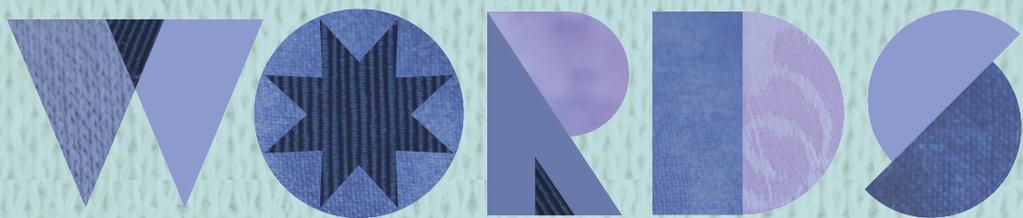
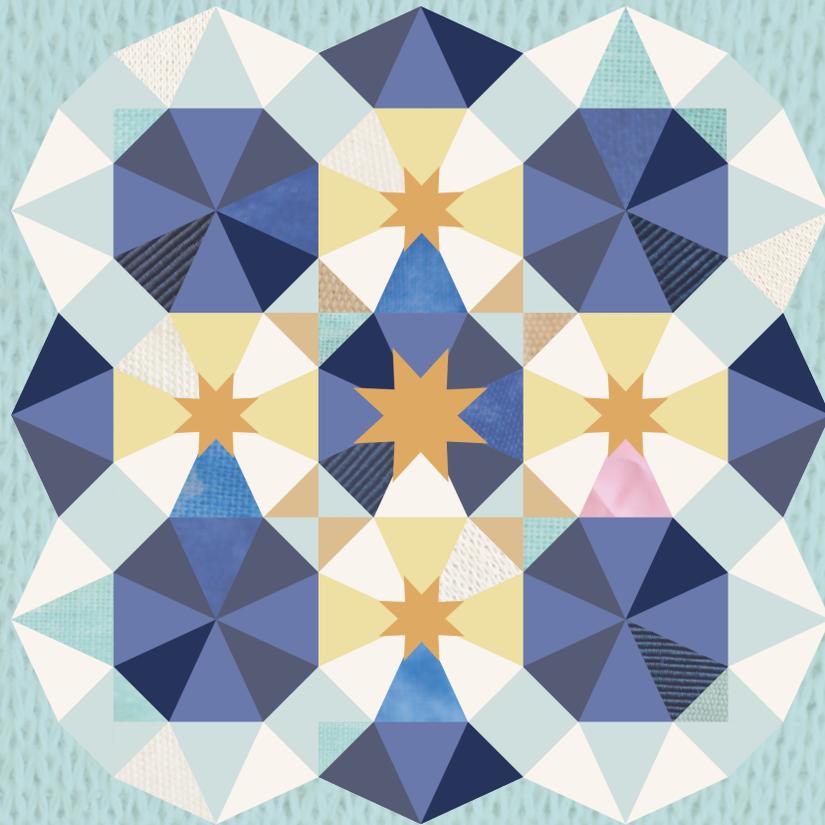


AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



FOR THE **Be**GINNING

Art, Poetry, &
Reflections
for Advent

 *a Sanctified Art*
sanctifiedart.org



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Advent is a season of endings and beginnings. As the calendar year comes to a close, a new church year begins. Christ's birth ushers us into new ways of living and loving; and yet, the world as we know it spins madly on. In many ways, pregnant Mary was surrounded by endings—large and small, personal and political. But Mary proclaimed hope in a God who was and is making all things new. Christ's birth offered a beautiful new beginning for shepherds and Magi alike—all the while, King Herod tried to bring Christ's story to an end. When we ourselves navigate seasons filled with endings and beginnings, we need reminders. We need words that can feel like steady ground, like a path for our feet to find as we step forward into the unknown.

This devotional is shaped around several reminders we all need from time to time: *you are a blessing; we can't go alone; do the good that is yours to do; hope is worth the risk; love knows your name; don't forget to laugh; the road isn't straight.* These reminders root us in the fundamental truths of our faith. Many of them are life lessons we teach to children—lessons that adults continue to learn and relearn. They may resemble the blessings we impart to loved ones during special ceremonies like weddings or baptisms. And so, we invite you to move through this Advent season as if you are entering a sacred new chapter, holding fast to the reminders that will bolster you for the journey ahead.

