

SHARED LONGINGS · LENT 2024 ·

shared



LONGINGS



STONY PLAIN
ALLIANCE CHURCH

What is Lent?

A central season in the Church calendar is the season of Lent. Lent marks the time from Ash Wednesday until Holy Saturday (the day before Easter Sunday). It is one of the most ancient Christian practices dating back to at least the early 300's AD. It is a forty day fast, with breaks given on Sundays, that mirrors Jesus' fast in the wilderness after his baptism. In her book, *The Liturgical Year*, Joan Chittister writes,

"Lent comes to train us, like spiritual athletes, to keep our eyes, with Jesus, on the road to Jerusalem."

Lent is a solemn season that prepares us for Easter. It is a time to reflect on our lives, the direction they are going and ask of ourselves: How am I living into the reality of being a new creation? How am I stuck in the old ways of my flesh (not my physical body but the part of me that has been twisted by sin and its broken ways)? Lent is an invitation to identify the things in our lives that are keeping us from experiencing fullness of life with Jesus, one another, and ourselves.

Lent is also something meant to be experienced within the context of community. While many of us will choose individual fasts for the duration of Lent, we are inviting you take part in weekly fasts that we will practice together as a community.

Consider inviting others to join you: your life group, a friend, or family members. Each week at our Sunday gathering, we will be coming to the communion table to break our fast as a larger community, to celebrate the provision of Christ, and to declare our dependence on him.

shared longings

One of the themes that Jesus has put on our hearts as a church in this last season is to pay attention to our appetites. The things we hunger and thirst most for reveal a lot about who we are as human beings. It is not an exaggeration to say that most of our decisions and choices are motivated by how we seek to satisfy the longings of our hearts, souls, minds, and bodies. It is also true of us that we tend to be impatient with our appetites. When I feel the first pangs of discomfort, I will often run to the thing that most quickly dulls the ache, whether it is good for me or not.

The truth is God created us with good longings that He shares and provides the satisfaction for. When we ignore those truest and deepest longings, our lives become driven by wants that are distortions of what God has placed within us. To then chase after what we want believing that it will somehow make us whole leads to entanglements that rob us of life instead of enhancing life. In turn, our thinking and behaviours become dominated by the powers of rights and freedoms instead of the way of self-giving love and, before long, we are wondering how we got into such a mess.

Lent is a practice designed to help rid us of harmful attachments as we learn to trust Jesus for the ways he wants to satisfy the deepest longings of our souls. As you make your way through this Lent guide you will see a pattern to our reflections. We will be identifying our wants, renouncing entanglements, and asking Jesus to reveal the shared longing that he is calling us to embrace. By fasting from our wants in the strength the Holy Spirit provides and trusting Jesus with our appetites, we believe that we can live more fully into the life God has prepared for us.

May the love and peace of Christ sustain you in this season of Lent as we anticipate the glory of resurrection.

WADE PATON

Here is what you will encounter week by week!

STORY

Read through the personal reflections from our staff team. What do you relate to? Does their story stir anything in you? How can their reflections help you to better understand your own story?

READ

Slowly read through the passages offered. How do they relate to the reflection? What is Spirit revealing through them?

REFLECT

Take time to work through the prompting questions to reflect on how you may be grasping for wants and becoming entangled rather than embracing shared longings with God.

RESPOND

Using the guided prompts, take time to respond in confession, asking God to identify, cultivate, and provide for those truer, deeper longings.

FAST

An ancient practice of the people of God is fasting. Fasting is the act of abstaining from something in order to focus on Jesus instead. Every week, you will be invited to participate in a different fast to help detach from our surface wants and pay attention to our longings.

How you engage with these fasts are up to you. At the end of the week as your fast comes to a close, we invite you to reflect on how going without has allowed you to be with Jesus instead. How has life has been different while taking a break from satisfying your normal wants? Share with those who are journeying with you. Encourage one another along the way.

RECEIVE

Take time to receive from Jesus at the Table of Blessing where we find fulfillment for our deepest longings in him and through him. Join us on Sunday mornings as we come to the Table together and experience his mercy, goodness, and love.

