

WHAT IS LENT?

ASH WEDNESDAY
MARCH 5

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,

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

Genesis 3:19 NIV

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

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.

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.

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.

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 to take part in weekly fasts that we will practice together as a community.

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.

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.

On Ash Wednesday we have a quiet and reflective service with space to prepare for Lent through confession and receiving ashes on your forehead 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 questions.

How is the fear of death keeping me enslaved? How is Jesus inviting me to embrace life this lent? Is there anything I need to give up before entering into Lent?

As we gather together for our Ash Wednesday service, at 7PM on March 5, there will be space to continue asking these questions and to respond in confession and repentance.

DEATH TO LIFE

Our story as humans begins with life. Abundant. Eternal. Joyful. Life that was free and full. God spoke and formed what was formless, filled what was void, and breathed life into His creation. Life abounded and it was very good. However, life was not the only power at work in the world. Death, though nothing but a vaporous threat at the time, was seeking to mar God's good creation and steal life from those who had only known vibrancy. Temptation. Decision. Shame. Death became the curse that would now plague humanity as the seemingly unbeatable enemy of life.

For millennia, deaths sting touched every single person and the fear of inevitable end, a plunging into mysterious darkness, afflicted each one that would draw breath. With this, death became more than just the end of physical life; it became the force behind pride, certainty, control, perfection, assumption and despair. Destructive choices. Broken relationships. Fearful existence. Death was the adversary that stood in rebellion against God and the way of forever life that he had intended for us.

What could be done about this curse of death? Death itself must be defeated. Who could do such a thing? Only Jesus. Our Emmanuel, God with us, came into the world as the source of all life to break the curse of death and set us free. How did Jesus do this? When he absorbed the curse into his flesh and blood at the cross when he died, took the curse to the grave, and then rose again to life, death stayed dead and Life emerged victorious.

Hebrews 2:14-15 says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

As we journey through this season of Lent, we will hear the invitation of Jesus to choose life over the broken curse of death in our lives. Every time we respond to his voice by embracing humility, mystery, surrender, faithfulness, curiosity and hope, we are walking in the way that leads to fullness of Life.

This booklet will serve as your guide through Lent as we enter into these days together as church. And as we move

toward Holy Week and our Easter Celebration, my prayer is that each one of us will be able to declare with all of hearts the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

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? 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 moving towards death rather than embracing life in God.

RESPOND

Using the guided prompts, take time to respond in confession. In repentance how can you turn towards God and others?

RECEIVE

Take time to listen to the voice of Jesus and receive his mercy and grace.

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 pay attention .

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?

PERFECTIONISM TO FAITHFULNESS

"Practice makes perfect." I wish it did. I wish that 'perfect' was an attainable goal. In school I had a measurable target: get 100%. In life, the target is much less accessible.

I lived for a long time with the belief that if I wasn't perfect, then I would be judged. My failures, my shortcomings, my weaknesses would be seen, criticized and deem me unworthy. My identity was rooted in the idea of perfectionism, and it took a toll.

I actively silenced myself—in classrooms, on teams, even in prayer. "Why pray in front of others when I'll just say the wrong words? It's better just to listen and be quiet." If I wasn't certain that I would succeed—and succeed perfectly—in something, I found it easier to not even try.

Anxiety, depression, and a crippling fear of judgement held me in chains for too long.

This verse in 1 Corinthians reminds us that God isn't about perfectionism. He isn't looking to hand out gold stars for 100% grades in life or Christianity. God sees our trying, our struggling, failing, and trying again. He holds it all and does so without a judgement of condemnation.

When I began to step out in faith, willing to try and fail than to never try at all, something amazing happened. God honoured my faithfulness in the trying and showed me that was all I ever needed in the first place. To use my voice in prayer now is often met with whispers from the Lord, affirmations that my voice matters—even if I sometimes use the wrong words.

I recently heard the adapted, "practice makes progress," and my heart soared at the opportunity captured within this language. To practice, to try, to walk faithfully forward trusting that God sees our efforts... That's so much better than striving ceaselessly for perfection.

When we are faithful to trusting God and moving in his Spirit, to following Jesus as he leads, then God too is faithful, in moving us forward—not into perfectionism, but into a beautiful progress marked by his loving kindness and grace.

