



LENT **(SEASON OF LENT: MARCH 9–APRIL 23, 2011)**

Sunday, March 13, 2011

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The unit you are viewing, Lent, is a compact unit. This means that it does not have a supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided scriptural text(s) that we suggest for this moment on the calendar along with a sermonic outline, suggested links, books, articles, songs, and videos. For additional information, see Lent in the archives of the Lectionary for 2008, 2009, and 2010. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment: Lent

The Lenten season is the period of the liturgical calendar that precedes Resurrection Sunday (also known as Easter). It is typically marked by fasting from foods, almsgiving, increased devotional time, and abstaining from other creature comforts in order to show our solidarity with Jesus and to highlight the sacrifices Jesus made. Lent is an important time on the liturgical calendar because it also emphasizes self-denial, which is necessary to be a disciple of Christ.

Lectionary commentator, John Guns, wrote in 2008:

...Throughout the course of time, Lent has evolved to serve as a season of self-denial and intense consecration.

While the former are worthy pursuits, the notion of redemptive service tied to self-denial has not been sufficiently presented from the modern pulpit nor embraced in Christian culture. I believe it is important that Lent becomes a season, particularly in the African American church, of sacrifice and self-denial tied to the purpose of redemptive societal engagement.

The words of Jonathan Chism, who prepared the Cultural Resource for Lent for 2009, also merit repeating:

In the second century, Lent was the period in which new Roman Catholic converts (*catechumens*) went through an intense process in preparation for baptism at the Easter Vigil. Over the next few centuries, the tedious process of the catechumen began to diminish; as a result, during the fourth century, Lent became a forty-day period of penitence and fasting for all Christians, not only new converts.¹ In A.D. 325, the Council of Nicaea referred to Lent as a forty-day period that precedes Easter on the Christian calendar. The number forty is significant in light of Jesus' forty-day period of fasting in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry (Matthew 4:1-2).²

Today, Lent consists of the forty days before Easter in which Christians prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ by practicing the spiritual disciplines of fasting, prayer, and penitence. Sundays are always excluded as fast days during Lent because they are mini-Easters that symbolize the weekly celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Many Western churches only exclude Sundays as fast days during Lent, but Eastern Orthodox Churches exclude both Saturdays and Sundays. Subsequently, in Eastern Orthodox churches, the season begins earlier and is spread out over a longer period of time. Despite differences in chronological arrangement, both Western and Eastern churches honor the period for a minimum of forty days.³

Many African American Christians who follow the liturgical calendar, such as Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and United Methodists, value the season of Lent as a time for embracing physical weakness through deliberate self-denial in order to secure spiritual strength in Christ (2 Cor. 12:7b-10). Furthermore, many African Americans who have not followed the liturgical calendar can find value in Lent's symbolic power as a season of preparation for celebration.

II. Lent: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text(s): Job 2:8 and Daniel 9:3 (New Revised Standard Version)

Job 2:8

Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes.

Daniel 9:3

Then I (Daniel) turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

B. Possible Titles

- i. Giving Up to Go Up
- ii. Back to the Basics
- iii. Lessons in a Low Place

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

Job 2:8

In any text there can be several words or phrases that require significant exegetical inquiry. One exegetical inquiry raised by this text is the word potsherd. The word potsherd is transliterated (*cheres*) from the Hebrew (חרש), which means earthenware, pottery, or earthen vessel. After being afflicted by Satan, Job is relegated to scratching the inflammation that covered his entire body, similar to the way complete darkness covers an unlit country road. Job was covered by darkness; his sores were but one sign of it. Job was sitting in ashes. Job, the once rich and respected but now destitute and derided businessman, is now left scratching his sores with broken clay, as he is now keenly aware he is broken clay himself. Sitting in ashes was the deepest form of mourning and humility. Job's life's troubles, pains, and sorrow made the ash heap seem like the only place he could go.

