THE REDEEMING CONFLICT
Guide for Pastors and Preachers
Ann M. Garrido
In the introduction to *Redeeming Conflict*, we talked about how each church community is called to be a school in the art of relationship, enabling its members to grow in the capacities and skills needed to live the Trinitarian life into which they were baptized.

The Sunday pulpit and bulletin can be an avenue for helping parishioners see the intersection between their faith and the relationships that permeate their lives. In addition to sponsoring a small-group study of *Redeeming Conflict*, parishes can reinforce the themes in the book by regularly incorporating them into the community’s preaching and reflection material.

The first half of this resource (pp. 1–12) includes an outline of where *Redeeming Conflict* themes naturally emerge in the three-year lectionary cycle, with suggestions for how preachers might tie these themes to the readings of the day, particularly the readings that are in bold font. Where there is alignment (or near alignment) between the Catholic lectionary texts and the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) but the Sunday is titled differently the RCL reference is also given.

Catholic lectionary texts can easily be referenced at www.usccb.org. RCL texts can easily be referenced at lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu.

The second half of this resource (pp. 13–26) includes sixteen columns that can be inserted into parish bulletins over the course of the three-year cycle. The passages for which there is a bulletin column included are marked with a “#” in the Preaching Ideas chart.
# Preaching Ideas