Amanda Krause

MARCH 10-16

READ

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

REFLECT

Invite the Holy Spirit into your reflections and welcome the voice of Jesus to help you answer these questions.

- 1. How is the fear of death showing up in my life as perfectionism?
- 2. What lies am I believing about myself, others, or God that contribute to this fear?

RESPOND

Make confession.

Jesus, I surrender perfection to you and agree that faithfulness is the better pathway to life in you.

I renounce the lie that _

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

Today I choose to turn away from perfectionism and turn toward faithfulness.

Walk in repentance by turning towards others.

Jesus, who is someone that has been affected by the ways that perfectionism has expressed itself in my life? How can I be a person of life towards them by walking in faithfulness?

RECEIVE

Spend some time listening for the voice of Jesus and receiving his mercy and grace.

What gifts of life do you want to give me in exchange for the fear of death that causes me to turn to perfection to feel safe?

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from social media and internet surfing. We recognize that some of you need to do these things for work, but what if that was it? What would a week without social media and the internet do to your ability to be present with Christ? What would it do to your levels of contentment? What if you just signed off for the week?

CONTROL TO SURRENDER

"The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need."

Psalm 23:1, NLT

This last year was a year of learning to ask for help. I confess this isn't something that comes naturally to me. I tend to be someone who defaults to control. How can I carry all the things and manage all the variables? Sometimes it is easy to live into the illusion that I can craft a sphere of self-sufficiency. The refrain becomes "I've got this". I forget to let God be God, and simultaneously sideline community.

In many ways it took being confronted by my own weakness, my own human frailty, to see all the ways that I've grasped for control. Life circumstances meant the breakdown of self-reliance. It became clear that I couldn't do it all on my own. Of course, this has always been true, but it laid bare the pervasiveness of a mentality of self-sufficiency. When areas of life felt like they could no longer be controlled, I had to learn the way of being instead of doing. Be in God's presence and receive his love and wisdom. The first step in moving towards life was acknowledging my need and bringing it to God in surrender.

We are created as finite creatures and there is a dependency upon God that is good and beautiful. It is here in the awareness of this reality that life is found. In coming to God in prayer there is movement from self-reliance to vulnerability and intimacy. For me, it was learning to further trust in the goodness of God. Learning to invite other people in. Replacing isolation with relationship and striving with rest. God has a better way that doesn't involve mustering up the strength to do things on my own, instead it is a way of peace and richness of relationship.

Jesus doesn't call us to be without lack or have it all figured out before approaching him. Rather it is in those very things the unfinished, unknown, the heavy, the comfortable and the uncomfortable that he calls us to lay down at his feet. It's a moment by moment acknowledgment that he is our good shepherd and we have all that we need in him.

Emalee Lane

MARCH 17-23

READ

Psalm 23

REFLECT

Invite the Holy Spirit into your reflections and welcome the voice of Jesus to help you answer these questions.

- 1. How is the fear of death showing up in my life as control?
- 2. What lies am I believing about myself, others, or God that contribute to this fear?

RESPOND

Make confession.

Jesus, I surrender control to you and agree that surrender is the better pathway to life in you.

I renounce the lie that

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

Today I choose to turn away from control and turn toward surrender.

Walk in repentance by turning towards others.

Jesus, who is someone that has been affected by the ways that control has expressed itself in my life? How can I be a person of life towards them by walking in surrender?

RECEIVE

Spend some time listening for the voice of Jesus and receiving his mercy and grace.

What gifts of life do you want to give me in exchange for the fear of death that causes me to turn to control to feel safe?

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from radio, podcasts, and music. We have constant noise going on our world, and yet God comes in the still small whisper. What if you were to take a week without constant noise to just let yourself sit in the silence, to be still before God, and to be present to him in the moment?

CERTAINTY TO MYSTERY

I really, really want to know things. I want to know how things work. I want to master concepts. I want to understand people's motivations. I want to know the meaning behind everything. I want to insulate myself from all of life's uncertainties and be prepared for every outcome. As Jesus brings healing to different parts of my heart and past, I recognize that this penchant for *needing to know* is very old and deeply rooted in all kinds of fear. The pursuit of certainty was my attempt to keep myself safe.

