



LENT

Lent is ultimately about the Gospel. It's during this time that we are invited to stop, pause, and slow down in order to enter into a more intentionally season of prayer, examination, and confession. Lent is also a time to imitate Christ – commemorating his 40-day fast in the wilderness. This draws us deep to realize that Lent is not merely a time for our own spiritual strengthening, but also a discipline in loving others as well.

As Pastor Chuck Colson writes, “Lent gives us the opportunity to move towards our neighbor in charity” because it “emphasizes simplicity for the sake of others.” We want to do more than simply abstain from movies and simplify our calendars – we want our affections for Christ to be radically stirred as we forms us to reflect his glory more and more. Lent allows us to see the parts of ourselves we'd rather keep covered up and surrender them to the only one who can restore us.

I hope and pray that as you read, journal, mediate, pause, breathe deeply, open your eyes, and expose your heart that the beauty of the cross will be made ever clear and the resurrection call will beckon louder than ever.

O Lord and Master of my life, give me not the spirit of laziness, despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of sobriety, humility, patience and love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen

-- St. Ephraim the Syrian (AD 305-373)

Celebrated each spring as the days begin to lengthen (the term Lent is from a Saxon word meaning “lengthen”), Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, 46 days before Easter Sunday. It is marked by periods of fasting and feasting. Each week, participants traditionally fast during the week and feast on Sundays. This pattern continues throughout the season as the Church journeys toward the Holy Week commencing on Palm Sunday. The final period of Lent is often referred to as the Triduum, beginning Maundy Thursday and continuing through Easter Sunday.

In our context, it is easy to get lost in the cultural expectations of Easter and miss out on the meaning. Lent is a reminder that the resurrection only occurred after the crucifixion. Rather than skipping over the ministry and crucifixion of Christ, Lent is a season to prepare ourselves for the joy of Resurrection Sunday as we enter the sorrow and pain which preceded it.

- The Village Church (Flower Mound, TX)

BEAUTY IN THE COMMON

PHOTO A DAY LENT CHALLENGE

During this season of slowing and seeing – we invite you to post a photo each day following the calendar below with the hashtag #beautyinthecommon.. Our hope and prayer is that by pausing each day of Lent to see beauty in mundane, unexpected places, that your heart will become more and more attuned to seeing God’s presence all around us.

Using the calendar below, post a picture each day that shows a glimpse of beauty in that area. You can then search the hashtag and pray for others who are also posting. Pray that your image might encourage, spur, or inspire someone else.

MARCH

6. Beginnings
7. Movement
8. Shadows
9. Rest
10. Family
11. Light
12. Stillness
13. Power
14. Structure
15. Faint
16. Fullness
17. Past
18. Freedom
19. Small
20. Loud
21. Sacrifice
22. Movement
23. Struggle
24. Celebration
25. Reflection
26. Growth
27. Transparency
28. Composition
29. Chaos

30. Subtle

31. Community

APRIL

1. Surrender
2. Tension
3. Victory
4. Pattern
5. Contrast
6. Familiar
7. Pure
8. Simple
9. Unplanned
10. Weathered
11. Moment
12. Difficult
13. Calm
14. Dreams
15. Memories
16. Doubt
17. Identity
18. Weakness
19. Suffering
20. Unknown
21. Restoration

WEEKLY FASTS

Each week, we have suggested an area of fasting to apply to our lives. Far from a mere responsibility, these weekly fasts give us opportunities to pursue greater communion with Christ. By emptying our lives of commotion, clutter and noise, we hope to find greater room for Him to speak through His Word. Rather than simply subtracting something from our lives, this is an opportunity to add something greater.

Some of the fasts are traditional (food, caffeine, sweets), while others may be new for many of us (media, shopping). These particular fasts were chosen because each represents a common comfort to which our culture runs for distraction. The hope for each is that a season of unplugging from the background buzz will be leveraged for the sake of communing with the Lord. Therefore, we should consider ways in which we can leverage the fast to engage in deeper prayer, study, community, meditation, etc.

READINGS

We encourage you to read the passages, at least once a week (preferably Monday) and consider journaling, discussing, or praying through the text the rest of the week. Some potential questions could be:

- What surprises me about this passage? What stands out to me?
- What attributes of Christ or his followers do I see here?
- How can/should I respond to what I just read?

Ash Wednesday

Call to Worship

Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been before, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations. "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster."