Daniel 9:3

Daniel, unlike Job, found himself in ashes because he needed an answer to a prayer. In other words, one can cover themselves with ashes for more than one reason. What is the import of Daniel sitting in ashes? Daniel is praying, but not only that, he is praying with supplication and fasting, and he is using sackcloth and ashes. Daniel is placing himself in the most humble position he knows, dressed in sackcloth—attire worn to show deep contrition or humility—while also sitting in ashes. Daniel recognizes that he is approaching the God of creation for a divine favor and utilizes everything possible to demonstrate his seriousness in obtaining God's favor.

III. Introduction

The late John Wooden, one of the most influential coaches in American sports, coached college basketball at UCLA for 27 years. During that span, UCLA won 10 national championships, won 88 consecutive games, and was the most decorated program in the country. The best high school basketball players in the country wanted to attend UCLA. The first practice of the year, every year, Coach Wooden would teach the players how to put their socks on, how to tie their shoes, how to put on their uniform, and other seemingly mundane things. Imagine how these players—who had played basketball all their lives—must have felt watching this endless tutorial about such simple and mundane things. Coach Wooden was really teaching them a life lesson that all the players later understood. That lesson was simply that no matter how accomplished we seem to be and how much we have attained, we must always go back to the basics. The basics, the foundational practices, are what remind us of who we are and what we are doing, and they focus our minds on a unified goal. Like Coach Wooden teaching All-Americans how to put their socks on properly, the Lenten season is a time for us to return again to the basic Christian disciplines: prayer, fasting, introspection, renunciation of sin, and reception of the Word of God and the ways of Christ.

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – During the Lenten Season, we must go back to the basics because our successes are not forever.

Daniel returns to the basics. Job, because of his material wealth, seems to have everything people want. Job had:

- a. family;
- b. fortune; and
- c. fame.

Move/Point Two – Our setbacks are not final.

Although Job seemed to have lost everything, his losses had limits:

- a. His life was spared;
- b. His mind was spared; and
- c. His wife was spared.

Move/Point Three – This season is formative.

Job's successes and his sudden misfortune placed him in a position to regroup and see himself and God in different ways:

- a. Job was re-introduced to his humanity;
- b. Job humbled himself to God's divinity; and

c. Job learned how to endure difficulty.

V. Celebration

Billionaire Donald Trump rode the economic expansion of the 1980s to a season of unprecedented wealth. Everything he touched yielded millions in profit. But as the decade ended, the economy tanked and he soon was on the brink of financial ruin. While watching his life collapse, he decided to take steps to return to the foundational basics that gained him his now-lost financial empire. He was able to leverage his losses and eventually become wealthier than he had previously been. After this, he wrote a book entitled The Art of the Comeback, which chronicled his journey.

Many of us during the Lenten season are reminded that we need to go back to the basics of our faith (our foundation). The faith that brought us this far can still carry us. The prayers we prayed as we believed God for miracles are still powerful now. The fasting and devotional habits that opened doors before can do it again. I thank God for giving us a time and space to reflect on where we have been, where we are, and where we can go. We take this Lenten season to remember our savior and his sacrifices so that we can live the abundant life, a life devoted first to him!

VI. Illustration(s)

Perseverance

Edison Pena was one of the Chilean miners trapped in 2010 two thousand feet below ground. He was a marathon runner and believed he would finally escape the mine and be able to pursue running again. While he was waiting in the mine, he would drag a wooden pallet while he ran to build strength. After the miners were rescued, people with the New York Marathon contacted him about attending the race. He did not only want to attend but run in the race, which he did. While he was trapped, he kept working so that when he was freed he would be ready to run. While we are in unfavorable conditions, we need to make use of them because God is at work and so should we be.

See the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary for additional illustrations that you may wish to use in presenting a sermon for this moment on the liturgical calendar.

VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in These Passages

Job 2:8

Sounds: Job crying; Job's measured but intense scratching of the infected sores; the silence that was created by the death all of his children; frustrated whispers of bewilderment from a man who has experienced the good of life;

Sights: Puss-filled sores that slowly but steadily release infectious fluid onto Job's tattered clothing; once-smooth skin that now resembles the rugged terrain of sandpaper; hair falling out; weight loss; Job's wife looking helpless and angry as she grapples with depression and confusion; a vast compound that is now silent and empty; and

Colors: Red scaly patches that turn black on Job's infected skin; the dark grey color of the ash heap.

Daniel 9:3

Sounds: The fervent sounds of Daniel praying to God;

Sights: Daniel sitting, standing, and kneeling as he is praying to God; the mounds of ashes that adorned Daniel's head and fell onto his garments; the loose-fitting sackcloth that he was wearing; and

Colors: The dull, grey ashes that covered Daniel; the brown garment of sackcloth that Daniel wore.

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Hymns(s)

- Is Your All on the Altar? By Elisha A. Hoffman
- Christ Is the Way. By Charles Tindley

Verse 2

Christ the way, in self-denial;
Fasting in the wilderness,
He endured the tempter's trial,
Stood unmoved, the threefold test

Verse 5

Christ the way, amid afflictions;
Cursed and bruised in Pilate's hall.
False accused and more contradictions,
Lamb of God, he bore it all.

B. Well-Known Song(s)

- Somebody Bigger Than You and I. By Johnny Lange, Hy Heath, and Sonny Burke. Performed by Marion Williams.
- Sanctuary. By John W. Thompson. Arr. by Randy Scruggs
- Lamb of God. By Twila Paris. Performed by Paul Morton. "Lamb of God: Full Gospel Praise Break Paul Morton COGIC pt1." Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLj0XCQwGao>; and "Lamb of God: Full Gospel Praise Break Paul Morton COGIC pt2." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37u8t9qebg8&NR=1> accessed 4 January 2011

- Create in Me a Clean Heart. Performed by Donnie McClurkin. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILRjmgvVB8> accessed 4 January 2011

C. Spirituals

- I Want Jesus to Walk with Me.
- Live a Humble.

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005–2010)

- Take My Life. By Scott Underwood.

You can review past Lectionary worship units for Lent to find additional songs and suggestions for planning a worship service for this liturgical moment.

IX. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

- Printout: “Family Activities for the Forty Days of Lent.” Online location: http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=4&ved=0CCoQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cfm.org%2Flethome.pdf&ei=NFFETdPIDsODOufakaMC&usg=AFQjCNE9XVH5JU1_L0kjG3YyV-36dp32kA&sig2=kg7_6bHR3BtCk4iNgvKE-A accessed 2 January 2011
- Fasting Through Lent. Spectrum. New Covenant Metropolitan Church. Online location of PDF: http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=17&ved=0CEIQFjAGOAo&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.newcovenantmcc.org%2Fspectrum%2Fspectrum0703iv.pdf&ei=oilDTY35LersOaT1hYEC&usg=AFQjCNHitJSEUeX470o7V_rgO3doE8MTGQ&sig2=WfQMz1CmKqmeMZgveoQSDQ accessed 2 January 2011
- The Footsteps of Jesus. An interactive aerial map of Jesus’ life and travels is provided. Sacred-destination.com. Online location: <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/israel/footsteps-of-jesus> accessed 2 January 2011
- “Micah Stampley—Take My Life.” Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSH8fSOD-NU> accessed 2 January 2011

X. Books and Articles to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Lent

- Bullock, Wyvetta, and Speller, Julia. “Lent and Easter: Celebration of Liturgical Church year from an African American perspective.” National Council of Churches USA. Online location: http://www.nccusa.org/nmu/mce/lent_and_easter.pdf accessed 2 January 2011
- Brown-Felder, Gwendolyn. On Ma Journey Now: A Lenten Study Based on African American Spirituals. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Bratcher, Dennis. The Season of Lent. The Voice/CRI Voice. Institute. Online location: <http://www.crivoice.org/cylent.html> accessed 2 January 2011

- Brown, Carolyn C. “Observing Lent and Celebrating Easter.” *Worshipping with Children: Including children in the congregations worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary*. Online location: <http://worshippingwithchildren.blogspot.com/2011/01/observing-lent-and-celebrating-easter.html> accessed 20 January 2011 accessed 2 January 2011
- Lee, Jenny. “Towards Jerusalem: Developing the spiritual discipline of discomfort.” Online location: <http://www.thefellowship.info/Files/Resources/Towards-Jerusalem> accessed 2 January 2011
- Schaper, Donna F. Prayers for Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.