But belief does not require certainty. The text does not indicate that Thomas doubted the possibility of Jesus' resurrection. Rather, his inquisitive and rational mind longed for evidence to back the claim – he wanted a tangible revelation of his own. When we define faith as an unwavering certainty in a set of beliefs, we create a hostile environment for people experiencing doubts, hesitations or questions that can cause hurt, shame or even despair. But like Thomas, who of us with our western, rational worldview would *not* demand evidence?

When we witness a miracle, do we not immediately turn to every other rational explanation before naming it as such?

When we hear a confession of faith that doesn't fit our boxes, do we not question its validity?

When we sense the prompting of the Spirit, do we not run it through filters of skepticism before responding to God's voice?

Jesus has no condemnation for Thomas; only invitation. In an act of compassion, Jesus offers his body to be inspected by Thomas to bring his soul to rest. Look and see! It's okay! I know your hesitations and I will meet you in them.

But Jesus also knows that the pursuit of certainty will always rob us of life. He promises a better way. "Blessed are those who believe in me without seeing." He does not ask us to deny our doubts or 'simply' set our questions aside. He knows what it is to be human. But he *does* invite us to let go of the ways we cling to certainty to ease our fears and give us a false sense of security and control. Instead, we can surrender to a mystery far greater – a Mystery of love, goodness and perfect peace that is resurrection life

Sheleena Boulianne

MARCH 24-30

READ

John 20:24-29

REFLECT

Invite the Holy Spirit into your reflections and welcome the voice of Jesus to help you answer these questions.

- 1. How is the fear of death showing up in my life as certainty?
- 2. What lies am I believing about myself, others, or God that contribute to this fear?

RESPOND

Make confession.

Jesus, I surrender certainty to you and agree that mystery is the better pathway to life in you.

I renounce the lie that

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

Today I choose to turn away from certainty and turn toward mystery.

Walk in repentance by turning towards others.

Jesus, who is someone that has been affected by the ways that certainty has expressed itself in my life? How can I be a person of life towards them by walking in mystery?

RECEIVE

Spend some time listening for the voice of Jesus and receiving his mercy and grace.

What gifts of life do you want to give me in exchange for the fear of death that causes me to turn to certainty to feel safe?

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from the way of busyness this week. Take the slow way. Choose the long line. Have an unhurried meal. Embrace opportunities to wait. How can you be more present to Christ this week by slowing down and being still.

DESPAIR TO HOPE

We are trained by movies and media to expect easy resolution to our despair. The hero saves the day. The guy gets the girl. The underdog trains hard and wins the championship. I love military movies and sports stories where sheer grit and determination conquers all. But real life gets hard, sometimes very, very, very hard and resolution so unattainable.

My more recent health challenges caught me in a riptide of despair, the intensity of pain and dysfunction pulling me under. I remember lying in bed so many nights with my phone in my hand with 9-1 already typed, my thumb hovering over one more 1 to complete a call for help. Disease and dysfunction draining any determination.

I used to think of hope as something that I had to churn up, to create ideas of hope in my mind, to strive for hope, or at the very least it depended on me to cling to hope. Instead, what I experienced is that Hope is a person. Hope is Jesus Christ. Hope dives into the deep to rescue me. Hope fights for me. Hope breathes for me. Hope journeys with me. Hope holds me. Hope hears me. Hope creates a survival glow in the darkness.

Despair can feel all consuming, sneaky, ever attacking, drowning out hope. Moment by moment, I needed to decide will I companion with despair or will I companion with Hope? Really this is a challenge to my trust. Will I trust Jesus even when all is death around me? To choose the way of life, I repeated the simple phrase of "Trusting Jesus!", whenever the despair was sucking me under. That phrase became the short form of declaring that I trust that Jesus is with me. I trust that Hope will never leave me nor forsake me. In the midst of all that is horrific and unbearable, there is Hope, because Jesus holds true as the anchor of my soul.

I choose life. I choose Jesus. I choose Hope.