## Year A

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<td><strong>First Sunday of Advent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Is 2:1–5</strong>&lt;br&gt;Rom 13:11–14&lt;br&gt;Mt 24:37–44</td>
<td>Isaiah speaks of the fullness of the kingdom of God as a time of peace, when swords are beat into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. A time when people will not study war. Each of us is invited to study peace as a way of collaborating with God’s plan. What would happen if we were as conscientious and intentional as a country about educating ourselves in the skills and capacities needed for peaceful relationships as we are studying the best ways to wage war? What could we do in our own parish community to study peacemaking?</td>
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<td><strong>Second Sunday of Advent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Is 11:1–10</strong>&lt;br&gt;Rom 15:4–9&lt;br&gt;Mt 3:1–12</td>
<td>Isaiah again paints a picture of the fullness of the kingdom of God when creatures that ordinarily wouldn’t coexist with each other are at peace in each other’s presence. Who is it hardest for you to imagine being in a peaceful relationship with? What steps might you take to change the nature of this relationship? John the Baptist calls out for us to “repent” because this kingdom is “near.” Do our lives bear witness to the belief this time of peace is dawning?</td>
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<td><strong>Third Sunday in Ordinary Time / Third Sunday after Epiphany</strong></td>
<td><strong>Is 8:23—9:3</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>1 Cor 1:10–13, 17</strong>&lt;br&gt;Mt 4:12–23</td>
<td>Chloe’s people have written to Paul about divisions among the Christian community in Corinth. Paul reminds them that although they were each introduced to Christianity by different preachers, they all share a common baptism marked by the cross of Christ. Working for healthy unity in the midst of our diverse experiences and perceptions is one of the ways we participate in the Paschal Mystery and thereby live out our baptism. What kinds of attitudes and skills help us to sustain us in that effort today?</td>
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<td>Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Fourth Sunday after Epiphany</td>
<td>Mi 6:1–8; 1 Cor 1:18–31 Mt 5:1–12</td>
<td>Among those Jesus names as blessed in today’s gospel passage are the peacemakers. What does it mean to be a peacemaker? It is not the same as being “nice” or “a pushover.” Indeed it takes great strength to do this work. (Chapter 10 from Redeeming Conflict offers some ways to concretely practice peacemaking skills and may be a resource to a preacher trying to flesh out the beatitudes further.)</td>
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<td>Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time / Seventh Sunday after Epiphany</td>
<td>Lv 19:1–2, 17–18 1 Cor 3:16–23 Mt 5:38–48</td>
<td>Today’s gospel seems to sanction the taking of abuse: if someone makes demands of you, give them more. It could also be understood to further the notion that being a Christian means being “soft.” Rather, what Jesus is advocating here is a profound freedom—the freedom to change the balance of power in the relationship. (Chapter 11 from Redeeming Conflict talks about creative ways we can still exercise freedom in life, even when we feel others are treating us badly, thereby breaking the cycle of tit for tat. See especially pages 221–222.)</td>
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<td>First Sunday of Lent</td>
<td>Gn 2:7–9; 3:1–7 Rom 5:12–19 Mt 4:1–11</td>
<td>Although Adam and Eve have no idea as to why God doesn’t want them to eat from one particular tree, they fill in the blank by suspecting bad intent on God’s part: God doesn’t want competition. Jesus in today’s gospel refuses to cave into the tempter’s attempts to make him doubt the ways of God. In our own lives, do we get caught in the web of suspicion about others’ intent? (Chapter 3 of Redeeming Conflict—especially pages 73–76—gives examples of how this trap gets played out in daily life and tips for avoiding it.)</td>
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<td>Third Sunday of Lent</td>
<td>Ex 17:3–7 Rom 5:1–2, 5–8 Jn 4:5–42</td>
<td>Jesus confronts the Samaritan woman with the details of her life, and rather than become defensive, she takes joy in the truth. She welcomes this knowledge of herself, perhaps because it is spoken with such love. She can be a model for us of being open to feedback from others rather than becoming defensive. (Chapter 7 of Redeeming Conflict could be useful in fleshing out what it would look like to learn from feedback in our own lives.)</td>
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| Second Sunday of Easter # | Acts 2:42–47  
1 Pt 1:3–9  
Jn 20:19–31 | Each time the Risen Christ enters the scene in today’s gospel he greets those gathered with the phrase “Peace be with you.” Jesus had been abandoned and betrayed, misunderstood and denied by these disciples. He could have vented, interrogated, or unleashed justifiable wrath on those present, but instead he says “Peace be with you”—giving us an insight into what true forgiveness looks like. (To connect to current understandings of forgiveness and ways we can practice forgiveness in our own relationships, see chapter 8 in Redeeming Conflict.) |
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| Third Sunday of Easter | Acts 2:14, 22–33  
1 Pt 1:17–21  
Lk 24:13–35 | When Jesus encounters the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they had interpreted the events of Jerusalem as the end of the Jesus story and the end of the kingdom Jesus had preached about, but the Risen Christ shows them another way of looking at the very same set of events. Often we think we know the way the story goes and are sure of our interpretation, but there is another way of looking at it. (The content of chapter 2 in Redeeming Conflict could help flesh out this idea further.) |
| Pentecost # | Acts 2:1–11  
1 Cor 12:3b–7, 12–13  
Jn 20:19–23 | In the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis, God scatters the people and confuses their language. In the story of Pentecost, God unites the people without removing the diversity of languages they speak. We could say that in Pentecost God works a “miracle of the ears”—allowing diverse peoples to understand each other. When we practice “Pentecost listening” in our own lives, we continue the work of God. (Chapter 3 in Redeeming Conflict explores this further.) |
| Most Holy Trinity / Trinity Sunday* | Ex 34:4b–6, 8–9  
2 Cor 13:11–13  
Jn 3:16–18 | In today’s second reading Paul closes his second letter to the Corinthians with a plea that they commit to living in peace with one another, wrapped in the love of the Trinity. The feast of the Holy Trinity celebrates the deep intuition that God in God’s very being is the mystery of relationship, the mystery of love. (For more ideas on how to talk about the mystery of Trinity, see the introduction to Redeeming Conflict, especially pages 3–7.) |
| Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 10 | Is 55:10–11  
Rom 8:18–23  
Mt 13:1–23 | In this parable, Jesus speaks of the Word of God falling on various kinds of ears. Sometimes it is able to make an impact, sometimes not. What kind of listeners do we want to be? Are we receptive to the various voices in which God may be speaking to us? (Material from chapter 3 in Redeeming Conflict could be used to further explore the idea of what good listening looks like.) |
| Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 15 | Is 56:1, 6–7  
Rom 11:13–15, 29–32  
Mt 15:21–28 | When Jesus initially is dismissive of the Canaanite woman’s plea, she does not give up but continues to respectfully jest with him until he responds favorably. She models the kind of “speaking up” that the Christian community is called to engage in. (Chapter 6 from *Redeeming Conflict* includes suggestions on “speaking up” that could help flesh out this idea.) |
| Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 18 | Ez 33:7–9  
Rom 13:8–10  
Mt 18:15–20 | Triangulation of tensions is a recurring feature of Church life. The opening of today’s gospel passage provides a corrective to this tendency: first address the person directly before bringing others into the conflict. (Material from chapter 1 in *Redeeming Conflict* could help expand an understanding of triangulation and ways to avoid the harm it does in communities.) |
| Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 22 | Ez 18:25–28  
Phil 2:1–11  
Mt 21:28–32 | In Jesus’ parable of the two sons, he addresses the problem of our speech not being aligned with our actions. Although God’s Word and God’s actions are always one and the same, this is not so for us. As Christians, how can we make sure that our words and actions align even if the words and actions of those around us do not? (Chapter 11 from *Redeeming Conflict* further develops the idea that we should not resort to imitating the bad behavior of our neighbors but that we should model how we want them to treat us. See especially pages 209–211.) |
| Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 28 | Prv 31:10–13, 19–20, 30–31  
1 Thes 5:1–6  
Mt 25:14–30 | In the parable of the talents, the various workers are each speaking about the same master, but they “know” him in radically different ways. How could two servants know the master in such a way that encouraged them to take risks and invest the master’s talents while the other servant was so nervous about the master that he buried what he was given? Is there a parallel to the way that people think about God? A parallel to the way that people think about others who they live and work with? What allows us to have such very different stories about the same people or the same events? (Link to the Ladder of Inference discussed in chapter 3 of *Redeeming Conflict* or to the question of individual wiring in Chapter 5, especially pages 95–100.) |
### Year B

