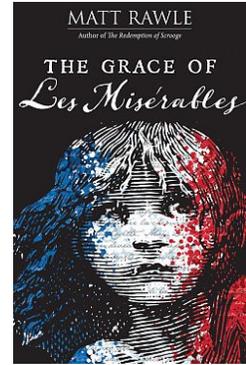


## “The Grace of Les Misérables”

Brainstorming Summary

Based on the book by Matt Rawle

Feb. 17 (Ash Wednesday)-April 4, 2021 (seven weeks)



**Members present:** Dave Booth, Jill McMahon, Jimmy Epplert, Betty Kinney, Diane Thompson, Carole Koch, Rose Emmons, Jim Post, Karen Post, Mike Post, Pastor Mary, Vicki Zuker (via Zoom), Lynne Richmond, Karen Booth

**2021 theme:** Still Blessed (even in the mess)

**2021 theme connection/synopsis:** Lent is a season of preparation and intentional focus on our spiritual lives and practices so that we’re ready to embrace the joy of new life and the promise of resurrection. To journey through the 40 days reminds us of Jesus’ time in the wilderness and the many other references to 40-day (and 40-year) journeys that brought transformation. Even though the whole last year may seem like a Lenten time facing our mortality, we walk this season knowing the blessing of relationship with God that continues to transform us.

**Key words:** Repent & Refocus (Lent), Redeem/Redemption (Easter)

**Series theme:** Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* is a truly epic story. Whether you’ve tackled the 1,400-page 19<sup>th</sup> century novel, witnessed the Broadway musical (and memorized its soundtrack), or seen the several screen adaptations of it, you already know the power of its story. We’ll ponder the themes of grace, justice, poverty, revolution, freedom, hope, and love — each represented by a character in Hugo’s story. As these imperfect and relatable characters interact, we can see how these ideals work together (perhaps even in spite of each other) out in the world. **Note:** Betty highly recommends watching both videos.

- Series promo ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRzM8ES\\_yas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRzM8ES_yas))
- Session 1 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6IMHZ\\_hs\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6IMHZ_hs_U))

**Notes for series:** Through the Pop in Culture series, we will explore what role God plays in our culture—in our day-to-day lives and in the work of our hands that produces music and art and literature and plays and movies and technology. Throughout history, people have debated and drawn a dividing line between the “sacred” (that which is explicitly religious in nature) and the “secular” (everything else). At first glance, the dividing line may seem obvious, but when we stop to examine what God has to say about this division, we might be surprised at what we find.

Scripture says that *all* things were made through Christ (John 1:3), and through Christ *all* things were reconciled to God (Colossians 1:20). In other words, everything and everyone in our world contains a spark of the divine—everything is sacred, and whether or not we choose to live in that truth depends on our perspective. Through Jesus, God put on flesh and walked among us, in our world, in order to re-narrate what it means to be a child of God. God assumed culture

and transformed it. So now all is sacred, and in everything we are to see and proclaim God's glory. I truly believe we are called not to reject the culture we live in, but to re-narrate its meaning—to tell God's story in the midst of it.

#### **Additional resources:**

- Interview with Matt Rawle <https://www.umc.org/en/content/faith-and-pop-culture-get-your-spirit-in-shape?fbclid=IwAR2lvE-66vCxawKPHjq28PcO3zbFXoPonZKac9pBCbE0RPkSM5SmyMyTck4>
- "Movies Are Prayers" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78Vq6aZeWrM>
- "Les Misérables Gets Real about Misery" <https://www.thirteen.org/blog-post/les-miserables-gets-real-about-misery/>
- "The NT Parable that is Les Misérables" <https://thinkchristian.net/the-new-testament-parable-that-is-les-miserables>
- "Les Misérables and Gospel Connection According to John Ortberg" <https://www.gospelherald.com/articles/48165/20130508/les-miserables-and-gospel-connection-according-to-john-ortberg.htm>

- Author Matt Mikalatos posted a reflection on Facebook in 2020:

*My kids are watching "Les Misérables" tonight and I can't help but think there are a lot of people who love this story and would absolutely hate everything about it if it were set in modern day.*

*A convict imprisoned for minor theft highlights the plight of the poor and the inequities of the justice system. A single-minded police officer whose insistence on the letter of the law creates injustice.*

