

SPiRiT XTRa

Part 2: January through April, 2011

by Anna Zaros

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January 9, 2011

Baptism of the Lord

“Sound of Sunshine,” Michael Franti & Spearhead, *Sound of Sunshine*, Capitol

See the *Spirit Guide*, page 20, for reflection and questions.

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January 16, 2011

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Release Me,” Tonic, *Tonic*, 429 Records

In Sunday’s gospel John the Baptist tells how he saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus. This is a moment when Jesus’ identity was revealed and he was called to his divine mission. Just as God calls Jesus, God calls us.

Key Lines: *Come and release me sender / Come and release me / I will go / It’s the part I need to show / Come and release me silence / Come and release me so I’ll know / When it’s time to let it go / I want to know / Where the deeper parts of life will grow / I want to see / Where’s the deeper part of love in me / Where’s that part of love in me*

Questions: When have you felt called to a special mission or task? What was the call? What are ways we can try to understand God’s vision for our lives? How is Jesus’ response to God a model we can follow in our response to God in our lives? How is vocation different from career?

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January 23, 2011

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

“Dog Days are Over,” Florence + the Machine, *Lungs*, Island

The everyday people of Jesus’ society struggled. Yet Jesus begins his mission by traveling around his country proclaiming that things are looking up, that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus’ disciples give up their work to follow Jesus into better days ahead. “The Dog Days are Over” is a song about leaving everything behind to meet a big change that is about to come.

Key Lines: *Run fast for your mother / Run fast for your father / Run for your children / For your sisters and brothers / Leave all your love and your longing behind / You can't carry it with you if you want to survive / The dog days are over ... And I never wanted anything from you / Except everything you had and what was left after that too*

Questions: Why did the disciples leave their work and their home to follow Jesus? Would you leave everything behind to be a part of a mission or cause? Why or why not? What cause or mission? Why is following Jesus and his teachings the greatest mission of our lives? What do we give up by following Jesus? What do we gain?

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January 30, 2011

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“One Day,” Matisyahu, *Light*, Epic Records

The Beatitudes are Jesus' way of explaining to his disciples that although this world is full of sorrow, poverty, and violence, God blesses those who work against these difficulties. When we work against injustice and war, it often seems like progress is slow and people oppose us. But Jesus constantly reminds us that our work matters and makes a real difference in the lives of those in need.

Key Lines: *Sometimes I lay / Under the moon / And thank God I'm breathing / Then I pray / Don't take me soon / 'Cause I am here for a reason / Sometimes in my tears I drown / But I never let it get me down / So when negativity surrounds / I know some day it'll all turn around / Because all my life I've been waiting for / I've been praying for / For the people to say / That we don't want to fight no more / They'll be no more wars / And our children will play / One day*

Questions: How did Jesus' disciples work against poverty, violence, and injustice in their lives? How were they rewarded? How do you work against such difficulties in your daily life? How do you stay hopeful for better days? Where and how have you seen God's blessings in the midst of sorrow, hardship, and poverty? If you could write a beatitude, what would it be?

“Pop Goes the World,” The Gossip, *Music for Men*, Columbia

In Sunday’s gospel Jesus uses an analogy of flavorful salt and bright light to explain how we can bring positive change to the world by being passionate about who we are and what we believe in. We shouldn’t hide our gifts but rather should openly use them. “Pop Goes the World” is a song about making change in the world and not apologizing for who you are.

Key Lines: *We’ll start a demonstration / Or we’ll create a scene / Make noise from our frustration / Newspapers, magazines / We’ll turn them on their heads / You can’t deny it / For once / We’ll do what comes naturally / We’ll approach it casually / With no apology / For once / We can have the final say / Goodbye to yesterday / ‘Cause we know we’re here to stay*

Questions: How do you show others who you are and what you believe in? What positive change would you like to see in the world? What steps can you take now to make this change? How can you let loose your flavor and bright light? How do you nurture your flavor and bright light?

“Half of My Heart,” John Mayer, *Battle Studies*, Columbia

Jesus often stunned the Pharisees with his interpretation of the Mosaic Law. In Sunday’s gospel he explains that one must follow the spirit of the law and commandments honestly to get to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus calls us to live these teachings fully as guides to help us live a rich life dedicated to God, rather than living a halfway commitment or doing the minimum.