| Third Sunday in Ordinary Time / Third Sunday after Epiphany | Jon 3:1–5, 10  
1 Cor 7:29–31  
**Mk 1:14–20** | John the Baptist has now been arrested, but Jesus continues to preach John’s message: “Repent! The kingdom is near!” What is meant by the word “repent”? What does repentance look like? (Material from Chapter 9 from Redeeming Conflict could help flesh out the idea of repentance further.) (Note that the same verse about repentance appears again in the Sunday reading for the first week of Lent, Year B and could be addressed there as well.) |
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| Second Sunday of Easter # | **Acts 4:32–35**  
1 Jn 5:1–6  
**Jn 20:19–31** | Each time the Risen Christ enters the scene in today’s gospel he greets those gathered with the phrase “Peace be with you.” Jesus had been abandoned and betrayed, misunderstood and denied by these disciples. He could have vented, interrogated, or unleashed justifiable wrath on those present, but instead he says “Peace be with you”—giving us a wonderful insight into what true forgiveness looks like. (To connect to current understandings of forgiveness and ways we can practice forgiveness in our own relationships, see chapter 8 in Redeeming Conflict.) |
| Third Sunday of Easter | **Acts 3:13–15, 17–19**  
1 Jn 2:1–5a  
**Lk 24:35–48** | The Risen Christ commands that “repentance and the forgiveness of sin” be “proclaimed in his name to all the nations.” In what ways do we talk about repentance and forgiveness in our daily lives? Do we even think about these concepts in the context of our own relationships? Do we practice these in our relationships with others? (Chapters 8 and 9 in Redeeming Conflict may offer some ideas about how to describe these two concepts and their relationship to one another.) |
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<th>Scripture References</th>
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<td>Fifth Sunday of Easter #</td>
<td>Acts 8:26–40, 1 Jn 4:7–21, Jn 15:1–8</td>
<td>On the night before he dies, Jesus gave his friends a new image of his relationship with them: he is a vine and they are the branches, meaning they are absolutely inseparable. He asks them to “remain” in him. “Remaining” in any relationship is not easy; it takes skills that will need to be consciously developed; they do not come automatically. What can we do to equip us to be able to “remain” in the relationships that mean the most to us? (See pages 257–260 in Redeeming Conflict for additional thoughts on “remaining.”)</td>
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<td>Pentecost #</td>
<td>Acts 2:1–11, 1 Cor 12:3b–7, 12–13 or Gal 5:16–25, Jn 20:19–23 or Jn 15:26–27; 16:12–15</td>
<td>In the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis, God scatters the people and confuses their language. In the story of Pentecost, God unites the people without removing the diversity of languages they speak. We could say that in Pentecost God works a “miracle of the ears”—allowing diverse peoples to understand each other. When we practice “Pentecost listening” in our own lives we continue the work of God. (Chapter 3 in Redeeming Conflict explores this further.)</td>
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<td>Most Holy Trinity / Trinity Sunday* #</td>
<td>Dt 4:32–34, 39–40, Rom 8:14–17, Mt 28:16–20</td>
<td>In one of the earliest examples of explicitly Trinitarian language, Jesus missioned the disciples to baptize “disciples of all nations” “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” What does it mean to be baptized in the name of the Trinity, and what does it imply for our lives? (See pages 3–7 in Redeeming Conflict for ways to connect baptism with the call to live utterly relational, Trinitarian lives.)</td>
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<td>Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 9</td>
<td>Ez 2:2–5, 2 Cor 12:7–10, Mk 6:1–6a</td>
<td>Often we think that being strong means never admitting weakness or fault. Never saying we are sorry. Never admitting we are vulnerable. In today’s second reading, the apostle Paul confronts our stereotypes about strength and reminds us that God’s power is all the more evident when we acknowledge our weakness. (For additional ideas about how to acknowledge weakness and struggle, see Chapter 9 in Redeeming Conflict, especially pages 173–182.)</td>
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<td>Seven-teenth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 12</td>
<td>2 Kgs 4:42–44 Eph 4:1–6 Jn 6:1–15</td>
<td>In today’s second reading, Paul challenges the Christians at Ephesus to “live in a manner worthy” of their “calling,” “bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.” How seriously do we take our baptismal call to live in deep and loving relationships with others? How hard do we work to maintain a spirit of unity instead of focusing on division? What kinds of skills and capacities do we need to develop as a community to do a better job of living together in a “manner worthy” of our calling?</td>
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<td>Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 18 #</td>
<td>Is 35:4–7a Jas 2:1–5 Mk 7:31–37</td>
<td>In our world there are many efforts to mitigate the isolating and limiting side effects of physical deafness, but the challenge of real communication and full participation in a community’s life extends far beyond those born into a muted or silent world. All of us can resonate with what it is like to feel as if our modes of communicating with one another are clogged, blocked, or frustratingly muffled. Just as Jesus cared about the man born deaf, he also cares about our struggles to hear and communicate with one another. We, too, can ask for his healing power in our relationships.</td>
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<td>Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 24</td>
<td>Is 53:10–11 Heb 4:14–16 Mk 10:35–45</td>
<td>As we age, often we take on positions of power (parenting, teaching, supervising others, etc.). While we see ourselves as the same people we always were, others begin to see us differently and are hesitant to share freely with us. In today’s gospel, Jesus highlights that Christian leaders must be conscientious to not lord their power over others, even unwittingly. They need to make sure to draw out the voices of those with less power. (See chapter 6 in Redeeming Conflict, especially pages 124–126, for ideas on practical things we can do to make sure power doesn’t get in the way of us hearing what is important.)</td>
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### Year C