*An impoverished woman whose #metoo moment ends with her disbelieved, cast away from society, further impoverished and forced into prostitution, where she is taken advantage of and ultimately wrung out until dead by upper class johns and the justice system.*

*These injustices lead to an ultimately failed riot by young people, that is nevertheless held up as an exemplar of the Kingdom of God that is coming.*

*Even the minor villains are small business owners who are working hard to achieve riches at the expense of the people around them.*

*And in all of this, the heroes, the only people who provide any help to one another:*

- \* *An ex-convict on the run from the law*
- \* *a lying churchman who extends grace*
- \* *a young rioter*
- \* *a prostitute and her child*
- \* *a homeless child (also murdered by state violence)*

*All of this in an unapologetically spiritual, inherently Christian story in which every prayer is answered save one: Javert's prayer that the convict be placed behind bars again.*

*And the thief is not transformed by prison, which makes him only more desperate, more dangerous. He is not transformed by justice. He becomes a better man, a functioning part of*

society because of mercy, and because he is invited into the community of faith. Love, faith, kindness, mercy. Justice and rule of law bring only injustice and death in this story.

*I wonder in that world if each of us would be cast in the role of villain or hero. Food for thought.*

### Ideas for the series:

- Show film version of *Les Misérables*: 2012 movie trailer  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luEFm84s4oI>  
 Set against the backdrop of 19th-century France, *Les Misérables* tells an enthralling story of broken dreams and unrequited love, passion, sacrifice and redemption—a timeless testament to the survival of the human spirit. Jackman plays ex-prisoner Jean Valjean, hunted for decades by the ruthless policeman Javert (Crowe) after he breaks parole. When Valjean agrees to care for factory worker Fantine's (Hathaway) young daughter, Cosette, their lives change forever.
- Use short introduction videos each week from resources
- Use music from the Broadway musical - maybe instrumental?  
<https://www.jwpepper.com/sheet-music/search.jsp?keywords=les+miserables>
- Lynne's pins <https://www.pinterest.com/lynandlid/grace-of-les-miserables/>
  - Favorite quote: The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved; loved for ourselves, or rather, loved in spite of ourselves. – Victor Hugo
  - Image: **Revolution**
- Sanctuary: GRACE. Smaller vignettes featuring objects representing each character.
- Related graphics:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUtFcgRNYI8>
- Lent handouts:
  - Lent in a bag <https://buildfaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/in-a-bag-trifold-Cuthbert-4-1.pdf>
  - Lent in a bag <https://buildfaith.org/lent-in-a-bag/>
  - Holy Week in a box <https://buildfaith.org/holy-week-in-a-box/>

### Hands-on items:

- Character guide, right.
- Ash cross on burlap (Ash Wed.)
- Copy of Ten Commandments
- "Silver" candlestick (Jill will check on supplies)
- Valjean's prisoner number 24601 – maybe with the
- Photo card quote: To love another person is to see the face of God. – Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*



- Link from a metal chain
- Hello my name is JAVERT – Do not forget my name.
- Tricolor ribbon pin a.k.a. cockade (represents the French Revolution): Directions found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lx2SZPK1q0Y>. More information about its meaning is at <https://www.1qct.org/2014/07/the-cockade-pin/>.

**Music:** Amazing Grace (UMH 378), Grace Greater than Our Sin (UMH), Grace Like Rain, My Chains Are Gone, Redeemed, Beautiful Things, Something Beautiful (UMH 394)

**Theme verse:** Ephesians 2: 8-10

<sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.



**Visuals:** GRACE. Silver candlesticks – on table and incorporated into GRACE, above right. Bread, wine, chalice on the table, similar to our “It’s Wonderful Life” altarscape, right. Chains. Garden. Barricade. Red, white, blue fabric.



**Publicity:** Promote watching the film or reading the book before the series begins. The 2012 musical version is currently on Netflix. Masterpiece Theater has a 2019 six series version available free to people who have a WGVU Passport. There are also non-musical versions from 1998 and 1978. Could we offer one or two showings in the sanctuary?

