

LENT

The Journey to the Cross



2019



roots
COVENANT
CHURCH



“LENT is the forty-day season of reflection and preparation for the death and resurrection of Jesus, which are commemorated on GOOD FRIDAY (April 19th) and EASTER SUNDAY (April 21st). It is a time of repentance, of considering Christ’s sufferings and rethinking how we are all called to take up our crosses. During this time many Christians fast, which means to abstain from food or some other pleasure. Some Christians integrate something new into their lives like visiting the sick, the imprisoned, a new prayer practice, and so on. It is a good season to rethink how we live and let some things go, or maybe even develop some new holy habits.

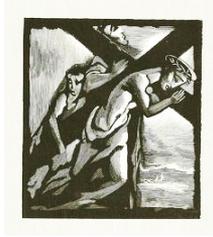
ASH WEDNESDAY, March 6th, marks the beginning of Lent. At an Ash Wednesday service, participants receive ashes in the form of a cross as a reminder of our mortality and as a sign of repentance.

- Adapted from *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*

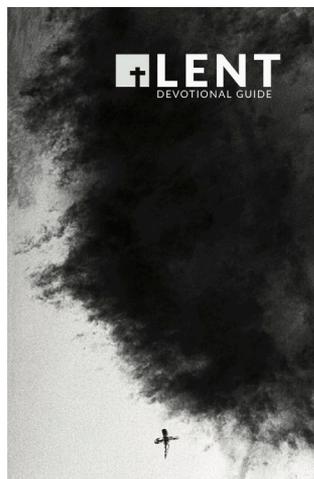
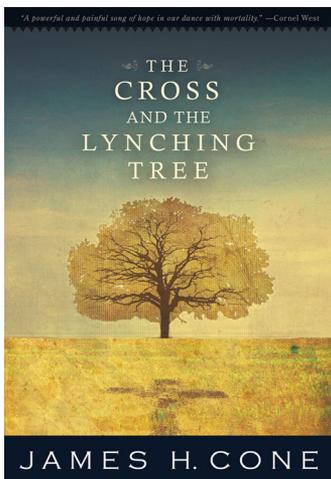


We invite you, therefore, in the name of Jesus, to the observance of a holy LENT, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word. And, to make a right beginning of repentance, and as a mark of our mortal nature, let us now kneel before the Lord, maker and redeemer.

- Adapted from *The Book of Common Prayer*



This Lenten Guide draws inspiration from *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James Cone and from the Lenten Devotional Guide of Word of Life Church in St. Joseph, MO.





HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each of the seven weeks of Lent will begin with a [REFLECTION] on *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. The forty days of Lent do not include Sundays because every Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. Each day you will have a brief passage of Scripture to [READING], primarily from the Gospel of John. As you read pay close attention to the surprising things Jesus says and does. You will also be given the [PRAYER] of the week. Pray this prayer each day of that week. After that, you'll be given suggestions on what form of [FASTING] you might practice as self-denial. Finally, suggestions will be given for opportunities for [GIVING] to others.

WEEK I: MARCH 6-9: ASH WEDNESDAY

[REFLECTION]

“What I studied in graduate school ignored white supremacy and black resistance against it, as if they had nothing to do with the Christian gospel and the discipline of theology. [...] How could any theologian explain the meaning of Christian identity in America and fail to engage white supremacy, its primary negation? [...] The cross helped me deal with the brutal legacy of the lynching tree, and the lynching tree helped me understand the tragic meaning of the cross.” (xvi-xviii)

Dr. Cone uses the term “white supremacy” for the whole of white cultural dominance and oppression of black people. It’s not just a label for hate groups like the KKK; it also applies to systemic racism that is much more subtle, yet just as deadly. How does reading the words “white supremacy” make you feel? Pay attention to the emotions this arouses in you. Pressing into discomfort is an important part of Lenten practice.

Throughout *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Dr. Cone draws upon the parallels between the Roman practice of crucifixion and the American practice of lynching. Both Jesus and Black Americans were scapegoated and murdered through mob violence. Do you think of Jesus’s cross as a murder due to mob violence. Ask yourself why you do or do not?

[WEDNESDAY READING]

LUKE 18.9-14

[THURSDAY-SATURDAY READING]

THURSDAY: JOHN I.29-34 FRIDAY: JOHN I.35-42 SATURDAY: JOHN I.43-51

[PRAYER]

*O God, Who before the passion of your only-begotten Son
revealed his glory upon the holy mountain:
Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance,
may be strengthened to bear our cross,
and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen*

[FASTING]

Spend an extended amount of time (10-60 minutes) every day this week by yourself, away from other people.

