



UNITED IN HIS DEATH

A Journey Through Lent | 2012

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Introduction to Lent

Easter. It is arguably the most important day of the year for the Christian. In fact, all worship throughout the year points to and retells the story of Holy Week (Palm Sunday through Easter morning). This is the pivotal scene in the story that God has been telling since the beginning of time. The question is: *how do we prepare for it?*

For those people that know me, they know that I love music - all music. I really enjoy jazz. There is something about good jazz that seems to speak *from* the heart and *to* the heart, telling stories about life, love, joy, and loss. It is improvisational in nature. A music professor once told me that the highest form of understanding and involvement in music is demonstrated through improvisation.

When you improvise in jazz, you are not thinking about chords, scales, harmonies, technique - at least the best players aren't. You have done all that ahead of time in preparation. You've played all the scales, hidden the chord changes in your heart, worked to master technique, and sung the harmonies in your head over and over. When it is time to perform, all that preparation frees you to become one with the music and to put your heart and soul into it.

This is what Lent is about. Lent takes place over 40 days leading up to Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. If Resurrection is the dance, Lent is the preparation. Before you can be resurrected, you must die. The key to the Lenten season can be found in the words of Paul to the Roman church:

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

(Romans 6:4-5)

There is a story about a learned young scholar and a wise spiritual teacher. The scholar had an extensive background in religious studies and was an expert on sacred texts. He came to study with the teacher and after making the customary introductions, asked her to take him on as a student. Then, he began to talk about his extensive doctrinal background and rambled on and on about the many texts he had studied.

The teacher listened patiently and then began to make tea. When it was ready, she poured the tea into the scholar's cup until it began to overflow and run all over the floor. The scholar saw what was happening and shouted, "Stop, stop! The cup is full; you can't get anymore in."

The teacher stopped pouring and said: "You are like this cup; you are full of ideas about this spiritual path. You come and ask for teaching, but your cup is full; I can't put anything in. Before I can teach you, you'll have to empty your cup."

By keeping Lent - by allowing our hearts to die with Christ - we empty our cup, freeing ourselves to be filled with the new life Christ alone offers. It is the preparation that gives us freedom to move, to sing, to dance, to worship without worrying about scales, steps, rhythms, or technique. It is a time to hide the story in our heart so that our lives become an improvisation of incarnation.

Traditionally, the church has welcomed the Lenten season with these words:

Dear People of God: The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting. This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when those who, because of notorious sin, had been separated from the body of the faithful were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the Church. Thereby, the whole congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Savior, and of the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith.

from *The Common Book of Prayer*

Lent is not just a time of fasting and giving up something. Rather, through fasting and self-denial, we are “united with him in a death like his” by dying to ourselves and our own wants and desires. We do this so that we may also “be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

We spend the four weeks of Advent preparing our hearts for the celebration of the coming of Jesus at Christmas. Let us spend these 40 days before Easter identifying with Jesus’ death so that he may be resurrected, take on flesh (incarnate), and come alive in us again come Easter morning!

We also encourage you to make this a journey in community by logging on to Ecclesia’s website at www.ecclesiabaptist.org where you will find daily meditations on the Lenten text. Look for the “blog” page under the “Resources and Media” tab. Feel free to join the conversation by adding your own thoughts and meditations in the comment section. We also encourage you to check out the “Lent” page on Ecclesia’s website for additional ideas on observing Lent with your family.



Confession

One of the central components of Lent is the act of confession. One way of entering into Jesus' death is by admitting those places in our lives that have been tainted by the ultimate death - sin. It is to agree with God about the state of our lives - that we have "fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

In the Baptist tradition, we often think of confession as a private matter, something between myself and God. We often don't feel comfortable with "canned" prayers and corporate creeds or confessions. We don't go to a priest or pastor on a regular basis to lay out our sins before another human being.

The idea of corporate confession is based on Paul's teaching of the church as the body of Christ. Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul states, *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. . . . If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together"* (1 Corinthians 12:12, 26).