**Discussion groups:** Would people be interested in discussion the film in small groups?

**General discussion points:** 1) Lent 2020 has been described as the “Lentiest” Lent ever in our lifetimes. There was more time than ever for self-examination and facing our own mortality. The church’s call remained the same. 2) Les Misérables is a gritty, messy story ripe with many character’s inner conflicts. 3) Jean Valjean’s story is in one of transformation. He recognizes grace when it was given to him and extends it to others. 4) The musical version of “Les Mis” came out in 1985. 5) Related book: What’s So Amazing About Grace? By Philip Yancey. 6) There has always been an emotional tension between law (Javert) and grace (Valjean). Grace is the only thing that can really change us. 7) Jimmy was surprised to see to

see that Valjean actually received his grace in church. It totally changed his idea of what the movie was going to be – in a positive way – like an ongoing prayer. He could see Valjean’s change of heart. 8) Why has this movie/musical endured? Inner struggles. Politics (power/hungry children). Constant search for grace. Revolution. Prison/ongoing need for reform. 8) Lynne’s middle school kids read Sounder and had to defend the dad in a mock trial after he stole a ham to feed his family. She was amazed at their compassionate pleas to let him go. 9) The last song, “Finale,” reminded more than one person of Amanda Gorman’s poem that was read at President Biden’s Inauguration (<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/20/politics/amanda-gorman-inaugural-poem-transcript/index.html>).

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**February 17, 2021:** Ash Wednesday - pre-recorded with MMM churches

**Hands-on item:** “Ash” cross on burlap – to be used in worship during the whole season  
**Prayer vigil** in the sanctuary

**General discussion points:** This is the first anniversary of the death of Pastor Mary’s dad.

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**February 21, 2021:** “Grace: The Long View of God’s Love”

Lent 1 – Jean Valjean

**Scripture:** Luke 6: 27-36

“Love for Enemies”

<sup>27</sup> “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. <sup>29</sup> If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup> “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. <sup>34</sup> And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. <sup>35</sup> But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

**Scripture to be projected:** I Corinthians 1:18

<sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

**Synopsis:** We wrestle with the nature of grace as we look at Jean Valjean, ourselves, and our relationships. What does it look like to offer grace in a world that seems more “gray” rather than “black and white”? What does it look like to respond to grace when it is offered?

**Felt need:** To focus on grace as God’s gift and our struggle to offer it and receive it

**Visuals:** bread, 24601, silver candlesticks

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

- “Les Misérables Film Trailer.” Length: 2:30. Cost: Free. **Comments:** Use this.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSjbdufL828>
- “Les Misérables – What Have I Done?” Length: 3:42. Cost: Free. Javert chose death but Valjean chose to be reborn. After Valjean is forgiven by the Bishop, he decides to take another path in life, breaking up his criminal identification papers and taking up a new alias. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJx1pRCey78> **Comments:** The other scene (bishop forgiving Valjean) without music is almost more powerful, but this is still great, especially the look on their faces.

**Music:** Shades of Grey (Billy Joel)

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship Leader:** Dave Stamy

**Discussion points:** 1) Project a slide on grace - prevenient, justifying, sanctifying. 2) The Luke passage is from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. 3) Jean Valjean receives and understand grace (from the church). His conversion is evident when he rips up his parole papers. 4) Javert can’t receive grace. His despair leads to suicide. 5) Hugo lifts up the church as a place of grace – the church at its best. Valjean keeps going back to church when he needs help or a change in identity. He sends the man who was pinned under a cart to be a gardener in a convent. 6) Shame – can’t forgive self. 7) Pastor Mary: One of her toughest situations was pastoring when a 19-year-old parishioner was caught in an internet sex sting. She could visit him in jail as a representative of his parents and the church. It was awful watching him, his parents, and the rest of the congregation struggle with this. 8) Big question: When have you been shown grace in an unexpected way? 9) Inspiration from Jimmy and his Roots days: Show the “What Have I Done?” video. As soon as Valjean rips up his parole paper, have the Praise Band start singing, “My Chains Are Gone.” At the same time, rip up a paper in church and let a fan blow the pieces away. 10) Lynne: The blessing of cancer is the grace that people show. 11) Receive grace graciously. Allow it to transform us. That can be challenging. We often feel indebted to the giver. Being thankful and paying it forward is enough. It is not about getting even. Related story from Rose: Her friend told of a near death experience, walking with Jesus, learning that it is not his/her job to worry about other’s hearts.

