

SPiRiT XTRa

Part 2: January through April, 2012

by Johanna Hatch

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January 8, 2012

Epiphany

“Called Out in the Dark,” Snow Patrol, *Fallen Empires*, Polydor Limited

Just as the magi followed the star to find the newborn Jesus, we still look for signs to point us to God. Nature can inspire us. Friends and events can fire us up and confuse us. Feelings can pull us in different directions. We may feel as if we are in the dark, trying to find the right way to go. In “Called Out in the Dark,” the band Snow Patrol sings about the desire to find the right path in a confusing world.

Key Lines: *Show me now, show me the arms aloft / Every eye trained on a different star / This magic / This drunken semaphore / And I / We are listening / And we’re not blind / This is your life / This is your time*

Questions: Who points you towards Jesus? In what ways does your life point others to Jesus? Where do you find God in creation as the magi did in the stars? How hard is finding God in the world today? What gifts do you think Jesus wants from us today?

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January 15, 2012

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Cup of Sorrow,” Amos Lee, *Mission Bell*, Blue Note Records

Just as Jesus invites disciples in Sunday’s gospel to come to his house and hang out, so also Jesus invites us to “come and see” who he is.

How we respond matters. “Cup of Sorrow” is a song about responding to the invitation, and sharing in the work of Jesus.

Key Lines: *I want to sit at your table of wisdom / So that not one crumb shall go to waste / For if we keep down this pathway to destruction / Well, our children will suffer for our haste*

Questions: What call do you hear from Jesus? How do you respond? Why is it important to you? What distracts you from Jesus’ call? What qualities do people who follow Jesus possess? How will your choices today impact future generations?

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January 22, 2012

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

“You Are a Tourist,” Death Cab for Cutie, *Codes and Keys*, Atlantic Recording

When Jesus begins to call his followers, their lives take a radically different turn. They leave their fishing nets behind. In “You Are a Tourist” the band Death Cab for Cutie describes how following our hearts can lead us into unfamiliar territory.

Key Lines: *And if you feel just like a tourist in the city you were born / Then it's time to go / And define your destination / There's so many different places to call home*

Questions: What are the risks of following Jesus? To what unexpected places has Jesus led you? How do you feel when you start something new? When have you felt a “burning in your heart” like the song describes? Where has it lead you?

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January 29, 2012

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Rise to Me,” The Decemberists, *The King is Dead*, Capitol Records

Not only does Jesus speak with authority in Sunday’s gospel, his actions match his words as he casts out a demon. Even when it would have been easier to ignore the possessed man, Jesus stands his ground and sets him free. “Rise to Me” by the Decemberists is a reminder about the importance of standing firm for what is right.

Key Lines: *They sing out / I am going to stand my ground / You rise to me and I'll blow you down / I am going to stand my ground / You rise to me and I'll blow you down*

Questions: When is it hard to stand your ground? What makes it easier? When do you feel it is important to take a stand? What gives someone the authority to lead? Who speaks the truth in your community?

“Waste,” Foster the People, *Torches*, Sony Music Entertainment

In this Sunday’s gospel, Jesus heals the sick and frees people possessed by demons, bringing them out of loneliness and back into their communities. Foster the People’s song “Waste” is about reaching out to someone who is isolated and giving the person hope, just as Jesus reached out to the people he encountered who were sick or possessed.

Key Lines: *I’ll hold your hand when you are feeling mad at me / Yeah when the monsters they won’t go away / The windows are closed / I’ll pretend to see what you see / “How long?” I say, how long will you relive the things that are gone? / Oh yeah, the devil’s on your back but I know you can shake him off*

Questions: Who are the healers that you know? How do they care for others? Why is it hard to let go of past hurts? What “monsters” do you see people struggling with? Where does our world need healing today? When do you feel alone? How is God present to you in that experience?

“Keep Your Head Up,” Andy Grammer, *Andy Grammer*, S-Curve Records

Communities isolated and shunned people who suffered from leprosy and skin diseases in Jesus’ time. When Jesus heals a leper in Sunday’s gospel, he gives the man hope and returns him to his family and friends. Everyone feels out of place sometimes and needs encouragement.