By extension, we might add, "if one part of the body sins, the whole body sins." Corporate confession seeks to remind us of our unity as Christ's body. While you, personally, may not have committed some of the acts you are confessing, you can rest assured that there is someone in the body who has and we need to confess it together as one body. Confession is not just about acts committed, however. It is also about acts not committed that should have been. For example, if we know that there are those that are hungry in our community, we must confess that we have not done enough to feed the hungry. If there are atrocities and injustices in our world, we must confess our inaction there as well.

Take some time to meditate on the different parts of the following prayer and honestly confess to God the places you have failed.

Repentance begins with acknowledging where we have fallen short and bringing it out into the open. It is about being honest with God. I also encourage you to write your own prayer of confession, looking back over the past year at areas where you have fallen short of God's glory. Use it daily, along with the prayer below, for your Lent devotions.

For inspiration from another good prayer of confession turn to Psalm 51, David's confession after sinning with Bathsheba.

Prayer of Confession
from *The Common Book of Prayer*

Most holy and merciful Father:
We confess to you and to one another,
and to the whole communion of the saints
in heaven and on earth,
that we have sinned by our own fault
in thought, word, and deed;
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength.
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven
others, as we have been forgiven.
Have mercy on us, Lord.

We have been deaf to your call serve, as Christ served us.
We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved you
Holy Spirit.
Have mercy on us, Lord.

We confess to you, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the pride,
hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,
We confess to you, Lord.

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other
people,
We confess to you, Lord.

Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,
We confess to you, Lord.

Our intemperate love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,
We confess to you, Lord.

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,
We confess to you, Lord.

Accept our repentance, Lord, for the wrongs we have done: for our blindness to human need and suffering, and our indifference to injustice and cruelty,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

For all false judgments, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbors, and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

For our waste and pollution of your creation, and our lack of concern for those who come after us,
Accept our repentance, Lord.

Restore us, good Lord, and let your anger depart from us; *Favorably bear us, for your mercy is great.*

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,
That we may show forth your glory in the world.

By the cross and passion of your Son and Lord,
Bring us with all your saints to the joy of his resurrection.



Baptismal Connection

In the early church, baptism was only celebrated at Easter. For this reason, those that were to be baptized would spend the Lenten season learning about the Church and the decision that they were making by being baptized into it. For those of us who have already been baptized, Lent serves as a time for us to remember our baptism and the commitment we made to follow Christ through that outward act. It is a time to renew those commitments in our lives. For those who have not taken that step forward in baptism, Lent is a time to reflect on baptism's meaning and significance. Lent holds out a hand in invitation for you to follow Christ in this public declaration of faith. *(If you would like to talk to someone about baptism, please contact the pastor.)*

Many of us were asked some questions before being baptized to make sure that we understood what we were doing. While the following questions may be a little different from what you experienced, take some time to think about them and renew your commitment to follow Jesus Christ.

- Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?
- Do you renounce the evil powers of the world, which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?
- Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

- Do you turn to Jesus and accept him as your Savior?
- Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?
- Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

Many of us will then remember the words that were said as we were baptized: "You are buried with Christ in baptism and raised again to walk in new life." Lent is a time to renew that commitment to walk in the new life Jesus has promised.



Fasting, Giving, and Prayer

Fasting is probably the most familiar part of Lenten observance. It is a part of Lent because it is a way to die to ourselves – leading us into the mystery of the death of Christ. Fasting is not just about giving something up, it is about replacing it with something that will lead you into a deeper relationship with God.

During Lent, fasting should be accompanied by prayer and almsgiving. If you are fasting from a meal, spend that time in prayer and use the money you would have spent to give to someone else who might be in need. In this way, you are drawn closer to God and to your fellow brother or sister through the practice. Be creative and really think about ways that you can die to yourself and draw closer to God and others through your fast.

You should not fast on Sundays since this is the day each week that we remember the Resurrection. The Resurrection is a time of joy and celebration, not a time for denial and sacrifice. That is why we start celebrating Lent on Ash Wednesday (March 9 this year) – so that there will be 40 days of fasting between then and Easter morning (the same number of days that Jesus was tempted in the desert by the devil).

Fasting is a symbol of the discipline it takes to turn away from
sin.

Prayer is the act of turning to God in dependence.

Almsgiving is the symbol of the virtue we are taking on to
replace our sin.