Ash Wednesday

"For dust you are and to dust you will return"

Genesis 3:19 NIV

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. It calls us to recognize the brevity of life and to remember that just as we have been made of dust, we will one day return to it. It's easy to go about our days thinking that we will live forever, but the reality is that our days are limited. Ash Wednesday functions to interrupt us from the rhythms of life, reminding us of our human frailties. It challenges us to consider how we are living, what we value, and the ways we use our time.

If we let it, Ash Wednesday can work like a reset button. It can reestablish our true orientation – life with Christ in the kingdom of God. We allow our perspective to be renewed. Because life is a vapour, we acknowledge that we don't have time to waste, waiting for tomorrow.

As you enter this season of Lent on this Ash Wednesday take some time to reconsider your life, your death, and the direction your life is taking.

On Ash Wednesday we will be having a quiet and reflective service where there will be space to prepare for Lent through confession, and also in receiving the ashes as a mark of the beginning of the Lenten season. In preparation for the service, or if you can't attend, we encourage you to ask these two questions.

What do I need to confess before entering into Lent?

Is there anything I need to give up before entering into Lent?

As we gather together for our Ash Wednesday service, at **7PM February 14**, there will be space to continue asking these questions and to respond in confession and repentance.

fulfillment

It is hard to wait. It can feel unnatural, unnerving, uncomfortable. We want our hopes, dreams and longings to be realized now. We want the things in our lives that are painful, wrong and messy to get better or be fixed immediately. Perhaps you could say we've been conditioned to believe that waiting is unproductive, a waste of time, something that doesn't serve a purpose.

But what if waiting was the norm? What if we flipped the entangled idea that waiting is a bad thing and rather welcomed waiting as good – a purposeful and fulfilling part of our lives?

As I've grappled with this switch in thinking about waiting lately, I've been drawn to John 15 where Jesus asks us to remain in him as he remains in us. "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you." (The MSG) Before I long for him, Jesus longs for me. Before I love him, Jesus loves me. Before I wait for him, Jesus waits for me. Before I remain in him, he remains in me.

Remaining in Jesus, as He remains in us is an image of union – the branch is united with the vine, and that allows the vine to provide life to the branch, bringing nourishment, strength, and resilience. The result for the branch is blossoming, fruitfulness, abundant life – the Fruit of the Spirit.

Ultimately though, remaining in Jesus results in Jesus being our fulfillment. It's hard for my mind and heart to grasp, but there is no limit to the remaining, the union, the fulfillment to be found in Jesus. He himself is enough.

My prayer these days has become: "Jesus, heal our union. Jesus, remain in me and show me how to remain in you, so that you can bear your fruit in me."

KIMBERLY MCELROY

READ

John 15:4-5

REFLECT

How is the wanting of **immediacy** expressed in my life?

What entanglements are showing up in my life as a result of chasing after this want?

If my wanting of **immediacy** is actually a shared longing with God for **fulfillment**, what might pursuit of **fulfillment** over **immediacy** look like?

RESPOND

Start with a confession. Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender that arise in you.

I confess that I have wanted ____ more than ____.

I confess the ways that I have become entangled by this want and renounce the lie that ____.

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

I confess that you are God and I am not and that your longing for ____ is actually my deeper longing.

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from **the fast way** this week.

Take the slow way. Choose the long line. Have a n unhurried meal. Embrace opportunities to wait.

RECEIVE

Read Psalm 23. Right in the middle of our entanglements (our enemies), Jesus meets us with love and provision.

Holy Spirit, what do you want to give me from the table you have prepared for me?

shalom

Do what makes you happy. We often hear this refrain championed as the way to walk through life. More often than I'd like to admit, I accept the challenge and do just that. I gravitate towards comfort, towards the things that make me feel good. This shows up in my life to varying degrees, in a myriad of different ways. In the foods I eat, the social engagements I choose to accept or decline, the things I buy, the mindless scroll on social media or binging tv. I create a space of escape where I feel in control and comfort reigns. But in the midst of that, God is moved to the periphery. I find myself saying yes to me, instead of saying yes to God.

