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Lent: A Season of Lament and Hope for Creation

A collection of resources

Notes for Pastors and Worship Leaders

The cry of Christ is in the cry of Creation. The betrayal and crucifixion of Christ is in the betrayal and devastation of Creation. The resurrection of Christ is witnessed through the surprising and grace-filled moments of healing, accountability, reparation, and flourishing of all life. In that spirit, I have written this collection of resources for Lent through the eyes and heart of Creation (which includes all of us).

The resources for Ash Wednesday and Lent are for you to use throughout the season as you see fit. There is no one liturgy in these materials, although there is a short ritual with responsive prayer in “Steps Towards the Empty Tomb”, and that particular piece will need advance preparation. The rest of the pieces are simply readings and prayers for you to plug in to your services.

The resources for Holy Week include a collection of readings as well, for you to use in an already-existing service you will have crafted. There is also a longer Maundy Thursday/Good Friday liturgy for you to use, as well, which will include Communion.

Some of the pieces are related to a few of the Lectionary readings for the season, so you will probably want to use those in the appropriate week.

These scripture references are:

- Lent – Genesis 9:8-17, Psalm 51: selections, and John 2:13-16.
- Holy Week – Psalm 31:9-16, and Luke 23: selections, as well as several references to Jesus’ words from the cross which can be found in all four of the Gospels.
- Easter – Isaiah 25:6-9

I hope these resources are helpful for you and for your congregation! May you have a blessed and meaningful Lenten season, and a joyous Easter!

Ash Wednesday resources

We Have to Tell a Different Story

Introduction *[Read by pastor or other worship leader]*

Lent is a season of Lament and Hope intertwined. It's a time for us to face our own lament, and to celebrate the hope in our midst. It's a time of reflection on the stories of our faith that engage so honestly with both hope and lament.

Stories sustain us. In our lives, our church, and our society, stories help form us. They give us a frame for understanding ourselves and our world. Some stories are life-giving and others are not.

Our world is living in the midst of one of those destructive and oppressive stories, and it is threatening our lives and future generations. It's the story of Empire: domination and power over, of fear, greed, separation, apathy and extinction. At the same time, our world is striving mightily to live into a new story, a different story, one of hope, of justice, of accountability and healing,

Lent is calling us to participate in this new story, to live into this new story. Lent is calling us on the journey towards a life-giving story that lives with hope and lament together, that calls for courage and community. And surprises us with resurrection.

Reading: We Have to Tell a Different Story

Reader 1: We have to tell a different story. We have to embody a different story.

Reader 2: The stories of Business as Usual, the stories of Empire and “more and more for me” are just not cutting it any more. The stories of “power over” and not “power with” are not cutting it anymore. The stories that we are separate from all creation are just not cutting it anymore. They never really have.

Reader 1: Those stories lack sufficient awe and gratitude. They have a deploring loss of accountability. They shy away from lament and confession and are unable to grow or change or move forward.

Reader 2: And those old stories are killing us – you, me, “them,” and creatures and air and rock and waters, all Creation, and future generations.

Reader 1: We have to tell a different story.

We have to tell a *new* story that has been abiding in the age-old stories of our faith tradition. We have to embody this new story.

Reader 2: We have to tell a Resurrection story: one that wrestles with betrayal, despair, lament, fear, death, and yes, an empty tomb that opens up to new possibilities.

Reader 1: And so, inspired by the age-old stories of our faith tradition, let us move through Lent with the eyes and heart of Creation – you, me, “them”, and creatures and air and rock and waters,

and generations yet to come. Let us seek accountability, engage in lament and confession, and carve out hope with and for each other.

Readers 1 & 2: For we are all connected.

Carve Out Hope – a Reading

(Read by pastor or other worship leader)

Have you ever seen those intricately fashioned pieces of jewelry,
carved from the found antlers of deer and elk?

From a living creature that followed its own internal signals for growth and change,
shedding an exquisite piece of itself, which someone else transformed into beauty of another
sort.

Carve out hope like that:

Find the pieces of life and beauty hidden in the undergrowth
What was forgotten and left behind is re-membered again, in a new way.

Carve out hope.

What does it look like?

Something precious and alive held in your hands, what it might become still unknown.

But it's the holding that counts.

Solid in your hands, not to slip between your fingers to shatter on the hard ground, or to be
lost and trampled over in the undergrowth.

But real.

Held in your hands. Feel its texture, and dream of what it might become.

And then, offer it to another, half-made because you cannot form it all yourself,
yet still real and of value.

Carve out hope from what you find around you.

A thing of beauty even in the hands of an amateur artisan – for aren't we all –
but a thing of beauty precisely for its awkward angles, rough edges, and “interesting” design.

Carve out hope. Not alone. What is real and true is what we discover or just stumble upon
through hard work or simple surprise,
and what we make of it together.

Carve out hope. And you are changed in the making.

Imposition of Ashes

Opening words

(Pastor/Worship Leader reads these words before the ashes are shared. It may also go in your bulletin)

You are from dust and to dust you shall return.

You are of Earth, and she calls you to return.

