stop making art completely. But surprisingly, Matisse did the opposite: at the end of his life, he created one of his biggest works of art ever! This one was bigger than a painting. It was even bigger than his paper cut-out murals that covered a wall. This work of art was an entire building!

A chapel, to be exact. Encouraged by his friend and former nurse (a Dominican nun), Matisse designed the Chapel of the Rosary in a town called Vence. He decorated everything, from the huge stained glass windows, to the drawings on the walls, to the special robes the priests wore during worship. His bright colors, clear lines, and cut-out shapes fill the space with energy, joy, and wild love. He called the chapel his “masterpiece,” a culmination of “a lifetime of work.” Right up until the end of his life, Matisse did his best to create, to love, and to serve. Check out the [*Chapel of the Rosary in Vence*](#).



GOOD FRIDAY

GOD WITH US



READ

Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? + Psalm 22:1

THINK

The wilderness is a place where we can sometimes feel lost and alone. Whenever we struggle in life, it can feel as if God has turned away or forgotten us. One of the old, old songs in the Bible, Psalm 22, provides a powerful example of this feeling: the singer asks God, "Why have you forsaken me?"

One of the most amazing things about the story of Jesus' suffering and death is that Jesus – God in the form of a human being – asks this same question, "Why have you forsaken me?" This means that whenever we suffer and struggle, whenever we feel that God has left us alone, Jesus is there with us, feeling what we feel, and whispering to us that this feeling will not have the final word. Remember: one of Jesus' names is "Emmanuel," which means, "God with Us."

LOOK

Matisse struggled during many parts of his career: at times, people made fun of his art because it was so different, and at other times, people dismissed his art because it seemed old fashioned (it is said that the artist Pablo Picasso once used a Matisse painting as a dart board!). His family went through financial disgrace and ruin; he lived through two world wars; and the last years of his life included serious health challenges.

Matisse brought all of these experiences to his "Stations of the Cross" on the back wall of the Chapel of the Rosary: fourteen scenes along the way of Jesus' Passion, his journey of suffering and death. Matisse drew these scenes in an extremely rough, simple style, both because he wanted to capture the essence of each scene, and because, as he later explained, he didn't want the drawings to be beautiful: "I have not painted beauty. I have painted the truth. The truth of the Passion is not, and has never been beautiful!"



Check out Matisse's Stations of the Cross [here](#) and [here](#).



EASTER SUNDAY

THE GRACEFUL DANCE

READ

Jeremiah 31:1-6

The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, God appeared to them from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merry-makers! + Jeremiah 31:2-4

THINK & LOOK

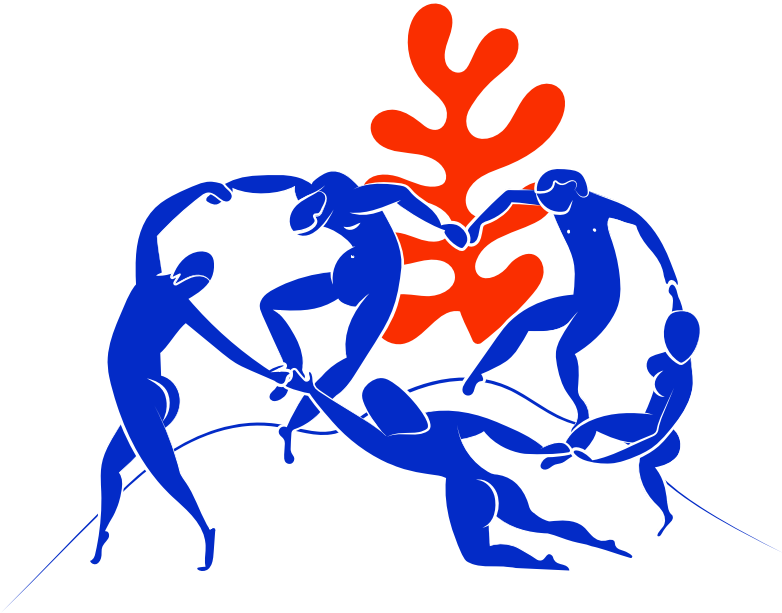
We have traveled a long way, into the wild and through the wilderness – all the way to the empty tomb! Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed!

The struggles and suffering of life, the cruelty of violence and injustice, the pain of loneliness and sorrow – all these things are overcome, and will be overcome, by the wild love and grace of God, the vibrant new life of resurrection.

The 40 days of Lent are over, and now the 50 days of Easter begin. A season of dancing, of tambourines and merrymaking – not because everything is fixed and fine, but because Jesus' resurrection is an "already/not yet" glimpse of beauty, peace, and justice. A new day that has already begun to dawn, and is still yet to come.

So shake your tambourines – for we have found grace in the wilderness! God is transforming even the sorrow and death of the cross into a beautiful, colorful Tree of Life! Hallelujah! Amen!

Check out Matisse's [*Tree of Life*](#) (a stained glass window in the Chapel of the Rosary).



BUT ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK,
AT EARLY DAWN, THE WOMEN CAME TO
THE TOMB, TAKING THE SPICES THAT
THEY HAD PREPARED. THEY FOUND THE
STONE ROLLED AWAY FROM THE TOMB,
BUT WHEN THEY WENT IN, THEY DID
NOT FIND THE BODY. WHILE THEY WERE
PERPLEXED ABOUT THIS, SUDDENLY
TWO MEN IN DAZZLING CLOTHES STOOD
BESIDE THEM. THE WOMEN WERE
TERRIFIED AND BOWED THEIR FACES TO
THE GROUND, BUT THE MEN SAID TO
THEM, "WHY DO YOU LOOK FOR THE
LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? HE IS NOT
HERE, BUT HAS RISEN."

+ LUKE 24:1-3

SPECIAL EVENTS OF THE SEASON