[JOEL 2:1-2, 12-13]

Confession

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Amen.

[PSALM 51:1-2,6,10-12]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.

[MARK 8:27-30]

DEVOTIONAL

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten season. The aim of Ash Wednesday is threefold: to meditate on our mortality, sinfulness, and need for a savior; to renew our commitment to daily repentance in all of life; and to remember with confidence and gratitude that Jesus has conquered sin and death. Our worship today should be filled with gospel truth because it is a witness to the power and beauty of our union with Christ and to the daily dying and rising with Christ that comes with this unity.

During a traditional Ash Wednesday service, ashes are applied to the worshiper's forehead (the "imposition") in the shape of a cross. In Scripture ashes or dust symbolize mortality (Gen. 18:27), mourning (Est. 4:3), judgment (Lam. 3:16), and repentance (Jon. 3:6). An ashen cross serves as a reminder that you come from dust and to dust you shall return one day. It is also a call to "Consider yourself dead to sin and alive in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11).

As you begin this journey of Lent, you must start with rending your heart—tearing it from self-absorption and binding yourself (mind and devotion) to Jesus. Regardless of your current state or your proneness to wander, you must "Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13). After all, Lent is not about your faithfulness, but rather about the faithfulness of Jesus on your behalf. He is the faithful One!

REFLECTION

- 1. Spend some time being still before God, asking the Spirit to search you: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24).*
- 2. What hesitations or hindrances do you have in beginning this journey of Lent?*
- 3. What habits/tendencies of self-absorption do you need to tear yourself from?*

Closing Prayer

Journey with us, O holy God, as we begin our way to the cross. Sharpen our focus, that our attention may center more on you than ourselves. Lead us through the shadows of darkness and prepare our hearts, that we might be a people of prayer, ready to perceive and respond to your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

First Sunday of Lent

This is the good news that we have received, in which we stand, and by which we are saved: Christ died for our sins, was buried, was raised on the third day, and appeared first to the women, then to Peter and the Twelve, and then to many faithful witnesses. We believe Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One of God, the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from the dead, in whom all things hold together, in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell by the power of the Spirit. Christ is the head of the body, the church, and by the blood of the cross reconciles all things to God. Amen.

[BASED ON 1 CORINTHIANS 15; COLOSSIANS 1]

How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give
His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure
How great the pain of searing loss
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons
to glory

Behold the Man upon a cross
My sin upon His shoulders
Ashamed, I hear my
mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it
was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life
I know that it is finished

I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus
Christ
His death and resurrection
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give
an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

[STUART TOWNEND]

Week One

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REPENTANCE

Call to Worship

Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

[PSALM 96:1-5, 11-13]

Confession

Father in heaven, we need to be forgiven. We have tried to heal ourselves. Instead of trusting in the death of Jesus Christ, we have tried to work off our guilt. We have tried so hard to pile up good deeds that outweigh our sins. Instead of trusting in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have tried to change through our own efforts. We have tried to change our hearts through sheer willpower. Forgive us for trying to heal ourselves. Forgive us for neglecting your grace. Forgive us and heal us, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Contemplation

And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "'If you can!' All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately,

“Why could we not cast it out?” And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

[MARK 9:14-29]

DEVOTIONAL (Pick One)

<http://2016.thecommonyear.com/themes/beauty-in-the-stillness>

REFLECTION

- 1. In what areas are you feeling shame, guilt, a need for a do-over, or drive to “do better”?*
- 2. Take a few moments and confess these areas to God. Thank him for his grace and mercy in the gospel that frees us from being slaves to these things.*

WEEKLY FAST

Food

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. In this season of repentance, restore to us the joy of our salvation and strengthen us to face our mortality, that we may reach with confidence for your mercy, in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

[WSB]

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

We believe the Word was in the form of God and did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He emptied himself, took the form of a servant, and was born in our own likeness. We believe he humbled himself and became obedient unto death. We believe God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. We believe that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth; and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

[BASED ON PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11]

Rise, O church, and lift your voices, Christ has conquered death and hell. Sing as all the earth rejoices; resurrection anthems swell. Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the risen King!

See the tomb where death had laid Him, empty now, its mouth declares: "Death and I could not contain Him, for the throne of life He shares." Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the risen King!

Hear the earth protest and tremble, see the stone removed with pow'r; All hell's minions may assemble, but cannot withstand His hour. He has conquered, He has conquered, Christ the Lord, the risen King!