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<td><strong>The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph / First Sunday after Christmas #</strong></td>
<td>Sir 3:2–6, 12–14 Col 3:12–21 Lk 2:41–52</td>
<td>The gospels do not give us a lot of insight into Jesus’ growing up years, but it is interesting that the one event they record between his infancy and adulthood involves a tension with his parents who clearly viewed his breaking off from the pilgrimage group in a different way than he did. Even holy people see things differently and struggle to understand one another. In their communications with one another, however, they model the “bearing with one another and forgiving one another” that Paul talks about in the second reading. In our own lives as well, we can practice asking open-ended questions, being patient with one another, and forgiving.</td>
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<td><strong>Third Sunday in Ordinary Time / Third Sunday after Epiphany</strong></td>
<td>Neh 8:2–4a, 5–6, 8–10 1 Cor 12:12–30 Lk 1:1–4; 4:14–21</td>
<td>In the second reading, Paul once again emphasizes that our baptism is baptism into the Body of Christ. We are not baptized into a “Me and God” relationship but a “Me and All the People of God” relationship. Our lives are intimately connected to one another, and the way we relate to each other matters. Anything that helps us relate better to others also helps us to be better Christians. (See the introduction to Redeeming Conflict, especially pages 6–8, to develop this idea further.)</td>
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<td><strong>Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Fifth Sunday after Epiphany</strong></td>
<td>Is 6:1–2a, 3–8 1 Cor 15:1–11 Lk 5:1–11</td>
<td>In the first reading Isaiah recognizes himself as a “man of unclean lips” who lives “among a people of unclean lips.” Today, we could still say the same; for many of us, our speech is our greatest source of sin. We lie. We use our words to harm. We gossip. We do not consider the effect of what we say. The messenger of the Lord presses a hot coal to Isaiah’s lips and readies them for a new mission. What would it look like for God to purify our lips and ready them for a new work? God can heal and transform our speech.</td>
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<td>Sunday of Lent #</td>
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<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Jos 5:9a, 10–12</td>
<td>Today’s gospel gives a beautiful image of what reconciliation looks like when the repentance of the prodigal son meets the forgiveness of the merciful father. In the second reading, Paul says the God has reconciled the world through Christ and now has entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to us. We can’t just preach about reconciliation; the world expects us to be able to show what it looks like. (See pages 182–183 in <em>Redeeming Conflict</em> for an idea on how to further describe the concept of reconciliation.)</td>
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<td>2 Cor 5:17–21</td>
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<td>Lk 15:1–3, 11–32</td>
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<td>Second</td>
<td>Acts 5:12–16</td>
<td>Each time the Risen Christ enters the scene in today’s gospel he greets those gathered with the phrase “Peace be with you.” Jesus had been abandoned and betrayed, misunderstood and denied by these disciples. He could have vented, interrogated, or unleashed justifiable wrath on those present, but instead he says “Peace be with you”—giving us an insight into what true forgiveness looks like. (To connect to current understandings of forgiveness and ways we can practice forgiveness in our own relationships, see chapter 8 in <em>Redeeming Conflict</em>. )</td>
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<td>Sunday of Easter #</td>
<td>Rv 1:9–11a, 12–13, 17–19</td>
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<td>Jn 20:19–31</td>
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<td>Third</td>
<td>Acts 5:27–32, 40b–41</td>
<td>The gospel today again gives us an image of what reconciliation looks like when the honest contrition of Peter meets the forgiveness of Jesus. Note that the subtle nuances of the Greek words for love in this passage (not detectable in English translation) demonstrate Jesus coming down to meet Peter where he is. When Jesus asks for <em>agapao</em>—radical, unconditional love—Peter can only respond with <em>fileo</em>—friendship love. Jesus welcomes what Peter is able to offer, even if it is not all that may have been hoped. (See in pages 182–183 in <em>Redeeming Conflict</em> an idea on how to further describe the concept of reconciliation.)</td>
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<td>Rv 5:11–14</td>
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<td>Sixth Sunday of Easter</td>
<td><strong>Acts 15:1–2, 22–29</strong>&lt;br&gt;Rv 21:10–14, 22–23&lt;br&gt;Jn 14:23–29</td>
<td>Today’s first reading from Acts introduces the first major crisis the new Church faced as a whole: a debate about whether non-Jewish Christians would have to be first initiated to Judaism through circumcision in addition to Christian baptism. “Because there arose no little dissent and debate” the passage notes, all of the leaders involved in this discussion gathered in Jerusalem: the first Church council. The practice of open dialogue and debate in the face of differences of opinion is deeply rooted in our Christian tradition.</td>
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<td>Pentecost #</td>
<td><strong>Acts 2:1–11</strong>&lt;br&gt;1 Cor 12:3b–7, 12–13 or Rom 8:8–17&lt;br&gt;Jn 20:19–23 or Jn 14:15–16, 23b–26</td>
<td>In the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis, God scatters the people and confuses their language. In the story of Pentecost, God unites the people without removing the diversity of languages they speak. We could say that in Pentecost God works a “miracle of the ears”—allowing diverse peoples to understand each other. When we practice “Pentecost listening” in our own lives we continue the work of God. (Chapter 3 in <em>Redeeming Conflict</em> explores this further.)</td>
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<td>Most Holy Trinity / Trinity Sunday</td>
<td><strong>Prv 8:22–31</strong>&lt;br&gt;Rom 5:1–5&lt;br&gt;Jn 16:12–15</td>
<td>The responsorial psalm today (Ps 8) says that we have been made “little less than gods”; indeed, we would say that we have been invited to share in God’s own Trinitarian life, a life of utter relationality. Both the second reading from Romans and the gospel mention the Father, Son, and Spirit all at work together in the transformation of our lives. (See pages 3–7 in <em>Redeeming Conflict</em> for ideas about how to talk about the Trinitarian life to which we are invited.)</td>
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<td>Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 6</td>
<td><strong>2 Sm 12:7–10, 13</strong>&lt;br&gt;Gal 2:16, 19–21&lt;br&gt;Lk 7:36–8:3</td>
<td>Both the first reading and the gospel today explore the mystery of forgiveness and repentance. In the first case, David acknowledges his fault in the death of Uriah, and God lets go of his anger with David. In the gospel, a “sinful woman”—usually assumed to be a prostitute—weeps over Jesus’ feet and anoints them with oil, and Jesus announces God’s forgiveness. Both seem to suggest that the greater the sin, the greater the joy in being released of it. (See pages 182–183 in <em>Redeeming Conflict</em> for an idea on how to further describe the concept of reconciliation as the meeting of repentance and forgiveness.)</td>
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| Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 12 | Gn 18:20–32  
Col 2:12–14  
**Lk 11:1–13** | Both the first reading and the gospel passage today share clues as to what deep relationship looks like. Abraham feels free to speak openly with God, no holds barred. Likewise, the two friends in the parable quibble back and forth with one another but do not give up on their conversation. You sense that at this level of friendship there is a lot of freedom to say what one really thinks and wants. We should cherish such friendships in our own lives, especially the friendship we enjoy with God. |
| Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 24 | **Ex 17:8–13**  
2 Tm 3:14–4:2  
**Lk 18:1–8** | The judge in this parable “fears neither God nor man.” It is not by intimidation that the woman changes his mind but by her persistent expression of her needs and doubts. She models the kind of courage we should have as Christians in speaking up about what impacts us. (Material from chapter 6 of *Re redeeming Conflict* could flesh this idea out further.) |
| Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 26 | Wis 11:22–12:2  
2 Thes 1:11–2:2  
**Lk 19:1–10** | Often during Advent and Lent we hear the phrase “repent” but do not know exactly what repentance would look like. We say we are sorry and think that should be enough. Zacchaeus models what true repentance looks like when he takes concrete actions to repair the damage he’s done. (Material from chapter 9 of *Re Redeeming Conflict* explores this notion further.) |
| Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 15 | Jer 38:4–6, 8–10  
Heb 12:1–4  
**Lk 12:49–53** | Ultimately, the kingdom of God is a reign of peace, but that doesn’t mean that the journey we take toward that final peace will be without chaos. When the earth God envisions is so different than the earth that is, you know some tables are going to need to be overturned, some egos upset, and some systems upended in order to get there. There will be experiences of profound change and upheaval on the way to peace. And that’s not going to be comfortable, but we should look for the face of God in it. Similarly, Jeremiah had a very uncomfortable message to speak to the people of Jerusalem. In the first reading, he is put in a cistern for it, but because someone says something uncomfortable does not mean it is untrue. (Chapter 6 in *Redeeming Conflict* includes ideas for how to speak up, even in uncomfortable situations.) |
| Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 28 | Mal 3:19–20a  
2 Thes 3:7–12  
**Lk 21:5–19** | In today’s gospel, Jesus speaks of his followers being brought up before kings and governors and asked to defend themselves, but they are to come unarmed—not only without weapons but without prepared words. They are not to garner all their arguments in advance but to trust in God’s presence with them to guide them in their speaking. When we go to a challenging conversation with another we often have all of our reasons and arguments prepared in advance, ready to prove our point. We neglect to enter the conversation curious and ready to listen. (See chapters 2 and 12 in *Redeeming Conflict* for more ideas on how to prepare ourselves to enter tough conversations from a stance of curiosity.) |