Read, look, and sing your way through the pages of this devotional. Each week offers art, reflections, poetry, and hymns to give you strength, courage, and grace. As you journey through this season, may you find words for belovedness and hope. May you find words for beginning again. For no matter what you are facing, no matter what this new day brings, love is your beginning.

Artfully yours,

The Sanctified Art Creative Team

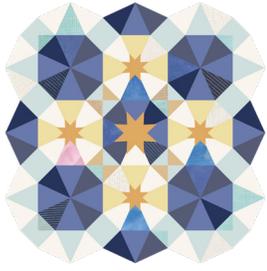
Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Hannah Garrity

Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Rev. Anna Strickland



ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM

REV. LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

Founder | Creative Director of SA

Lisle Gwynn Garrity (*she/her*) is a Pastorist (pastor + artist) and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. Her faith is rooted in creative practices that help her break free from perfectionism and control and participate in creating a more whole, just world.

REV. LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

Director of Branding | Founding Creative Partner of SA

Lauren (*she/her*) is an artist, graphic designer, and theologian. She uses paint, metallic inks, linoleum carving tools, and her trusty Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. Visual exploration offers her a holy space to ask questions, find her voice, take risks, and make bold statements.

HANNAH GARRITY Founding Creative Partner of SA

Hannah (*she/her*) is the Director of Christian Faith, Life, and Arts at the wonderful Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA. She also serves as liturgical artist for the Summer Worship Series at Montreat Conference Center (Montreat, NC). Hannah is currently pursuing a Master's of Divinity and Master's of Christian Education at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA.

REV. SARAH A. SPEED

Founding Creative Partner of SA

Sarah (Are) Speed (*she/her*) is the Head of Staff/Senior Pastor at Second Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, MO. Sarah feels called to welcome people into the church by using her energy and passion for beautifully-scripted words, raw and relevant liturgy, and hands-on worship experiences to engage our longing for God and the need for justice in this messy world.

REV. ANNA STRICKLAND

Creative Partner | Operations Support

Anna Strickland (*she/her*) looks for the Divine in the everyday like treasure in clay jars and first encountered God in the integration of her spiritual self and artistic self. She is a former teacher and college minister, a proud Texas Longhorn and graduate of Iliff School of Theology, a Baptist to the core ministering in ecumenical spaces, and a lover of chaos anchored by the belief that the Spirit is most active in the spaces between us.



ABOUT OUR GUEST CONTRIBUTORS



GUEST WRITER Kayla Craig

Kayla Craig (*she/her*) is a former journalist who brings deep curiosity and care to her writing. She's the author of two books: *Every Season Sacred: Reflections, Prayers, and Invitations to Nourish Your Soul and Nurture Your Family throughout the Year* and *To Light Their Way: A Collection of Prayers & Liturgies for Parents*. Kayla graduated from Drake University with a B.A. in Magazine Journalism from Drake's well-known School of Journalism & Mass Communication. She minored in Sociology and English, and has been writing professionally for more

than 15 years. With a poetic, prophetic voice, she created the popular "Liturgies for Parents" Instagram account, which Christianity Today named an "essential parenting resource." Kayla's nuanced and accessible reflections, essays, and prayers are featured in various books, devotionals, and Bible studies. Kayla lives in a 115-year-old former convent in her Iowa hometown, where she hopes to create spaces of welcome alongside her four children, two dogs, and husband, Jonny. kaylacraig.com | @liturgiesforparents | @kayla_craig



GUEST ARTIST Rev. Nicolette (Faison) Peñaranda

Rev. Nicolette "Nic" (*she/her*) is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America serving as the Program Director for African Descent Ministries. Nic is the creator of MONadvocacy, a racial justice resource grounded in play, as well as the "Talks at the Desk" series which celebrates the voices of leaders in the ELCA African descent community: livinglutheran.org/2022/02/a-love-letter-to-african-descent-communities.