Doubt may lift its head to murmur, scoffers mock and sinners jeer; But the truth proclaims a wonder thoughtful hearts receive with cheer. He is risen, He is risen, now receive the risen King!

We acclaim Your life, O Jesus, now we sing Your victory; Sin or hell may seek to seize us, but Your conquest keeps us free. Stand in triumph, stand in triumph, worship Christ, the risen King!

[JACK HAYFORD]

Week Two

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HUMILITY

Call to Worship

Let us worship God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ. We are new creations; the old has gone, the new has come! Let us worship God as Christ's ambassadors. Through us and through our worship may we announce the good news to all. Let us worship God in spirit and in truth. Praise God! We are reconciled, redeemed, renewed!

[BASED ON JOHN 4:24; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21]

Confession

We confess that even though we have been united with Christ, our thoughts and words are divisive. We have been comforted with His love, but have withheld our love from others. We have fellowship with the Spirit of God, yet we still seek our own way. Forsaking unity, we have acted out of selfish ambition. Exalting ourselves, we have sought to be praised. Neglecting our neighbor, we have looked to our own interests above all else. But You, oh Lord, have not withheld your love from us. You became nothing so that we might gain everything. Have mercy upon us, according to your great compassion through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

[BASED ON PHILIPPIANS 2]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

[MARK 10:32-34]

DEVOTIONAL (Pick One)

<http://2016.thecommonyear.com/themes/beauty-in-the-uncertain>

REFLECTION

- 1. Have you given thanks for the humility of Jesus?*
- 2. What are you holding on to that you need to let go of for the good of others?*
- 3. Do you sense a need to submit to God in some area of your life?*

WEEKLY FAST

TV & Movies

Closing Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. [BCP]

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

By his resurrection he has overcome death so that he might make us share in the righteousness he won for us by his death. By his power we too are already now resurrected to a new life. Christ's resurrection is a guarantee of our glorious resurrection.

[HEIDELBERG Q.45]

Jesus Christ is the hope of God's world. In his death, the justice of God is established; forgiveness of sin is proclaimed. On the day of his resurrection, the tomb was empty; his disciples saw him; death was defeated; new life had come. God's purpose for the world was sealed.

[OUR SONG OF HOPE, ST. 4]

Man of Sorrows! what a name For the Son of God, Who came Ruined sinners to reclaim. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned He stood; Sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we; Spotless Lamb of God was He; Full atonement can it be? Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die; "It is finished!" was His cry; Now in heaven exalted high. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King, All His ransomed home to bring, Then anew His song we'll sing: Hallelujah! What a Savior!

[PHILIP BLISS]

Week Three

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SUFFERING

Call to Worship

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

[SELECTED VERSES FROM PSALM 118]

Confession

Holy Lord, I have sinned times without number, and been guilty of pride and unbelief, of failure to find thy mind in thy Word, of neglect to seek thee in my daily life. My transgressions and short-comings present me with a list of accusations, But I bless thee that they will not stand against me, for all have been laid on Christ; Go on to subdue my corruptions, and grant me grace to live above them. Let not the passions of the flesh nor lustings of the mind bring my spirit into subjection, but do thou rule over me in liberty and power. [VOV]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me." And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'From man'?"—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

[MARK 11:27-33]

DEVOTIONAL (Pick One)

<https://www.thecommonyear.com/january>

REFLECTION

- 1. How does the reality of suffering challenge your faith?*
- 2. Have you tried to explain suffering in ways that might be unbiblical?*
- 3. How does Jesus' death and resurrection give you strength and hope?*

WEEKLY FAST

Sweets

Closing Prayer

Help me to be resolute and Christ-contained. Never let me wander from the path of obedience to thy will. Strengthen me for the battles ahead. Give me courage for all the trials, and grace for all the joys. Help me to be a holy, happy person, free from every wrong desire, from everything contrary to thy mind. Grant me more and more of the resurrection life: may it rule me, may I walk in its power, and be strengthened through its influence.

[VOV]

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve. We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, fully God. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God: preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives, forgiving sinners, and calling all to repent and believe the gospel. Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was crucified, suffering the depths of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world. God raised Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to life eternal. With believers in every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[FROM A BRIEF STATEMENT OF FAITH]

I hear the Savior say, "Thy strength indeed is small; Child of weakness, watch and pray, Find in Me thine all in all."

Lord, now indeed I find Thy power and Thine alone, Can change the leper's spots and melt the heart of stone.

