

March 2022

# The LabOratory Incubator



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## The LabOratory Incubator

March 2022

*A Monthly Publication of  
The LabOratory Church*

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## The Why of The LabOratory Incubator

**W**e are living in difficult times, and no part of the world is exempt. We name this not to add to your anxiety, but instead to ***start a conversation about where we go from here.*** For those of you who attend The Worship Labs or watch them on YouTube, you know that we address the context of our times, and our history, in most of our meetings. Yet, we realize that some of you are only connected to us through this email list. As such, we want to engage with you here and share some of our insights about how we can heal and work towards easing the suffering in this world, while working to build a kinder, gentler world alongside it.

This will be a place where we discuss where God is in all of this, what it means for our faith, as well as how we can find ways to find love and find safety in ourselves, and with one another, in these unstable times. There will be discussion of political issues, in the sense of how we interact with our world in both a spiritual context as well as a practical day-to-day living context. Our hope for this newsletter is to ***move from a one-way message to one of conversation.*** We want you to share your concerns, questions, hopes, and shape the conversations going forward. Let's grow this as a monthly place to forward deeper understanding and connections with one another in a world set on keeping us divided in fear.



## The LabOratory Church

# Lenten Reflection: Spiritual Critical Thinking

BY PASTOR AMIE VANDERFORD

In this season of Lent, we enter together the 40 days (over 6 weeks) of reflection and repentance in preparation for Easter. This time also represents the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness being tempted by Satan before he began his ministry. For some this is a time for fasting, and for others a time to start a new spiritual practice that will bring them closer to God and bring greater understanding of their faith. I would like to invite us all to take up a very specific spiritual practice during this time (and beyond), and that is spiritual discernment, which I compare to spiritual critical thinking. As mentioned in why we are starting this newsletter, this is a time of deep division and increasing hate, along with sickness, death, and war. ***Sadly, much of this evil has been, and is being done, in the name of Christ.***

As we look at what is happening in Ukraine, many are fearful, and that is justified. One day the people of Ukraine were independent, and the next they were invaded by Russian tanks and missiles, killing hundreds, sending thousands to flee, and others to take up arms. In a story I was watching on DW news, a bishop in the Russian Orthodox Church blessed the tanks, and declared that Russia's values were God's values. I shuddered as I thought about how many more will die, yet again in the name of the God we serve, whose only begotten Son was actually killed by empire for spreading a message of peace and love. I pray for peace and protection for Ukraine during this time, just as I pray for peace and an end to war in all other parts of the world, as well. If we are to love one another and care for God's creation, war cannot be the go-to way to resolve disputes and conflict! War is destruction, when we need resolution and reconciliation, and we must carry this concern for every part of the world being ravaged by it!

The United States, too, has many ongoing deep divides and conflicts stemming from hundreds of years of oppression from genocide to slavery to the -isms of today, and these divides threaten our idea of democracy just as much as Russian tanks threaten

the democracy of Ukraine. ***While Ukraine's threat is external, ours is internal.*** A very clear example of this particular threat is the way that politicians have begun to criminalize the accurate study of our oppressive history by demonizing the idea of 'critical race theory' and even banning books that criticize Nazi Germany, while restricting our teachers' lessons to the parts of our history that are 'more palatable'. After WWII, Germany itself was willing to look at the evil it wrought, yet here in the USA, the mere thought of facing our racist history (which continues to this day) must be stopped because it would be uncomfortable for white people, including and especially, those who claim Christian values.

