

Intro to Lent – Week 1

This Week's Sermon Passage: Matthew 21:1 – 11

What is Lent?

Lent is a traditional Christian practice of fasting for forty days, beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Holy Thursday. Traditionally, Sundays are not part of the Lenten season because Sunday is the day of Jesus' resurrection, which we celebrate every Sunday in our morning gatherings. We participate in the practice of Lent leading to Easter for a similar purpose that we participate in the season of Advent at Christmas. Advent is a time of expectation and preparation for Emmanuel, God with us, the light of the world come down to live among his people. Lent is also a time of expectation, only this time it is a time to be transformed as we wrestle with the darkness of sin and death, remembering our mortality and letting go of the things that we hold dear. In Lent, we grieve the sins of the world that are the reason that the light of the world was nailed to the cross. In humility, we seek the face of God and ask him to prepare our hearts for Easter.

The lent season calls back to significant moments in scripture, beginning with the forty days of rain when God flooded the earth to cleanse it of the sins of humanity in the book of Genesis. In Numbers, God tells the Israelites that they will not enter the promised land until they have wandered in the wilderness for forty years. The wilderness served to strip Israel of their old sinful ways of living and prepare them to enter the promised land as God's kingdom of priests. Jesus himself spends forty days in the wilderness fasting and praying as preparation for his public ministry. In lent, we willingly participate in the wilderness, in the place of meeting with God and allowing him to transform us as an act of joining with Christ in his suffering so that we may join with him in his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Prayer/Psalm

The Penitential Psalms are prayer by Christians all over the world throughout the season of Lent. These Psalms serve to help us confess our sins, repent, and receive God's forgiveness. We will begin with Psalm 6.

Psalm 6:

- ¹ *LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.*
- ² *Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint;
heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.*
- ³ *My soul is in deep anguish.
How long, LORD, how long?*
- ⁴ *Turn, LORD, and deliver me;
save me because of your unfailing love.*
- ⁵ *Among the dead no one proclaims your name.
Who praises you from the grave?*
- ⁶ *I am worn out from my groaning.
All night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears.*
- ⁷ *My eyes grow weak with sorrow;
they fail because of all my foes.*
- ⁸ *Away from me, all you who do evil,
for the LORD has heard my weeping.*
- ⁹ *The LORD has heard my cry for mercy;
the LORD accepts my prayer.*
- ¹⁰ *All my enemies will be overwhelmed with shame and anguish;
they will turn back and suddenly be put to shame.*

Penitential Psalms: Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143

Additional Scriptures: Luke 4:1-13 (Jesus in the wilderness); Numbers 14 (The Israelite's sin that led to forty years of wandering); Genesis 6:9-8:22 (The Flood)

Reflection Questions:

- 1. Have you ever participated in Lent before? What was that experience like?**
- 2. What kinds of thoughts or emotions are brought up for you as you think about spending time grieving and contemplating the darkness of sin as a way to prepare for Easter?**
- 3. As we consider the stories of the flood, the wandering of the Israelites, and Jesus fasting in the wilderness for forty days, can you think of any times in your own life that you have experienced God transforming you by removing things from your life?**

4. **What could it look like for you to intentionally make space for God to move in your life and transform you as we wait for the promised resurrection?**

Lent Devotional – Week 2

This Week's Sermon Passage: Matthew 21:12-17

¹² Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ¹³ "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'"

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

¹⁶ "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

*"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,
"From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?"*

¹⁷ And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

This Week's Practice: Giving to the Poor

Each of us have been blessed with gifts from God that we are entrusted to steward well. We recognize that everything we have is a gift from God. Nothing that we have been given is for us to keep to ourselves, but it is given to us that we may share it with others. In the season of Lent, many people practice the discipline of charity. Charity begins with the recognition that all people share a common origin and destiny, that we are all dust and to dust we shall return. In charity, we willingly give of our wealth so that those who do not have enough can be blessed. The pattern of giving is seen in the Old Testament law, in the teachings of Jesus, and in the practices of the early church.

In giving to others, we recognize that all people are made in the image of God and are loved by God. As those who are part of the Church, we are invited to participate in loving and serving the people around us as representatives of Christ's love, compassion, and mercy. In humility, we raise up those around us to emulate the humility of Christ, who gave up his glory in heaven to die on the cross so that we might reap the rewards of his victory and live with him in his kingdom.