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**February 28, 2021: “When Grace and Justice Collide”**

Lent 2 – Javert

**Scripture:** Matthew 18: 21-35

“The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant”

<sup>21</sup>Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.\*"

<sup>23</sup> "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

<sup>26</sup> "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' <sup>27</sup> The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

<sup>28</sup> "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

<sup>29</sup> "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

<sup>30</sup> "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

<sup>32</sup> "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' <sup>34</sup> In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

<sup>35</sup> "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

\*Loosely translated at "more times than you can count"

**Scripture to be projected:** Matthew 5:38-39

"Eye for Eye"

<sup>38</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' <sup>39</sup> But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup> And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. <sup>41</sup> If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

**Synopsis:** There is more to being a Christian and following Jesus than following the rules. Our faith calls us to consider grace and justice - not as opposites - but often indistinguishable.

**Felt need:** To see the connection between grace and justice

**Visuals:** Chains. Masks (connection to honesty).

**Hands-on item:** Ten Commandments

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:** "Les Misérables – Javert Releases Prisoner 24601." Length 1:28.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rlnBDrEWoU>

**Related info:** “The Theology of Les Misérables”

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/philosophicalfragments/2012/12/29/the-theology-of-les-miserables/amp/>

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship Leader:** Brad Hilleary

**Discussion points:** 1) Javert’s “Stars” lyrics show how Javert loves predictability, which is one reason he finds Valjean so difficult to understand. <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/lesmiserablescast/stars.html>. 2) Javert’s “Suicide” lyrics <https://www.stlyrics.com/lyrics/lesmiserables/javertssuicide.htm>. 3) Javert’s background was not so different from Valjean’s. He was born in prison. 4) “An eye for an eye” may sound like Old Testament justice, but it means that the punishment should fit the crime, not go beyond. 5) Big questions: What does justice look like? What does it mean to follow Jesus? 6) Shame narrows a world view into tunnel vision. In Javert’s case, it means he can’t understand grace though there were a couple times he let Valjean go, e.g. to find Cosette. 7) We like grace extended to ourselves. What about when we grace extended to others (who don’t deserve it)? Could we be like the priest? 8) Messing up: Do we wish for “do-overs”? Do we pray for forgiveness? Or do we go back, say we messed up, and explain what we should have said? 9) Javert is convinced he is doing God’s work. Can you think of contemporary situations in which justice seeking turns out to be less than just/fair? 10) How do we treat people who have been in prison? How do we set fair boundaries so that they can move on with their lives while protecting others even in church? 11) Honesty/background check.

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**March 7, 2021: “Poverty and Our Response”**

Lent 3 – Fantine

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:31-46

“The Sheep and the Goats”

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup> “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

<sup>37</sup> “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and

invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

<sup>40</sup> “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

<sup>41</sup> “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

<sup>44</sup> “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

<sup>45</sup> “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

<sup>46</sup> “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

**Synopsis:** Poverty doesn’t have to be, and yet we know it is an everyday reality for so many people for so many reasons. Poverty affects everything it touches. For some it leads to perseverance. For others, poverty destroys the soul. What is our role in combating poverty as people of faith in Jesus Christ?

**Felt need:** To understand how differently we respond to poverty - and to pray for more compassion and generosity

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion

**Media possibilities:** We only watched the second clip.

- “Les Misérables – At the End of the Day.” Fantine and coworkers in the factory. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PH1KeMsQ1UA>
- “Les Misérables – I Dreamed a Dream.” Length: 4:43. Fantine sings of her past the horror of her current **desperation**. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulJXiB5i\\_q0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ulJXiB5i_q0)