XI. Including Children in Lent

The Lent-Easter stories are the key stories of our faith and the worship services of Lent. Holy Week and Easter are our high Holy Days. Children need to be part of them along with the rest of the congregation. Here are a few ideas from Carolyn C. Brown about including children in your congregation’s observation of Lent and celebration of Easter. Some of these ideas are also suitable for the entire congregation during observance of Lent. For details about carrying out these suggestions, see Carolyn C. Brown’s blog:

<http://worshippingwithchildren.blogspot.com/2011/01/observing-lent-and-celebrating-easter.html>.

- Children CAN hear the passion and resurrection stories.
- Children find different kinds of good news in the passion and resurrection stories than adults find in them.
- Exploring the stories in the sanctuary in worship gives them more power for children.

As you begin planning for the season as a whole, consider the following:

- Make a big deal about changing the colors in the sanctuary.
- Encourage a Lenten worship discipline for children and their families.
- Encourage households to pray together at home each day during Lent.
- As you plan services that include children, be sure to invite them and their parents repeatedly.

XII. Notes for Select Songs

A. Hymns(s)

- Is Your All on the Altar? By Elisha A. Hoffman
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #393

African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal. Nashville, TN: The African Methodist Episcopal Church (1948) second printing 1986. #333

Church of God in Christ. Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. Memphis, TN: Church of God in Christ Pub. Board in association with the Benson Co., 1982. #300

- Christ Is the Way. By Charles Tindley
Location:
Beams of Heaven. Hymns of Charles Albert Tindley (Singer's Edition). S.T. Kimbrough, Jr. Ed. General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church. New York, NY: GBGMusik, 2006. #16

B. Well-Known Song(s)

- Sanctuary. By John W. Thompson. Arr. by Randy Scruggs
Location:
www.sheetmusicplus.com
Product Number 2395491
- Somebody Bigger Than You and I. By Johnny Lange, Hy Heath, and Sonny Burke. Performed by Marion Williams. Marion Williams is one of the greatest American singers of the 20th century, a recipient of the MacArthur "Genius" grant, and a Kennedy Center honoree. Online location: Youtube.com/watch?v=w5GFV3hrilw&feature=related accessed 12 January 2011

C. Spirituals

- I Want Jesus to Walk with Me.
Location:
African American Heritage Hymnal. #563

African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal. #375

Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. #381
- Live a Humble
Location:
Negro Spirituals.com. Online location: http://www.negrospirituals.com/news-song/live_a_humble.htm accessed 12 January 2011

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005–2010)

- Take My Life. By Scott Underwood.
Location:
Micah Stampley. The Songbook of Micah. Dallas, TX: EMI/Dexterity Records, 2007.

You can review past Lectionary worship units for Lent to find additional songs and suggestions for planning a worship service for this liturgical moment.

Notes

1. White, James F. Introduction to Christian Worship. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000. p. 56; Cross, F. L., and Elizabeth A. Livingstone. "Lent." The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
2. Bellenir, Karen. Religious Holidays and Calendars: An Encyclopedic Handbook. Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2004; Catholic University of America. New Catholic Encyclopedia. Detroit, MI: Thomson/Gale, 2003. pp. 468–469.
3. White, James F. Introduction to Christian Worship. p. 56; Bullock, Wyvetta and Julia Speller. "Lent and Easter: Celebration of the Liturgical Church Year from an African American Perspective." Online location: http://www.nccusa.org/nmu/mce/lent_and_easter.pdf accessed 19 January 2011