And when before the throne I stand in Him complete, "Jesus died my soul to save" my lips shall still repeat

Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow.

O Praise the one who paid my debt And raised this life up from the dead

[ELVINA HALL AND KRISTIAN STANFILL]

Week Four

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LAMENT

Call to Worship

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

[LAMENTATIONS 3:21-26]

Confession

Almighty God, you created the world, and it was good. But our first parents fell into sin, and we have inherited their corruption. We confess that we have turned our backs on you; we have served our own idols; we have sought our own glory. Forgive our sin, O God, and renew us by your grace, that we might bring redemption to the world, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

[MARK 12:41-44]

DEVOTIONAL (Pick One)

<https://www.thecommonyear.com/june>

REFLECTION

- 1. What breaks your heart? What about your own brokenness frustrates or grieves you?*
- 2. How do you normally deal with these emotions? Can you say these things to God?*

WEEKLY FAST

Shopping

Closing Prayer

We hear Jesus say: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And we too at times pray: "Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame." We hear the words of the ancient psalm even as we see Jesus: "But I am a worm and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; 'Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—let him rescue the one in whom he delights!'" And we too pray: "Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help."

[WSB]

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Lord Jesus was born under the law and perfectly fulfilled it. He endured most grievous torments in his soul and most painful sufferings in his body; he was crucified, died, and was buried; he remained under the power of death, yet his body did not undergo decay; and he arose from the dead on the third day with the same body in which he had suffered. In this body he ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and he shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the age. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself—which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up to God—has fully satisfied the justice of his Father. He purchased not only reconciliation but also an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all whom the Father has given to him.

[WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH CH. 8]

Christ hath risen! Hallelujah! Blessed morn of life and light! Lo, the grave is rent asunder, Death is conquered through His might.

Christ is risen! Hallelujah! Gladness fills the world today; From the tomb that could not hold Him, See, the stone is rolled away!

Christ hath risen! Hallelujah! Friends of Jesus, dry your tears; Through the veil of gloom and darkness, Lo, the Son of God appears!

Christ hath risen! Hallelujah! He hath risen, as He said; He is now the King of glory, And our great exalted Head.

[FANNY CROSBY]

Week Five

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SACRIFICE

Call to Worship

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

[ISAIAH 6:1-7]

Confession

O God, in creation you fashion us in your image, in Christ you reveal to us your love, through the Holy Spirit you welcome us into the fellowship of believers; we bow in gratitude before you. We constantly distort your image, but still you restore it. We daily betray your love, but still you extend it. We often disrupt fellowship, but still you bless it. Come unto us at this time and in this place, O Lord, that your image in us might be revealed, your love for us returned, and our fellowship in Christ renewed. Amen. [VOV]

Contemplation

Gospel Reading

It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people." And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

[MARK 14:1-9]

DEVOTIONAL (Pick One)

<http://2016.thecommonyear.com/themes/beauty-in-the-weathered>

REFLECTION

1. *What are some of your fig leaves (false coverings)? These are just things you and I use to try to make ourselves look okay or feel okay about ourselves (good works, talents and abilities, religious duty and discipline, performance at work).*
2. *God calls us to put our faith in the covering that he alone provides. He calls us to faith in Christ. The bloody death of Jesus is our only hope. What would it look like for you to believe that today when you are tempted to “self-cover”?*

WEEKLY FAST

Music

Closing Prayer

Everlasting Creator-Father, I bless thee for the everlasting covenant, for the appointment of a Mediator. I rejoice that he failed not, nor was discouraged, but accomplished the work thou gavest him to do; and said on the cross, 'It is finished.' I exult in the thought that thy justice is satisfied, thy truth established, thy law magnified, and a foundation is laid for my hope. I look to a present and personal interest in Christ and say, Surely he has borne my griefs, carried my sorrows, won my peace, healed my soul. Justified by his blood I am saved by his life, Glorifying in his cross I bow to his scepter, Having his Spirit I possess his mind. Lord, grant that my religion may not be occasional and partial, but universal, influential, effective, and may I always continue in thy words as well as thy works, so that I may reach my end in peace.

[VOV]

SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT: PALM SUNDAY

By his resurrection Christ broke apart the gates of death and opened to us the way of life, announced victory to the women and apostles and brought salvation to the whole world, annihilated the power of death and renewed the entire creation, gave us the promise of resurrection so that we might rise with him in new life. We proclaim and affirm that, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, "Death is swallowed up in victory." And so we cry out: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[FROM THE WCF 20.1; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:55-57]

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All—
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For ev'ry sin on Him was laid—
Here in the death of Christ I live

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine—
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death—
This is the pow'r of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home—
Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.