This is not to say God doesn't want us to be happy. Far from it. Jesus himself is joy embodied. Rather, it's in partnering with God in his kingdom where there is a true and lasting joy and peace - one that looks different than our own fleeting attempts to conjure up comfort. A friend recently asked me what the highlights of the last year were. I surprised myself by responding that one would be learning to step outside my comfort zone more. For someone whose default is often 'no thanks' if something feels hard or uncomfortable, much of the joy in the last year was found in saying yes to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It was in the space of trusting God to be faithful to his promise "my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid", where there was goodness and growth.

I think of John 10 where Jesus calls his sheep out of the pen to follow him into the pasture. We are given the choice, stay within the fences where it might feel familiar and comfortable or follow the Good Shepherd into the wild where there is abundance and wholeness. Where in the presence of God, shalom reigns.

EMALEE LANE

FEBRUARY 26 - MARCH 3

READ

John 14:27 | John 10:2-4

REFLECT

How is the wanting of **comfort** expressed in my life?

What entanglements are showing up in my life as a result of chasing after this want?

If my wanting of **comfort** is actually a shared longing with God for **shalom**, what might pursuit of **shalom** over **comfort** look like?

RESPOND

Start with a confession. Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender that arise in you.

I confess that I have wanted ____ more than ____.

I confess the ways that I have become entangled by this want and renounce the lie that ____.

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

I confess that you are God and I am not and that your longing for ____ is actually my deeper longing.

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from **what brings you comfort** this week.

Take the week off from what entertains, distracts or delights.

RECEIVE

Read Psalm 23. Right in the middle of our entanglements (our enemies), Jesus meets us with love and provision.

Holy Spirit, what do you want to give me from the table you have prepared for me?

righteousness

One of the phrases that I have heard a lot over the last decade is something like “I want to be on the right side of history on this.” This statement is often uttered about a cultural issue which, more often than not, is deeply nuanced and without a clear solution. When something comes without a clear solution and our desire is to be on the right side of history (which is hard to know since history is only written after it happens), one needs to ask, what drives this desire?

I think at the core of the desire for rightness is the longing for righteousness, to live in right relationship with God, with others, and with the creation. In the words of the Prophet Micah: “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). The problem is that we don’t always know how to do this and when things are nuanced, it is especially difficult.

There’s a lot of reasons why it can be easier to grasp for rightness over righteousness, but I wonder how many of them come down to fear. Fear of what if I’m wrong? What if I’m responsible for supporting something or someone that damages people? What if it turns out that I was against God? When we make choices out of fear, we are making movement away from righteousness because God does not make decisions out of fear, nor does he use fear as a motivator. Instead, as Scripture tells us, perfect love sends away fear, and the direct message from God and his messengers often include the words “don’t be afraid.” Fear destabilizes us and causes us to look for anything that can provide stability.

As a result, when we don’t walk in righteousness, we end up moving toward controlling the story and nurturing an obsession with certainty, also called rightness. The desire to be right and certain can bring with it pride, superiority, and judgment — where we look down on those who hold a different view than us. It can also keep us from faith as we put more trust in our viewpoints and opinions (and even our theology!) than we put in Jesus. But righteousness must depend on trust in Jesus. A life of apprenticeship to Jesus is a life where we place certainty in him, and allow him to lead.

MATT KINNIBURGH

READ

Matthew 6:33

REFLECT

How is the wanting of **certainty or rightness** expressed in my life?

What entanglements are showing up in my life as a result of chasing after this want?

If my wanting of **rightness or certainty** is actually a shared longing with God for **righteousness**, what might pursuit of **righteousness** over **certainty** look like?

RESPOND

Start with a confession. Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender that arise in you.

I confess that I have wanted ____ more than ____.

I confess the ways that I have become entangled by this want and renounce the lie that ____.

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

I confess that you are God and I am not and that your longing for ____ is actually my deeper longing.

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from **being right** this week.

Leave things unsaid. Give up reading or watching your go-to news or information source.

RECEIVE

Read Psalm 23. Right in the middle of our entanglements (our enemies), Jesus meets us with love and provision.

Holy Spirit, what do you want to give me from the table you have prepared for me?

intimacy

Relationships are part of the fabric of our lives. We are undoubtedly social creatures, created for connection. There is very little that happens in our lives completely outside of the reach of another person's influence, for better or for worse. Our souls are shaped by how we are or have been loved or rejected by one another. Families of origin, friendships, romantic connections, neighbours, colleagues: these form the framework of our existence. Just as everything in creation had been declared good by the Creator, the first utterance of "not good" was in reference to man being alone (Gen 2:18). We were made for one another. Jesus said that all commandments, all paths to fullness of life, could be realized in only two – to love God and love others (Mark 12:30-31). But we know that simple is not always easy.