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship Leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) One of the major themes of this story is poverty. 2) Key word: desperation. 3) Jesus said the poor will always be with us. He did not specify whether they would be poor in material goods or in spirit. He did/does call us to meet their needs. Most of us have not known what it means to have absolutely no support. 4) Jean Valjean was distracted by his own problems as Fantine was fired. Fantine wasn’t born into poverty. It was after a “summer fling,” and the birth of her daughter that she was on her own, a vulnerable position for a young, unmarried woman with a child. The trajectory of her life quickly goes from bad to horrible, a result of her own decision (the fling) and the way the

world treats people in her position. 5) It is easy to take “the poor’s” humanity from them if you don’t know their stories. 6) Niki and Skylar’s video on human trafficking highlights the vulnerability of certain people. Jimmy had a chance to put a face on the problem when he was speaking at a conference about a man who specialized in trafficking six-year-old boys. It wasn’t until he invited his own 6-y-o son, Camden, on stage, that the weight of his message clicked with the audience. Ignorance is bliss; you don’t have to deal with some awful realities. 7) Jill saw the vulnerability in her English as a second language students from China. 8) How do we define poverty? Household income? Does it depend on where you live? What do you need to survive? A cell phone or computer? Choosing a cell phone or food? What does it do to kids’ self-esteem? 9) Grace should be offered without any strings attached. 10) Pastor Mary: We are the first she has served that has not housed a food pantry. 11) Mike: After falling down, his first thought was about not having medical insurance and potential bankruptcy. 12) Once upon a time, several generations tended to live close together, even in the same household. That is not often true here and now. How has that change impacted family support and poverty?

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## **March 14, 2021: “The Gift of Love”**

Lent 4 – Marius and Cosette

**Scripture:** John 15: 9-17

<sup>9</sup> “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.

**Scripture to be projected:** I Corinthians 13: 4-8a, 13

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. <sup>8</sup> Love never fails.

**Synopsis:** It can be difficult to define love because we use the word so often. Sometimes love can be a placeholder when we don’t quite know how we feel. What does it mean to proclaim that “the greatest of these is love?”

**Felt need:** To consider love and its ties to devotion and loyalty to others and obedience to God

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:** “Les Misérables – In My Heart/A Heart Full of Love.” Length: 3:37.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocDL\\_b6BRE4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocDL_b6BRE4)

**Music:**

**Resource:**

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship Leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) Today’s message will look at love beyond Marius and Cosette’s relationship. 2) It seemed like everything happened very quickly between these two. People didn’t live as long then and there was a revolution that created a sense of urgency. 3) Greek has six different words for love, which makes more sense than the one word we have in English. They are agape (love for everyone), eros (sexual passion), philia (deep friendship), ludus (playful love), pragma (longstanding love), and philautia (love of self). Our focus will be on agape love. 3) We are called to love God and love others. Just as Valjean quickly learned to love Cosette, we have members of our congregation who have fostered and loved non-family members .

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## **March 21, 2021: “Giving or Taking”**

Lent 5 – Bienvenu (priest), Thénardier, Gavroche, Eponine

**Scripture:** II Corinthians 5: 14-21

<sup>14</sup> For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Scripture:** Psalm 32 - call to worship

Blessed is the one  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.

- <sup>2</sup> Blessed is the one  
whose sin the LORD does not count against them  
and in whose spirit is no deceit.
- <sup>3</sup> When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.
- <sup>4</sup> For day and night  
your hand was heavy on me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer.
- <sup>5</sup> Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions to the LORD."  
And you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.
- <sup>6</sup> Therefore let all the faithful pray to you  
while you may be found;  
surely the rising of the mighty waters  
will not reach them.
- <sup>7</sup> You are my hiding place;  
you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance.
- <sup>8</sup> I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.
- <sup>9</sup> Do not be like the horse or the mule,  
which have no understanding  
but must be controlled by bit and bridle  
or they will not come to you.
- <sup>10</sup> Many are the woes of the wicked,  
but the LORD's unfailing love  
surrounds the one who trusts in him.
- <sup>11</sup> Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;  
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

**Synopsis:** We receive blessings from God every day, and acknowledging those blessings is important spiritual work. It can keep us from selfishness and greed and keep us more ready to give, share, and forgive.

**Felt need:** To understand the need for sacrifice as a part of living our faith in Jesus

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:** Pretzel (prayer/arms, bread/nourishment - <https://www.faithward.org/lent-pretzels-recipe-and-pretzel-prayer/>)

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:** We only looked at the first video together. It was very powerful.