[KEITH GETTY AND STUART TOWNEND]

Week Six

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DEATH

Call to Worship

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

[ISAIAH 25:6-9]

Confession

O Lord, we confess our hands are not clean, our hearts are not pure. Forgive our capricious discipleship and keep our faith constant, O Lord. Lead us always to a deeper experience of your love. Enliven us by the familiar but always new story of shame and triumph, suffering and hope, that this week reveals. Mold us to the ways of the Servant whose life we honor. In the name of Christ, our Lord, Amen. [WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak." And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

[MARK 14:66-72]

DEVOTIONAL

<http://www.thecommonyear.com/narratives/2016-03-21>

REFLECTION

When I survey the wondrous cross On which the Prince of glory died My richest gain
I count but loss And pour contempt on all my pride.

Were the whole realm of nature mine That were a present far too small; Love so
amazing, so divine Demands my soul, my life, my all.

[ISAAC WATTS]

- 1. What attitudes, desires, and tendencies toward self-centeredness are present in your life that you need to put to death?*
- 2. In what areas of your life are you unwilling to give up control in order to follow Jesus?*
- 3. What would God have you do this passion week in order to prepare the way for the joy of resurrection that awaits you on Sunday?*

WEEKLY FAST

Caffeine

Closing Prayer

You are holy, O God of majesty, and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. As one of us, he knew our joys and sorrows and our struggles with temptation. He was like us in every way except sin. In him we see what you created us to be. Though blameless, he suffered willingly for our sin. Though innocent, he accepted death for the guilty. On the cross he offered himself, a perfect sacrifice, for the life of the world. By his suffering and death, he freed us from sin and death. Risen from the grave, he leads us to the joy of new life. Through Christ, all glory and honor are yours, almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit in the holy church, now and forever. Amen.

[WSB]

Maundy Thursday

Call to Worship

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

[PSALM 34:1-4, 8]

Confession

Lord Jesus, like Judas, we have betrayed you; like Peter, we have denied you; and like the other disciples, we have forsaken you. Yet you remain faithful to us unto death, even death on a cross. We plead for your forgiveness and mercy. And we ask that you strengthen us so that we do not turn aside but follow you to the very end—for the final victory belongs to you. [WSB]

Contemplation

Gospel Reading

And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

[MARK 15:21-32]

DEVOTIONAL

God, You who generously give to all your creatures, satisfy our thirst and hunger not for drink and bread alone but for love, truth, justice and peace through your gift of the Eucharist.

Jesus, in the breaking of the bread in the Eucharist, we remember your suffering and we acknowledge the hungers of so many in this world. Through our sharing in the Bread of Life, open our hearts to the needs of all. May this Bread become the bread of hope, of peace, of abundance for everyone on this Earth.

Holy Spirit, may the Blood of Christ we share renew us and energize us to be true communities of light amid the darkness of the structures of sin and injustice in the world today. Christ's sacrifice gives us new life and nourishes our souls so we can hear and respond to your discerning call.

As we are called to the table of the Eucharist, let us in turn call our brothers and sisters to the table where we can all share the resources of Creation, where Justice and Peace reign, and where Love transforms human souls and earthly structures so life and goodness can flourish. Amen.

-Education for Justice

REFLECTION

- 1. Ask God to reveal to you the ways in which you do not fully comprehend his love for you. Where are you plagued by unbelief?*
- 2. Spend a few minutes meditating on the three verses above.*

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you, for the honor of your name. Amen.

[WSB]

GOOD FRIDAY

Call to Worship

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[ISAIAH 53:1-6]

Confession

Gracious God, having heard your Word, we thankfully remember the life of our Lord Jesus Christ on this earth. Yet we also acknowledge our failure to respond earnestly and faithfully to his witness. We often mistake Jesus for a mere earthly king, friendly companion, or problem-solver, failing to see him as the ruler of all creation. We do not appreciate the depth of his passion and sacrifice on the cross, failing to acknowledge him as our way of salvation. Even in this Lenten season, we have not walked faithfully in the way of Jesus Christ. Forgive us, we pray, and bring us ever more fully into the joy of union with Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. [WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud

cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him, and there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem. [MARK 15:33-41]