Although the following passage was not written for, nor about, our context, I cannot help but think of this passage from **Jeremiah 6:13-19**:

*13 For from the least to the greatest of them,  
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;  
and from prophet to priest,  
everyone deals falsely.  
14 They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,  
saying, "Peace, peace,"  
when there is no peace.  
15 They acted shamefully, they committed abomination;  
yet they were not ashamed,  
they did not know how to blush.  
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;  
at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,  
says the Lord.  
16 Thus says the Lord:  
Stand at the crossroads, and look,  
and ask for the ancient paths,  
where the good way lies; and walk in it,  
and find rest for your souls.  
But they said, "We will not walk in it."  
17 Also I raised up sentinels for you:  
"Give heed to the sound of the trumpet!"  
But they said, "We will not give heed."  
18 Therefore hear, O nations,  
and know, O congregation, what will happen to them.  
19 Hear, O earth; I am going to bring disaster on this people,  
the fruit of their schemes,  
because they have not given heed to my words;  
and as for my teaching, they have rejected it.*

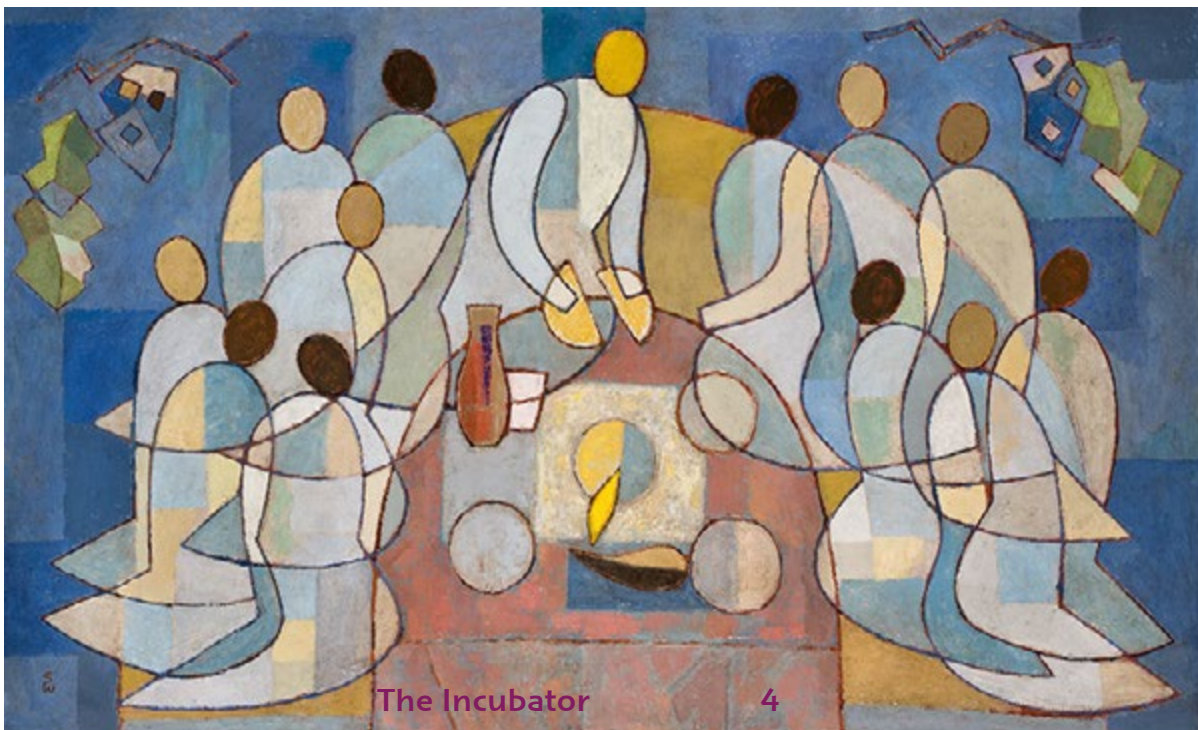


## Lenten Reflection (cont.)

**F**or a country that claims to be free, and for the preservation of individual rights, these rights seem to end for decisions that some elected officials disagree with based upon their 'religious beliefs.' The day before Russia invaded Ukraine, the Governor of Texas instilled a path towards criminalizing parents and doctors for child abuse when medically supporting transgender kids under the age 18. This is the same state that is trying to pay the average citizen a monetary bounty to turn in women in for getting a legal abortion. These politicians claim to be pro-life, yet this concern for life ends once a child is born, has needs, and develops the potential to make decisions contrary to theirs. This is not only hypocritical in the '*pro-life and individual liberty*' sense, but also goes against the idea of keeping the government out of our varied religious, and non-religious, practices and beliefs. In our next issue, I will write more about why keeping our religious interpretations out of government is crucial for the protection of us all.