[GIVING]

Reach out to friends or neighbors you have lost contact with. Call, text, email, or message them and express to them what their friendship means to you.

WEEK 2: MARCH 10-16

[REFLECTION]

“That God could ‘make a way out of no way’ in Jesus’ cross was truly absurd to the intellect, yet profoundly real in the souls of black folk. Enslaved blacks who first heard the gospel message seized on the power of the cross. Christ crucified manifested God’s loving and liberating presence in the contradictions of black life—that transcendent presence in the lives of black Christians that empowered them to believe that ultimately, in God’s eschatological future, they would not be defeated by the ‘troubles of this world,’ no matter how great and painful their suffering. Believing this paradox, this absurd claim of faith, was only possible through God’s ‘amazing grace’ and the gift of faith, grounded in humility and repentance. There was no place for the proud and the mighty, for people who think that God called them to rule over others. The cross was God’s critique of power—white power—with powerless love, snatching victory out of defeat.” (2)

Here, Dr. Cone draws upon the biblical paradox of the Cross. It is powerful in its powerlessness. God used that which was despised and cursed to embrace and forgive. God exposed the injustice of violent power by becoming its innocent victim in Christ.

Part of Lent is embracing this paradox. We enter into this journey giving up our power. Yet, as we journey with Jesus we receive his power to overcome sin in ourselves, evil in the world, and ultimately death itself. In what areas of your life must you embrace powerlessness to journey with Jesus? Where do you see God critiquing systems of power over others in our world today? Where do you see God “snatching victory out of defeat”?

[READING]

MONDAY: JOHN 2.1-12; TUESDAY: JOHN 2.13-22; WEDNESDAY: JOHN 2.23-3:15;
THURSDAY: JOHN 3.16-21; FRIDAY: JOHN 3.22-36; SATURDAY: JOHN 4.1-26

[PRAYER]

*Almighty God,
Whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan;
Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations;
And, as you know the weaknesses of each of us,
let each one find you mighty to save;
Through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen*

[FASTING]

Deny yourself all fluids except for water (or coffee you brew at home) each day this week. Keep track of the money you would have spent on soft drinks, coffee, tea, etc.

[GIVING]

Give the money you saved this week to those less fortunate through the local church or a trustworthy nonprofit.

WEEK 3: MARCH 17-23

[REFLECTION]

*“During my childhood, I heard a lot about the cross at Macedonia A.M.E. Church, where faith in Jesus was defined and celebrated. We sang about ‘Calvary,’ and asked ‘Were you there?’, ‘down at the cross,’ ‘when they crucified my Lord.’ ‘Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.’ The spirituals, gospel songs, and hymns focused on how Jesus achieved salvation for the least through his *solidarity* with them even unto death. There were more songs, sermons, prayers, and testimonies about the cross than any other theme. The cross was the foundation on which their faith was built.*

In the mystery of God’s revelation, black Christians believed that just knowing that Jesus went through an experience of suffering in a manner similar to theirs gave them faith that God was with them, even in suffering on lynching trees, just as God was present with Jesus in suffering on the cross. [...]

If the God of Jesus’ cross is found among the least, the crucified people of the world, then God is also found among those lynched in American history.” (21-22, 23)

As we enter into Lent, we enter into the mystery of God’s own suffering. Be attentive to how you respond to this idea. What response does it arouse in you? Are you ashamed of God’s suffering? Do you feel comforted by God’s suffering? What songs bring you comfort when you sing them? Are they songs of victory? Or are they songs which explore the pain of human life? As a Lenten practice, listen and sing songs that draw you closer to the suffering of God in Christ. Pay attention to your soul’s response to this practice.

[READING]

MONDAY: JOHN 4.27-42; TUESDAY: JOHN 4.43-54; WEDNESDAY: JOHN 5.1-18;
THURSDAY: JOHN 5.19-29; FRIDAY: JOHN 5.30-47; SATURDAY: JOHN 7.1-13

[PRAYER]

*O God, Whose glory it is always to have mercy:
Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways,
and bring them again with penitent hearts
and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast to
the unchangeable truth of your word, Jesus Christ your Son;
who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen*

[FASTING]

Draw back from the words of others. Deny yourself access to your social media accounts or television news this week.

[GIVING]

Write down a brief word of encouragement and give it to a neighbor or send it to a friend.