She is passionate about queer Black liberation, cultivating diverse leadership in faith spaces, and the art of creation. She is also the illustrator of *God's Holy Darkness*, written by Sharei Green and Beulah Selnick (Beaming Books, 2022). The book deconstructs anti-Blackness in Christian theology by celebrating instances in the story of God's people when darkness, blackness, and night are beautiful, good, and holy. She resides in the Chicagoland area with her spouse, two daughters, and two cats, Penne Pablo and Rigatoni Braxton.



The Third Sunday of Advent
WORDS FOR THE BEGINNING

DO THE GOOD THAT IS YOURS TO DO

HARVEST

Maybe none of it matters.

Maybe you can't make a difference.

Or maybe that watermelon seed you spit out over the summer will grow into a green orb, full of sticky sweet fruit. Maybe the rain will nourish it. Maybe your mother's hands will pull it from the vine, slice it into wedges, and place it on the dining room table. Maybe the neighbors will come over and chomp into that soft pink fruit, juicy water running down their chins. Maybe you will laugh at the shared experience, at this garden-grown communion, and maybe the stars will shine brighter that night.

People say the problems of the world are too big to
make a difference,

but surely those people have forgotten the fruit that grows from one little
seed.

Poem by

Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

DO THE GOOD THAT IS YOURS TO DO

READ Luke 3:7-16 | Isaiah 58:9b-12

REFLECTION | Kayla Craig

Headline after headline, creation groans. Our world's labor pains seem compounding and never-ending. In the overwhelm of daily responsibilities and the barrage of global crises, it's easy to feel like anything we do or say is simply a drop in the ocean.

Yet, in this liturgical season of expectant hope, we must remember that the good we do in the world has ripple effects beyond what we can see. We are not the world's saviors, but we move toward the One who invites us into the work and who labors alongside us.

Advent reminds us that Christ came into a world fraught with the very same issues of injustice and inequality that we face, and he did not turn away. Instead, he showed us a way forward: engaged action rooted in compassion.

We may think, "I'm just one person. What can I do?" Yet, as followers of Christ, we're invited to consider a different question, one rooted in hope and action: "What is *mine* to do?"

This week's scripture calls us to a profound yet simple truth: "I can't do it all, but I can do something that matters."

When approached by various community members—each grappling with their role in a society marked by inequality and injustice—John the Baptist gives practical advice that speaks across centuries. To the crowds, he says, "Share what you have." To the tax collectors, "Take no more than your due." To the soldiers, "Do no harm in pursuit of personal gain."

Each instruction differs, yet the core message is the same: Do the good that is yours to do.

After John shares this wisdom, he shares a second part: He points people toward Jesus. We labor in vain if we are only relying on our own strength. With God's help, we are able to do the work that is ours to do.

John's directives resonate with the words found in Isaiah 58, where the prophet calls us to be the "repairers of the breach, the restorers of streets to dwell in." This passage invites us to bring forth restoration through ordinary actions: feeding the hungry, serving the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted. It's about the cumulative power of small acts that weave together to create a fabric of communal flourishing.

A popular quote stems from the Hebrew Bible's admonition in Micah 6:8: "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it."⁵

What is holding you back from taking these words to heart? Consider your unique gifts, perspectives, talents, and resources. How might these uniquely situate you to move into action in your actual, everyday life?

This Advent, in the quiet spaces of our hearts, where God's still, small voice speaks, we are called to discern what is ours to do. Frederick Buechner articulates this discernment: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."⁶

As you light the third Advent candle, consider what specific opportunities you have to contribute to your community. *What makes you come alive? How does that meet a need?* Maybe you can extend hospitality to a lonely neighbor, volunteer at your local school, or do the personal work of healing that prevents the passing on of generational wounds.

We are all called to participate in God's restorative story—a plan set in motion from the creation of the stars.

The work of our hands and our hearts takes time, but that doesn't mean our labor is in vain.

Our work might seem small or insignificant, but when we look at the lineage of Christ and the history of God's people, we see lots of ordinary, flawed people giving their small and shaky "yes" to God. *Could they have fathomed that their lives were part of an extraordinary story where heaven breaks through and alters the course of history?*

Labor pains of the world are real and often feel never-ending. But as we journey toward the birth of Christ, we must remember the promise that new life can spring from pain.

Each good work, no matter how small, is a thread in the fabric of God's ongoing creation story—one where love overcomes, peace prevails, and new life emerges.