Fasting can be intimidating for those of us who do not regularly practice this spiritual discipline. It can be food, but it can also be other things. The following page contains some suggestions for fasting during this Lent season:

External Fasts

Take less of what you like and more of what you dislike at meals today

Take nothing to drink between meals.

Do not use seasoning on your food today.

Do not use any sweeteners with your food or drinks today.

Avoid listening to the radio at all today.

Take nothing to eat between meals today.

Avoid any T.V. or videos; instead read the Passion of Christ in your Bible

Take only one helping of each item at meals today.

Internal Fasts

Don't do any unnecessary talking

Exercise your patience today in all things.

Don't make any complaints today.

Restrain any anger, and go out of your way to be kind to the person who caused your anger.

Don't be distracted with someone else's business.

Avoid any gossip today, instead say an extra prayer to overcome this great fault.

When asked to do something extra do so with a joyful and pleasant attitude today.

Speak in a pleasant tone to everyone today.

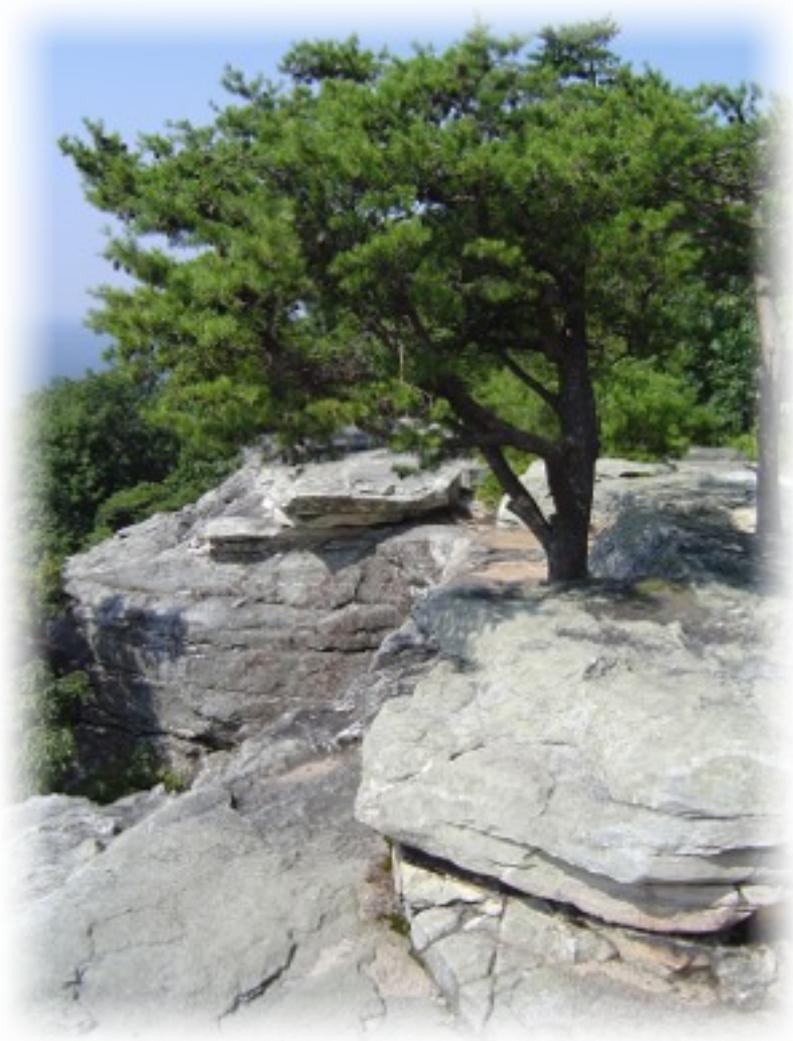
Avoid using the phone.

Tell the truth in all your dealings today.

Avoid vanity or self-seeking today.

Resources for Lent Meditation and Personal Devotion

On the following pages, you will find a guide for personal and family devotion during the Lenten season. Take time to read at least one of the scripture passage each day and find the question(s) for reflection that correspond to each reading. Take to some time to answer them personally or as a family. Write down your answers in a journal so that you can go back over them at a later time and see what God has been teaching you.