* Note that for Trinity Sunday, the gospel passage used in the Catholic lectionary for Year A appears in Year B in the RCL, and vice versa for Year B.
Innumerable TV shows and movies have envisioned for us the “end of the world,” generally involving nuclear or environmental disaster, perhaps with but a small remnant of survivors. The prophet Isaiah foresees something quite different in today’s first reading: a reign of peace where all creatures find a safe and harmonious existence with one another, even those creatures that would formerly have evoked disgust and terror. Does the prophet promise that peace, not war, is the world’s end? Well, it depends on what you mean by “end.” If I asked, “What is the end of a pencil?” some might say “the eraser,” but it would be just as legitimate to say “to write.” When Isaiah illumines the “end of the world,” he is not talking about “end” as in an eraser. His question is not the literal “What will happen in five million years when the sun exhausts itself?” He is talking about “end” in the other sense: “What is the purpose of history?” And Isaiah wants us to know that the purpose of history is communion. This is the reason for which God created our earth. This is the reason for which we exist: to enjoy communion with one another, with God, and with all of creation.

Whether that “end” will be realized depends a good part on us and whether we will collaborate with that end or actively work against it. It depends on whether we are willing to talk with our neighbors whom we dislike. It depends on whether we will forgive the relative who offended us. It depends on whether we will stick our hand into the serpent’s lair of civic engagement. We can only hope for Isaiah’s peaceable kingdom to the degree that we are willing to participate in it. What kind of world will you practice living into this Advent?
Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time / Seventh Sunday after Epiphany—Matthew 5:38–48

The Jewish crowds to whom Jesus preached suffered daily from the policies of the Roman Empire. They were taxed into such debt that they often had to use their outer cloaks as collateral on their loans. They were regularly impressed upon to carry soldiers’ baggage for up to a mile. Many of Jesus’ listeners often felt themselves to have only two options in life: to violently rebel or to submit to the abuse. Today’s gospel, at first glance, appears to encourage the latter. But, as biblical scholar Walter Wink points out, Jesus here illuminates a third, creative option: turn the structures of oppression on their head. If someone slaps your right cheek, give them your left. If someone takes your cloak, give them your undergarments. If someone makes you walk one mile, go two. When someone uses their power to make you feel you have no freedom in the situation, show them that you still have your freedom intact. Surprise them. Confuse them. Create other options.