WEEK 4: MARCH 24-30

[REFLECTION]

“Dealing with nearly four hundred years of ongoing suffering in African American history is enough to make any black person lose faith and roam in a blues-like way, trying to find meaning in an absurd world of white supremacy. Unlike the spirituals and the church, the blues and the juke joint did not lead to an organized political resistance against white supremacy. But one could correctly say that the spirituals and the church, with Jesus’ cross at the heart of its faith, gave birth to the black freedom movement that reached its peak in the civil rights era during the 1950s and 60s. The spirituals were the soul of the movement, giving people courage to fight, and the church was its anchor, deepening its faith in the coming freedom for all.” (28)

The Blues is a uniquely American genre of music, borne out of the pain of the African American experience. Much like the Psalms, the Blues explore the deepest pain and heartache of the soul. Both the Psalms and the Blues give voice to the hurt and the unbreakable faith of people who trust in God. Have you ever listened to the Blues? Have you ever prayed the Psalms out loud? As a Lenten practice, listen to Blues music and pray the Psalms out loud.

[READING]

MONDAY: JOHN 7.14-36; TUESDAY: JOHN 7.37-52; WEDNESDAY: JOHN 8.12-20;
THURSDAY: JOHN 8.21-32; FRIDAY: JOHN 8.33-47; SATURDAY: JOHN 8.47-59

[PRAYER]

*Almighty God,
You know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves:
Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls,
That we may be defended from all adversaries which happen to the body,
And from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, For ever and ever. Amen*

[FASTING]

Only eat food you prepare at home. Deny yourself fast-food and restaurants.

[GIVING]

Give the money you saved this week to those less fortunate through the local church or a trust-worthy nonprofit.

WEEK 5: MARCH 31–APRIL 6

[REFLECTION]

“As Jesus was an innocent victim of mob hysteria and Roman imperial violence, many African Americans were innocent victims of white mobs, thirsting for blood in the name of God and in defense of segregation, white supremacy, and the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race. Both the cross and the lynching tree were symbols of terror, instruments of torture and execution, reserved primarily for slaves, criminals, and insurrectionists—the lowest of the low in society.” (31)

Mobs seek to release their collective fear and anxiety through violence. They often seize upon a victim, innocent or not, and agree to destroy that victim in exchange for peace. This is called “scapegoating.” Jesus was the scapegoat to end all scapegoating. But we still feel the same sense of collective fear and anxiety. Where have you seen crowds turn into mobs and take out their fears and anxiety on victims, innocent or not? Have you been caught up in such a practice? Have you been the victim of scapegoating? Who have you scapegoated? Be attentive to your response to these questions. As a Lenten practice, press into the discomfort of exploring your own sin and victimization.

[READING]

MONDAY: JOHN 6.1-15; TUESDAY: JOHN 6.16-27; WEDNESDAY: JOHN 6.27-40;
THURSDAY: JOHN 6.41-51; FRIDAY: JOHN 6.52-59; SATURDAY: JOHN 6.60-71

[PRAYER]

*Gracious Father,
Whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread
which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us,
and we in him; Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever. Amen*

[FASTING]

Purchase only essential items this week. Deny yourself all online and in-store shopping for unnecessary items.

[GIVING]

Donate items you own which are unnecessary to those less fortunate through the local church or through a trustworthy nonprofit.

WEEK 6: APRIL 7-13

[REFLECTION]

“The public gallows Niebuhr saw and read about in the media in Mississippi should have reminded him of the tree on which Jesus hung and ‘the involuntary cross’ he preached about at Bethel in 1915. In that sermon, he spoke about Simon of Cyrene, the African, bearing Jesus’ cross. Black ministers, searching for ways to identify racially with the story of salvation in the scriptures, have since slavery times liked to preach about ‘Black Simon’ (as they called him) who carried Jesus’ cross.” (46)

Reinhold Niebuhr was a white, American theologian who wrote a lot about Jesus’ Cross during a time when lynching was still a common part of the African American experience. Yet, as Dr. Cone points out, Niebuhr never saw a connection between the two, as many black theologians did and do. He didn’t see this connection even though he did see a connection between Simon of Cyrene, an African man, carrying Jesus’ Cross and the plight of African Americans in the United States.

“Black Simon” (as he is sometimes called by black ministers) carried Jesus’ Cross involuntarily. However, the presence of his name in the Gospels is likely due to his presence in the early church. As Christians, Jesus calls us all to take up the Cross—to deny ourselves, to face injustice, to identify with the crucified ones in society, and to love sacrificially. As a Lenten practice, meditate on how you might take up the Cross in your life? How might you deny yourself? Who are the crucified with whom you are called to identify? What injustice are you called to confront? What would it look like for you to love sacrificially?

