

# WEEK TWO

## *Invocation: Attending to the Holy*

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It may seem presumptuous, even manipulative, to invoke God's presence when we gather for worship. Isn't the Holy One already there? Must God wait in the wings until properly summoned, like Johnny Carson waiting on Ed McMahon's "Heeere's Johnny"?

The previous week of readings touched on God's initiating presence in the forming of faith's community. It follows then that invocation does not signify some magical conjuring to ensure that God makes an appearance. Invoking God, naming the Holy One, reminds us of whose presence and purpose gathers us in worship and sends us in service. Invocation serves as a hedge against worship reduced to self-improvement seminars or political workshops because invocation declares we do not gather first and foremost for the sake of our agendas. Invocation bids us attend to God in our midst.

The readings and reflections of this coming week challenge you to consider invocation's transformative possibility for worship and for discipleship. What does it mean to attend to the Holy One whom Jesus reveals as the *crucified God*?

## DAY 1 • *Do You Not Fear God?*

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*Read Luke 23:39-41.*

The concept of the fear of God has fallen onto hard times. The admirable desire to lift up grace and love as preeminent in God's character casts a suspicious eye on faith grounded in fear. Doesn't 1 John 4:18 counsel us that "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear"? As a consequence, many have come to view and often discard the fear of God as an antiquated relic of primitive religion that has not yet seen the light of "what a friend we have in Jesus." But in doing so, have they overly domesticated the sense of God's holiness?

In his book *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Russian writer Dostoevsky makes this observation through one of the book's characters: "Without God. . . Everything is permitted."<sup>1</sup> On the hill called Golgotha outside of Jerusalem, it appears that everything *is* permitted. Setting aside whatever theologies we carry about the nature of Jesus' divinity, at that place, authorities execute an innocent man. The only fear present seems to be the one that religious and political leaders hope to impose as a deterrent on any who would trouble the status quo that assures their positions. But as sometimes happens in the Gospels and in Luke in particular, an outsider, an outcast, cuts to the heart of the matter. The penitent thief cries out, "Do you not fear God?" to the third man being crucified who spends his dying moments mocking Jesus. In the midst of this unworshipful gathering marked by smugness and callousness to human suffering, the penitent utters the protest that is in truth an invocation demanding attention to the holy in our midst: Do you not fear God?

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The invocation not only cries out against the spiritual and political blindness that sanctions the killing of an innocent. The penitent asks to be remembered in Jesus' kingdom, a request that reveals an assessment of his crucified companion as much more than a guiltless victim. The invocation of the penitent challenges those who gather at the cross then and those of us who will gather now in its shadow in the season of Lent to attend to God's holiness. That holiness hopes to generate a sense of awe that moves beyond our experience of worship into the transformation of our lives and ethics.

*When and to what purpose, O God, do I need to  
hear anew: "Do you not fear God?" Amen.*