

Listen to these startling words, whispered by God towards a lover long gone: "Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead" (Joel 2:12-13a, NLT). David echoes this same sentiment in Psalm 51:17: "The sacrifice You desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God."

Lent is a season within the rhythm of the Church year, preceding the startling explosion of the Easter resurrection, whereby hearts are torn, spirits are broken, and wills are bent towards walking with Jesus in the way of the cross. Robert Webber writes that what God wants of us is a spirit that is truly broken of pride and self-sufficiency and a heart that leads towards the presence of God in obedience to His will for my life. In essence, a fresh tearing of our souls, a deliberate wounding through which hardness of heart is softened and a return to dependency upon God is renewed.

A 40-day practice of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving whereby we walk with Jesus on the road to the cross, Lent calls us to die to ourselves in order to renew the reality of our own resurrection within life gone stale. Joan Chittister echoes this call, writing "Lent demands both the healing of the soul and the honing of the soul, both penance and faith, both a purging of what is superfluous in our lives and the heightening, the intensifying, of what is meaningful."

Torn. A journey into the heart of Christ, for the purpose of allowing Christ to journey deep within our own broken hearts. Welcome 3rd Place, to the season of Lent.

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE LENTEN SEASON

At a fixed point each day, light a tealight as a welcome reminder that God's Spirit dwells as Light within us and throughout every corner of the world. Ask the Spirit to open your spirit to the presence of God in your life & during these moments of meditation. Select one of the weekly Lenten texts & practice the discipline of responsive listening as a means of opening up to God's active word. Once finished, return to the Lenten themed meditation for the week. Again, let the words read you. What is God saying? Engage in action that responds to God's living word in you.

## THE PRACTICES OF FASTING, PRAYER, + ALMSGIVING

The season of Lent asks us to "enter into a fresh conversion experience with Jesus Christ by an act of metanoia (turning), a turning from sin to Christ. To assist us in this pilgrimage Lent calls us to fast, pray, and give alms. The nature of these actions is to help us to actually embody what it means to turn from sin and put our trust in Jesus. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving is not only the act of giving something up...it is also the activity of taking something on...to turn towards a virtue that replaces our sin." (Robert Webber).

**FASTING:** "The purpose of this fast is to be liberated from the flesh...to liberate us from the power that flesh holds over the spirit, the power that brought Adam into ruination" (Robert Webber). The question to ask the Spirit is "What is my spirit in bondage from in this season of life?" followed by, "What is the Spirit desiring to free me from?" Fasting can encompass bodily actions (freedom from addiction to alcohol, caffeine, food, etc), to distractions (freedom from media, technology, etc), to internal vices (freedom from negative self-thought, sinful patterns, etc).

**PRAYER:** Prayer fills the space that fasting creates in one's life. As Robert Webber writes, "Prayer is the actual experience of turning to God in dependence." As fasting produces room within one's busy, distracted life, prayer breathes fresh life and wind into that newly created space. Explore a fresh discipline of prayer in this Lenten season.

**ALMSGIVING:** "Almsgiving is the symbol of the virtue we are taking on to replace our sin" (Robert Webber). In essence, giving testifies to the internal transformation taking place in our soul through the practices of fasting and prayer. Almsgiving is an ancient spiritual practice that takes seriously Jesus' teaching that our heart will reside in the place where our treasure lays. How can you actively seek to fast from something in this season, and to then financially engage in a project of justice + mercy, putting your resources where your heart truly desires to reside? Engage a friend in this creative work, and tell the story of where God leads you among our community at 3rd Place.

## ASH WEDNESDAY {March 9}: REMEMBER YOU ARE DUST

Ash Wednesday: "Ash Wednesday, an echo of the Hebrew Testament's ancient call to sackcloth and ashes, is a continuing cry across the centuries that life is transient, that change is urgent. We don't have enough time to waste on nothingness. We need to repent our dillydallying on the road to God. We need to regret the time we've spent playing with dangerous distractions and empty diversions along the way. We need to repent of our senseless excesses and our excursions into sin, our breaches of justice, or failures of honesty, our estrangement from God, our savorings of excess, our absorbing self-gratifications, one infantile addiction, one creature craving another. We need to get back in touch with our souls. 'Remember man that you are dust and unto dust you shall return,' the old Sacramental formula warned us from God's words to Adam and Eve, as the ashes trickled down our foreheads. We hear now, as Jesus proclaimed in Galilee, 'Turn away from sin and believe the good news' (Mk 1:15)" (Joan Chittister).