“Keep Your Head Up” is a positive anthem to remind us that there is always hope things can get better.

Key Lines: *The glow that the sun gives / Right around sunset / Helps me realize / This is just a journey / Drop your worries / You are gonna turn out fine / Oh, you’ll turn out fine*

Questions: What do you do to encourage others? Who do you look to for encouragement? What are some reasons that people get treated like lepers? What do you think about the validity of these reasons? Who do you think Jesus would hang out with at your school? Why do you think he would choose to be friends with this group?

“Secrets,” One Republic, *Waking Up*, Mosley Music/Interscope Records

Jesus forgives sins. We have the power to forgive each other for our mistakes, hurts, and slights. But sometimes, fear or shame can keep us from asking for or granting forgiveness. The song “Secrets” is about letting go of these negative emotions and being truthful about our lives.

Key Lines: *insincere / So I'm gonna give all my secrets away / This time, don't need another perfect lie / Don't care if critics never jump in line / I'm gonna give all my secrets away*

Questions: Why do people keep secrets? Why is it hard to ask for forgiveness? What can be gained from asking for forgiveness? How does keeping secrets stand in the way of reconciliation? How is telling the truth connected to forgiveness?

“What Doesn't Kill You,” Kelly Clarkson, *Stronger*, 19 Recordings Limited

The solitude of the desert tested Jesus. Our relationships can test our values and make us struggle with what we really want. “What Doesn't Kill You” is a song about one of those relationships and how surviving a test can make us stronger.

Key Lines: *What doesn't kill you makes you stronger / Stand a little taller / Doesn't mean I'm lonely when I'm alone / What doesn't kill you makes a fighter / Footsteps even lighter / Doesn't mean I'm over cause you're gone*

Questions: What relationships have made you stronger? In what ways do relationships test you? What are some good things about spending time alone? Why do you think people are often afraid of being alone? How can spending time alone help your spirituality?

“Let the Rain,” Sara Bareilles, *Kaleidoscope Heart*, Sony Music Entertainment

When Jesus shows his true self to his friends, they were amazed, scared, and confused. Sometimes fear can keep us from sharing our true selves with others. Sara Bareilles writes about this fear and the need to overcome it in her song “Let the Rain.”

Key Lines: *And if I were fearless / Then I'd speak my truth / And the world would hear this / That's what I wish I'd do, yeah / If my hands could hold them you'd see / I'd take all these secrets in me / And I'd move and mold them to be / Something I'd set free*

Questions: What do you risk when you speak your truth? What do you gain? What is something you would like others to know about the “real” you? Who do you feel safe sharing your secrets with? When is a time that someone shared his or her true self with you? How did it make you feel?

“Dear Mr. President,” Fitz and the Tantrums, *Pickin’ Up the Pieces*, Dangerbird Records

In Sunday’s gospel the people buying and selling in the temple anger Jesus. Anger can wake us up to injustice and people’s everyday needs. Sometimes we get angry with political leaders or others in positions of power who don’t seem to care about the needs of others. It can be difficult to know what to do with anger. “Dear Mr. President” by Fitz and the Tantrums is a powerful call to make positive change.

Key Lines: *Get in line, there’s no jobs / And the kids are shootin’ dope / Out of work, out of time / Mama’s startin’ to loose hope / It ain’t enough to pray / When you got no place to stay / Daddy just walked out / Mama raisin’ family / Hey put your foot down and take a look round / Don’t like what you see*

Questions: In what ways do you stand up for what you believe? What injustices do you see in your community? What do you speak out about? Who is a role model for work for justice that you look up to? What responsibility do you think political leaders have to fight injustice? When do you get frustrated with people who are in positions of power?

“Crazy Girl,” Eli Young Band, *Life At Best*, Republic Nashville Records

Sunday’s gospel focuses on the message of God’s powerful and all-encompassing love through Jesus. Like God’s love, the song “Crazy Girl” is about a love that can’t be hampered by human imperfections.