The Temptation of Christ

Week of February 27-March 3

<i>Mon:</i>	Matthew 4:1-11	<i>Thurs:</i>	Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7
<i>Tues:</i>	Mark 1:9-13	<i>Fri:</i>	Romans 5:12-19
<i>Wed:</i>	Luke 4:1-13	<i>Sat:</i>	Psalms 32

“Lent is a time to intentionally confront all the ways the first Adam continues to control our lives, to carry these ways to the cross, to let them be crucified with Jesus, and to bury them in the tomb never to rise again.”
- Robert Webber

Satan was trying to tempt Jesus to establish his kingdom in some way other than the cross. What areas in your life are the weakest when it comes to Satan’s temptations?

How has our response throughout history been different than Jesus’ response to Satan’s schemes? How might we be more like Jesus?

In what ways do you see the “first Adam” still at work in your life?

How might your life be different if you truly experience the forgiveness that David talks about in Psalm 32?

How might the world be different if they knew that God offered this forgiveness that David is talking about?

How can you use your fasting/praying/almsgiving to share that message this week?



The Call to Deny Sin

Week of March 5-10

<i>Mon:</i>	Mark 8:31-38	<i>Thurs:</i>	Genesis 15:1-12; 17-18
<i>Tues:</i>	Luke 13:22-35	<i>Fri:</i>	Philippians 3:17-4:1
<i>Wed:</i>	John 3:1-17	<i>Sat:</i>	Psalms 27

“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.”

- Robert Webber

What does it mean in your life to deny yourself and take up your cross to follow Jesus?

Can you see that Jesus mourns over Jerusalem? He longs for the people to see him for who he is and to accept his message. Has Jesus mourned over you for lack of belief? Why?

Can you think of any sin in your life that is keeping you from experiencing the newness and completeness that Jesus is talking about in this conversation with Nicodemus?

Jesus called Abraham to leave everything behind (family, friends, job, etc.) and follow his lead. How can these things become sin when you are responding to God's call?

Paul tells the Philippians to imitate him and others that set a good example. Would you be comfortable telling a church to imitate you? Why or why not?



The Call to Repentance

Week of March 12-17

<i>Mon:</i>	John 4:5-42	<i>Thurs:</i>	Romans 5:1-11
<i>Tues:</i>	Luke 13:1-9	<i>Fri:</i>	Psalms 51
<i>Wed:</i>	Isaiah 55:1-9	<i>Sat:</i>	Revelation 2:1-7

The third Sunday “brings our spiritual experience from dealing with temptation, to a denial of the power of evil over our lives, through, to the place of repentance.”

“In repentance we turn away from sin and determine with God’s power to walk in newness of life...In Lent we are called to once again experience the first love of faith, the breath of fresh air in the newness of our experience with Jesus. Lent is to stir up that original passion within us, to build a fire in the belly, to inspire within us the glow of first love.”
-Robert Webber

How are you like the woman at the well? What does God thirst for or want from you? What do you thirst for from God?

Isaiah calls for the unrighteous to return to the Lord while he may be found. What, if anything, is keeping you from the Lord?

What is it that you are willing to die for? God died for us while we were still the enemies of God. What does that mean to your relationship with God?

How does Psalm 51 reflect your relationship with God? Verse 17 describes the sacrifices that God desires. How does this line up with your personal worship?

Think back to the first time you experienced the love of God. How does your experience today compare with that? Would you say that you have left your first love?



Healing and Conversion

Week of March 19-24

<i>Mon:</i>	John 9:1-38	<i>Thurs:</i>	Ephesians 2:1-10
<i>Tues:</i>	John 6: 25-59	<i>Fri:</i>	John 3:14-21
<i>Wed:</i>	Luke 15:11-32	<i>Sat:</i>	Isaiah 53

This week is a little more joyous “because it shifts away from an emphasis on the repentance of the sinner to Christ’s healing power.”
-Robert Webber

What wounds do you have that you need Christ to be the healer of this Easter season?

How does the claim of Jesus in John 6:39-40 bring you comfort this season?