You are of this world: its pain and its grief, its indescribable beauty and its grace.

You are of God, and they hold you even now – and always.

Be blest in the receiving of these ashes.

Sharing of the ashes

People come forward; place the ashes on forehead or hands, saying, “Be blest in the receiving of these ashes”

Prayer by Pastor or worship leader

Lent: A Season of Lament and Hope for Creation

The first week of Lent – Call to Worship

Leader:

Welcome to the first week of Lent!

People:

So it begins! What are we giving up for Lent this year?

Leader:

We are here together on this Lenten journey not to give up, but to take on. Not to beat ourselves over the heads with guilt, but to embrace God's promises of life over death, love over hate and apathy, and hope over despair.

We are on this journey together to engage with the stories of our faith: to engage with the stories of lament, fear, despair, and rage. To engage with the stories of community, hope, and hard work.

What do you say? Shall we embrace Lent together?

People:

It's easier to give up chocolate or coffee! In the face of the world's pain and grief, it is frightening to think of embracing such a journey.

Leader:

Of course it is!

But we're doing this together! In this church we hold each other up, we tend to each other, and we give each other courage.

Because, you know, God won't desert us. We are not alone.

People:

Well, in that case – let us begin!

The Ones Who Stayed
A charge to the church towards the start of Lent

In our biblical tradition, when they weren't busy deserting and denying him, many people stayed with Christ. Many never left, and saw him through to the end and beyond.

Some stayed with him – albeit in a fast-asleep-fashion – in the garden of Gethsemane. To their credit, they did wake up and try again.

Some stayed with him at the foot of the cross, perhaps reaching up to touch what they could – his foot, or ankle, or even bare wood – trying in their grief to convey comfort, love, presence.

What does it mean for us to be among those who stayed with the One who embodied Love?

In the face of betrayal and fear and division and violence and repression and all that would destroy Creation, we struggle to not run away but to continue the work of embodying love and justice, and peace.

Sometimes we are sound asleep in the midst of another's wrenching pain – Creation's wrenching pain – and yet, we wake up and try again.

Sometimes we reach out to touch just one small piece of Creation in some way, to heal what might be beyond healing, but that does not stop our love.

Sometimes that's all we can do at a given moment – all we can do is wake up, or bear witness, and continue to love.

Start where you are with what you have. Start, but do not stop there. And the only really effective way to do this is in community, with each other.

May it be so!

Never Again
(Reflection on Genesis 9:8-17)

Reader 1: When did “Never again” become “Here we go again” ?

Reader 2: Wildfires. Mass shootings. Category 5 hurricanes.

Reader 1: Species going extinct at alarming rates. Politics of supremacy and division. War.

Reader 2: Again. And again. And again.

Reader 1: When did “Never again” become “Oh no, not again”?

Reader 2: God said “Never again” and meant it. God said “Never again” and instead of returning to Business as Usual (floods in this case, and forty days in a stuffy ark), God made a new covenant with all Creation, so life could flourish.

Reader 1: When did our “Never again!” become “Again, and again, and again...”? And, more importantly, when will it stop?

(Read by the pastor or other worship leader; a time of silent reflection could follow this reading)

Sacred Heart

What breaks your heart? What holds your heart? What heals your heart?

Ancient Israelites had it right –
the heart is not the seat of emotion, but of will.

Love at its best feels really good
Caress of a lover
Puppies. Just puppies.
Laughter with friends

But love is first and foremost an act of will – willing the good for another.

What, then, breaks your will? What holds your will?
What heals your will?
What touches your will and gives it power, strength?

Speak softly to your heart gentle words of fierce determination and affirmation and hope.

Hope *in* your heart, your will, your strength.

Hope *in* the hearts of others.

Hope *in* the heart of God – that indescribable force bending towards justice and connectedness.
Join in, link up.

Don't be party to heartbreak.

You will participate in grief, but do not participate in the breaking of another's will.

Sacred heart – holiness in what it *could* choose – connectedness and integrity: love.

Even as tattered heart, wounded heart, but not isolated heart.

What breaks your heart?

What holds your heart?

What heals your heart?

Creation's Psalm: A Plea
(A take on Ps51: 6, 10-12)

From the eyes of Creation,
From the heart of Creation,
From the very bones of Creation,
Comes pleading without ceasing

Listen!
Listen and bear witness to Creation's embodied plea:

Create in me a clean heart
Wash away the toxins that crush my bones and my spirit: fear, hate, greed

I am Creation.

We are Creation

Creation's plea, humanity's confession:

Create in us a clean heart, renew our spirits, wash away our species' toxic need for power and dominion.

Restore us to your salvation, to your Web of Life, this community of all your Creation

O God, we plead, let us not be wasted
Let us not cast ourselves from the presence of all that is holy,
Let us not cast ourselves from the web of life,

O God, our God, restore us, sustain us, bring us back into right relationship with all Creation.
Create anew in us a clean heart and a willing spirit, oh God!

Amen.

Lent 3

John 2:13-16, Jesus drives out the money changers

This can be read by one reader, two readers, or responsively with the congregation.