Key Lines: *I was made to believe I’d never love somebody else / I made a plan / Stay the man who can only love himself / Lonely was the song I sang / ‘Til the day you came / Showing me another way and all that my love can bring / Half of my heart’s got a grip on the situation / Half of my heart takes time / Half of my heart’s got a right mind to tell you / That I can’t keep loving you / With half of my heart*

Questions: When have you only half-heartedly worked on an important project or assignment? How did this project or assignment turn out? What happens when you don’t put energy into something you’ve committed to? What happens when you do? How does life change when you love God, family, and friends fully, rather than halfway?

“I’d Do it All Again,” Corinne Bailey Rae, *The Sea*, EMI

In Sunday’s gospel Jesus gives one of his most difficult to follow teachings: love your enemies and greet violence with peace. Jesus is advocating an active love that takes the power out of violence and hatred. Jesus wants his followers to know that love, not hatred, has the last word. “I’d Do it All Again” is a song about continually offering love to those who may hurt you.

Key Lines: *It’s hard to believe this time / Hard to believe / That my heart / My heart’s an open door / You got all you came for, baby / So weary / Someone to love / It’s bigger than your pride’s worth / It’s bigger than the pain you got for it hurts / And outruns all of the sadness / It’s terrifying life through the darkness / And I’d do it all again*

Questions: What does it mean to you to love your enemies and turn the other cheek? What power does love and peace have that violence does not? What is the difference between meeting hatred with love and tolerating abuse in relationships? Which is Jesus advocating? How can you love your enemies and practice peace in your daily life?

“Alright,” Darius Rucker, *Learn to Live*, Capitol Nashville

Jesus explains in Sunday’s gospel that the disciples don’t need to worry about the future, about material things, about money. He promises God will provide all they need. Jesus challenges us to put our energy into trusting God instead of worrying about the future. “Alright” is a song about appreciating the simple but meaningful things in life.

Key Lines: *It may be a simple life / But that’s okay / If you ask me baby / I think I’ve got it made / ‘Cause I’ve got a roof over my head ... I’ve got shoes under my feet / Forever in her eyes staring back at me / And it’s alright, alright / I’ve got all I need / And it’s alright by me / It’s alright by me / When I lay down at night I thank the Lord above / For giving me everything I ever could dream of*

Questions: What material things are important to you? Why does Jesus challenge us not to let material things consume us? What non-material things do you appreciate? How can you practice simplicity in a world of materialism and consumerism? What is your biggest worry? How can your relationship with God be a source of reassurance and calm?

“Pyramid,” Charice, *Charice*, 143/Reprise

In Sunday’s gospel Jesus describes a person who listens to his words and obeys his teachings. Jesus explains that this person will be able to stand up against any difficulties that will come upon them. “Pyramid” describes a love that stands the test of many storms. This is exactly the kind of love and friendship God offers us every day.

Key Lines: *Stones / Heavy like the love you’ve shown / Solid as the ground we’ve known / And I just want to carry on ... Now I just want to let you know / Earthquakes can’t shake us / Cyclones can’t break us / Hurricanes can’t take away our love / Pyramid / We built this on a solid rock / It feels just like it’s heaven’s touch / Together at the top / Like a pyramid*

Questions: How does your relationship with God help you to withstand hardships in your life? What does God expect you to contribute to the relationship? Who else in your life helps protect you from hardship? Why does knowing God, family, and friends love us help us through life’s struggles? Some describe God’s love like a pyramid; how would you describe the love of God?

“King of Anything,” Sara Bareilles, *Kaleidoscope Heart*, Epic

The temptations put before Jesus don’t seem like a big deal—only things like turning stones into bread. But as Jesus knows, giving into any of these temptations would display that he does not trust God and the person God created him to be.

Key Lines: *You sound so innocent / All full of good intent / Swear you know best / But you expect me to / Jump up onboard with you / And ride off into your delusional sunset / I’m not the one who’s lost / With no direction / But you’ll never see / You’re so busy making maps / With my name on them in all caps / You’ve got the talking down / Just not the listening*

Questions: When did you do something that you knew really wasn’t you? How did you feel afterwards? What tempts you to turn away from who you truly are? What tempts you to turn away from your relationship with God? How do you handle these temptations and stay true to yourself? What encourages you to trust God?