Sometimes in our own lives, we also feel trapped in relationships where we are treated unfairly. There are people who will bully us, who will take advantage of us, and who will try to cheat us. Being a Christian does not mean being “nice” or passive in the face of injustice. Rather, it means possessing a maturity and fearlessness, creativity and freedom that can turn situations around without exercising violence.

Lest we say we have no concrete examples of how this is done, we need look no further than Jesus himself. Once upon a time, he was told his only options were to stop preaching or die. Talk about trapped; talk about creativity. Hello Easter Sunday morn.

Second Sunday of Easter—John 20:19–31

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Can you imagine Jesus entering the locked room on Easter Sunday night and pretending nothing had happened? Here were “friends” who had betrayed him, denied they knew him, and abandoned him in his time of greatest need. Here were “disciples” who had not followed but scattered. Jesus could have vented a justifiable wrath; he did not, but neither did he sweep events of the previous days under the carpet and begin talking about the good ol’ times they had fishing with one another. Rather, Jesus greets those gathered with the words “Peace be with you.”
Pastoral counselor Marie Fortune, who works with people who have been through traumatic experiences such as the experiences Jesus endured in his Passion, notes that forgiveness can be defined as “willing the best for another person.” It does not mean forgetting, which could make one vulnerable to being hurt in the same way again. It is not even a promise that the relationship will be renewed. Sometimes it might make the most sense to cut off ongoing contact with certain persons this side of the heavenly kingdom. But we can still reach a place where we can wish the other peace. A place where we can wish that whatever would be best would happen for them.

It might be that the best for another person would mean they find another job or another place to live. In rare cases, it might mean jail. We are generally not the ones who decide that. But we can place the person in God’s hands, and with time, like the Risen Christ in today’s gospel, we can wish even those who have hurt us deeply peace.

Pentecost—Acts 2:1–11

Each Pentecost, we celebrate the “miracle of tongues”—the remarkable way that the Holy Spirit opened the lips of Jesus’ frightened followers to proclaim the Gospel to pilgrims from far and wide who had gathered in Jerusalem for the annual festival of first fruits. But as author and priest Eric Law points out, the new preaching powers of the disciples are only half of the story. He draws attention to verses 6–7 in the text: “Are not all those who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?” Perhaps Pentecost was not only a “miracle of the tongues,” Law reflects, but also a “miracle of the ears.” Perhaps God also graced the pilgrims with a new power of listening.

In the story of Pentecost, we get a glimpse into what God intends for humankind: clear communication across all differences and divides and understanding not limited by culture or era. But most days, our world still feels a lot more like Babel: a place where differences in language hinder capacity to understand and relate to one another. As persons baptized with the Spirit, what would it mean for us to participate in the “miracle of the ears” today? Are there ways in which we could be better listeners? When others around us speak, instead of jumping to conclusions about what they mean, could we ask more questions? When their words offend us, could we listen more charitably to presume good intent? When their words are confusing to us, could we challenge ourselves with a task: “I need to figure out why this makes sense to them”? 

15
Communication is a two-way street. It takes skill to speak well; it takes even more skill to listen well. The Spirit makes both possible.

*Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time /
Proper 28—Matthew 25:14–30*

In today’s gospel, one verse—Matthew 25:24—perhaps holds the key to understanding this challenging parable: “Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a demanding person.’” It is an intriguing line. The other two servants served the same master, but they clearly did not experience him in the same way. Their knowledge of the master led them to take risks with his money, to try to make the most of what they had received without fear of consequences. But this third servant had a different story in his head about the same master, and it led him to bury the talent he’d received. Did the master have multiple personalities, or did each interpret the same actions and traits of the master differently?

In our own lives, it is sometimes perplexing how one person’s actions and traits can be read so differently by so many different people. Is the boss politically savvy or duplicitous? Is my cousin extraverted or overbearing? Is your daughter assertive or aggressive? When we describe other people we are always saying something not only about them but also about ourselves and the lens through which we look. When others describe us, they do likewise. Today’s gospel encourages us to explore the labels that we so easily attach to one another and to ask, What are the experiences I’ve had that have led me to this conclusion? Are there other sides of this person that I should be looking at? Are there other ways of interpreting their actions more charitably? Is this “all about them,” or is there a piece of me involved in this as well?
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The parable of the True Vine was the last of the parables that Jesus gave, and it wasn’t shared with everyone. It wasn’t spoken to the crowds on the hill or the plain but to those who were closest to Jesus on the night before he died. There were no more fishing expeditions to be had. No more preaching missions through the towns of Galilee. No more healings of the sick or time away in the desert. No more “going”
anywhere. In these final, intimate moments Jesus shared with his friends he talked about how he saw himself in relationship to them: He was a vine and they were branches. They were so integrally related that they were nothing without one another. The same sap flowed through all of their veins. And Jesus told his closest friends what he most needed of them in that moment: not to follow but to remain. Indeed, in these verses, Jesus speaks of “remaining” twice as frequently as he speaks of “bearing fruit,” which should clue us in to something.