Key Lines: *Crazy girl, don’t you know that I love you? / I wouldn’t dream of going nowhere / Silly woman come here let me hold you / Have I told you lately I love you like crazy, girl?*

Questions: Who shows you love when you feel flawed? How do you show love to your friends and family? What qualities or behaviors make it difficult to love someone? What relationships have had the greatest impact on your life? How would you describe God’s love?

“Skyscraper,” Demi Lovato, *Unbroken*, Hollywood Records

Jesus says in Sunday’s gospel that a grain of wheat must die to bear fruit, meaning that sometimes something must be lost in order to make room for something good to happen. Even in the face of tragedy or struggle, God has the power to bring about good. Demi Lovato’s “Skyscraper” is a song about the ability to grow, even after a painful experience.

Key Lines: *You can take everything I have / You can break everything I am / Like I’m made of glass / Like I’m made of paper / Go on and try to tear me down / I will be rising from the ground / Like a skyscraper / Like a skyscraper*

Questions: When have you seen good come out of a seemingly bad situation? How do you see people tearing each other down? What do you find frightening about change? In what ways have you grown and changed in the last year? What is something you have had to work hard for?

“Paradise,” Coldplay, *Mylo Xyloto*, EMI Records Limited

On this Sunday, we remember the suffering and death of Jesus. As we reflect on his suffering, we also call to mind the suffering we see in the world around us. “Paradise” by Coldplay reminds us of the suffering of those who have no safe place to turn to.

Key Lines: *When she was just a girl / She expected the world / But it flew away from her reach / And the bullets catch in her teeth / Life goes on, it gets so heavy / The wheel breaks the butterfly / Every tear a waterfall / In the night the stormy night she'll close her eyes / In the night the stormy night away she'd fly*

Questions: Where do you see suffering in your Church or community? How do you show God’s love to someone who is suffering? When does loving someone cause suffering? How do you think God feels about suffering in the world? What do you think Jesus’ suffering teaches us?

“Dead Hearts,” Stars, *The Five Ghosts & The Séance*, Vagrant Records

No way are Jesus’ disciples expecting Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. His friends struggle with amazement, doubt, faith, and grief. We experience struggles in the mystery of our relationships with friends. “Dead Hearts” by the band Stars examines the struggle to believe in love and life that continues after death.

Key Lines: *I could say it, but you won't believe me / You say you do, but you don't deceive me / It's hard to know they're out there / It's hard to know that you still care / I could say it but you won't believe me / You say you do but you don't deceive me*

Questions: How do you think the disciples feel when Mary Magdalene tells them she has seen Jesus? How do you think Mary Magdalene feels when Peter doesn’t believe her? What do you say when someone questions how you can believe in Jesus and the Gospel? Do you ever find it difficult to believe? Why or why not?

“When we Stand Together,” Nickelback, *Here and Now*, The All Blacks B.V.

After Jesus dies, he does not leave his friends afraid and alone. Instead, he returns to them to reassure them and prepare them to go out together and spread the good news. “When We Stand Together” by Nickelback is about the power of communities to create positive change by working together.

Key Lines: *The right thing to guide us / Is right here inside us / No one can divide us / When the light is nearly on / But just like a heartbeat / The drumbeat carries on*

Questions: What communities support you? How do they help you serve others or work for justice? When have you seen a community stand up for justice? How does being part of a community support your faith? How do you hear Jesus speaking to you?

“Spectrum,” Florence + the Machine, *Ceremonials*, Universal Island Records

Jesus’ disciples feel afraid and unsure until he returns to them and they experience him risen and bringing them peace. Through his loyalty and love, Jesus helps his disciples to understand who he truly is. “Spectrum” shows us how love can change the way we see the world and ourselves.

Key Lines: *When we first came here we were cold and we were clear / With no colors in our skin, we were light and paper thin / And when we first came here we were cold and we were clear / With no colors in our skin ‘til we let the spectrum in / Say my name and every color illuminates / We are shining and we will never be afraid again*

Questions: In what ways has a relationship with Jesus changed you? What relationships bring you peace? What are some of the Christ-like qualities you see in your friends? What stops us from recognizing goodness in others? Where do you recognize Jesus present in your life today?