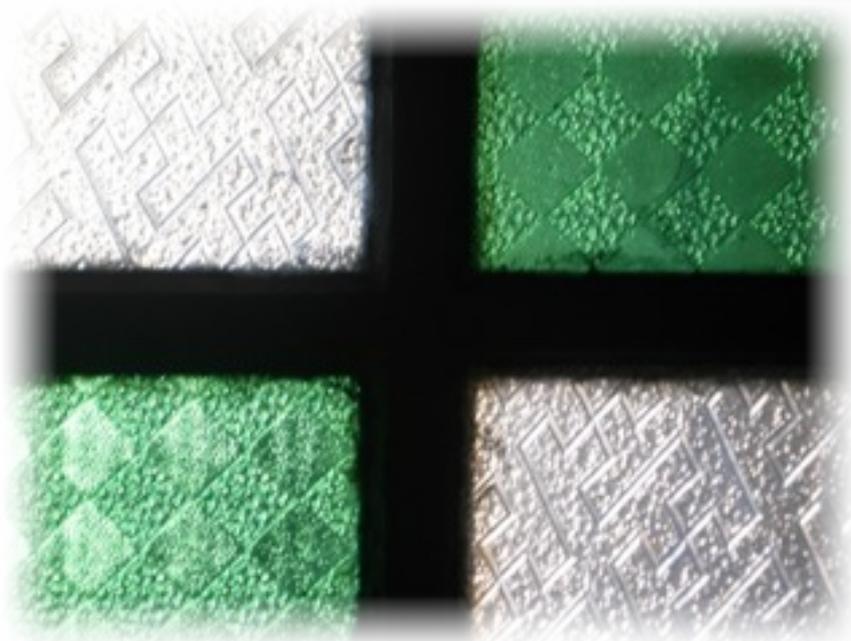
What does the John 6 passage mean for you in your observance of Communion?

In what ways can you identify with the Prodigal Son in Luke?

Paul states in the Ephesians passage that we were dead in our trespasses and sin. Jesus states that we must die to join him in his resurrection and life. How do these passages go together?

What areas of your life are you afraid of bringing into the light? Looking at your life, where can you see that you love the darkness more than the light?

Isaiah says that “surely he has borne our griefs and has carried our sorrows.” What grief and sorrow are you holding onto of which you don’t want to let go? What would happen if you didn’t have that crutch to lean on anymore? What is keeping you from letting go?



A Foretaste of Easter

Week of March 26-31

<i>Mon:</i>	Luke 20:9-19	<i>Thurs:</i>	Ezekiel 37:1-14
<i>Tues:</i>	John 11:1-17	<i>Fri:</i>	Hebrews 5:5-10
<i>Wed:</i>	John 12:20-33	<i>Sat:</i>	Psalms 126

“We are called to 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 [go along with] the traditions 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 by prayer, by [Communion] 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.”

-Robert Webber

My college pastor said that his greatest fear was that the Lord will return and ask him, “Why did you settle for so little? I wanted to do great things through you.” What is your greatest fear? Why?

A pastor once said that our greatest ministries are birthed from our greatest failures and weaknesses. How might this be related to Jesus words in John 12:24?

What dry bones do you have in your life that are in need of a fresh breath of God’s life-giving breath?

What lessons have you learned through suffering in your life?

Psalms 126 praises God for “doing great things for us.” What great things has the Lord done for you?



Final Words

Lent is never a destination. Rather, it is a path. Well-worn by many travelers that have gone before us, it beckons us to make our way towards the party, the dance of resurrection. But while there may be rejoicing at the end of the journey, let there be no doubt that death is painful. Freeing ourselves from greed, lust, anger, hypocrisy, pride, and our addiction to stuff will not come easy. There are no heroic acts to be done, just little deaths that we die daily as we give our lives as a “living sacrifice” to God (Romans 12:1).

As you enter this season, know that you do not enter it alone. We journey together as the body of Christ, united in Him by the Spirit that He has placed as a seal in our hearts. Allow that Spirit to guide you into truth, to empower you for worship, to convict you of sin, and to transform you into the very image of our Lord.

May you journey courageously.

May you love recklessly.

May you give abundantly.

May you confess transparently.

May you die boldly.

And may you never forget this truth:

You are loved

(and there’s nothing you can do about it).

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