DEVOTIONAL

"The executioner laid the crossbeam behind Jesus and brought Him to the ground quickly by grasping His arm and pulling Him backward. As soon as Jesus fell, the beam was fitted under the back of His neck and, on each side, soldiers quickly knelt on the inside of the elbows...The thorns pressed against His torn scalp...With his right hand, the executioner probed the wrist of Jesus to find the little hollow spot. When he found it, he took one of the square-cut iron nails...raised the hammer over the nail head and brought it down with force...two soldiers grabbed each side of the crossbeam and lifted. As they pulled up, they dragged Jesus by the wrists. With every breath, He groaned. When the soldiers reached the upright, the four of them began to list the crossbeam higher until the feet of Jesus were off the ground. The body must have writhed with pain...When the crossbeam was set firmly, the executioner...knelt before the cross. Two soldiers hurried to help, and each one took hold of a leg at the calf. The ritual was to nail the right foot over the left, and this was probably the most difficult part of the work. If the feet were pulled downward, and nailed close to the foot of the cross, the prisoner always died quickly. Over the years, the Romans learned to push the feet upward on the cross, so that the condemned man could lean on the nails and stretch himself upward [to breathe].

-Jim Bishop

REFLECTION

1. *Take some time to reflect on the darkness of that first Good Friday. Think about what the disciples must have been experiencing that day.*
2. *Read back over Isaiah 53:1-6, reflecting on Jesus suffering and death.*

Closing Prayer

Holy God, you have opened our ears to hear your Word and our lips to proclaim

your truth: open our eyes this day to see in the cross the revelation of your love; through Jesus the crucified, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, be honor and praise, now and forever. Amen.

[WSB]

HOLY SATURDAY

Call to Worship

King Jesus comes, King Jesus, Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah. Hail! King Jesus, King of all! Recall the words of the Scriptures: "A great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'" In praise we adore you, King Jesus. Enter our hearts today as you entered Jerusalem long ago, and lead us by faith in the way everlasting. Amen.

[BASED ON JOHN 12:13]

Confession

Loving God, you rode a donkey and came in peace, humbled yourself and gave yourself for us. We confess our lack of humility. As you entered Jerusalem, the crowds shouted "Hosanna: 'Save us now!'" On Good Friday they shouted "Crucify!" We confess our praise is often empty. We sing "Hosanna," but cry "Crucify." As the crowd laid their palms in front of you, you took no glory for yourself. We confess that we want to be accepted and take the easy way. We do not stay true to your will. Forgive us, Lord, and help us to follow in the way of obedience. Amen. [WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And when evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself looking for the kingdom of God, took courage and went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he should have already died. And summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the corpse to Joseph. And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

[MARK 15:42-47]

DEVOTIONAL

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. - Scot McKnight

REFLECTION

- 1. How have you seen God work in your heart and mind through this journey of Lent?*
- 2. In what areas of your life do you most long to experience greater transformation through the victory of Easter?*

Closing Prayer

Giver of life, we wait with you to offer the hope that comes from the cross to earth's darkest places. Where pain is deep and affection is denied: let love break through. Where justice is destroyed, let sensitivity to right spring up. Where hope is crucified, let faith persist. Where peace has no chance, let passion live on. Where truth is trampled underfoot, let the struggle continue. Where fear paralyzes, let forgiveness break through. Eternal God, reach into the silent darkness of our souls with the radiance of the cross. O you who are the bearer of all pain, have mercy on us. Giver of life, have mercy on us. Merciful God, have mercy on us. Amen.

[WSB]

EASTER SUNDAY

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

[MARK 16:1-8]

Christ, the Lord, is risen today, Alleluia! Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia! Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia! Sing, ye heav'ns, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia! Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia! Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia! Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia! Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia! Once He died, our souls to save, Alleluia! Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia! Following our exalted Head, Alleluia! Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia! Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Hail, the Lord of earth and heav'n, Alleluia! Praise to Thee by both be giv'n, Alleluia! Thee we greet triumphant now, Alleluia! Hail, the Resurrection Thou, Alleluia!

[CHARLES WESLEY]

"On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realized the new wonder; but even they hardly realized that the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in a semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but of the dawn." [GK Chesterton]

See a very special Easter song/interview by Ava and Ben Calhoun by clicking here!

<http://www.thecommonyear.com/themes/beauty-in-light>