Matthew 6:1-4; 19-24

¹ "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know

what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

...

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Penitential Psalms: Psalms 32 and 38

Additional Scriptures: Philippians 2:1-18; Deuteronomy 15:1-11; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Reflection Questions:

- 1. Have you ever considered the connection between humanity’s common origin to the call to give generously to the poor?**
- 2. We can become deeply attached to the things that we consider to be “ours,” and as a result it can be difficult for us to give those things away to others. What does it look like for us to steward the things that we have been given from God so that we can be generous?**
- 3. What kinds of internal or external factors prevent you from practicing charity?**

Lent Devotional – Week 3

This Week's Sermon Passage: Matthew 21:23-32

²³ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

²⁹ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

This Week's Practice: Prayer and Forgiveness

Two of the practices we can intentionally implement in the Lenten season are the practices of prayer and forgiveness. There are many ways to engage in the practice of prayer. Across the world, people use liturgical prayers to focus their minds and hearts as they surrender themselves to God and seek his movement in their lives. Prayer is the way that God has asked us to engage in relationship with him, and it serves many purposes including giving us time to confess our sins, to process the way he is moving in our lives, to discern the work he is asking us to do, and to seek his transformational grace in the world around us. In prayer, we learn to abide God’s presence and create space for him to transform us into who he created us to be.

The practice of forgiveness is one that each of us is called to do as a follower of Jesus. In Lent, we practice forgiving those around us for the ways that they have sinned against us

even as we grieve our own sins and the sins of the world which Christ was crucified for. Just as we have been forgiven of our sins by the blood of Jesus, we forgive others for their sins. Forgiveness is surrendering the pain, anger, grief, and bitterness that we have experienced because of other people's decisions. We choose to release them of the debt that they owe us. In obedience to Christ, we take their sins and we surrender them at the foot of the cross, accepting that vengeance belongs to Christ alone. As we practice forgiving others, we experience healing, redemption, and in many cases, reconciliation to one another.

Matthew 6:5-14

⁵ *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

⁹ *“This, then, is how you should pray:*

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,*

*¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,*

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

*¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

*¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’*

¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

Penitential Psalms: Psalms 51

Additional Scriptures: Matthew 5:38-48; Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 18:1-8

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Do the practices of prayer and forgiveness come naturally to you?**
- 2) Have you ever considered using tools such as liturgies or prewritten prayers in your personal prayer time?**

3) Are there people in your life that you have struggled to forgive? What is the work that God might be calling you to do this season of Lent to forgive others in light of how you have been forgiven?

Lent Devotional – Week 4

This Week’s Sermon Passage: Matthew 26:1-13

¹When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ²“As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ⁵“But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.”

⁶While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

⁸When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. ⁹“This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”

¹⁰Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. ¹²When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

This Week’s Practice: Fasting

One of the most common Lenten practices is the practice of fasting. A traditional fast is a fast from food, denying our bodies of something that it needs to create an emptiness in us so that God can fill us. When we become hungry for food, we turn our attention towards God and recognize our hunger for more of him. Fasting is about reconciliation. We fast to be reconciled to God as his people, to experience more of him as his children, and to follow the example of Christ as his disciples. A full forty-day fast is not commonly practiced, but even a partial fast can help you make space to engage more fully with God and learn to rely on him. Fasting is also a way that we grow in holiness, learning to deny our flesh of the things that it needs so that we can grow in self-control. You could consider a weekly practice of fasting, fasting a meal or a day each week, or a partial food fast such as a fast from coffee or sugar. If you choose to fast from food for a day or longer, remember to drink lots of water.

Connected to fasting is the practice of abstinence. Many people choose to abstain from different activities or habits that take up time and attention in order to create more space to engage with God. Some choose to abstain from luxury items, social media, screentime, or other activities that could be temporarily removed to create margin in their lives so they can make time for solitude, silence, prayer, or service to others. The money saved by practicing fasting or abstinence is often given in charity to those who are in need.