In our own day, we admire those who “go” a lot. We look up to athletes who complete amazing feats of endurance and strength in marathons and mountain climbing. But we pay little attention to the endurance and strength it takes to “remain” well. In marriages. In friendships. In religious community. In the Church. We acknowledge the skills it takes to keep moving on without thinking much about the immense skill it sometimes takes to stay put.

What could you do in these coming months to bolster your capacities for listening, for empathy, for inquiry, for being present to another person in his or her pain and joy? What could you do to enhance your skills for “hanging in there” in times of conflict or challenge? How could you grow in your ability to remain in the relationships that mean the most?

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*Most Holy Trinity / Trinity Sunday*—Matthew 28:16–20

Today’s gospel passage closes with Jesus’ final command: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” These words have echoed through the ages. Indeed, they were recited at our own baptism. But what does it mean to be baptized in the name of the Trinity? Why does it matter?

When we say that God is Trinity what we claim is that God is distinction—three—in perfect unity—one. Communion-in-Diversity. It is another way of saying that God in God’s very being is relationality. Now, that is a big thought: God is not a being who has relationships. God is a relationship.

But there is more. God is not content to remain a romance swirling in the heavens. God wants us to share in that utterly relational life. Through Baptism, we are invited to partake in God’s own eternal life, the Trinitarian life.

Have we fully realized our baptismal calling yet? No. But our life in the Church is intended to be a boot camp for such a life. Here is where we learn and practice being in communion with one another while not erasing our differences. Here is where we develop the skills and capacities we need to live an utterly relational life. Things such as listening toward understanding and problem solving. Things such as curiosity and self-reflection. Things such as forgiveness and repentance.

These are not things we do to earn heaven. They are capacities we need to be in heaven—which is not a place but a state of being. A state of fully participating in the Trinitarian life.

*Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 18*—Mark 7:31–37

For as long as there have been human communities human communities have struggled with the phenomenon of deafness. Not uncommon among the aging, it is quite uncommon among the young—only about one in every one thousand children
is born profoundly deaf—but when it does occur, it often comes with significant challenges.

History testifies that even in ancient times there have been deaf persons who thrived. In the Hittite empire more than three thousand years ago, a concentration of the 35delG gene mutation in the population gave birth to a rich deaf culture—a culture still celebrated at places such as Gallaudet University today.

But that should not make us underestimate the challenges deaf children face, especially when born into hearing communities not fluent in the language of signing. Unable to grasp the structure of language in the period when it is normally acquired between the ages of eighteen to thirty-six months, the language centers in the child’s brain can begin to atrophy, making it hard to figure out language’s mysteries later. Not only communication is affected but also the capacity to grasp abstract thought. As Andrew Solomon’s 2012 tome *Far From the Tree* notes, even today, only a third of deaf teens graduate from high school. Of those who go on to college, only a fifth complete a degree. Those deaf from childhood can experience a profound isolation and increased mental health issues. They are vulnerable in a particular way to sexual abuse. One study estimates that up to one third of prisoners are deaf or hard of hearing.

The man who Jesus encounters in today’s gospel appears to be one who experienced deafness from infancy—unable to hear but also struggling to speak. We don’t know the other ways it may have also affected his life; we can only guess there were other ways.

It would not be a stretch to say that obviously the man was loved by his community—it is they who bring him to Jesus—but it is also clear that his deafness presents a real challenge for them. They are unable to communicate with one another as they would want. They are asking for healing of what blocks them from being able to really participate fully in each other’s lives. And we discover that it is a cause Jesus is partial to as well. With his hands and his spit, he opens the man’s ears and frees his tongue to speak plainly so that he can be understood.

In today’s world, there are an ever-growing number of efforts to mitigate the isolating and limiting side effects of physical deafness, but the challenge of real communication and full participation in a community’s life extends far beyond those born into a muted or silent world. The reason that we can so readily empathize with the stories of those who are deaf is that all of us at some time or other can resonate with what it is like to feel as if our modes of communicating with one another are clogged, blocked, or frustratingly muffled. That we are seeing lips move but not
grasping all of what is being said. All of us have moments when we feel surrounded by love and concern on all sides but are lonely and isolated at the same time. All of us have moments of feeling like our tongue won’t serve the longings of our heart, won’t speak the words we want it to say. That we can neither understand nor be understood as we desire.

We can suspect that Jesus is still partial to this cause. That Jesus cares a lot about our ability to live richly relational lives. We have often heard that the purpose of our lives is to enjoy communion. Indeed, every time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we enact in ritual our belief about where all of history is headed: communion with God and each other. But perhaps we’ve not thought much before about the fact that communion and communication share the same root. The acts of listening and speaking are meant to enable deep and abiding relationship with one another. And whenever we make any effort to work at the quality of our communication with one another—when we open ourselves to listening at a new level, when we practice care of our words, when speak what is most deeply in our hearts—we are, by the very act of doing so, working in service of God’s plan for communion.
Year C

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph /

The gospels do not say much about Jesus’ growing up years, but it is interesting that the one event they do choose to record has to do with a disagreement between the twelve year-old Jesus and his parents. Clearly if this family—who we so often refer to as the “Holy Family”—had its arguments, it is a sure sign that “holiness” does not imply we will all see things in the same way. Such an erroneous belief is common in the Church. We often think that if we were just better people, we would all agree on everything and live happily ever after. And so when disagreement arises, we presume sin must be involved and someone must be at fault. But, it is very possible—as in today’s gospel—that very holy people will view things quite differently based on the role they play in the event, their age and experience, and the varied ways they are impacted.