A Kyrie for Rage

Creator God, God of love and mercy, and yes, God of your people's rage, we offer our prayers of confession, of purpose, and of gratitude for our rage. Strange words for a Kyrie, but here we are, God, in you and with you and for you.

Receive the prayers of your people.

For those times we have been filled with rage, and have harmed others through our words or deeds, God have mercy. And help us to change.

For those times we were filled with rage and did nothing about it, Christ have mercy. And help us to act.

For those times we were filled with rage and opted for silence, God have mercy. And help us to make noise.

For those times we were filled with rage and sought to channel it in constructive ways, we are grateful.

For those times when we call out injustice and did not fall into self-righteousness, we are pleasantly surprised and vow to keep this up.

For those times we were filled with the rage of hitting dead end after dead end, of beating our heads against a brick wall, for those times when helpless frustration takes its hold on us, O God, hold us in your courage and hope.

But always and ever, have mercy and help us to discern where and how the gift of rage may be spent, for the sake of your good creation.

Amen.

Taking Steps Toward the Empty Tomb

A ritual as you move towards Holy Week, perhaps Week 5, or Palm Sunday

Set up ahead of time

Create notecards that each contain a headline, or handwritten line or two that describe occasions of hope. Samples might be: stories of victories from Our Children's Trust cases (Google this if you're not familiar with it – this good work with and for youth and environmental justice), articles about young people creating non-profits to help those in need worldwide (Facebook is full of such stories, but make sure they're actually real), reclamation and restoration projects for wetlands and other areas such as the recent Klamath River removal of dams. Look for examples in your own community and in your own congregation, as well.

Arrange for four or five people to read from the cards during the litany time; have them stand up front with the worship leader for the reading.

Responsive Prayer as we move towards the empty tomb

Introduction by pastor or other worship leader

We are taking steps towards the empty tomb, that place and time where death does not hold sway, but openness and possibility reign.

We are taking steps towards the empty tomb, that place and time where a new Creation is possible, and is peeking cautiously around the corner.

We will move through the shadows of betrayal and crucifixion, taking our steps towards the empty tomb of Easter. And we glimpse a new creation in bits and pieces.

We find glimpses and promises of hope. We become glimpses and promises of hope for others.

Responsive Prayer

One: God, you have always led your people in hope, embracing us with your love that never stops. Even as we lament Creation's struggles and devastation, our struggles and devastation, we still celebrate and give thanks for the gifts of hope we find.

Many: O God of hope and possibility, we give thanks!

Readers begin reading from the cards, one at a time, indicating to the people to give the response below after each card is read. (If there are lots of cards, read two or three at a time before the congregational response). At the end of the prayer, the Readers place their cards on the Communion Table or altar, or a small table nearby.

Many: "For these, and more, O God of hope and possibility, we give thanks."

One: As we enter into the shadows of Holy Week, let us remember embodied stories of hope and possibilities. Let us remember these glimpses of the empty tomb and of new life.

Many: Amen!

Palm Sunday, or a lead-in to Holy Week

Lament, Rant, and Affirmation of Faith: Most likely a Dramatic Reading

Reader 1: We know what is happening. We know what it takes to bring healing to our earth.

Reader 2: In confession and grief we will enter into the shadows. And with each other – in community – we will sit together, and the light *will* return.

Reader 3: *And*, doing needs to emerge from grieving. *And*, we – Church – need to figure out the “doing” together

Reader 1: It will include a mighty wrestling with
Denial
Status Quo
Business as Usual

Reader 2:
Government and Politics
Capitalism
Racism
Identity
Progress

Reader 3
Privilege
Runaway Individualism
Religion
Power over

Reader 1: Doing needs to emerge from grieving.

Reader 2: And we – Church – need to figure out the “doing” together

Reader 3: It will include a mighty wrestling.

Reader 2: For this is not your felt-board easy Bible stories church. This is not your nice feel-good church. This is not your happy church with latest church growth fads in hand.

Reader 1: This is church as a snarling tiger defending her young, the future of all Creation whimpering in the den, our grandchildren of all species, as the predator closes in.

Reader 3; This is not your church of gentle Holy Week candlelight, reading graphic scriptures of torture and execution and saying, “Oh, that poor man!” and then leaving him there in the cold and quiet sanctuary.

Reader 2: This is a church on the front lines of extinction, standing with the glaciers, the pollinators, the children in cages, and future generations. Or, at least, it had better be!

Reader 1: This is a witnessing women at the cross kind of church, hearts torn open with grief and loss, but who somehow manage to put one foot in front of the other, and eventually find themselves as witnesses to Resurrection.

Reader 2: *That's Church.*

Reader 3: *That's Beloved Community.*

Reader 2: Ragged, tear-stained, muddy, damn angry and persistent, and wrenchingly and wondrously in love with all Creation.

Reader 1: That is Church that won't give up.

Reader 2: So we sit in the shadow of this Holy Week, and feel it all. Weeping, snarling, or simply in silence.

Reader 3: And then we get up and move on, because there's more work ahead of us. And a new world *is* possible.

Reader 1: The shadows can't hold us. The tomb *won't* hold us.



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