Linda Stover

MARCH 31-APRIL 6

READ

Hebrews 6:18-19, Romans 15:13

REFLECT

Invite the Holy Spirit into your reflections and welcome the voice of Jesus to help you answer these questions.

- 1. How is the fear of death showing up in my life as despair?
- 2. What lies am I believing about myself, others, or God that contribute to this fear?

RESPOND

Make confession.

Jesus, I surrender despair to you and agree that hope is the better pathway to life in you.

I renounce the lie that

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

Today I choose to turn away from despair and turn toward hope.

Walk in repentance by turning towards others.

Jesus, who is someone that has been affected by the ways that despair has expressed itself in my life? How can I be a person of life towards them by walking in hope?

RECEIVE

Spend some time listening for the voice of Jesus and receiving his mercy and grace.

What gifts of life do you want to give me in exchange for the fear of death that causes me to turn to despair?

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from thoughts of despair this week. Each time your thoughts get fixated on despair or start spinning on topics of worry, choose instead to declare truth. You may use my phrase of "Trusting Jesus!" or choose a verse that directly combats the lie that is leading you to despair. Invite Jesus to reveal Himself to you as Hope, and look for the ways His Presence is breaking through the darkness with bits of hope.

PRIDE TO HUMILITY

APRIL 7-13

Pride is a master of deception. It can show up in many ways for different people. For some, pride presents itself as arrogance and an overabundance of confidence. For others, it may show up in the complete opposite way; a way that looks like humility, but really, it's just us holding ourselves to higher standards than everyone else. Or, it may arrive as a need to control everything, or to do everything.

In this story of Adam and Eve in the garden, they were created to be who they were; loved children of God, created to be in relationship with him, and to steward God's created order. But through deception, pride crept its way in. They decided they wanted to be more than what God created them for. Instead of humbly accepting their limits and acknowledging God's authority, they chose to try to be something more than they were created to be.

Lots of us find ourselves in this story today. While I'm sure that many of us are not currently living in a garden with talking snakes, pride sneaks its way into our lives as it did with Adam and Eve. Pride can cause many symptoms (many that we see in this story)- guilt, shame, entitlement, fear, burnout, stress, and death. A death to self. A death to our limits. A death to who we were created to be.

But Genesis teaches us that embracing humility is actually a gift to ourselves and others. Humility does not mean to think that you are less than others. Humility is to walk in a way that acknowledges our limits, acknowledges who God created us to be, and acknowledges who God created others to be.

I get it. Many of us feel like we have to be everything for everyone. That if we aren't, the world will fall apart. But God calls us to surrender that pride and to embrace humility, because this humility helps us live in, and invite others into, the fullness of life that Jesus desires for everyone.

Ren Mueller

READ

Genesis 2-3

REFLECT

Invite the Holy Spirit into your reflections and welcome the voice of Jesus to help you answer these questions.

- 1. How is the fear of death showing up in my life as pride?
- 2. What lies am I believing about myself, others, or God that contribute to this fear?

RESPOND

Make confession.

Jesus, I surrender pride to you and agree that humility is the better pathway to life in you.

I renounce the lie that

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God. Today I choose to turn away from pride and turn toward

Today I choose to turn away from pride and turn toward humility.

Walk in repentance by turning towards others.

Jesus, who is someone that has been affected by the ways that pride has expressed itself in my life? How can I be a person of life towards them by walking in humility?

RECEIVE

Spend some time listening for the voice of Jesus and receiving his mercy and grace.

What gifts of life do you want to give me in exchange for the fear of death that causes me to turn to pride to feel safe?

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from the pride this week by embracing Sabbath. Take a break from the work and demands that bring you a sense of pride and purpose, and instead, take a true Sabbath, and invite Jesus to reveal his true character and love for you.

ASSUMPTION TO CURIOSITY

Its amazing how quick we can be to move to assumption, something goes wrong, someone says something that rubs us the wrong way, we aren't received in the way that we expect, and we move to assumption. We question intentions, perspectives, and we start to wonder the worst about others. What has begun as potentially a small thing, becomes a big thing.

Its amazing how assumptions can bring out the worst in us.

Assumption is a way of death, and can often work its way out in a form of relational death. Whether bitterness, broken trust, guardedness, or even ending the ending of a relationship. What can start with one small assumption can build up into a giant wall of hostility, and once that walls up its hard to bring it down.