- “Les Misérables – Release Him (M. Bienvenu - bishop).” Length: 3:19.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhpwV4cwB4o> **Comments:** The actor that portrayed the bishop actually play Jean Valjean in the “Les Mis” production in London. Note that the bishop says, “Bless the food we eat today,” not the food we are about to eat, extending grace to Valjean who had already started eating.
- “Les Misérables – Master of the House (Mr. and Mrs. Thénardier).” Length: 4:48.  
**Comments:** These two are polar opposites of the bishop.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bG\\_yNzXDKMk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bG_yNzXDKMk)
- “Les Misérables – Look Down (Gavroche).” 3:32.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnbQdl5RP7k>
- “Les Misérables – On My Own (Eponine).” 3:25.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdJa1hc3T-I>

<p><u>Gavroche:</u></p> <p>"There was a time we killed the King. We tried to change the world too fast. Now we have got another King. He is no better than the last. This is the land that fought for liberty. Now when we fight, We fight for bread. Here is a thing about equality: Everyone's equal when they're dead."</p>
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**Music:**

**Resource:**

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship Leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) Use Wesley’s Three Simple Rules: *Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.* 2) Betty’s reflection after breaking her wrist: She is used to offering help to others. It has been a challenge to accept that help now. Several other voiced that same idea. 3) The Thénardiers had several children of their own including Eponine and Gavroche. The two little boys that Gavroche briefly cared for were his younger brothers. 4) Giver: The priest didn’t know what Valjean would do with the stuff or grace that he was offered. It was offered without strings. Great quotes: “I bought your soul for God.” “Wine, bread, what we have we have to share.” Note from Karen Booth – the second quote is probably not very accurate. 5) Taker: We found it disgusting that Mr. Thénardier ended up in the sewer searching dead bodies for valuables. 6) Justice – retributive versus restorative.

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**March 28, 2021: “Do You Hear the People (or Rocks) Sing?”**

Palm Sunday – the Barricade

**Scripture:** Mark 11: 1-11

<sup>11</sup> As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and

bring it here. <sup>3</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

<sup>4</sup> They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, <sup>5</sup> some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” <sup>6</sup> They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. <sup>7</sup> When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

<sup>10</sup> “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>11</sup> Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

**Scripture to be projected:** Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

**Synopsis:** Though we don’t always acknowledge it, what happened on Palm Sunday was amazing. It was a miracle that no one drew a sword in a time of high tension. As we consider the expectations for Jesus and his response - the kind of Messiah he was - what do we say about seeking justice, standing up for what we believe, and following the gospel call?

**Felt need:** To work for and advocate for justice with peaceful resistance

**Visuals:** Barricade. Donkey or colt.

**Hands-on item:** Palm branches. Rocks.

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:** “Les Misérables - Do You Hear the People Sing?” Length: 2:21. Do you hear the people sing? Singing the songs of angry men? It is the music of the people who will not be slaves again! When the beating of your heart echoes the beating of the drums, there is a life about to start when tomorrow comes! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q82twrdrOU>

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship Leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) The original Palm Sunday could have been a bloodbath. People had high expectations of Jesus and were waiting for him to act. Their expectations did not align with what he knows to lie ahead. For those of us who have grown up in the church, we probably have missed the sense of revolution/resistance that Jesus’ peers felt. They wanted someone to save them and to do it now. The Gospel of Mark conveys that urgency. Events would

“head south” in a hurry. 2) There are parallels in “Le Mis” and now with Holy Week events. What does justice look like? Where do we see unjust things? 3) Have we taught a “sanitized” version of Palm Sunday to our kids? 4) Jesus is in trouble with religious leaders during his entire ministry. He isn’t necessarily speaking against the leaders as much as he is speaking for what is right.

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## **Thursday, April 1, 2021: “The Garden at Night: Watch and Pray”**

Holy Thursday – the Garden

**Scripture:** Mark 14: 12-26, 32-41

“The Last Supper”

<sup>12</sup> On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

<sup>13</sup> So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. <sup>14</sup> Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ <sup>15</sup> He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

<sup>16</sup> The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

<sup>17</sup> When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. <sup>18</sup> While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”

<sup>19</sup> They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”

<sup>20</sup> “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. <sup>21</sup> The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

<sup>22</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”

<sup>23</sup> Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

<sup>24</sup> “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. <sup>25</sup> “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

“Gethsemane”

<sup>32</sup> They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” <sup>33</sup> He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. <sup>34</sup> “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

<sup>35</sup> Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. <sup>36</sup> “*Abba*, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

<sup>37</sup> Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? <sup>38</sup> Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

<sup>39</sup> Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. <sup>40</sup> When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

<sup>41</sup> Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.