**Scripture Texts:** Joel 2:12-17; Is 58:1-12; Ps 51:1-17; 2 Cor 5:20b-6:19; Matt 6:1-6, 16-21

**Meditation:** "I live as though I will never die; it is not on my agenda of things to do. But in that moment I was reminded of my own mortality, the short duration of my own life, and of the accountability of my own life to God. Sobered by the reality of death, I titled my head higher as the celebrant dipped his thumb into the ashes, and I allowed myself to feel the moisture of the ashes and the pressure of his thumb throughout my whole body as he made the sign of the cross on my forehead and intoned those chilling words, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Robert Webber).

**Response:** Invite the Spirit to help you experience your own mortality ("a mist that vanishes," as James writes) today, and to become grateful again for every breath you take.

**Love Your Neighbour:** Journey with a friend to a cemetery this next week. Take paper and colored pencils along with you. Trace over a gravestone that you find interesting or meaningful. Let this experience remind you of your own mortality, and hopefully, open your heart toward's God's grace in your life.

## LENT WEEK 1 {March 13-19}: THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

**Scripture Texts:** Gen 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Ps 32; Rom 5:12-19; Matt 4:1-11

**Meditation:** "The temptation was a turning point in the process of reversing the human situation. For here, the church fathers tell us, is the exact counterpart to Adam. Adam yielded to the temptation. Christ overcame the temptation. Christ not only overcame the temptation for himself, he overcame it for us. Orthodox Christianity has always taught the incarnation was not simply the vehicle for God to be with us but the reality of God becoming one of us and doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Because we are of the first Adam, we cannot overcome temptation by ourselves. Like Adam we face temptation and yield to it. But because Christ became one of us and was fully human in every respect, we can share in his conquering of the evil one" (Robert Webber).

**Response:** Ask the Spirit to search your heart and bring to light areas of temptation for you.

**Love Your Neighbour:** Deliberately engage a friend in conversation about an area of temptation in their life this week. Simply listen to their struggle, rather than seek to fix it.

## LENT WEEK 2 {March 20-26}: THE CALL TO DENY SIN

**Scripture Texts:** Gen 12:1-4a; Ps 121; Rom 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

**Meditation:** "During Lent God may call us, as he called Nicodemus, to abandon the world of our pharisaic religion, to stop pretending we are righteous, to come to grips with the reality of our own phoniness, and to break through to a faith that is real and genuine. Like Nicodemus we need to cut through the shackles that bind us to the powers controlling our lives. We need to deny the powers that control us, turn our backs on them, and go in a new direction. Perhaps this new direction will come from the abandonment of a deep-seated habit that holds us in its grip. Perhaps there is need to have a breakthrough in a relationship with a friend or with someone who is no longer a friend. Perhaps we need to forgive someone of a wrong done to us in the past. These are the kinds of sins that hold us back from the experience of the one complete newness. Once they are cared for, a rush of newness comes upon us..." (Robert Webber).

**Response:** How are you pretending to be righteous, denying the reality of your own phoniness?

**Love Your Neighbour:** Practice denial of a deep-seated habit of yours by engaging in action that counter-acts what you struggle so deeply with. Let this action lead you towards a Neighbour in love.

## LENT WEEK 3 {March 27-April 2}: THE CALL TO REPENTANCE

**Scripture Texts:** Ex 17:1-7; Ps 95; Rom 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

**Meditation:** "Here is a biblical process: face our sin; say no to sin; repent of sin. A striking example is the woman of Samaria...When Jesus asks the woman of Samaria to give him a drink, we gain an insight into God's basic attitude toward us: God wants something from us. God thirsts for something from us. God thirsts for us to turn away from sin through confession and repentance. God wants us to acknowledge our sins and to identify the nooks and crannies of our lives not turned over to the Spirit. In repentance we turn away from sin and determine with God's power to walk in newness of life" (Robert Webber).