So how does the way of life offer another option than assumption? I would say its through the path of curiosity. When faced with an interaction or situation that confuses or frustrates us, love chooses curiosity. Curiosity makes an assumption and that is that it doesn't know all the answers so it better ask some questions. Curiosity looks for the good, seeks to understand, and get answers before making decisions. Curiosity is a posture of openness, of looking for common ground, and that keeps the walls from being built.

Curiosity isn't just for the other though, its also for ourselves, for self examination. Curiosity asks questions like why am I feeling the way that I am? Why did I respond that way? I wonder what they meant when they said that? As we ask these questions we open ourselves to the Spirit of God allowing him to bring life and goodness into us and to tear down the walls of hostility that we have erected.

So how do we embrace curiosity? Don't grumble and complain in assumption, but instead open your eyes and heart in curiosity and look. Look for what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Curiosity takes hard work and intentionality, but in it you will find life and life himself - the God of peace - will be with you.

Matt Kinniburgh

APRIL 14-20

READ

Philippians 2:14-15, 4:8-9; Ephesians 2:14

REFLECT

Invite the Holy Spirit into your reflections and welcome the voice of Jesus to help you answer these questions.

- 1. How is the fear of death showing up in my life as assumption?
- 2. What lies am I believing about myself, others, or God that contribute to this fear?

RESPOND

Make confession.

Jesus, I surrender assumption to you and agree that curiosity is the better pathway to life in you.

I renounce the lie that _____

Now, choose repentance by turning toward God.

Today I choose to turn away from assumption and turn toward curiosity.

Walk in repentance by turning towards others.

Jesus, who is someone that has been affected by the ways that assumption has expressed itself in my life? How can I be a person of life towards them by walking in curiosity?

RECEIVE

Spend some time listening for the voice of Jesus and receiving his mercy and grace.

What gifts of life do you want to give me in exchange for the fear of death that causes me to turn to assumption to feel safe?

FAST

As a way of living into your repentance, consider fasting from the food at some point this week. How that looks is up to you; maybe it's a whole day of meals, maybe it's the same meal for each of the days, maybe it's one meal this week. One fast is not more impressive than another, but instead is an opportunity to allow your hunger pangs to draw you to prayer and remind you of your dependence on the one who provides our daily bread.

HOLY WEEK

APRIL 13-20

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.

We want to provide you with three ways in which you can enter into Holy Week.

CHURCH GATHERINGS

The first way is to join us in our four Holy Week services -Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. We will gather as a community to mark these times so please plan on coming to all four services as we practice the way of Jesus together.

PALM SUNDAY - APRIL 13 | 10 AM

GOOD FRIDAY - APRIL 18 | 10 AM

HOLY SATURDAY - APRIL 19 | 7 PM

EASTER SUNDAY - APRIL 20 | 10 AM

ONLINE: THE GOLGOTHA EXPERIENCE

Another way you can enter into Holy Week is through the arts. The group Poor Bishop Hooper has put together a video experience with musical and visual art that refelcts on Christ's journey to the cross. To view this, visit golgothamusic.com/full-experience where you can watch the video and find the link for the companion book with readings and lyrics that go along with it. You will need to set aside around an hour for this, if you would like to engage in the story in this format.

ENTERING INTO THE SCRIPTURAL STORY

Everyday this Holy Week we will sit with Jesus in the gospels, walking with him as he walks towards the cross. We will walk with him as he tastes death for everyone in order to break the power of death and the devil so we no longer need to live in fear of death (Hebrews 2:9, 14-15). Each day there is a chapter to enter into, except for Easter Sunday where there's four resurrection chapters to celebrate. Whether you read them or listen to them is up to you.

As you read the passages, here are some questions to ponder:

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 | Matthew 21:1-17, 26:1-75

HOLY MONDAY | Matthew 27

HOLY TUESDAY | Mark 14

HOLY WEDNESDAY | Mark 15

MAUNDY THURSDAY | Luke 22

GOOD FRIDAY | Luke 23

HOLY SATURDAY | John 18-19

EASTER SUNDAY | Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20



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