[READING]

MONDAY: JOHN 9.1-17; TUESDAY: JOHN 9.18-41; WEDNESDAY: JOHN 10.1-18;
THURSDAY: JOHN 10.19-42; FRIDAY: JOHN 11.1-27; SATURDAY: JOHN 11.28-44

[PRAYER]

*Almighty God,
You alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners:
Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise;
That, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed
where true joys are to be found;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and for ever. Amen.*

[FASTING]

Deny yourself access to digital screens (phones, tablets, computers, laptops, TV), unless necessary for work, school, and essential communication purposes.

[GIVING]

Have a face-to-face conversation with friends or family members this week during a meal.

WEEK 7: APRIL 14-17

[REFLECTION]

“Like Reinhold Niebuhr, whom he studied in graduate school, King believed that the cross was the defining heart of the Christian faith. Unlike Niebuhr, his understanding of the cross was inflected by his awareness of the lynching tree, and this was a significant difference. While the cross symbolized God’s supreme love for human life, the lynching tree was the most terrifying symbol of hate in America. King held these symbols together in a Hegelian dialectic, a contradiction of thesis and antithesis, yielding to a creative synthesis.

In considering the subject of God and the problem of race in America, King reflected that God’s love created blacks and whites and other human beings for each other in community (thesis). White supremacy was the sin that separated them in America and in much of the world (antithesis). God reconciled humanity through Jesus’ cross, and thereby white supremacy could never have ‘the final and ultimate word’ on human relationships (synthesis). God’s reconciling love in the cross empowered human beings to love one another—bearing witness with ‘our whole being in the struggle against evil, whatever the cost.’ Thus, blacks and whites together were free to create the American Dream in society and the Beloved Community in our religious life.” (71)

Unlike Niebuhr, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. saw the connection between Jesus’ Cross and the lynching tree. He denied himself, entered into solidarity with the oppressed, confronted injustice in society, and loved sacrificially. Dr. Cone says he held Jesus’ Cross, as a symbol of God’s supreme love, and the lynching tree, as a symbol of American terror and hate, together in tension. He saw God at work reconciling blacks and whites in a “Beloved Community.”

Be attentive to how you respond to this idea. What response does it arouse in you? Does it give you hope? Do you feel frustrated? Sit with your response as a Lenten practice. Where might God be calling you to seek reconciliation? What would it look like for the Beloved Community to be manifest in your life?

[MONDAY-WEDNESDAY READING]

MONDAY: JOHN 12.9-19; TUESDAY: JOHN 12.20-26; WEDNESDAY: JOHN 12.27-36

[PRAYER]

*Almighty and everliving God,
In your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon himself our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen*

[FASTING]

Don’t live in denial about those you have wronged. Contact them and ask for forgiveness.

[GIVING]

Offer forgiveness to those who have wronged you. Contact those who have wronged you and extend forgiveness.

MAUNDY THURSDAY: APRIL 18

[READING]

JOHN 17.1-II

[PRAYER]

*Almighty Father,
Whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered,
instituted the sacrament of his body and blood:
Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully
in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord,
who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life;
and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever. Amen*

[FASTING]

Fast breakfast and lunch, eating only a small meal after attending an evening Maundy Thursday service.

[GIVING]

Invite an unlikely guest to your home or to a restaurant for lunch or dinner sometime next week.

GOOD FRIDAY: APRIL 19

[READING]

JOHN 13.36-38 & JOHN 19.38-42

[PRAYER]

*Almighty God,
We pray you graciously to behold this your family,
For whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed,
And given into the hands of sinners,
And to suffer death upon the cross;
Who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever. Amen*

[FASTING]

Fast breakfast, lunch, and dinner today, if you are physically able. Drink only water.

[GIVING]

Give yourself fully to reflect on the sorrow and sufferings of Christ on the cross.

**Join Roots Covenant Church
For a combined Good Friday worship gathering with other
multi-ethnic congregations from throughout the Twin Cities:**

**Sanctuary Covenant Church
710 W. Broadway Ave.
Minneapolis
At 7PM**

HOLY SATURDAY: MARCH 31

[READING]

ROMANS 8.1-II

[PRAYER]

*O God,
Creator of heaven and earth:
Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son
Was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy sabbath,
So we may await with him the coming of the third day,
And rise with him to newness of life;
Who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever. Amen*

[FASTING]

Either early in the morning or after sunset, find a place where you can sit in darkness as a reminder of the darkness in our world.

[GIVING]

Reach out to a friend or neighbor and invite them to join you for Easter Celebration tomorrow at church.

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