Just as we often exchange love of God for love of weak, powerless replacements – idols – so too do we grasp for acceptance instead of loving one another and being loved.

In an effort to feel secure, we become entangled in all sorts of unhealthy patterns, behaviours, and image management to prove, validate and define our existence. Our true longing, though, is not that elusive, it's just vulnerable. It requires trust. We were made for intimacy, and God shares this longing with us – he created us for it. I recently read a quote that upended my soul:

"The more you heal, the less you see attachment as affection, attachment as connection, codependency as support, disagreement as an attack, enmeshment as intimacy, lack of boundaries as empathy, external validation as internal self-love, and trauma bonding as healing." – Rev. David N. Moore

I see myself in this more than I care to admit. My soul is entangled in all sorts of cheap imitations of intimacy. But as I heal and give God and others access to the real me, my surface desires are exchanged for that deeper, truer, and more beautiful, shared longing for intimacy. In love, God honours our autonomy and waits with endless patience for us to accept his invitation to be welcomed into deeper communion with him and one another – that eternal, life-giving, and holy kind of relationship that can't be coerced, imitated, or replicated. It is love.

SHELEENA BOULIANNE

READ

John 17:20-25 | Colossians 3:12-15

REFLECT

How is the wanting of **acceptance** expressed in my life?

What entanglements are showing up in my life as a result of chasing after this want?

If my wanting of **acceptance** is actually a shared longing with God for **intimacy**, what might pursuit of **intimacy** over **acceptance** look like?

RESPOND

Start with a confession. Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender that arise in you.

I confess that I have wanted ____ more than ____.

I confess the ways that I have become entangled by this want and renounce the lie that ____.

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

I confess that you are God and I am not and that your longing for ____ is actually my deeper longing.

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from **image management** this week.

Resist the urge to explain yourself, elevate yourself, or secure surface acceptance for yourself.

RECEIVE

Read Psalm 23. Right in the middle of our entanglements (our enemies), Jesus meets us with love and provision.

Holy Spirit, what do you want to give me from the table you have prepared for me?

meaning

We can all relate to the desire to be important. To be valued. To have something to offer. The unique thing about humans among the created order is that we're all on a quest to find meaning for our lives.

For some, we may chase prestige in our careers. For others, it may be filling up our schedules to the brim, because the busier we are, the more we have to offer. For others, we may try to find our meaning in our families, in a cause, or by investing time in activities that we're good at.

I know what this is like. Being only a year and a half into full-time pastoring, I've felt like I have little to offer and a lot to prove. In my pursuit of importance, I become entangled in all kind of ways of trying to accomplish as much as I can and prove my competency to others. I bet I'm not alone in feeling like this.

The way of Jesus is different. Jesus himself, the king of kings, taught us what being a servant looked like (Mark 9:35). Jesus, who had the busiest, most demanding schedule in the world, still took the time to seek solitude and intimacy with God the Father (Luke 5: 15-16).

His worth and meaning were not dependent on what he accomplished and were confirmed by God at his baptism (before he even started doing ministry!) when He said, "You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1: 11). Jesus did not need to validate or broadcast his own importance because the meaning of his life depended solely on his identity as God's son.

God longs for us to know that our purpose and identity in him is secure, eternal, and rooted in love. By following the Jesus way of servanthood, we get to exchange striving for importance with resting in the meaning he gives us.

BEN MUELLER

READ

Matthew 23:11

REFLECT

How is the wanting of **importance** expressed in my life?

What entanglements are showing up in my life as a result of chasing after this want?

If my wanting of **importance** is actually a shared longing with God for **meaning**, what might pursuit of **meaning** over **importance** look like?

RESPOND

Start with a confession. Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender that arise in you.

I confess that I have wanted ____ more than ____.

I confess the ways that I have become entangled by this want and renounce the lie that ____.

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

I confess that you are God and I am not and that your longing for ____ is actually my deeper longing.

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from **work** this week.