This Advent, remember that your efforts, though they might seem modest, are part of a larger, divine tapestry. With God's help, may our acts of love and works of justice lead to the flourishing of all people.

BLESSING

You are uniquely situated to bring light into the world. May you find courage this season to do the good that is yours to do. It matters. May you see the ripples of your actions expand outward, touching lives and mending the fabric of our shared humanity.



BREATH PRAYER

INHALE: *God of goodness,*

EXHALE: *Guide the work of my hands.*

⁵ Rabbi Rami Shapiro, *Wisdom of the Jewish Sages*, (Harmony/Bell Tower, 1995), 41. This is a paraphrase of Rabbi Rami Shapiro's interpretive translation of Rabbi Tarfon's work on the Pirke Avot 2:20. The text is a commentary on Micah 6:8.

⁶ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker's ABC*, (HarperOne, 1993).



Lisle

The Good That Is Yours | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Ink dyes and gold resist on silk, with digital collage

DO THE GOOD THAT IS YOURS TO DO

READ Luke 3:7-16

FROM THE ARTIST | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

As John the Baptist preaches about transformation, he receives the same question three times from those gathered by the river: “What, then, shall we do?”

His responses are straightforward and practical, but also particular. He tells the crowd to share any excess clothing and food with those who have none. He tells the tax collectors not to use their position of power to launder and steal money. He tells the soldiers not to coerce and threaten, and to be satisfied with their wages.

In other words, he tells them what not to do, which leads me to assume that those showing up to be baptized are carrying some things they need to atone for. And yet, they have shown up. They have journeyed into the wilderness to be baptized and transformed. They long for a new beginning.

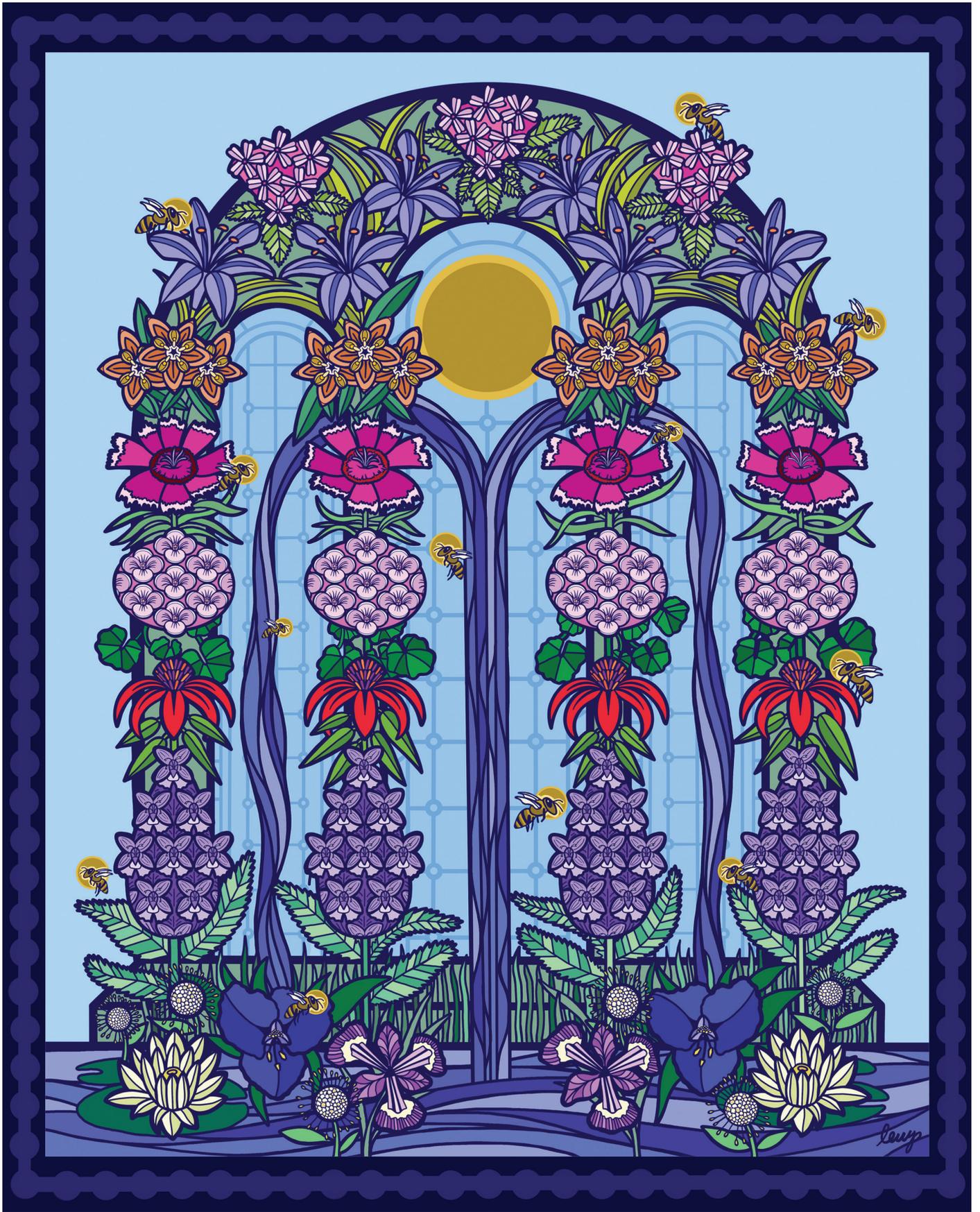
At the center of this quilt square collage, a pinwheel of fire spins. It represents the Holy Spirit impelling the world to turn. Surrounding it are four petal shapes that bloom like a flower. They are each filled with branches of fruit. When we align ourselves with the movement of the Spirit, we can do the good that is ours to do. Our actions can bear good fruit.