In the meantime, I invite us all to *sharpen our spiritual critical thinking* to determine what is the most loving and just way we can influence the care of all while we share this world together! Do not be deceived by those who say peace and freedom, yet offer war and oppression. Just as Jesus checked the biblical words Satan quoted to tempt him to serve power, so must we, through the Fruit of the Spirit, check those who would misuse our holy texts. **Ask yourself:** are these (ideas, laws, actions, words) serving and promoting fear, power, selfishness, and greed, or are they serving and promoting love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control? We are all interconnected, and so we must look inward at how our words and actions are affecting others just as much as how the words and actions of others are affecting us. We are called to love and peace, so let us reflect this calling in all that we do, say, and support. I close with these words from Jesus (quoting Isaiah) in **Luke 4:18-19**:

*18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*



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## Balancing Spiritual Practices: Planting the Future

**A**s we practice our spiritual critical thinking, we also need to do **spiritual practices that fuel our hope**. As challenging as these times have been and continue to be, there are places where we can find hope and even create hope. We have found that focusing on both the beauty of nature as well as doing work to heal our land has been uplifting our souls. Our earth is the source of our resources and inspiration, and as much as we are called to heal ourselves, we are also called to heal God's land and animals.

*Here are a few areas where we have been finding hope and renewal:*

- Planting gardens with pollinator flowers, vegetables, and fruit;
- Feeding hungry neighborhood stray animals;
- Taking walks in local parks, especially ones with water, whether a creek, river, lake, or pond;
- Taking time to scan your home and see if it is adding to your anxiety or bringing calm, if the former, perhaps take the first step of organizing that one corner of the room where you throw all your junk mail, and other odds and ends without a proper place, and go from there;
- Finding time for naps! This last one may sound impossible in a time of busy; however, like with children, naps restore our bodies and refresh our minds, so give it a try every now and again!

*Would you like to plant something, but don't have any seeds? [Drop us an email](#), and we will help get you started! No matter where you live, planting is possible, even if in only one pot.*





# Ways to Support and Stay Connected with The LabOratory Church

## Ways to Support

- Support this work financially through any of our giving links at the end of this newsletter.
- Volunteer to help at our **4KEEPS Mobile Pantry** and/or our **Garden Lab**;
- Contact us about participating in our mentoring program: **Project L.E.A.S.T.** (Love Everyone As Self Training);
- Do you know someone with farmable land who would like to donate or lease for our use?
- **Link your Kroger Plus card** to our 4KEEPS Mobile Pantry, and we'll receive a percentage of your total grocery bill as a donation. There is no cost to you, and it won't affect your other Kroger Plus card benefits!

### *How to link the card to The Laboratory Church:*

- Log in to your account: [www.kroger.com](http://www.kroger.com)
- Scroll to and click on Community then Kroger Community Rewards
- Click on "Search for your organization"
- Search by NPO number GS580 or The Laboratory Church
- Select the organization and click Save
- Your Donation Summary Status should display as "Enrolled".

## Ways to Connect

- Attend **The Worship Lab** via Zoom on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month @ 6:30 pm ET (links are always on our website: [www.TheLabOratoryChurch.org](http://www.TheLabOratoryChurch.org));
- Share this newsletter with specific friends you think might appreciate it, and/or on your social media;
- Subscribe, Like and Share content from our **YouTube channel**;
- **We want to hear from you!** Please share, via this QR code, your concerns, questions, and hopes in order to help to shape the conversations going forward, and if/how you have been impacted by the work of this church.



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## Upcoming Events & Links



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