Matthew 6:16-18

¹⁶ “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Penitential Psalm: Psalm 102

Additional Reading: Isaiah 58; Exodus 34; Matthew 4

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What is your experience with the practices of fasting and abstinence?
- 2) What could you consider abstaining from to make room in your life to meet with God?

Lent Devotional – Week 5

This Week's Sermon Passage: John 13:1-20

¹ *It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

² *The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

⁶ *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

⁷ *Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."*

⁸ *"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."*

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹ *"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"*

¹⁰ *Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.*

¹² *When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place.*

"Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³ "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

¹⁸ *"I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.'*

¹⁹ *"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. ²⁰ Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."*

This Week's Practice: Repenting of Worry

Repeating of worry is a discipline that we often forget to practice. It is easy to get swept up in the temptation to control the many different areas of our lives. For you, it may be worrying about finances, marriage, schoolwork, your job, friends, family, or health. We seem to believe that we can change things around us if we simply care enough about them.

If we are tempted to worry about the future, we can be tempted to try to control those around us to control the outcome of their decisions, or we may become paralyzed by anxiety so that we are unable to make our own decisions. If we are tempted to worry about the past, we can become stuck in an endless cycle of *what if?* We think about what might have happened if things had gone differently and we desperately try to change the past by worrying about it. Another way that worry can show up in our lives is in hurry. We hurry from one thing to the next and we do not take time to slow down to be with God because we simply do not have time. We keep ourselves very busy as we worry about the future, we worry about the past, and we worry about the future.

In the season of Lent, we remember that we are made of dust and to dust we will return. We must learn to recognize that God alone is in control, he is the only one who can bear the weight of the worries of the world. There is nothing to be gained by trying to take on a burden that was never ours to bear. In repentance, we must learn to recognize that we have tried to control that which is for God alone to control. Then in surrender, we willingly go to him in prayer to surrender the things that we care most deeply about. With open hands, we offer him the things that we love and fear most, trusting that he is a good God who loves his children.

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ *“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?”* ²⁶ *Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?* ²⁷ *Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*

²⁸ *“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.”* ²⁹ *Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.* ³⁰ *If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?* ³¹ *So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’* ³² *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* ³³ *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* ³⁴ *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Penitential Psalm: Psalm 130

Additional Reading: Philippians 4:4-9; Genesis 22:1-19; Luke 11:1-13; Job 1:1-22

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Are you most often tempted to worry about the past, the present, or the future?**
- 2) Is repenting of worry a practice that you have considered implementing in your life before?**
- 3) What does it look like for you to trust God, to believe that he is good when he gives and when he takes away?**

Lent Devotional – Week 6

Mark 11:1-11 – Palm Sunday

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, ²saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

⁴They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, ⁵some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” ⁶They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. ⁷When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. ⁹Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

¹⁰“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

The End of the Lenten Season

Today marks Palm Sunday, the beginning of the last week of Lent for this year. We have sought God together with Christ in the wilderness to prepare our hearts for the crucifixion, and we spend this week remembering the coronation of our King. Our King who entered the city on a donkey, who was anointed with oil, and who washed his disciples' feet. Our king who waited in the garden of Gethsemane for the moment he would be betrayed by his friend and willingly took the crown of thorns as he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross for the sins of the world.

In this season of Lent, we have remembered that we are dust and to dust we will return. We have grieved our own sin, repented, and sought communion with our God and with one another. We have died many small deaths, perhaps through financial sacrifice, or forgiving other's sins against us, or in giving up food or abstaining from earthly pleasures. In community, we have explored different practices that can help us be transformed to look more like Jesus, our King. Learning to be like Jesus means learning to die to ourselves, to take up our cross and follow him to Calvary. It is a challenging and often painful journey, but even as we suffer with Christ, we are also glorified with him.

“Death will one day take us all, it is true. But we need not fear it. Though it come, God came first and in Christ has walked through it before us and walks through it with us. The good Shepherd who daily bears our burdens bears this burden as well: he carries us through death and into life.” - Kimberlee Ireton

Penitential Psalms: Psalm 143

Additional Reading: Romans 6:1-23; Romans 8:18-30; Matthew 18:21-28

Reflection Questions:

- 1) **What have you learned during this season of Lent?**
- 2) **Are there any practices that you would like to take with you into the rest of the church year or revisit next Lenten season?**