**Response:** Ask the Spirit to reveal to you where Christ is thirsty for you to turn towards Him.

**Love Your Neighbour:** Invite a friend to experience something you have never before done: a completely new experience. Pay attention to your emotion + thought as you play with this new experience. How can this experience serve as a metaphor for repentance in your life?

## LENT WEEK 4 {April 3-9}: CHRIST'S HEALING POWER

**Scripture Texts:** 1 Sam 16:1-13; Ps 23; Eph 5:8-14; John 9:1-42

**Meditation:** "The fourth Sunday of Lent...strikes a more joyous note than the previous Sundays of Lent because it shifts away from an emphasis on the repentance of the sinner to Christ's healing power...The joy of salvation is a welcome respite in the middle of a long season of repentance and preparation...The accent is on what God can do for us when we repent and turn to the grace He offers...A foretaste of the resurrection to come--a welcome stop at an oasis in the desert spirituality of Lent" (Robert Webber).

**Response:** Invite the healing power of Christ into brokenness in your life. Let Him carry you...

**Love Your Neighbour:** Pause at various points throughout this week from the rigorous self-examination of the previous three weeks. Without ceasing your fast, invite a friend into a spontaneous experience of joy. Play, laugh, run around, and smile...Resurrection is coming!

## LENT WEEK 5 {April 10-16}: A FORETASTE OF EASTER

**Scripture Texts:** Ezek 37:1-14; Ps 130; Rom 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

**Meditation:** "The death of Lazarus is a symbol of our own dead spiritual condition. During Lent we are called on to look at our own deadness and to act on it. In this week we look at the juxtaposition of death and resurrection. We are called not to remain dead but to be raised to newness of life, to new birth, to a fresh and new encounter with Jesus. Some of us are spiritually dead because our faith is purely intellectual. We believe the right things. We adhere to the creeds, the confessions, and the doctrines of the church. But there is no life in us, we simply acquiesce to the tradition for tradition's sake. We believe that we believe, but we know that is not enough. Others of us are dead because we have a total lack of feeling. We are not moved by the worship of the church, by song and prayer, by Eucharist and festivity. It is there, but it isn't real, it doesn't touch us in the inner recesses of our being. And we feel cold, numb, and dead. The God who raised Lazarus for the dead will raise us up from our intellectualized and nominal faith" (Robert Webber).

**Response:** Where is your faith in Christ suffering from a lack of emotional engagement, or a spiritual of intellectual stimulation alone? How can thought + feeling become more deeply integrated within your faith practices in fresh ways?

**Love Your Neighbour:** If your faith has become too intellectually-oriented, pursue a spiritual practice that engages your heart + mind this week. If your faith is suffering from a lack of emotional engagement, pursue a spiritual practice that stimulates your mind. Share this exploration with a close friend.

## PALM SUNDAY {April 17}: WALK IN THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Palm Sunday: "For Jesus, Palm Sunday was his gateway to the culminating events of his earthly life. As we enter that gate with him, our spiritual lives are being ordered into the most sacred moments of the history of the world and of our own experience being the meaning of human existence" (Robert Webber).

**Scripture Texts:** Is 50:4-9a; Ps 31:9-16; Phil 2:5-11; Matt 21:1-11

**Mediation:** "I knew I had come to the most intense part of the pilgrimage--one I could not ignore or take lightly. I realized the events of this week were to order my spiritual experience into a reliving of the spiritual journey experienced by thousands in Jerusalem in the first century. I knew this was not a week for shopping, vacation, parties, or hilarity. I sensed this was the week that above all weeks was to be set aside for the journey into death. I knew the worship of the church would take me by the hand and lead me step-by-step into the experience of death and rebirth, if I would allow it to do so. I resolved then and there to walk in the way of the cross. I purposed to make this the week God intended it to be for me, a week of intense spiritual struggle--and reward!" (Robert Webber).

**Response:** Invite the Spirit to speak freely to you regarding how you should spend Holy Week. How can you clear space within your schedule to walk with Jesus unto His death?

**Love Your Neighbour:** Pursue solitude (intentional space and time alone in silence + prayer) as a discipline this week...yet invite a friend to accompany you on the same journey. Let your shared practice move you towards action. Where do you see a Neighbour walking into death? How can you help prevent this?