**Synopsis:** Jesus offers grace to his disciples even as he warns them of betrayal. Jesus takes them to pray even as they struggle to stay awake. Jesus displays agape love even as he prays and recognizes his humanity in going to the cross to bring salvation. We gather with him in honest confession as we “sit with our sin” and ask for forgiveness.

**Felt need:** To hear the call to pray with Jesus as he faces the cross and as we face our sin

**Visuals:** Garden. See related Les Mis info (<https://medium.com/@spencerbaum/the-untended-garden-of-rue-plumet-a-master-class-in-description-from-les-miserables-5dad733e048a>).

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion, Prayer Vigil

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** Go to Dark Gethsemane (UMH 290)

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship Leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) We’ll have a service with communion, but no hand or foot washing. It will be followed by a Prayer Vigil. 2) Jesus offers grace in the face of betrayal.

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**April 2, 2021:** Good Friday - to be planned with MMM churches  
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**April 4, 2021:** “The Garden at Dawn: A Hopeful Vision”

Easter Sunday – the Garden

**Scripture:** John 20:11-18

The Empty Tomb

<sup>20</sup> Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. <sup>2</sup> So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

<sup>3</sup> So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. <sup>4</sup> Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came along behind him and

went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, <sup>7</sup> as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. <sup>8</sup> Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

**"Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene"**

<sup>11</sup> Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb <sup>12</sup> and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

<sup>13</sup> They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." <sup>14</sup> At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

**Thinking he was the gardener**, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

<sup>17</sup> Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

**Scripture to be projected:** Genesis 2: 8-10, 15

<sup>8</sup> Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. <sup>9</sup> The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup> A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters.

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

**Scripture to be projected:** Revelation 22: 1-3

<sup>22</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the

nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

**Synopsis:** Resurrection calls us to claim the hope that is always with us as people whose faith is in Jesus Christ. God offers a hopeful vision for new life right now and eternal life in God's love and care.

**Felt need:** To find hope and transformation in difficult circumstances and know that God works for good.

**Visuals:** Garden (related info - <https://medium.com/@spencerbaum/the-untended-garden-of-rue-plumet-a-master-class-in-description-from-les-miserables-5dad733e048a>)

**Hands-on item:** Flower seeds

**Activity:** Holy Baptism

**Media possibilities:** "Les Misérables – The Finale." Length: 4:42. Words from *Finale* of *Les Misérables* - Jean Valjean, Fantine, and Eponine

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8WlmoJp5HM>

*On this page*

*I write my last confession*

*Read it well*

*When I, at last, am sleeping*

*It's the story*

***Of one who turned from hating***

***The man who only learned to love***

*When you were in his keeping*

***Come with me***

***Where chains will never bind you***

***All your grief***

***At last, at last behind you***

*Lord in Heaven*

*Look down on him in mercy*

*Forgive me all my trespasses*

*And take me to your glory*

***Take my hand***

***I'll lead you to salvation***

***Take my love***

***For love is everlasting***

***And remember***

***The truth that once was spoken***

***To love another person***

***Is to see the face of God***

Do you hear the people sing

Lost in the valley of the night?

It is the music of a people

Who are climbing to the light

For the wretched of the earth

There is a flame that never dies

Even the darkest night will end

And the sun will rise

***They will live again in freedom***

***In the garden of the Lord***

***We will walk behind the ploughshare***

***We will put away the sword***

***The chain will be broken***

***And all men will have their reward***

Will you join in our crusade?

Who will be strong and stand with me?

Somewhere beyond the barricade

Is there a world you long to see?

Do you hear the people sing?

Say, do you hear the distant drums?

It is the future that they bring

When tomorrow comes!

**Music:**

**Children's Time:**

**Worship Leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) Note the parallels between the gardener at the convent in “Les Mis” and the “gardener” in John 20: 15. 2) “Les Mis” is a story of hope and transformation – same as Easter.” 3) Several babies have been born in the past ten months. Pastor Mary may baptize some on Easter. 4) The finale ends with a picture of heaven. Marius and Cosette even hear the choir of angels welcoming Valjean as he dies.