What we learn from today’s gospel is not that disagreements shouldn’t exist but how to handle them when they do. Note the way Jesus and Mary ask open-ended questions of one another to find out the other’s perspective. Note how Mary names the impact of Jesus’ action on them and the anxiety they felt. Note that at the end of the conversation Mary and Joseph still did not totally understand Jesus’ view and had to keep thinking about it more. Note they still all went home afterwards and hung in there with each other. These are all practices we, too, can engage in our disagreements. Even as holy people, we will look at things differently, but it doesn’t need to stop us from being family.


In today’s second reading from Paul to the Corinthians, one word appears over and over again in varying forms: reconciliation. Paul says that we who have been reconciled in Christ are now entrusted with the message and the ministry of reconciliation. What does reconciliation look like?

Today’s gospel gives us a beautiful image in the story of a prodigal son welcomed back home by a loving father. The son, who has run off with his father’s money, awakens to the harm he has done. He turns back toward his father with the intent to acknowledge his wrongdoing. In these actions we could say the son models repentance. The father, who has been so injured by his son, nevertheless waits
and watches for him, open to his coming home. Scanning his son on the horizon, he is free of bitterness and anger, free to renew his relationship with the boy. In this internal freedom we could say the father models forgiveness.

It is possible that these two experiences—repentance and forgiveness—can happen separately from one another. The son could truly be sorry and the father not welcome him back. The father could forgive his son and the son never return. But when repentance and forgiveness do meet, a miraculous thing happens: reconciliation. And when it does happen, Jesus says it is a sign of the kingdom of God breaking out in our midst. It is a sign of what God dreams for the world.

Reconciliation is never something that can be forced. Like the father or the son, we can each only do our own part in the healing of our broken relationships. But like the father and the son, we must still do our part and live in constant hope of God continuing the ongoing miracle of reconciliation.

Second Sunday of Easter—John 20:19–31
(This is repeated from Year A.)

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**Third Sunday of Easter—John 21:1–19**

Three times Peter denied knowing Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest, and now three times Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” It’s tough on Peter. Really, Jesus, three times? I said I was sorry already once. I feel terribly about it. Isn’t that enough? Do we need to revisit this again?

Ever had such a conversation with a friend, a spouse, or a co-worker? Repenting a wrong is an uncomfortable thing. We’d like to do it fast and be done with it. But sometimes real repentance is a process. It may take some time for the other person to be able to let a hurt go. We shouldn’t be surprised to find out we may need to apologize more than once for the other person to hear the sincerity of our regret.

Likewise, when we have been hurt and forgiven, we should not be surprised that we may need to forgive the same event more than once. Sometimes we will let something go yet find ourselves cycling back to the memory again and again. Forgiving also is a process, and we catch a glimpse of that in today’s gospel story as well. The first time Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me?” he uses the word _agapao_—the Greek word for unconditional, total, sacrificial love. Peter replies using the word _fileo_—the Greek word for the love of a friend. A second time Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” with _agapao_, and Peter replies that he loves like a friend. Peter isn’t getting what Jesus is hoping for. He can’t love Jesus in the way Jesus loves him. So the third time Jesus asks, “Do you love me?” he uses the word _fileo_. “Do you love me like a friend?” And Peter replies, “Yes, I love you like a friend.” In his forgiveness, Jesus meets Peter where he is at with what Peter is able to give and lets go of what Peter cannot. After this conversation, we can imagine both have a different sense of their relationship. It is not the same as it was before the crucifixion. But each understands the other better and the friendship has a new beginning.

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Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time / Proper 15—Luke 12:49–53

“Do you think I have come to establish peace on earth? No, I tell you but rather division.” An odd sentiment to come from the mouth of the one who we call the “Prince of Peace.”

It is important to understand Jesus’ teaching today in the wider context of his preaching about the kingdom of God. God’s ultimate dream for the world is peace, harmony, and communion. But the world as we know it does not resemble that dream. Instead it is riddled with power structures that keep the current order of things in place: political systems, economic systems, and even family systems. So long as these systems protect and promote unjust, oppressive relationships between people, the kingdom of God is obstructed. Jesus wants these systems turned on their head. And that is going to inevitably result in some chaos, even as the journey is pointed toward peace.

In an era where we talk a lot about family values, it is hard to hear Jesus speak of the family as one of those structures that will need to be overturned. But in Jesus’ day, the way that families functioned with strict roles and power relationships could become quite oppressive. For many, the traditional family structure worked well, but for some—widows, the childless, orphans, the unmarried, etc.—the system didn’t
work particularly well. And these were the people Jesus cared about the most—those who were not well served by the systems of the day.

Are there systems today that are you can see obstruct the kingdom of God as Jesus proclaimed it? How will you speak up about these systems, even if it may cause disagreement and division? What are you willing to disrupt for the cause of peace?