“All We Are,” Matt Nathanson, *Some Mad Hope*, Vanguard

When Jesus’ disciples saw him transfigured, they were amazed. They experienced a life-changing moment so powerful that they didn’t want to leave the mountain. But Jesus brought them back down to everyday life. We also have powerful religious experiences and must learn how to transform those events into inspiration to live our day-to-day lives.

Key Lines: *I tasted, tasted love so sweet / And all of it was lost on me / Bought and sold like property / Sugar on my tongue / I kept falling over / I kept looking backward / I went broke believing / That the simple should be hard / All we are we are / All we are we are / And every day is a start of something beautiful*

Questions: Describe a retreat or an activity that changed your life or was incredibly meaningful. How did you feel during that event? What made it special? How did you feel when this time ended and you went back to your daily routine? Did the special feeling last? Make a list of ways you can transform these powerful experiences into part of the simple moments of everyday life.

“Pretty Girl,” Priscilla Renea, *Jukebox*, Capitol

As a male Jew, it was quite unconventional for Jesus to speak with a Samaritan woman. Yet this woman was one of the few who truly understood who Jesus was and proclaimed him as the messiah. Beauty and truth can come to us from unexpected places. We should never underestimate those around us, or ourselves.

Key Lines: *Beauty lies / Within your eyes / That’s the truth / Break down the walls / Look past your flaws / Accept what’s you / You’re starting new and changing views / So you can finally see the girl that’s staring back finds what is true / What you see in your reflection is not the truth / ‘Cause girl what your thinking is perfection / Your perfection starts with you*

Questions: Describe a time you thought someone was not smart or cool, but then learned this wasn’t true. What changed your mind? Have you ever felt like you were uncool? How did you learn to think

better of yourself? What groups of people are the most marginalized in the United States today? What gifts do they have to offer? How can we help to let their voices be heard? Why does Jesus often choose the least powerful people in society to spread his message of love and peace?

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April 3, 2011

4th Sunday of Lent

“Breathe,” Ryan Star, *11:59*, Atlantic

In Sunday’s gospel the Pharisees are extremely upset with Jesus and the man born blind. To them, Jesus is usurping their power with his miraculous deeds. They criticize, harass, and expel the man born blind from the synagogue because he speaks the truth of his new sight and has come to believe in Jesus. When we experience difficulties, harassment, or discrimination, Jesus and the man born blind challenge us to stand up for what we believe and who we believe in.

Key Lines: *Breathe, just breathe / Take the world off your shoulders / And put it on me / Breathe, just breathe / Let the life that you live / Be all that you need / Let go of the fear / Let go of the time / Let go of the ones who try to put you down / You’re going to be fine / Don’t hold it inside / If you hurt right now / Then let it all come out*

Questions: Describe a time when you were treated poorly for who you are or for your beliefs. Who supported and helped you through this situation? How have you been a support to others in their time of need?

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April 10, 2011

5th Sunday of Lent

“Swim,” Jack’s Mannequin (Andrew McMahon), *The Glass Passenger*, Sire Records

See the *Spirit Guide*, page 34, for reflection and questions.

“Man in the Mirror,” Michael Jackson, *Michael Jackson’s Greatest Hits*, Epic

Change can only happen within each of us, the one we see in the mirror. This is a great song to use with a group’s stations of the cross in their community. Use different segments at each place.

Key Lines: *I’m starting with the man in the mirror / I’m asking him to change his ways / And no message could have been any clearer / If you wanna make the world a better place / Take a look at yourself and then make a change, yey / Na na na, na na na, na na na na oh no*

Questions: What is one small way you want to make your school, neighborhood, or town a better place?

“Unstoppable,” Rascal Flatts, *Unstoppable*, Lyric Street Records

For his disciples, Jesus’ crucifixion brought deep despair. Finding the tomb empty only worsened their anguish and fear. But Jesus returned to them to show them that he lives. Jesus’ resurrection is a continuous reminder that love is unstoppable, that God prevails in the end, even in times when we think all hope is lost.

Key Lines: *When your heart is full of doubt / And you think that there’s no way out / You find your faith has been lost and shaken / You take back what’s been taken / Get on your knees and dig down deep / You can do what you think is impossible / Keep on believing / Don’t give in / It’ll come and make you whole again / It always will / It always does / Love is unstoppable*

Questions: When have you ever been in a situation where all hope seemed to be lost? How did you make it through? How did you feel when your hope was finally fulfilled? What does Jesus’ resurrection teach us?