The petals and pinwheel are encapsulated by the outline of a blue cross. Four walls of the cross contain broken fragments. In stark contrast to the lush fruit, the fragments are like shards of glass. They symbolize the sins John the Baptist sees present amongst the crowds: extortion, coercion, and the hoarding of power and resources. And yet, these fragments are linked together by blue arrows filled with the waters of baptism. There is a way to begin again.

From each cardinal direction, a triangle of Holy Spirit fire faces inward, pointing us to baptism and transformation. When we do the good that is ours to do, we bear good fruit—fruit that repairs and nourishes, fruit that grows into the four corners of the earth.

PRAY

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Full Life in the Emptiest of Places | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting

DO THE GOOD THAT IS YOURS TO DO

READ Isaiah 58:9b-12

FROM THE ARTIST | Lauren Wright Pittman

After repeated readings of this text, I began to see a garden bursting out of a spring. I imagined the flowers working together to build a beautiful arched structure in a parched place. For me, the structure came to represent the rebuilt ruins in the text which create a safe space for restored communities to thrive. I began creating the piece by finding both drought-resistant and water-emergent plants to create the structure. The water-emergent plants lay the foundation in the midst of the gurgling spring: lotuses, birdbill dayflowers, blue flags, and buttonbush flowers. Building from there, drought-resistant plants craft the strong bones and arches of this rebuilt ruin; from the base to the top of the shelter are: catmint, coneflower, geraniums, dianthus, butterfly weeds, agapanthus, and verbena. Metaphorically speaking, the health of the garden depends on the hard work of gardeners culling weeds (which in the Isaiah passage could be represented by removing the yoke, the pointing of fingers, and the speaking of evil). The garden also depends on adding necessary nutrients to the soil (offering food to the hungry and satisfying the needs of the afflicted). This is the good that is ours to do.

I have a difficult time considering an image complete without a person as the focal point. As I worked on this piece, the flowers and structure alone felt insufficient to represent the fullness of life I was hoping for, so I decided to add bees floating and fluttering throughout this restored flower sanctuary. The community garden shelter provides nourishment for the twelve bees, which in turn provide for the whole ecosystem. When we do the good that is ours to do, our work in discipleship raises up the foundations of many generations. The whole community is uplifted when we lean into God's will in our life and share that goodness with others.

PRAY

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

A Sanctified Art LLC is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshipping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their mission is to empower churches with resources to inspire creativity in worship and beyond. Driven by the connective and prophetic power of art, they believe that art helps us connect our hearts with our hands, our faith with our lives, and our mess with our God.

Learn more about their work at sanctifiedart.org.



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