Take a true, full day sabbath to be reminded that you are not what you produce.

RECEIVE

Read Psalm 23. Right in the middle of our entanglements (our enemies), Jesus meets us with love and provision.

Holy Spirit, what do you want to give me from the table you have prepared for me?

eternity

Our world today makes it easy for everyone to be seen. We all have our different platforms—schools, jobs, social media—which make it easy for us to express who we are, what we think, how we live. We yearn and crave for influence—that our carefully crafted perspective and opinions would be known, would be agreed with, would be heard, and responded to with wholehearted agreement. Social media makes this easy. The Algorithm that discreetly manufactures our experience of the world around us makes it seem as though our thoughts are the same as everyone else's. That when we have a distinct experience, opinion, or preference, so will the people around us.

We long for this kind of power to be true: the power to be heralded as right, as thoughtful, intellectual, experienced...

As years go by and history textbooks evolve, there is something inside of humankind that yearns for legacy. We want to each find ourselves on the right side of history, to be among the great minds and characters that stand out through the ages. We long to be remembered, and the best way to cultivate that legacy is to put ourselves forth in the world: opinion and knowledge and perspective, in the hopes that it will be influential, that what we bring may be wrestled with and contended with for years to come. We want to make our mark.

Jesus gives us a grander invitation, however. To pursue him, the glory of his name even above our own, is met with the promise of eternity. The promise that we would not be forgotten in time, that we would not be overlooked or unseen. No! The promise of Jesus is that, in following him, we are seen and known more intimately than the masses may ever see or know us. We are loved, valued, cared for, and invited into an eternity that has much more to offer than a name on a page of a history book.

AMANDA KRAUSE

READ

2 Corinthians 4:18

REFLECT

How is the wanting of **legacy** expressed in my life?

What entanglements are showing up in my life as a result of chasing after this want?

If my wanting of **legacy** is actually a shared longing with God for **eternity**, what might pursuit of **eternity** over **legacy** look like?

RESPOND

Start with a confession. Invite the Holy Spirit to reveal barriers to surrender that arise in you.

I confess that I have wanted ____ more than ____.

I confess the ways that I have become entangled by this want and renounce the lie that ____.

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

I confess that you are God and I am not and that your longing for ____ is actually my deeper longing.

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from **social media** this week.

Distance yourself from ways to influence or have your voice heard.

RECEIVE

Read Psalm 23. Right in the middle of our entanglements (our enemies), Jesus meets us with love and provision.

Holy Spirit, what do you want to give me from the table you have prepared for me?

Holy Week

Lent prepares us to make way for Jesus as journey with him through Holy Week, the week leading up to Easter Sunday. Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, when we remember the Triumphal Entry as Jesus approached Jerusalem to the celebration of the people. As soon as the shouts and praises quiet down though, we recognize that Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem will result in his death. Jesus knows where this road is leading, and yet, he still has to walk through the week.

Everyday this Holy Week we will sit with Jesus in the book of John, walking with him as he walks towards the cross. This is the place where all of our shared longing find fulfillment in Christ. The ultimate shared longing, love, is perfectly expressed and demonstrated at the cross.

Please plan on coming to all four of our Holy Week services as we practice the way of Jesus together.

PALM SUNDAY - MARCH 24 | 10 AM

GOOD FRIDAY - MARCH 29 | 10 AM

HOLY SATURDAY - MARCH 30 | 7:30 PM

EASTER SUNDAY - MARCH 31 | 10 AM

MARCH 24 - 31

Take time to slowly read the stories.

What is Jesus like in these stories?

How is he aware of his death?

What does it mean to identify with him in his sufferings?

PALM SUNDAY | John 12:12-19

HOLY MONDAY | John 12:1-11

HOLY TUESDAY | John 12:20-36

HOLY WEDNESDAY | John 13:18-32

MAUNDY THURSDAY | John 13:1-17, 31-38

GOOD FRIDAY | John 18:1-19:37

HOLY SATURDAY | John 19:38-42



STONY PLAIN
ALLIANCE CHURCH

www.spaonline.com
info@spaonline.com
780.963.2082

FULLNESS OF LIFE FOR EVERYONE,
BY PRACTICING THE WAY OF JESUS TOGETHER